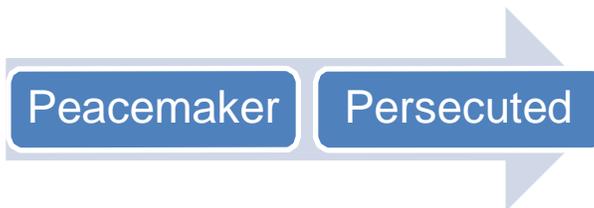


The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount

"Blessed are the Persecuted"

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10, NIV)*



When we generally think of persecution, we tend to think first of physical persecution that results in physical injury or loss of life. Because of this, many in this culture seem to be detached from the beatitude that Jesus speaks of in verse 10--thus missing the blessing that is promised for those who are persecuted for the name of Jesus Christ.

It is important to recognize that there are other forms of persecution that many have become blinded to. Besides physical persecution, there are other forms of persecution that comes from the world, from Satan within our mind, and from our own flesh. All forms of persecution has the goal of moving us from our stand for Christ and his righteousness.

When someone in Christ is persecuted, it is because of God's righteousness that now dwells in the believer's heart. Persecution is an attempt to exterminate, drive away, conquer, control, master, enslave, harass, torment, attack, oppress, weigh down, annoy, trouble, and to suppress. At the very root of the word "persecution" is the meaning "to cut away from." It all has to do with an attempt to cut a person away from Christ and the truth of Christ that now reigns in the heart of the believer. Sometimes this cutting is violent--sometimes it is very subtle. Persecutors, whether the enemy, the world, or the flesh, have the intent of cutting a person away from the place in which they stand. It is anything that comes against or opposes Christ, his righteousness, and who a believer is in him.

Persecution of the Mind

Much of our persecution of today, in this society, comes through a persecution within our mind. There are mockers of the word of God that rise up in our mind. One mocker is Satan that comes against us in our mind and mocks our status in Christ. He accuses us when we sin and mocks us that we would call ourselves "sons of God." He points to our imperfection and weakness as evidence that what we claim in Christ is not true. He points the finger and calls us names in an attempt to cut us away from the firm

foundation of Christ.

We also have our flesh that rises up and mocks us as well. We can fall into the trap of doubting God's provisions are sufficient. Most of the impure, unrighteous thoughts of our mind are a result of not trusting God and his provision. However, our mind does not rule us. As those who are in Christ, we are ruled from a new heart, where Christ resides and rules. We do have a choice. We can bow down to the persecution of the enemy and our flesh, or we can lean into the Spirit of God and be who we really are in Christ.

The word says, we are to *"demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ,"* This means to take any impure, unrighteous thought by the throat --wherever it comes from--and make it submit to the authority of Christ. We are to take every thought captive and make it obedient to who we are "In Christ."

It is the Spirit that is to rule--not the world--not the enemy--not the flesh--not the mind. Within our mind rises up the persecutor, harassing us for our stand in Christ. What does this persecutor look like in your mind? What does he say? What ploy does he throw at you in attempt to back you up from the righteousness that now lives in you? What are you afraid to give up in order to trust God? What are you afraid the enemy will take from you if you don't bow down to him and the world's system? Oh, never forget that this world's system is sin and rebellion against the righteousness of God.

Persecution Guaranteed

"Those who live according to the first seven beatitudes are guaranteed at some point to experience the eighth. Those who live righteously will inevitably be persecuted for it. Godliness generates hostility and antagonism from the world" (J. MacArthur). To live for Christ is to live in opposition to Satan in his world and in his system. The response from the world will be the same today as it was in the first century.

2 Timothy 3:12 states, *"All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* It is the guaranteed fruit of living a godly life. God declares it is one of the highest honors to be identified with Christ and to be persecuted for his name's sake. Let us give praise to God that we be counted among those who have planted our feet firmly in the name and righteousness of Christ.

Galatians 4:28-29 states, *"Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now" (ESV).* The point here is, that just in times past it is the same today; those things that are born of the flesh and this world's system will persecute those things born from heaven.

Wickedness by its very nature persecutes righteousness; just as righteousness by its very nature confronts wickedness. A righteous life is a constant rebuke to wickedness. We must decide between the riches of Christ and the temporal treasures of this world. Persecution is not a minor consequence to faithful Christian living--but is certain evidence of it.

Recently, I stood to worship the Lord in the temple when the persecutor came to my mind pointing out how unworthy I was to stand before the Lord. He pointed to the sins I committed during the week. He said, "How can you call yourself a Christian and lift your hands before the Lord ---put your hands down you fake!" Oh how the persecution hurt for it almost sounded like truth. But God stepped in and reminded me that I am his and I am saved by his grace--and his grace is sufficient. I took my stand and choose to believe God and stood fast in worship of the one who has saved me by his grace. Oh what victory in Christ alone!

If, and it is so, that we were crucified with Christ, buried with him, raised from the dead with him, and raised to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. This is where we now stand in Christ. How much more so when the world cries "crucify" against us should we maintain our stand in Christ, for he has already faced this cry against him, resisting it unto death--then overcame it through the resurrection onto to glorification with the Father. If he has faced it --so have we. What do we have to be afraid of, for all things have already come against Christ, and he overcame and now reigns victoriously. We do as well--only in him.

Co-heirs of Persecution

Romans 8:17 states, we are "*heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings (persecution) in order that we may also share in his glory*" (NIV). This is the normal Christian life. The Apostle Paul goes on to say, "*I consider that our present sufferings (persecutions) are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*" (NIV). These suffering he is talking about are not about ingrown toenails or other physical infirmities or worldly woes; he is referring to the persecution and affliction (torment) he was and others were suffering because of their stand in Christ.

Philippians 1:29-30 states, "*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer (to be persecuted) for him, ³⁰since you are going through the same struggle (affliction, torment) you saw I had, and now hear that I still have*" (NIV) (also see verses 27-28). Are we not being persecuted because the world has raised its standards, or because we have lowered ours? Are we reflecting or confronting the world we live in?

Let us be reminded and warned by the words of James, "*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to*

be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God," James 4:4. Similar words are found in 1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever" (NIV).

When opposition, ridicule, or persecution, in whatever form, comes to us because of our faith in Christ, we should not be surprised or resentful. We are not to seek persecution, but we are to be willing to endure it if it comes. We are called to endure in Christ's strength whatever trouble our faithfulness to Christ and his righteousness may bring. "To go along with the world, to laugh at its jokes, to enjoy its entertainment, to smile when it mocks God and takes his name in vain, and to be ashamed to take a stand for Christ--will not bring persecution" (J. MacArthur). If you want to avoid persecution for the Lord, then just live like the world--or at least "live and let live."

Let this be our "attitude of being" as we stand in Christ--eyes fixed on Jesus--living as overcomers in this world--not moved from the righteousness of God by the persecution of the world, the enemy, or our own flesh.

What's Your Next Step?