

YOU TAKE THIS BLESSING...I DON'T WANT IT!

Did your mom ever play tricks on you – sometimes downright nasty – broccoli under cheese – bananas in chocolate cake – liver, try it you'll like it – vegetables in mac and cheese. Can't hide yucky stuff under the yummy stuff

Feel kind of like that today – spend time in first 7 beatitudes – time of blessing – encouraged to hear stories from you of how applying (person not coming to new church going back and working things out at old one) Today we come to subject of persecution and suffering and facing hardship in our lives. No one wants to talk about that – we need to.

God never promises that those who are Jesus followers will have an easy life (great lie of evil one) – opposite – if we live for God we will be persecuted

- a) Jesus was persecuted
- b) Disciples of Jesus were persecuted – Philip crucified, Matthew killed with sword, Matthias stoned and beheaded, Andrew crucified, mark dragged to death, peter crucified upside down, Paul beheaded, Jude crucified, Luke believed hanged.
- c) Talk to missionaries and hear modern accounts – Nigeria, Kenya, Indonesia, Egypt, Vietnam
- d) Columbine – Cassie Bernall asked by gunman do you believe in God – yes – killed – columbine (1999) – journal year earlier it said 'I am not going to justify my faith to them and I am not going to hide the light that God has put in me...if I have to sacrifice everything, I will. I will take it. If my friends become my enemies for me to be with my best friend Jesus that is fine with me.'
- e) Since march 1, 2013 – china assaults home churches, gunman attacks church in Libya, falsely accused lady is tortured in Pakistan, turkey a murderer complained about treatment saying you are treating me like a Christian, university in south usa not allowing bible study on campus.

Must accept fact that persecution exists and we will experience it if we live faithfully for Jesus

Matt 5:10-12 – read together

Jesus has said some strange things in the beatitudes but none as strange as this. How can I be happy if I am picked on, made fun of etc. Makes no sense – Jesus must have known this one would be hard for his followers because it is the longest one and only one where he repeats the situation and blessing and then even tells us to be glad and rejoice.

I find it hard to be glad when I have a bad day let alone face persecution – Paul understood – acts 16 in Philippi overtaken by mob, beaten, arrested and put into prison. Sleep and things look better in morning – Paul and Silas were not singing blues, comparing sob storied – they were singing praises and praying. Years later Paul would write to church in Philippi and say rejoice always I will say it again rejoice. Phil 4:4

TYPES OF PERSECUTION JESUS MENTIONS

- a) Physical persecution – few of us experience – Karen people here next week have
- b) Verbal insults – mock -
- c) False accusations – behind back -

HOW CAN THE PERSECUTED BE BLESSED? Try to answer that today

I WE ARE BLESSED WHEN WE ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Persecution can take place for many reasons – politics, social ideals, standing up for cause, race, gender. Please note Jesus does not say blessed are you if you are persecuted. You are not even blessed if you are persecuted for being a follower of Jesus necessarily. It's possible for Christians to be persecuted for all sorts of reasons (obnoxious, self righteous, in your face evangelism) Truth is we can bring persecution on ourselves because we act foolishly and not spirit filled.

Jesus says blessed if persecuted for righteousness – if people cause us pain because we take our walk with God seriously or because we want to be like Jesus – there is a blessing for that. If you are mistreated because you love and live for Jesus – applying the previous 7 beatitudes Jesus says you are under the favor and approval of God.

Christians should live differently than others – values, priorities, goals, desires should produce a different life style. We should stand out like sore thumb – as we do sometimes persecution comes – live poor in spirit and world filled with pride – we mourn over sin world loves to indulge in it. Causes negative response to Christians.

Begs question why do we face so little persecution? Not because God is good and sparing us only it is because we have lost our uniqueness. Don't take godliness seriously.

We have sanitized, sterilized, Christian faith – remove all thorns so we can embrace it without pain – if we are not careful we settle for form of Christianity where main goal is to not rock boat, let sleeping Christians lie, go through motions, do bare minimum.

