

it, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." [1 Peter 4:13; see also Hebrews 11:24, 2 Corinthians 4:17]

This is especially true of those who are His ministers, for they are often in the front line as the Prophets. May any servant of God who is listening today take comfort that his sufferings are not forgotten by God. A.W. Pink writes, "That blessedness which worldly leaders value and crave is to be flattered and feted, humored and honored; but the felicity and glory of the officers of Christ are to be made conformable to the Captain of their salvation, who was 'despised and rejected of men.' Yet instead of being downcast over and murmuring at the hostility they meet with, ministers of the Gospel are to be thankful to God for the high honor He confers upon them in making them partakers of the sufferings of His Son".

Will you be a partaker in these rewards? Only if in this life you manifest that you are a child of God. My friend, do you ever take a stand for Christ? Does your godly life bring you into collision course with the world in which you live? If not, you need to examine your life. Remember the words of Paul, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." [2 Timothy 3:12]

These rewards will not be something the believers have earned, because this is the work of God in them. All that the believers enjoy were purchased for them by their Savior. So there will be no boasting, but rejoicing only in what God has done in bringing them to the kingdom through these tribulations. May each of you be among that glorious assembly, to hear the 'well done' of the Lord their Savior. Let me end with this hymn, written by a minister for fellow ministers:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus!
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song.*

*To him that overcometh
A crown of life shall be;
He with the King of glory
Shall reign eternally.*

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

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Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



BESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

We now come to the last beatitude, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." [Matthew 5:10-12]

This beatitude is different from all the rest in that the other seven point to a particular characteristic found in God's people; but this one tells us what will be the result of manifesting such a character as our Lord here says is characteristic of the children of the Kingdom. Now you would think people who manifest such wonderful characteristics would be loved and welcomed by the world. Yet we receive a shock when we are told they would be evil spoken of and persecuted! So once again we are faced with a paradox, that those who should be welcomed are instead hated, and that no less for righteousness sake!

Beloved, there are many who teach that when we follow Jesus all will be well, and we will experience peace, health, and prosperity. Yet such ideas do not harmonize with what the Lord taught. The world indeed considers persecution and sufferings not as a sign of blessing but of a curse. Scripture tells us that is not necessarily so. Let me give you two examples where this is illustrated. First, when Paul and his companions are shipwrecked on the island of Malta. They are welcomed by the inhabitants, who make a fire, and as Paul gathered wood and put it on the fire, a snake fastened itself on his hand, and this is what the people said, when they saw it, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." [see Acts 28:3-4] When Paul shook the snake off and suffered no ill effects, "they changed their minds and said he was a god" [Acts 28:6] The second example is when Jesus met a man who had been born blind, his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" [John 9:2] Jesus said neither, but this is to show the Glory of God.

The Jews believed when the Messiah came, their years of persecution and suffering would be at an end. They would then enjoy peace and prosperity. This seems to be no different from what many preach today. Our Lord here disabuses us of any such notions. He tells us if we are faithful to Him, we will be evil spoken of and persecuted even physically.

John Blanchard, in his book on the Beatitudes points out certain facts about persecution. Let me briefly state them. **First**, persecution of

God's people is the best attested fact in history. A notable historian Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote, "No other of the faiths of mankind, religious or political, has quite so extensive a record of violent and bitter opposition to its growth". Blanchard points out that in 28 chapters of the Book of Acts we have no fewer than 56 instances of persecution. **Second**, persecution of one kind or another is one of God's promises to his people. Note, my friend, Jesus did not say "If" you are persecuted; but rather "When" which means it is inevitable if you are a child of God. Let me give some Scriptures to show this truth, "*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*" [Acts 14:22] "*For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;*" [Philippians 1:29; see also 1 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Timothy 3:12, John 16:33]

J.C. Ryle commented: "Persecution...is like the goldsmith's hallmark on real silver and gold; it is one of the marks of a converted man". The only way in which Christians can escape persecution is to go along with the world; or to be silent about one's profession. It is to laugh with the world when they ridicule Christ, and indulge in sinful pleasures. Are you persecuted? If not, why not? Either you are not living godly before the world or you are not a Christian; for suffering is a gift given to all believers along with faith. [Philippians 1:29]

Let us look at what kind of persecution is considered to be blessed. It is not all suffering, for there are sufferings which we undergo for our own folly, of which we need to repent. "*But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.*" [1 Peter 4:15] "*For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*" [1 Peter 2:19-20]

The suffering which our Savior says is blessed is for **righteousness**. "These are the ones who seek to uphold God's standard of truth, justice and purity, and refuse to compromise with paganism or bow the knee to the idols that men tend to erect as substitutes for God" writes R.G.V. Tasker. These people are determined to live according to the words of Jesus their Lord. The world hates Christians because they highlight their sins by their very presence and honest actions.

The suffering that is blessed is not only for righteousness sake, but it is suffering for Christ's sake. Christians suffer not merely for holding some ideas, but for their relationship to Christ. The world hates Christians because their lives, when lived in righteousness, reflect Christ. The world hated Christ and so it hates all those who remind it of Him. Such then are the reasons why Christians will suffer persecution in the world. Listen to what our Lord taught, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of*

the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." [John 15:18-20]

How is the Christian to respond to such sufferings? The answer our Lord gives surprises us. We are to rejoice! Surely we do not rejoice in the pain, but what our sufferings point to, namely that we are disciples of Christ. We rejoice because it identifies us with Christ. You remember when Peter and John had been beaten in the council for preaching Christ, they came from such a scene rejoicing. What was the reason for it? "*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*" [Acts 5:41]

John Blanchard, to whom I am indebted for these points says, "As far as they were concerned, they counted it an honor to be dishonored, and were given grace to accept disgrace".

Not only do their sufferings identify them with Christ their Lord and Master, but it also identifies them with the prophets. Verse 12 says, "*for so they persecuted the prophets which were before you.*" Now, my friend, who does not consider it an honor when their names are mentioned among a list of famous men and women? Well, such will be the honor which God bestows on all who suffer for Christ's sake, as did the prophets.

It also strengthens their assurance of salvation. Now it is of interest that in the Western world which is very affluent, Christians suffer from assurance. But this is not a problem in countries where Christians suffer for their faith. So our Lord says here, "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" John Calvin wrote, "Persecutions are in a way seals of adoption to the children of God".

Who can tell the joy of Daniel as he was in that den with the lions when he enjoyed fellowship with the Son of God? Who can tell the joy of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they entered the fiery furnace and found a fourth like unto the Son of Man walking with them? We can be sure they had no questions about their salvation! They knew they were there because they loved their God more than their lives. Augustine uttered these wise words, "It is not the punishment, but the cause which makes the martyr".

Jesus went on to say, "*for great is your reward in heaven:*" As we have said in relation to other beatitudes, the blessings are not only future, but enjoyed even now. What a joy it is to the saints to know they are forgiven, and have a title to everlasting life. Now in this life they have the Spirit dwelling in them; now they know the joy of believing. Now they know liberty in Christ from sin. Now they experience the Fatherly chastisement of God. All these are blessings of the children of the kingdom. But there is a reward yet to come, for all the sufferings that they have endured for righteousness sake. It was this future reward that impelled the Old Testament saints to endure hardship; and it was the same which caused the apostles to endure