

## **PERSECUTION, A BLESSING ??? (07/06/2025)**

### **Illustration: The Planned Attack**

Let's go back to 1977, I was working in the hardware section of a large department store. I used to see two (2) guys handing out pieces of paper or small booklets. Watching them just aggravated me to no end, I was talking to another guy that worked in the same store and he didn't care for them either. We found out they had some kind of Christian meeting every week. I talked to them and they invited us to go there. I accepted their offer and I told them I was going to be bringing someone else. They were fine with that, and so we followed them to their home. We both followed them there in our own separate cars. We sat there and waited in our cars while they ran in and told everybody they had brought a couple of guys with them. Boy, were we going to give them a Surprise. We planned to beat them up and leave.

### **Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **I. Blessed**

It starts out by saying you are blessed when you are persecuted. In your mind you must be thinking blessed must mean something different than you're thinking.

- "The world considers "blessed" are those who are secure and popular and live at ease, [the rich and famous] not those who suffer persecution. The Christian cannot expect to be thanked for being merciful or sincere as a peacemaker: instead, we are opposed, slandered, insulted, and persecuted on account of the righteousness we stand for and Christ who we represent here on earth."
- All of these characteristics which Jesus labeled as blessed are usually not welcomed in the world at large.
- The word blessed which Jesus used with each beatitude can mean happiness. Typically, we think of happiness as an emotional response that's dependent on

circumstances. Jesus' idea of happiness, however, is associated with the truth that God is at work in you at all times.

- The word "blessed" used here stands in sharp contrast to "happy."  
"Blessed" are those who are not affected in their inmost beings by outside circumstances. They can continue to be blessed when persecution is directed at them. It is not persecution that makes them blessed. They are already blessed, and that is why they are persecuted. But if we make an honest effort to have a Christ like walk, others may persecute and revile us, this when we are to consider it a blessing. We are truly blessed for being an imitator and follower of Christ.

## **II. Persecution**

To persecute means literally to pursue, follow after. Here it means to vex or oppress one on account of their religion. They persecute others who injure their names, reputation, property, or who endanger or take their life, on account of their religious beliefs. Those who are hunted or spoiled. The term is properly used of wild beasts being pursued by hunters, or being chased by an enemy in flight. Persecution seeks to intimidate, silence, punish, or even kill people.

### **A. The Present Day**

In America, in the time we are living, we are not persecuted like in other areas of the world. Usually, in America the worst thing that happens to us is that we're given slang names that kind of label us. I've been called "Reverend, preacher, and some other names. You might have heard other names like Jesus Freaks, Holy Rollers, Bible Pushers & etc. This is nothing that would be classified as persecution.

In the magazine "The Voice of the Martyrs" there are some horrendous stories of persecution, that are seen in a lot of the foreign countries where they don't have it as good as we do.

### **B. In Jesus' Day**

- **“One of the outstanding qualities of Jesus was His sheer honesty. He never left men with any doubt what would happen to them if they chose to follow Him. He was clear that He had come “not to make life easy, but to make men great.”**
- **In Jesus day it is hard for us to understand what the early Christians had to suffer...EVEN IN THEIR:**

### **1. Work**

- a. **Stone masons-might have had to build a temple for heathen gods.**
- b. **Tailors-made robes for the heathen priests**
- c. **Early Christians found out that almost any job could cause conflict.**

### **2. Social Life**

- a. **Feasts-made sacrifices to false gods/idols.**

**In very few sacrifices was the whole animal burned upon the altar. It might be only a few hairs from the forehead of the beast were burned as a symbolic sacrifice. Part of the meat went to the priest as a prerequisite; and part of the meat was returned to the worshipper. With their share they made a feast for their friends and family.**

### **3. Homelife**

- a. **Salvation-Ostracized or became an outcast...**

**It happened again and again that one member became a Christian while others did not. It tore apart the families and caused separations between husband & wives, sons & daughters, and etc. Immediately there was a split in the family. Often the door was shut for ever in the face of the one who had accepted Christ.**

- b. **Ordinary meal – Even during a normal meal at home, wine was poured out to some deity. It was common as saying grace at our meals.**

### **4. Rome persecuted Christians**

#### **A. Slandorous thoughts**

- 1. **Accused of cannibalism- “This, is my body & blood”  
(Sacrificed a child and ate the flesh)**

- 2. **Immoral practices-meetings were orgies of lust  
Agape=love feasts (greet each other with a kiss)**

3. The world will end...threat of political revolution
4. Tampered with Family....split family relationships

**B. Political Disobedience**

1. Worship Roma only (the god of Rome)
  2. Worship the Emperor (mandatory)
- (Christians wouldn't do either)

The penalties some Christians had to suffer were terrible beyond Description.

