

## THE EIGHTH BEATITUDE

Matthew 5:10-12

<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.

### THE PARADOXES

Christian life is full of paradoxes, paradoxes that are beyond the understanding of the human mind but well understood by those in whom the spirit dwells.

The fact that God's saints rejoice with unspeakable joy, yet they also live with mourning and lamentation of their every day troubles is a paradox

The fact that the Believer in Christ is brought into contact with the source of perpetual satisfaction that is capable of meeting all his or her needs and yet he or she pants with a yearning like that of a thirsty heart is another

His entire life is a painful experience and yet he would not part with it for all the gold in the world

Ironically, these strange paradoxes are some of the evidences a Christian possesses that shows he or she is blessed by God

## THE ABSURDITIES AND MATTERS ARISING

It is absurd and illogical by mere reasoning to know that the reviled, the persecuted and the defamed are the ones who are blessed

Another absurdity is the thought that a man or woman could be reviled, persecuted and have all manner of things said about him or her for righteousness sake

The question that arises from the second absurdity is whether wicked men hate justice and like those who defraud and wrong others?

The answer surprisingly is NO.

It is the aspect of the Righteousness that respects God and religion that excites their hatred

Christians would not only be left in peace but perhaps applauded if they were content with doing justly and would cease living humbly with God.

## THE EVIDENCE

2 Timothy 3:12

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

Being "persecuted for righteousness sake" means being opposed for living right in Christ

Sadly, if you have no persecution in your life then that is probably just another way of saying that **you have been absorbed into the world**

#### WHY THE PERSECUTION?

1) Because the righteous lives rightly and wicked men are opposed to right living

2) Those that perform their Christian duty will condemn those who live for self and therefore evoke the hatred of the Wicked.

3) Loyalty to God and His Gospels is another reason why Believers get persecuted.

The proof of this can be found in the saying, "For in the same way they persecuted the prophets, who were before you"

Those before us were persecuted for being loyal to God and passionate about the Gospel

4) One thing that arouses Satan's anger and stirs up his children to the point of prosecuting faithful Christians is the efforts of the later to make Peace. Satan just doesn't like Peace makers; you make peace you are sure to have yours disturbed by him. It is as simple as that.

John 15:19 sums it up well. This is what it says

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

#### TYPES OF SUFFERINGS

The last verse enumerates the types of suffering Disciples of Christ are to endure in their line of duty

The first is insult, which is a verbal abuse or vituperation; it is the most common of the sufferings.

### The Story of the Ghanaian Security Man

One Day I was on duty when this young Ghanaian man knocked on the door, at about mid-night. I was wondering what the issue was.

I opened the door and let him in. After exchanging a few pleasantries to calm down my nerves, he told me about His mission. It was about Christ. We discussed the Bible at length and set up another meeting for the following week.

The next day at work, one of my colleagues raised the topic about one lunatic Africa Security man who usually popped in, in the middle of the night whenever he was on shift to talk to him about Christ

They all burst into laughter and called him every unprintable name they could conjure and made fun of him. I refused to tell them about my previous meeting with the so-called African loony for fear of persecution

The young man didn't turn up for our next meeting as planned, and when I enquired from his colleagues I was told he was transferred to another site for disturbing people about the Bible.

This is an example of the verbal persecution many Christians suffer on daily basis, from work colleagues, friends and even families.

The second is persecution, derived from the word pursue, in this case harass, molest or trouble. Persecution in its worst form could include hunting down and killing of Christians, the type Paul subjected the Church before his apprehension by Christ (Act 8 and 9)

The Third is, all sort of evils are falsely said against us, meant to defame our character. We are all too familiar with friends, families and other Believers say evil things that are untrue about us for no apparent reasons. Well, the Devil is never weary of inventing things in order to intensify the sufferings of God's Children

I would implore you take note of the words "persecuted for righteousness' sake" and "My sake" in the 8<sup>th</sup> Beatitude. Those words caution us to see the hatred and opposition solely on the basis of our dedication and submission to God and not on account of our misconduct or self-gratification

Let me re-emphasise this, "Intentionally, putting self in harm's way in order to claim persecution and glorifying self does not attract God's Blessings"

The Blessing only comes in when the act is righteous and done for the sake of God

## EXAMPLE OF RIGHTEOUS PAST PERSECUTIONS

Persecution had been part of the Christian history.

