

Blessed During Persecution

Count it all joy, brothers and sisters, and co-heirs with Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is ours. Today we're talking about being blessed during persecution.

Introduction

This past week we celebrated a holiday in America for a great man of God who peacefully fought for freedom for all people regardless of the color of their skin. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an amazing man and he is quoted often. His "I have a dream" speech is known around the world.

Dr. King was assassinated because of his preaching and teaching the equality of all people, in Jesus' name. He was shot and killed because he believed what America's Declaration of Independence rightly says, "All men are created equal" and knew that was inspired by God. He paid the price of his God-ordained teachings with his life.

Keep Dr. King in your mind as talk about being blessed during persecution.

During the sermon on the mount found recorded in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus shares the beatitudes. Let's read a passage of that teaching found in Matthew 5:10-12.

Matthew 5:10-12

(10) Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. (12) Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus is saying those who are persecuted are blessed. That seems to be a bit of a contradiction. In our natural selves, we often pity someone or feel bad for them when they are persecuted. We may even want to come to their defense. But Jesus is saying they are blessed.

Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted

Let's look at the first part, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." Righteousness is defined as the quality or state of being just or rightful. Jesus is not saying those that are self-righteous are blessed. He is talking about the Christian perspective. This view can only be seen with God's wisdom and the Holy Spirit's perspective. This is the same righteousness Dr. King lived with and taught.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of the righteousness of God. Some examples of that are standing up for what Jesus stood up and stands for. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, he came to set the captive free, he came to forgive the sins of all mankind, not condemn people for all of their sins and carry out judgment.



When we do the same thing we are being righteous in God's eyes. We are being the Church. We are blessed when we are persecuted because we stand up for the homeless, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and are persecuted for it. We are also blessed when we accept the stranger at our door and welcome them in and show them hospitality and are persecuted for it. This is also true when we go against the crowd and stand up for the unpopular and are persecuted for it. We are blessed. The blessing is the kingdom of Heaven.

Inheritances are handed down from generation to generation within a family to heirs. We are co-heirs with Christ. When we said yes to Jesus, we became his brothers and sisters, children of God with our own place at the table and our own portion of the inheritance. That is inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven. That's a blessing. That's an eternal blessing!

Blessed Are the Insulted and Falsely Accused

Jesus continues saying that we are blessed when people insult us, persecute us, and say all kinds of false things about us because of him. He tells us to rejoice and be glad in that because our reward in heaven will be great. The more we are insulted and persecuted as the prophets were before us, the better in the long run.

It's not easy, though. Being on the receiving end of insult, rumor, gossip, and lies is very difficult. But we must count it all joy. Look at what James tells us in James 1:2-3:

James 1:2-3

(2) Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

We can consider these insults and this persecution a bit of a badge of honor. When we face these kinds of trials we should count them as joy. James tells us that this kind of testing helps us build up our faith and perseverance, which is our patience and ability to endure. We all need more patience and the ability to endure.

Jesus was foretelling what the first-century church would endure in the coming decades. Christians were captured, imprisoned, and killed by the Jews of the day as well as the Romans. The religious leaders of Israel were capturing and stoning them for blasphemy and the Romans were capturing them, enslaving them, and throwing them to the lions in "games".

Friends, that's persecution. We here in America really don't know what persecution is. It is not having rules against proselytizing while on the job. You can still stand up for Christ and be the church without preaching to your co-workers.

It is not a ban on organized prayers in school. There's nothing stopping students from voluntarily coming together and praying without disrupting the education process.

It's not the removal of a monument of the ten commandments on the courthouse grounds. Psalm 119:11 says:



Psalm 119:11

(11) I have hidden your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you, Oh Lord.

We don't need a statue; we need to write His word on our hearts. We need to be living the message of Jesus Christ.

Persecution Is

Persecution is the young Pakistani couple, pregnant with their first child, being thrown alive into the furnace at a brick kiln factory for nothing more than being a Christian.

Persecution is being thrown in jail over preaching exactly what the Bible says in a church and not being let out of prison until you recant. This is happening in the western world today.

Few of us here in the western world really know what persecution is. It is not being disagreed with. That can be annoying and can frustrate you, but no one is coming to take your home and turn you out into the street because you said yes to Jesus.

Rarely will someone imprison you because you stand up for what Jesus has taught and continues to teach and work through you.

There is a group called *Voice of the Martyrs*. We encourage you to look them up online and read some of the stories of modern-day martyrs for Jesus.

Conclusion

Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness and those who are insulted and gossiped about.

I've been there, and I'm sure I'll be there again. It has happened in ministry and in everyday life and continues to.

Our encouragement to you today is not to boast about persecution, but to count it joy. That joy will lead to a deepened faith which leads to perseverance; perseverance that helps you carry on until the Lord returns.

Many leaders in the Church have faced severe persecution over the centuries but found joy. The Apostle Paul experienced this joy in the face of persecution. It is not easy but it is possible. Dr. King faced severe persecution and lost his life during it.

Count it all joy, brothers and sisters, and co-heirs with Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is ours despite the persecution we face. Be blessed!