- The stoning of Steven
- Jesus was crucified-Even Jesus when He was crucified, received no sympathy from his disciples, converts, family or anyone else. Jesus was met with jeers from one of the criminals crucified with him, those that passed by, and especially the Scribes and Pharisees, (He saved others, but He can't save Himself). He received no support from His disciples or anyone else. Only the soldiers offered Him vinegar and Gall. Gall was bitter wine, possibly poison. (Peter was crucified upside down...wasn't worthy enough to be crucified the same way as Jesus) (Andrew crucified on X)
- Others: Fed to Lions, burned at the stake, Nero wrapped them in pitch and set them on fire as living torches to light his gardens, sewed them in animal skins and released his hunting dogs on them (to tear them to death) , tortured on a rack, torn apart with pincher jaws, molten lead poured upon them, red hot brass plates affixed to tender body parts, eyes torn out, parts of their bodies roasted...while they watched!

**Matthew 10:34(NIV)**

<sup>34</sup> "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

1. Persecution should never come from inside the church, against your fellow believers! That is why Matthew Chapter 18 talks about proving allegations by 2 or 3 witnesses, This also does not mean it is a campaign to try to get people on your side!!!

Think of Job...he lost his family, possessions, and wealth. They were disasters caused by satan. Consider Job's persecutors (friends) they accused him of sin that caused his losses.

2. Yet the struggles of Job in his persecutions were viewed by God and his angels. God is watching us!
3. "Whatever God permits in our lives is never purposeless, although the purpose is not always immediately or fully, manifest to us."

### **III. Righteousness**

It has to do with absolute faith and commitment to God. Conformity to the demands and obligations of His will. One who in faith does God's will is righteous. Begins with salvation. Continues through our entire life (sanctification). Full faith and trust make a person pleasing to God. Persecution comes to us for being like Jesus. Righteousness is an adjustment of the whole life to God, every day, in every place, under all conditions, in all our attitudes.

It's very significant that the 8th beatitude..."blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", immediately follows the one about peacemaking.

If you have known examples in your life of the persecution about which we have been talking about-by taking an honest path at work, by refusing to compromise quality or service, by remaining pure when friends and acquaintances are doing outlandish things.

**Illustration: Christmas party @ the dealership**

One year I went to the Christmas party at the dealership I was working at. When the first beer bottle was flipped over the owner's shoulder crashing on the cement floor, I knew it was my time to leave. Monday when I came to work only one phone worked in the whole place, because beer was dumped in the phones. There were quite a few park police waiting at the service desk. They wanted to know who was screaming over the police radios in their cars, "they're going to shoot me with the fire extinguisher. If you guessed that they emptied all the fire extinguisher, you guessed correctly. The entire inside of the dealership looked

like there was a major snow storm. I'm glad I left, even though, on Monday I had to help clean up their mess.

**Illustration: You have to Lie (not)**

Your boss comes to you and says that you have to tell someone a little white lie. My response was, "good luck with that, that is not going to happen", I said I would send them to him, and he could tell them what he wanted.

The first guy I told that to, he said I can already guess the answer, besides your boss a liar anyway. They had him pegged!

**OUCH:** "But it is true that much of Christianity has sunk to a level where it is hardly noticed. The world has become tolerant of us. But we have become more tolerant of the world. There is sometimes precious little true Christian character visible"

**IV. Heaven:**

- As difficult as the persecution, the reward far outweighs the hazard, because "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven".
- This is the same promise that we see given to those that were "poor in spirit". (vs. 3 / 1<sup>st</sup> beatitude).
- Our reward is not here; it's out of this world...heaven!
- One of the old hymns says it best, "it will be worth it all when we see Christ".