If we buy into that we see someone excited about faith – fanatic, roll eyes, shake heads – we persecute followers of Jesus for righteousness. Sometimes Christians persecute other Christians

We are blessed as we are persecuted for righteousness

II BLESSED WHEN PERSECUTION IS A REACTION TO JESUS

Christian faith is a relationship with Jesus.

Blessed in midst of persecution when realize that this is not about me it is about my Lord – Acts 9:4 – John 15:20

III BLESSED WHEN WE RECALL JESUS' REMINDER

Jesus reminds us that we are in good company – not only ones to experience persecution cause of faith

Elijah – thought only one left – 7000 others

Isolation is enemy of the soul – when we are alone we give up hope and doubt God

Heb 11 and 12 – grandstand of heaven – watching and cheering

IV BLESSED BECAUSE OF PERSECUTIONS REWARD

Out of this world blessing – rewards in heaven matt 6:19-20

Heaven is reward so don't give up and quit – keep eyes focused on prize 2 Cor 4:17-18 – present life is vapor that appears and is gone – heaven is forever.

Illus. John Chrysostom - JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, a godly leader in the 4th century church preached so strongly against sin that he offended the empress Eudoxia as well as many church officials. When summoned before Emperor Arcadius, Chrysostom was threatened with banishment if he did not cease his preaching. He responded, "Sire, you cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house." "Then I will slay you." Arcadius said. "Nay, but you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God." "Your treasures will be confiscated" John replied, "Sire, that cannot be either. My treasures are in heaven, where none can break and steal." "Then I will drive you from man and you will have no friends left!" "That you cannot do, either, for I have a Friend in heaven who has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.'" Chrysostom was banished, first to Armenia and then farther away to Pityus on the Black Sea, to which he never arrived because he died on the way. But neither his banishment nor his death disproved or diminished his claims. The things he valued most highly not even an emperor could take away from him.

HOW DO I RESPOND TO PERSECUTION? Question is not if persecuted but how respond when I am.

- a) Sometimes leave situation – Jesus did this in John 8, Matt 12, Acts 9; 14.
- b) Guard against compromise – one way to end persecution is to become like those who oppose us – called to obey God not man – acts 4:19
- c) Love our enemies – break cycle of revenge – don't lash out in anger – don't retaliate – Rom 12:17-21
- d) Pray for those who persecute us – Matt 5:43-44 Hurting people hurt people. These people are not our real enemies Eph 6:12

CONCLUSION

Polycarp - ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS OF ALL THE MARTYRS WAS POLYCARP, THE AGED BISHOP OF SMYRNA WHO WAS KILLED IN 156 A.D. THE MOB DRAGGED HIM TO THE TRIBUNAL OF THE ROMAN MAGISTRATE. HE WAS GIVEN THE INEVITABLE CHOICE - SACRIFICE TO THE GODHEAD OF CAESAR OR DIE. POLYCARP RESPONDED, 'EIGHTY AND SIX YEARS HAVE I SERVED CHRIST, AND HE HAS DONE ME NO WRONG. HOW CAN I BLASPHEME MY KING WHO SAVED ME?' SO THEY BROUGHT HIM TO THE STAKE, AND HE PRAYED HIS LAST PRAYER: 'O LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, THE FATHER OF THY WELL-BELOVED AND EVERLASTING SON, BY WHOM WE HAVE RECEIVED THE KNOWLEDGE OF YOU...I THANK YOU THAT YOU HAVE GRACIOUSLY THOUGHT ME WORTHY OF THE DAY AND OF THIS HOUR.'" AND WITH THOSE WORDS POLYCARP WAS BURNED AT THE STAKE.

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the Gospel

By applying beatitudes you are going to live different than others – look different – that will cause some persecution. Jesus promises blessing to those who faithfully follow him.

At start of this series I asked who wants to be blessed – we all said yes – who wants to live under the favor and approval of God – we all said yes – Jesus has told us how we can do that – now it is up to us – will we relying on his strength daily commit to live life Jesus way – regardless of the consequences – will we choose to live in light of eternity – will we choose to live to be like our precious Savior. That is a decision that no one can make for you – it is one only you can make – what is your decision?