



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
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January 10, 2010

Theme: Blessed are those who are persecuted...

Text: Matthew 5:10-12

Today we come to the last in our series about the beatitudes. This one seems like a paradox. In other words, it seems like a contradiction in terms to say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted..." But Jesus says that in the Kingdom of God blessing and persecution stand together. God wants us to follow Jesus with our eyes wide open to all the possible consequence that may come to us. Persecution is one of those consequences. God wants us to count the costs of discipleship as well as the dividends. God's fullest blessing comes to those who are willing to pay the price.

When we hear the word persecution, we often think of those who have given their lives for the faith. Certainly, they have paid the ultimate price. Some historians of the Church say that more Christians were put to death in the 20th century than in all the previous centuries combined. The first thing that we might say about persecution is that believers should expect it. As we say that, we can make two observations. (1) According to verse 11, persecution can come in more than one form. Jesus speaks of being insulted, persecuted, and slandered because of our faith in him. (2) The second thing we can say is that if we live like Christ we will be treated like Christ. Jesus was the only sinless person who ever lived—yet he was persecuted and executed. Because we know that Jesus Himself was persecuted, we should not be surprised when we are harassed because of our faith.

If I can expect to be harassed for my faith, how should I respond when it happens? (1) First, we should remember the source of persecution. Although it comes through people, it comes from Satan. The apostle Paul wrote that in the final analysis our spiritual struggle is not with people but with spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. People who harass believers are to some degree pawns of the evil one. (2) Second, because we understand this we must refuse to retaliate. Jesus taught his disciples to turn the other cheek if someone insulted them by striking them on the right cheek. (3) Then we can replace evil with good. Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies. When people harass us, we must pray for them, do good to them, and say good things about them. Finally, we can rejoice in it.

Why should I rejoice in persecution? (1) First, I can rejoice in it because it testifies to the reality of Christ's presence in my life. Persecution validates the claim that Christ lives in me. I should consider it a honor to be harassed for Jesus' sake. (2) Second, persecution puts me in good company. The prophets were often rejected and persecuted. The prophets were people who brought God's word to their generation. We have now taken their place



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as those who bring God's word to our generation. (3) Third, harassment and persecution are only temporary. Compared to eternity, they will be less than a blip on a radar screen.

I can also respond to harassment by taking comfort in it. (1) As believers we want to be like Christ. We want to identify with him. We want to have His wisdom, compassion, love, and so on. But Scripture also speaks about identifying with His suffering. No one desires suffering. But when it comes to us as believers, we can more readily relate to who Christ is and what He has done for us. (2) When I suffer for Jesus, I inherit the kingdom of heaven. Most of the beatitudes describe a blessing that will come to the believer in the future. This one has that future sense also of course. But Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs shall be the kingdom of heaven." He says, "...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those who suffer for Jesus are promised a powerful foretaste of everlasting life already in this life. (3) Finally, Jesus promises that those who suffer for Him will receive a great reward in heaven. In my limited understanding, simply being in the presence of God would be all the reward I would want. Yet Scripture promises that plus more, to those who suffer for Jesus.