

DAILY DEVOTION THE JOURNEY OF FAITH: PART 13

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Matthew 5:10 NIV

**“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

The final beatitude that describes the Journey of Faith may be the most difficult of all for us. Like the others, it runs contrary to our human nature, especially when we're being mistreated for doing the right thing! When Jesus said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness....” it was like saying, “Happy are the harassed!”

Who associates “happiness” with any of the characteristics Jesus gave for a blessed life? Humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, or peacemaking are not typically on our list. Even less would be persecution, insults, and slander! If you read the next couple of verses, Jesus amplifies this beatitude in Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV).

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 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 knew what His followers did not know. He knew that living His way would result in humiliation and persecution. Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of Christ followers in the early church, who would later suffer much persecution himself when he became a missionary and church planter, told young Timothy, 2 Timothy 3:11-12 (TLB).

“You know how many troubles I have had as a result of my preaching the Good News. You know about all that was done to me while I was visiting in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, but the Lord delivered me. Yes, and those who decide to please Christ Jesus by living godly lives will suffer at the hands of those who hate Him.”

Why is it that living a godly life would bring persecution? Why would anyone suffer for doing the right thing? We only have to look at the life of Christ to see the answer. He never sinned? He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, delivered those oppressed by the devil, and even raised the dead! He fed the multitudes, showed kindness to the outcast, and came to save us from our sins. Yet how was He treated? He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Handed over to an angry mob, falsely accused, insulted, beaten, and crucified, yet without a single fault of His own! It doesn't make sense, does it – until you realize how treacherous our sinful nature is. Light always exposes darkness. A holy and righteous life brings conviction to those living in darkness. It is a rebuke to their pride that either brings repentance or disdain and rejection. Though crowds followed Him, Jesus never went along with the crowd. Even though His uncompromising message was given with compassion, many just didn't want to hear it because there was no middle ground. The same is true today. Whenever the gospel is proclaimed, people will either receive it or reject it. Compounding the sinfulness of the human heart, Satan is an active force of evil that hates the truth. He incites the hatred of all that is true and right and fills the hearts of wicked men to do evil. He filled the heart of Judas to betray Christ.

The final beatitude is the longest of all. I believe He gave it to prepare us for persecution. It's not a matter of if we are persecuted, but when. Persecution can come as insults, false accusations, loss of reputation and career, or physical pain. No matter what form it takes, Jesus said three things about persecution.

1. This is the only beatitude that gets a "double" blessing.
2. You have cause to rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven.
3. When you are being persecuted, you are in good company! Jesus said, "... for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

As tempting as it is, don't turn inward when you are mistreated for Christ. Look upward! Rejoice and be glad, you are double-blessed!

Prayer

Oh God, whenever persecution comes my way in the Journey of Faith, give me grace to overcome and to receive the rewards in Jesus name.