

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 3

"Rejoice When Men Shall Say All Manner of Evil Against You"

Matthew 5:10-12

For the last few Sunday evenings we have been in a series based on Christ's words found in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20), which stated *"and teach them to observe all the things that I have commanded you."* We have been attempting to answer the question, *"But just what is it that we are to pass on and teach new believers in Christ?"*

The first command to *"repent"* tells us how to restore fellowship with God and become qualified to enter his kingdom. The second command to *"follow me"* calls for a total change in goals and priorities so that we can become *"fishers of men."* Now the third command reveals the secret of becoming bright lights so that people will be able attracted to our love and God's truth.

The third command in Jesus' teaching is found in the section of the Sermon on the Mount referred to as the Beatitudes. Here Jesus list eight blessings

In Matthew 5, verse twelve we find the final blessing, lets pick up our reading verse ten, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (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."*

In verse ten we are told the tactic of the enemy concerning Christians, persecution. The word translated *"persecute"* (*dediomenoi*) in Greek literally means *"to pursue in a hostile manner."* And in verse eleven we are told the means by which the enemy will try to accomplish this goal, *"revile"* which means *"to defame"* and it carries the idea of criticizing severely with the aim of discrediting.

The key to understanding this teaching is in recognizing the significance of the second phrase of verse ten, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."* This means that there is no promise of happiness for those who are persecuted for being a nuisance, for Christians who have shown themselves to be objectionable, difficult, foolish and insulting to their non-Christian friends. The implication of course is that not every one that claims to be persecuted is actually undergoing persecution, some are simply suffering the consequences of their own foolishness.

The third command of Jesus is found in verse twelve, where the believer is told to *"rejoice and be exceedingly glad."* The verb for *"rejoice"* is an imperative, in other words it is

not a suggestion, it is a command. If persecution does come our way, not because of stubborn egotism or a self righteous attitude, but because of our stance as a true believer of Christ, then Jesus tells us to rejoice.

We are not to retaliate like an unbeliever, we are not to sulk like a child nor are we to lick our wounds in self-pity, we are not called to just grin and bear it like a Stoic, nor are we to just pretend to enjoy it like a Masochist. We are called to *“rejoice and be exceedingly glad.”* But, **HOW DOES A CHRISTIAN REJOICE IN PERSECUTIONS?**

First, we have to establish that this battle cannot be won upon by our reasoning or upon our feelings. There are some battles in the Christian life that can only be won on the basis of knowledge. For example, *“A young man goes to college and meets a girl with whom he falls in love and whom he would like to marry but who is not a Christian. He wants to marry her, but should not. The Holy Spirit within him is telling him so. As a result a terrific battle is in progress. How is he to win it? Well, it is certain that he will never win by trusting to his feelings, for his feelings are what have created the problem in the first place. He will not win by reason, for the human mind is subtle, and he will always find ten reasons why he should marry her for every one why he should not. Neither can he win the battle by trusting his conscience. The human conscience can be bent to do almost anything we want it to do; in this case it can even be bent to immorality. There is only one way in which the young man will win the victory in this situation, and that is by clinging to the knowledge of God’s will that he has received from scripture.Apart from any other factor he must determine to walk in the way that he knows God would have him to go. It is exactly the same when a Christian is the midst of persecution.”* [James Montgomery Boice. The Sermon On the Mount: An Exposition. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972. pp. 63-64)

Because we cannot trust our feeling or our own reasoning at such times, we must trust in the knowledge what God is accomplishing in our persecution.

WHAT ARE THE THINGS, WHICH WE CAN KNOW THAT WILL ALLOW REJOICING IN PERSECUTION?

[The following five principles were gleaned from Boice. pp. 63-65]

1. We Can Rejoice In Persecution Because We Know That It Is A Demonstration Of Our Identity

The point of the latter part of verse twelve where it says, *“...for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you,”* is that persecution identifies us as a part of the faith.

In John 15:18-20, Jesus warned his disciples to expect persecution, *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. (19) “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not*

greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."

