

Meet My Savior: Jesus (Slide 1)

*The Beatitudes:
Blessed are those who are persecuted*

Reading: Acts 14:8-22

Matthew 5:10-12 (Slide 2)

***10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

(Slide 3) 11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It seems from the human standpoint, that to feel blessed while persecuted would defy logic. To be persecuted and to feel blessed, not only blessed but ***"exceedingly glad,"*** taken without understanding could be considered perhaps the most paradoxical statement we may encounter in scripture. So, let's look deeper:

In today's world, individuals or groups don't necessarily need a specific reason to persecute someone else. It could be the way one dresses, looks or acts. Because someone is different, believes differently and for a variety of other reasons, one is targeted for persecution by being mocked with extreme prejudice. People harm others psychologically without even knowing them on a personal level.

However, the Lord is specifically saying you are blessed when you are persecuted for My Sake, for being a follower of Mine.

First, why would one be persecuted? Maybe the best way to answer that question is to see why the prophets of old were persecuted.

Jeremiah and the unpopular message:

In *Chapter 20* of ***Jeremiah*** we read that God's prophet is ***struck*** by one who was a priest and chief governor in the Lord's house, named ***Pusher***. In other words, a so-called religious leader!

Not only was ***Jeremiah struck*** that is; *severely beaten in public*, he was put in the ***stocks*** for punishment and public humiliation. The ***stock*** was an instrument used to cause unbearable discomfort by restricting the hands and feet. It was a form of public humiliation.

The difficulty of carrying God's message to His people caused ***Jeremiah*** to anguishly contemplate giving up. Because on all sides he was mocked, sometimes tortured and ridiculed.

Jeremiah 20:7-10 (Slide 4)

7 O LORD, You induced (convinced) me, and I was persuaded;

You are stronger than I, and have prevailed.

I am in derision (Contempt, persecution, mockery) daily;

Everyone mocks me.

(Slide 5) ***8 For when I spoke, I cried out;***

I shouted, "Violence and plunder!"

Because the word of the LORD was made to me

A reproach and a derision daily.

(Slide 6) ***9 Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him,***

Nor speak anymore in His name."

But His word was in my heart like a burning fire

Shut up in my bones;

I was weary of holding it back,

And I could not.

(Slide 7) ***10 For I heard many mocking:***

“Fear on every side!”

“Report,” they say, “and we will report it!” (They became informers, reporting to one another what **Jeremiah** was up to.)

All my acquaintances watched for my stumbling, saying,

(Slide 8) ***“Perhaps he can be induced;***

Then we will prevail against him,

And we will take our revenge on him.”

They watched him closely so that when he spoke they might find some way to trap him with his words to show that he had been deceived. Just as the scribes and pharisees, questioning Jesus on tradition, listened to His words trying to find a way to trap Him with what He said:

Matthew 12:10-14 (Slide 9)

10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him.

11 Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, (Slide 10) ***and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” 13 Then He said to the man,*** (Slide 11) ***“Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored as***

whole as the other. 14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Matthew 22:15-22 (Slide 12)

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. 16 And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; (Slide 13) nor do You care about anyone (seeks no one's favor or is a respecter of persons), for You do not regard the person of men. 17 Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

(Slide 14) 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the tax money."

So they brought Him a denarius.

20 And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"

(Slide 15) 21 They said to Him, "Caesar's."

And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Jeremiah's acquaintances are those who would have at one time been courteous and greeted him with the traditional Hebrew greeting: Shalom, "peace be with you." But now they watch and wait for him to speak the message of God so that they may attack him.

King David understood exactly what Jeremiah was going through:

Psalm 31:13 (Slide 16)

For I hear the slander of many; Fear is on every side; While they take counsel together against me, They scheme to take away my life.

It is as Jesus warned:

Speaking to His disciples He says:

Matthew 10:22a (Slide 17)

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.

Matthew 10:35-39 (Slide 18)

35 For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; 36 and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Slide 19) And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Enemies within and enemies without will begin with those closest to you when they reject Jesus.

Later on in the Book of **Jeremiah**, the prophet of God is put into prison, that is, a dungeon and given one piece of bread a day as his sustenance. Persecuted for believing God and compelled to present His message to the people.

What was in Jeremiah's message that was so unpopular?

(Slide 20) The messages of Jeremiah, known as the "*weeping prophet*" was about judgement for Judah and Israel because of their idolatrous sin.

It was about the injustice of social discrimination and cruelty that they perpetrated on their own people.

He admonished them for breaking their covenant with God. Their infidelity by following the ways of the world rather than being set apart for God's purpose.

God will judge them by the hands of Babylonian captivity for a period of 70 years.

His message is one of destruction-in that their sin will cause the Holy City of Jerusalem to be overrun and destroyed along with God's Holy Temple.

He preached against false teachers. Those that were the religious leaders, the priests giving false hope and those claiming to be prophets who spoke lies to gain authority and power.

He implored them to seek a true religion, one written on their hearts and not conducted superficially but with inner and deep change.

(Slide 21) He prophesied that their correction would lead to repentance and a **"new covenant"** (**Jeremiah 31**) created by God their true and Holy King.

Jeremiah, like all the prophets, point to what some refer to as the *"Branch of Righteousness"* that is; the coming of the Messiah who in reality is the powerful tree as we are the branches.

This was Jeremiah's unpopular message, that caused him to be mocked and persecuted in so many ways.

(Slide 22) Brethren, if you look closely at what his message was you'll notice it is much the same as the message of today's true Christianity.

A day of Judgement because of Sin

A message of repentance and confession

A message of hope through the Blood of Jesus

A New Covenant through Baptism into Christ which now saves

Today's message is just as unpopular as that of **Jeremiah's**. Today's message of salvation is the same message that caused each *Apostle*, except **John** to be murdered. It is the same message that caused those who heard the testimony of **Stephen** to stone him to death!

Today's message of hope is called "*hate speech*" by many. Even the wife of a very prominent politician recently bemoaned the fact that "*it is Christianity that stands in the way abortion.*"

Therefore, one can easily conclude that the opportunity for persecution is all around those who openly practice God's righteousness. Yet, friends we are not without hope:

Matthew 10:22 & Matthew 5:10 (Slide 23)

And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Invitation

Are you in a position to be subjected to persecution because you are right with God? If not, don't delay. Be baptized and experience the hope that lies only in the family of God.

Perhaps you are already a child of God but need encouragement to keep up the fight by strengthening your faith through prayer. Perhaps you have a need that only prayer from your Brethren can help. May we pray for you today and help relieve your burden.....

Please let us know how we may assist you.....

Reading

Acts 14:8-22

8 At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet."

And he leaped up and began to walk. 11 When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." 12 And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM. 16 In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, [o]satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." 18 Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. 21 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

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