**V. Happiness**

**How did Jesus expect His disciples to react under persecution?**

**The wrong ways**

1. Retaliation
2. Sulk like a child
3. Lick our wounds like a dog (pity party)
4. Grin & bear it
5. Pretend we like it (masochist/Martyr complex)

**The Only Way**

**Rejoice and be glad!**

- The idea of the 8<sup>th</sup> Beatitude is that we can be joyful, not because of our persecution, but in spite of it.

- Persecution and suffering should be welcome, not because it makes us feel good or makes us better, but because our attitude and suffering may win someone to Jesus Christ who is looking for more than words to prove to them the reality of our faith.
- Persecution is evidence that the believer is united with Jesus Christ.
- Persecution gives evidence that the Holy Spirit has been working in our hearts, turning us from our sin and sinful ways to Christ's way and is making progress in molding us into his sinless image.

### **Acts 5:17-42 (NIV)    The Apostles Persecuted**

<sup>41</sup> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. <sup>42</sup> Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

#### **Illustration:    The Planned Attack Cont'd**

Much to our amazement, we were the ones surprised. I didn't know so many people could fit into one town house. We panicked and decided to speed away. In the panic that pursued the person driving the other car backed into my 1968 Nova. I went to his dad's dealership to have it fixed. While I was there, he talked me into riding his motorcycle through his dad's used car dealership. I lost control and drifted out into a highway where I was hit by a car. The bizarre part was that it was a girl in my high school class. I was taken to the hospital where I laid for 6 hours, and they did nothing, because they couldn't get a hold of my parents. I had two broken bones so they ended up putting my foot/leg in a cast. More fun, I approximately 6 months with nothing to do. I also need to mention that the motorcycle I was riding on was owed by the father, who tried to sue me, because I road it without his permission. When they took the cast off, I decided to go fishing. I wrestled my way through the woods to get to my favorite fishing spot...bad move, I had to crawl back to my car. After that my girlfriend, who I

was planning to marry, left me. IF THERE IS MORE, I DON'T EVEN WANT TO TRY TO REMEMBER IT.

After I was all healed up and back to normal, 2 of my high school friends needed help in a football game that they were going to play against another church. They were going to a weekend youth retreat and they needed my football skills. Besides that, the invitation clincher was that they told me there were a lot of nice girls in their church. How's that for an invitation. You know, I don't even remember who won the game. I had so much fun (we even tied the youth pastor to the cot so he wouldn't stop us from going out and goofing off at night) he was such a good sport. The speaker was an amazing man, he was nick-named Dean <sup>1/2</sup> Nelson, a wrestling term. That Saturday night something amazing happened, he told us about Jesus. He talked about Jesus being in a storm with the Disciples. He told us there were 14 different positions we could be in with Jesus. He asked each one of us where we in that story. My choice was, that I was in the boat, and I wanted to go to Jesus' walking on the water. My whole life had changed! I met Jesus, gained new friends, and I also got a girlfriend.

- "Men seek to destroy what they cannot conquer. They may break your heart into a thousand pieces. BUT GOD, can take those pieces and make from them a life that glows with the radiance of His love and compassion for others."

Illustration: The Violin Maker

"A musician ordered a violin-maker to construct for him the finest instrument he could make. But when he came to test it, his face clouded with anger at the tone. Lifting the violin in the air, he dashed it to pieces on the table. Then paying the price he agreed upon, he left the shop. The violin maker shrugged his shoulders, gathered up the broken pieces, and set to remake the instrument. Again, the Musician was sent for and he drew the bow across the strings as before. The tone of the violin was perfect. When he asked the price, the violin-maker replied nothing. This is the same instrument you broke to pieces. I put it together, out of the shattered fragments made this perfect instrument. That is how our God often works in our lives. He sometimes allows others to break us to pieces that He may remake us.



## **2 Corinthians 4:8-11 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.

## **2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

## **2 Timothy 3:12 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

"There was never a moment in our Lord's life when bitterness or resentment found lodging in His heart. HIS ANSWER TO ALL the unkindness, the enmity, the plotting's, the denials, the treason, to all the cruelty, and brutal accusations and terrible wrongs inflicted upon Him WAS LOVE."

## **Luke 23:34 (NIV)**

<sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

July 4<sup>th</sup> is celebrated as Independence Day. It celebrates the thirteen American colonies receiving independence from British rule and gave us a new beginning as a nation.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross brought about the greatest victory ever, victory over death and freedom from the bondage and punishment of sin. That's real independence! OH WHAT A SAVIOR!!!