Paul warns his son in the faith Timothy that persecution comes to all those who truly live faithful lives, (2 Timothy 3:12) *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."*

Peter warned believers not to be shocked when they were persecuted, (1 Peter 4:12-14) *"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; (13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.(14) If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."*

Few men have understood this better than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor imprisoned during WWII for his stand against Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. He was executed by the direct order of Heinrich Himmler in April 1945 in Flossenburg Concentration Camp only a few days before it was liberated. While imprisoned he wrote; *"Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means.... Suffering because we have to suffer.... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and token of his grace."* [Dietrich Bonhoeffer. "The Cost of Discipleship." As quoted in John Stott. Essential Living: The Sermon On the Mount. (Great Britain: InterVarsity Press, 1988). p. 53]

When the church was persecuted the book of Acts (5:41) says that when they were released, *"... they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."*

It Is A Demonstration Of Our Identity

2. We Can Rejoice In Persecution Because We Know That God Uses Persecution To Perfect Us.

Peter warns believers (1 Peter 1:6-8) that persecution is the furnace in which God refines and purifies us and removes the impurities from our lives. *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, (7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (8) whom*

having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

“Dr. Billy Graham tells of a friend of his who went through the depression in the 1920’s, losing a job, a fortune, a wife and a home. But he was a believer in Jesus Christ, and he tenaciously held to his faith even though he was naturally depressed and cast down by circumstances. One day in the midst of his depression he stopped to watch some men doing stonework on a huge church in the city. One was busy chiseling a triangular piece of stone. ‘What are going to do with that?’ he asked. The workman stopped and pointed to a little opening near the top of the spire. ‘See that little opening up there near the spire?’ he said. ‘Well, I’m shaping this down here so that it will fit in up there.’ The friend said that tears filled his eyes as he walked away from the workman, for it seemed that God had spoken to him personally through the workman telling him that God was shaping him for heaven through his ordeal.”
[Boice. p. 66]

God Uses Persecution To Perfect Us And.

3. We Can Rejoice In Persecution Because We Know That It Give Us The Opportunity To Show Forth The Supernatural Radiance Of The Christian Life.

If everything is going well with you and you rejoice, what makes you different from all the non-believers around you?

Your effectiveness in fulfilling the previous command to be “fishers of men” will depend upon the brightness of your life. The ability of those around us to see the power of Christ resting on us; the glory of the Lord shining through us.

4. We Can Rejoice In Persecution Because We Know of The Promise Of Rewards.

You will remember that verse twelve has promised, *“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”* Some Christians consider it less than spiritual to think in terms of rewards, yet the writer of Hebrews wrote (11:26) that even the great man, Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God because *“he looked to the reward.”*

Jesus reminds all of His followers that they must determine their values from a perspective of eternity. The apostle reminds the church at Corinth of this when he wrote, (2 Cor. 4:16-18), *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

5. We Can Rejoice In Persecution Because We Know That Jesus Is Near When We Are Suffering.

In Isaiah 63:9 we read, *"...In all of their affliction He was afflicted, And the angel of His presence saved them."* The Old Testament tells us that when God's people were in bondage and suffering, God was mindful of them (Ex. 2:23-25). And at the time of the Judges, God shared the hurt of his people, *"that he could no longer endure the misery"* of his people (Judges 10:16). God is always present when His people are hurting.

Think of the story of the courage of the three Hebrew young men; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, cast into the fiery furnace for their faith in God. Yet when the king looking to the flames, he asked, *"...Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?...I see four men loose and walking in the midst of the fire...and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God"* (Dan. 2:24-25)

That angel of the His presence is none other than the Jesus of Today and we have his promise in Matthew 28:20, *"...and lo, I am with you always even until the end of the age"* and that is never more true than when we suffer for his name sake.

Conclusion

When we as Christians can anchor ourselves in the five great truths that we have just looked at them persecution can result in rejoicing.

Based on the knowledge we have gained that

1. Persecution Is A Demonstration Of Our Identity
2. God Uses Persecution To Perfect Us.
3. Persecution Give Us The Opportunity To Show Forth The Supernatural Radiance Of The Christian Life.
4. Because We Know of The Promise Of Rewards
5. Because We Know That Jesus Is Near When We Are Suffering.