

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 17 Oct 2021

Sermon Title : Persecuted for Righteousness

Speaker : Rev Shannon Chan

Text : Matthew 5:10

INTRODUCTION

When all the first 7 Beatitudes are incorporated into our lives, we will become more like Jesus. But the result is going to be, we will be persecuted. That's why Jesus included this 8th Beatitude at the very end of the list. The application of the first 7 Beatitudes leads naturally into the 8th because the more the characteristics and values of the Kingdom are reflected in our lives, the more we find that we will be persecuted by the world.

"Persecution is the gold stamp on the believer's life" - Greg Brown

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10 ESV)

What the word persecution means:

- To pursue or chase, to harass.
- The Greek word "to persecute" signifies to vex and molest, or to pursue a person to the death. The sense of the Greek word also suggests it means "to allow oneself to be persecuted".

A. What Persecution Is

- Matthew 5:10 is not a blanket promise or blessing for all who have been persecuted or who are being persecuted. God is not going to bless you for breaking the law, or being stubborn or foolish, or irresponsible.

The promise of Matthew 5:10 is only for us when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, on account of Jesus.

The reality is there may be believers who claim to be persecuted for their faith. Upon closer examination, we find that their interpretation of persecution was not due to righteousness or on Jesus' account but because of foolish decisions, poor conduct or wrong behaviour.

B. What Persecution Is Not

- It is suffering for the Jesus seen in you. God's goal is to mould us into the image of Christ and the world will react to the Jesus they see in us. Jesus also

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said to His disciples, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20)

- Persecution of the believers was evident in the form of martyrdom in the early church and certain parts of the world today.
- In addition, *"When people make fun of your faith and attack you online for what you state as your Biblical faith, when you are discriminated against for holding Christian values and views, you are also facing persecution."* - Robert Solomon

Jesus further explains in Matthew 5:11 the kind of persecution His disciples would receive, "Blessed are you when others revile you (Revile means people will abusively or angrily insult you), persecute you or falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me". At times like this, we need to remember that it is the evil powers of this world and those who are controlled by them who will react to the Jesus who is in you through the Holy Spirit, and the Jesus who is being formed in you as you become like His character. However this is not about drawing attention to ourselves because of the persecution we face. In fact, 1 Timothy 2 instructs us to live a tranquil life in all godliness and dignity. But if we are becoming like Christ, people around us will respond to the Jesus they see in us, and it will not always be positively.

Persecution is also not just reserved for pastors or church leaders but all of us who profess to be followers of Jesus.

We need to boldly ask ourselves this question: "What does the response of the world to us say about how much like Christ we are becoming in our character?"

- If "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12), and we are not being persecuted, what does this mean? Could it mean that we are not living godly in Christ Jesus? Or is it that we blend in so well with everyone else that we are no different from the rest of the world? There is a hidden but very real danger of being *in* this world and *of* this world. Hence we need to engage in prayer and self-evaluation and ask ourselves the difficult question, "How much really the character of Christ are others seeing in me?"

It is a reality that we will be hated for proclaiming the gospel message whether it's at work, in school or in public settings. If you and I speak because we want to be patted on our backs, then the "Message" will change with the times. As we walk in a climate that is more wary and even hateful of the gospel message and all it represents, it is more important than ever that the character of Christ is seen in us, that we have counted the cost and are willing to pay the cost of discipleship, lest our message of the "Message" be compromised.

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C. The Titanic History of Persecution

The time will come, if it hasn't already come upon us, when there is no getting around the truth:

People hated Jesus and they will hate us for preaching Jesus.

The Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11:35-37 lists believers who suffered various forms of persecution for their faith, but remained faithful. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put into prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, mistreated – The world was not worthy of them ... Satan's intense animosity towards God and His faithful people has been played out throughout all ages and places.