Cain killed Abel because his work was evil whilst his brother's was righteous

Joseph was persecuted by his own brother in Egypt and cast into prison for righteousness

Moses was insulted time and time again by those he led for following God's instructions (Ex 5:21, 14:11 etc)

Elijah was despised (1King 18:17) and persecuted (1King 19:2)

Samuel was rejected (1 Sam 8:5)

Christ himself, the faithful witness of God was put to death by people he ministered to

Stephen was stoned; John and Peter were cast into prison,

James was beheaded, whilst the entire Christian life and ministry of Apostle Paul was one long series of bitter and relentless persecution

The history of the church shows Christians who were living righteously suffered not only from pagans but were also persecuted when Christianity became a state religion of the Roman Empire.

Luminaries like Athanasius the Great, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, John Damascene, Sophronius of Jerusalem and many others underwent lack of recognition, vilification, exile and martyrdom

Saint John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, was a great zealot of righteousness.

He could not look indifferently on people's vices and he denounce them, not fearing persecution.

His enemies increased, but for righteousness he was prepared to endure every persecution.

He had this to say when his enemies succeeded in putting him behind bars and his friends were lamenting over his ordeal. "Remember me in your prayers" "The present life is a like a journey, during which it is necessary to bear both the good and bad".

John was also accredited with these remarkable words which many martyrs and righteous love to repeat.

"Glory to God for all things, but especially for afflictions"

Christians ought to accept suffering with joy and have mercy towards him who causes it; that was what John's life was all about and that was how Jesus expected us to live our lives

## PRESENT DAY PERSECUTIONS

The persecution today is a lot milder than what it used to be in the other ages, but it is still real.

Christians and Christianity are being annihilated by the states in communist countries and in countries with striving democracies where laws to protect Freedom of Religion are in place

Open Door, a Charity that tracks persecution of Christians around the world has short-listed the worst 50 offending countries and arranged them in the order of the Intensity of the persecution

It is no surprise that North Korea topped the list. Open Door, estimates between 50 to 70,000 North Korean Christians are suffering severe conditions in labour

camps. The only God they are to worship is their Beloved President, Kim Il-Sung and His son Kim Jong-Il

In Saudi Arabia non-Muslim public worship is banned and anyone who breaks this law risks arrest culminating in long imprisonment and public flogging

In Iran, there is still the possibility of mandatory death sentence to those who try to convert from Islam (apostasy) to other religions. Christians are highly discriminated against when seeking jobs or lose their jobs if they are found out. Arrest and torture of Christians are common in Iran

Out of the 1.3 billion population of China, only 6% are Christians. Registered Churches enjoy some freedom of worship but the unregistered Christians in certain areas of the country are put under enormous pressure and sometimes physical punishment

India is the biggest democracy in the world with a population of 1.1 billion people but only a mere 2.3% of that population are Christians. This is a country whose constitution guarantees Freedom of Religion and worship and yet on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2008, in the state of Orissa,

The majority Hindu went on rampage, killing 110 Christians, burned 170 churches, destroyed 4500 homes and displaced over 54,000 people in reaction to a murdered leader.

Some states have even tried to enact and legislate anti-conversion law that prevent primarily the Dalits and other tribes from becoming Christians

These People were not persecuted or are not being pursued for any misdeeds, or evil acts, their only crime is seeking God's righteousness and for this they will be blessed and rewarded greatly in heaven

The true Christian Joy is not the earthly happiness, pleasure or pleasant way of passing time, but the Joy in believing, (Rom 15:13) that cannot be compared to anything else, the joy of knowing God's love, the joy, according to the words of Apostle Peter, of worthily partaking in Christ sufferings (1 Peter 4:13)

Such is the joy of Christians, the joy of the martyrs, which more than anything else bears witness to the truth of the Christian faith and the genuineness of Christian spiritual life.

## Conclusion

This Beatitude is the culmination and conclusion of the Beatitudes. If we are following these Beatitudes that start off the Sermon on the Mount, then we will be persecuted for Jesus' name. If we are poor in spirit, meek, humble, mournful, hungering for righteousness, pure in heart, and sowing seeds of peace, we will be persecuted for proclaiming the teachings of our Messiah, Jesus Christ, as the truth and the only truth! For this, people will ridicule us, spat evil at us, and hate us for what we are, but we have the ultimate reward of the Kingdom of Heaven with Jesus forever!

AMEN!

LET'S PRAY

