

THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount

Part Ten

“The Promise of Persecution”

I. The Sermon on the Mount

We are working our way through the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived.

A. The Beatitudes

1. Jesus begins the sermon with 8 Beatitudes; where He answers the question, “Who are the real Christians?” “What does a true believer look like?”

- Poor in spirit—a sense of spiritual neediness
- Those who mourn—over their sins and the sins of the world
- They are meek—gentle toward others; teachable; able to be corrected
- Who hunger and thirst after righteousness
- Those who are merciful
- They are pure in heart, longing to live a holy life
- The peacemakers, who long to see men have peace with God and with each other

2. And now we come to the 8th and final Beatitude; one so unique and different from all the others that some Bible scholars don’t include it, insisting there are only 7.

3. Why? Because the 1st 7 Beatitudes tell us *who we are*; but this last one tells us what will happen to us *because* of who we are. Brace yourself! He we will encounter persecution!

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV

B. We May Need a Course Correction

1. My personal concern: Because of the way the Gospel is being presented in the American church, many believers are given a false sense of what it means to be a Christ follower. We have taught people to think, “OK, now that I am a Christian, *if I can just do everything just right*, everything is going to be great!”

2. But Jesus says just the opposite! He says that when we are really doing everything just right, persecution is sure to come.

3. When I live out the 1st 7 Beatitudes, #8 will be the result.

a. Charles Spurgeon, the great “Prince of Preachers” put it this way:

“The first 7 Beatitudes relate to character; the eighth is what comes upon the persons described in the 1st seven, when their excellence has provoked the hostility of the wicked; and, therefore, it may be regarded as a confirming and summing up of the seven blessings which precede it.”

C.H. Spurgeon

4. How tempting today to leave this one out! If we weren’t going through this Sermon on the Mount verse by verse, we might be tempted to stop after the 1st 7 Beatitudes! But Jesus didn’t stop; He told us the truth...

5. The more you live for Jesus; the more you let your light shine; the more you stand up for the Lord and for the truth...the more likely you are to be persecuted! I can sum up this sermon with this:

CHRISTIANS AREN’T CALLED TO BE COMFORTABLE!

6. What a contradiction to the Christian message if we leave this one out!

a. Christian author Dorothy Sayers, a close friend of the great C.S. Lewis said...

I believe it to be a grave mistake to present Christianity as something charming and popular with no offense in it.

—Author Dorothy Sayers

b. If we aren’t faithful to the Word of God, we can turn our pulpits into Gospel “recruitment stations”, where we just talk about the goodies!

c. My old friend Rubel Shelly, a true spiritual father in this city said it this way...

“(Military) Recruitment posters may emphasize seeing the world or getting financial help with college, but the harsh truth is that enlistment in our nation's armed forces carries serious and grave risks.”

Dare we present the Christian faith in the spirit of a recruitment poster that talks about the "perks" of being a church member without letting people know that one's life is on the line for following Christ?

Pastor Rubel Shelly, USA Today

7. Jesus didn't say go out looking for persecution to be blessed; He said persecution will come upon you because you ARE blessed! But take heart...

a. To be persecuted for righteousness sake confirms the Kingdom of God is yours and that you are a citizen of the Kingdom

II. Points About Persecution

A. What is “Persecution?”

“Persecution”

a program or campaign to exterminate, drive away, or subjugate people based on their membership in a religious, ethnic, social, or racial group

Dictionary.com

1. Persecution is always rooted in prejudice:

- The Jews against the Gentiles
- The Nazis against the Jews
- The White Supremacists against the blacks

2. But here, it refers to what we can expect from the world and from worldly people for no other reason than that we belong to Christ.

B. Persecution Takes Many Forms

1. In a recent article on the suffering church, Faith Works ministries listed 17 different kinds of persecutions Christians can suffer:

17 Kinds of Persecution

1. Disapproval-the most subtle 2. Ridicule-verbal slurs 3. Pressure to conform 4. Loss of educational opportunities 5. Economic sanctions 6. Shunning 7. Alienation from community 8. Loss of employment 9. Loss of property 10. Physical abuse
11. Mob violence 12. Harassment by officials 13. Kidnapping 14. Forced labor
15. Imprisonment 16. Physical torture 17. Murder or execution

a. The list begins with very mild persecution: ridicule; being shunned; loss of employment

b. It moves up to things like imprisonment, torture, and finally, murder or execution

2. Thankfully, most of us in America will not be tortured or executed for our faith; but some of us will lose a job or be harassed for it; and all of us will experience disapproval or ridicule.

3. Why does Jesus guarantee us persecution? Why does the world not like us?

3 Reasons Why We Are Persecuted

C. 3 Reasons Why We Are Persecuted

1. We are persecuted because we are different.

a. All persecution comes from prejudice against those who are different!

That was why the Pharisees and the scribes hated our Lord. It was not because He was good; it was because He was different. There was something about Him that condemned them.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

b. The Christian is different because he is “poor in spirit”; he is meek; he is pure in heart; he hungers and thirsts after righteousness; the RESULT of living like this will be persecution!

c. Even before what you DO can get you in trouble, what you ARE can bring persecution!