"When we look at the persecution of God's people, we can discern and uncover Satan's influence behind the scenes." - Robert Solomon

We see this in the film the "The Passion of the Christ", in the scene when the crowds turned murderous and shouted for Jesus to be crucified. There, Satan was depicted as an almost shadowy figure lurking in the crowd and inciting them into a murderous rage. Robert Solomon also says that Satan works in collusion with the sinful flesh of human beings, with the sinful world and its unjust and sinful structures. The rebellion in the human heart is stoked by Satan as individuals and crowds persecute Christians. Their hatred of God and God's people and things related to God directly find their objects in the persecuted and martyred.

Indeed, there is a basic incompatibility between the way of Christ and the way of this world and this resulted in and will continue to result in persecution if the Lord tarries. In Adam Clarke's words: As the religion of Christ gives no quarter to vice, so the vicious will give no quarter to this religion.

Wang Ming Dao, a Chinese pastor and evangelist was imprisoned for his Christian faith. When that happened, he confessed that he began to cower, slowly start to submit and renounced his faith in God. So, the authorities released him. However with this freedom, it dawned upon him that he had betrayed his Lord and he walked into the streets and confessed in public that like the apostle Peter, he had denied his Lord. He was arrested again and jailed for 21 years. It was the words of the prophet Micah, "But as for me, I keep watch for the Lord, I wait in hope for God, my Saviour. My God will hear me," that comforted and sustained him when he was imprisoned. Wang Ming Dao's example shows us the power of the gospel of Christ and exemplifies what the apostle Paul describes as the fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering. Even though he betrayed the Lord, he repented of his actions and with singleness of purpose, he never turned back and becomes to us a testimony of what it means to truly follow Jesus.

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Throughout history and the world, we see how the persecution of believers plants the seeds for a new harvest. Often we witness how believers who endure persecution create a titanic testimony of a vital and authentic faith.

CONCLUSION

As we live out the first 7 Beatitudes in our lives let us be prepared that it will lead naturally into the 8th. People hated Jesus and they will hate us for preaching Jesus because of the incompatibility between the way of Christ and the way of this world. But God's promised blessing will be upon all of us who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, on account of Jesus, and as we endure persecution we will create a titanic testimony of a vital and authentic faith, bringing about a new harvest.

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As a group, spend some time to share your success and struggle in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do at the previous meeting.

A. Review Sermon Content

Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.

Appoint someone to read Matthew 5:10 twice, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, 'This is the Word of the Lord.'

All to respond, "Thanks be to God." Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now."

- a. As God's word was read, what is the key takeaway for you from the sermon "Persecuted for Righteousness"?

- b. How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 2a. Why is it important to remember that God does not give a blanket promise for all who have been persecuted or are being persecuted?
- 2b. How has understanding that persecution is suffering for the “Jesus seen in you”, impacted your understanding of being like Christ?
- 2c. Do you fear persecution and try to avoid being persecuted? Why?

- 3a. 2 Timothy 3:12 states that “all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” What does the response of the world to you say about how much like Christ you are in your character?
- 3b. (i) What is a challenge you face in living out your faith for “Jesus to be seen in you” at home, with friends, in the workplace or in public places?
(ii) What is one thing you can you do to overcome this challenge?
- 3c. How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 3b(ii) for the following week(s) till your next meeting?

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C. Testimonies and Prayer

Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.

4. Share your personal experience on how you have experienced persecution and received God's strength to stand firm in your faith.

OR

Give thanks to God that those who experience persecution for righteousness' sake, on account of Jesus, will receive God's strength, comfort and blessing.

5. With a prayer partner, bring all that have been shared in 3a, 3b and 3c to God, asking for the Holy Spirit's revelation on areas in your life where you may need to repent for "Christ not being seen in you". Seek the Lord's forgiveness and pray too for your group and our church to be bold in living lives where "Christ is seen in us" by holding firmly to the promise that those who are persecuted will receive God's strength, comfort and blessing, to create a testimony of authentic faith and a new harvest.

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