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. 15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved

and among those who are perishing; 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

*Testimony: Carl Livingston at KMYO radio was a “witness” for Christ without saying a word!

d. He wasn’t weird; he didn’t say or do anything much; he was just *different*. And we made fun of him! (Which proved what he was and what we were)

2. The second reason we are persecuted is because we are like our Lord!

(We will experience what He experienced)

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 "It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebulb, how much more the members of his household!

Matthew 10:24-25 NASB

a. Jesus was perfectly righteous: He modeled all of the 1st 7 Beatitudes. And look what they did to Him!

- Rejected
- Ridiculed
- Almost stoned
- Finally, crucified

b. Have you ever wondered why the world hates you?

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. 19 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 hates you. 20 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...

John 15:18-20

c. Is it fair to say we don’t hear many sermons on suffering or messages about persecution today? Why? Because it’s not popular. We’re tempted to keep our message on the bright side and people will like us; but Jesus said...

“Woe unto you when all men speak well of you; for so their fathers spoke well of the false prophets.”

Luke 6:26

d. Persecution comes because we are different from the world; because we are like our Lord; and finally...

3. The 3rd Reason for Persecution: Because it Confirms Our Faith is Real

“Because if ever you find yourself persecuted for Christ and for righteousness' sake, you have, in a sense got the final proof of the fact that you are a Christian, that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.”

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

a. Notice it is “for RIGHTEOUSNESS sake”!

- Dumb decisions or making bad choices don't count
- Getting fired because you're lazy doesn't count
- Suffering because you are a Republican doesn't count
- Suffering because you are an obnoxious religious fanatic doesn't count

"What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? but if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, *this* is acceptable with God."

1 Peter 2:20

b. The blessing is upon those who are persecuted for righteousness sake!

“...anyone who renounces evil will be attacked.”

Isaiah 59:15

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution'

2 Timothy 3:12

c. Find me a Bible hero who didn't suffer persecution for righteousness sake!

- Moses, Joseph, David, Daniel, Jeremiah

- Objection: “The Bible just says believe; it doesn’t say suffer”.

For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for His sake.

Philippians 1:29

- Objection: The Bible says we will rule and reign with Him in heaven.” It also says...

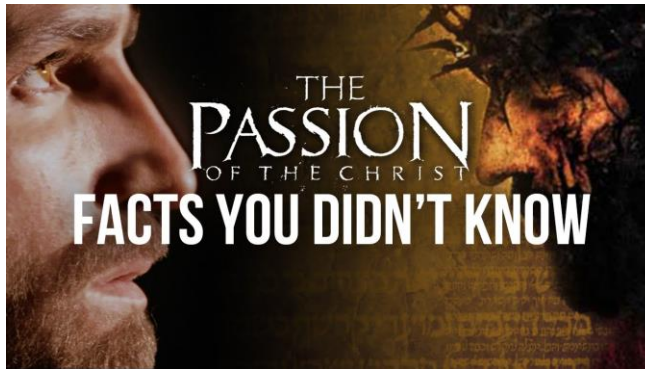
"If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him."

2 Timothy 2:12

4. We are persecuted because we are different; because we are like our Lord; and because it confirms our faith is real.

III. Conclusion

A. Following Christ is Costly



1. Director Mel Gibson chose Hollywood actor Jim Caviezel to portray Jesus in the movie, “The Passion of the Christ”; but he warned him if he took the part, his career would suffer.

a. But he took the part because he “wanted to honor His Lord by portraying His life and death.

b. Interesting that his initials are “J.C.”

b. And that he was 33 years old when the movie was made

2. And it happened. Because he played the role of Jesus, he was “blackballed” by the Hollywood film community and movie offers dried up. It would be several years before he got a good part again.

a. His response? “I’m not worried...”

"We all have a cross to carry. I have to carry my own cross. If we don't carry our crosses, we are going to be crushed under the weight of it."

Jim Caviezel

b. He went on to say....

“The awards actors get here on Earth don’t matter to me; my reward will come in heaven...”

"Jesus is as controversial now as he has ever been. Not much has changed in 2,000 years We have to give up our names, our reputations, and our lives to speak the truth."

Jim Caviezel

3. In a way, we’re all Jim Caviezel; we’re all portraying Jesus on earth; and we will suffer some persecution.

a. May we take it as well as he did!

“Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world.”

Supreme Court Judge Antonin Scalia

B. Leaving The Beatitudes

1. We leave the Beatitudes with this one, and with a question from Pastor John Hagee:

“If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

John Hagee

2. Remember, all 8 Beatitudes are signs and marks of the “normal Christian life”; evidence of what a true believer looks like.

3. If the evidence is there...“Rejoice, for yours is the Kingdom of heaven!”

“Prosperity has often been fatal to Christianity, but persecution, never.”

Amish Bishop