

10 THINGS JESUS I WISH NEVER SAID

WEEK THREE: BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED

THE BLESSING NO ONE WANTS!

TEXT: Matthew 5:9-12 & Matthew 16:24

In the 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus first said that those who bring peace/Shalom, to the earth are blessed. By *shalom* he meant 'universal flourishing, completeness, soundness and even delight, because it is from God. When this kind of wholeness (God's will and kingdom) collides with the broken world (our will and kingdom), it results in major conflict, which brings with it much suffering and persecution. Therefore, when we deny ourselves for the Kingdom of God and his glory, we exchange the "self" for a "cross" (persecution, suffering, betrayal, humiliation), in order to follow him. It is a guarantee and a call for all of God's children.

1. WHY WE EXPERIENCE PERSECUTION

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:21, 2 Timothy 3:1-4 & 2 Timothy 3:12-16

By persecution, Jesus did not just mean that as people we will be treated unfairly, though that is part of life at some level, he meant that we will be treated unfairly specifically *because of our faith*. Our desire to be right with God and to bring his shalom to our world will be met with extreme backlash. The reason the world is so resistant to it is because people want to be in control of their own lives and submit to no one else. The "self" rules, and God's rule is repulsive to them. The desire of the righteous to live God's way is an affront to the "self" and makes people hostile. Righteous living evokes mockery, disdain and at times, far worse. If we are not experiencing any form of persecution, chances are we are living in the ways of the world, and not identifiable as "the righteous".

- ❖ Q: What is the difference between our understanding of peace and what the Bible speaks of "shalom"?
- ❖ Q: Why are we to expect persecution for bringing God's kingdom into the broken areas of life?
- ❖ Q: If we never have any reaction to our Christian walk, why is it safe to say that we are not bringing shalom into our world?

2. WHY WE DON'T EXPERIENCE PERSECUTION

- Read Matthew 5:13-16

There are two reasons why we don't experience persecution:

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- I. We separate from our culture – either all of our friends are Christians and so we never have any pushback to the choices that we make, or we are so disconnected from our friend's realities that they do not really want to hang around with us long enough to see Christ in us.
- II. We are just the same as our broken culture – nothing about us reflects the fact that we are Christ-followers. We talk and behave just like everyone else, we go about our relationships and lifestyles in the same way as the world, and so we are indistinguishable from the world.

The gospel either draws and attracts people or it repels them. We should be experiencing both, and if we are not, we need to ask ourselves why.

- ❖ Q: If you have not experienced persecution for your faith at all over the last year, which of the 2 reasons above are the cause? (Are you too separate from culture or too blended in?)
- ❖ Q: What do you think it means to be in the culture but distinguishable from it?
- ❖ Q: In what ways are you currently distinguishable from culture because of your righteousness?

3. WAYS WE EXPERIENCE PERSECUTION

- Read Matthew 5:11

At this stage in our country, we do not experience any formal persecution for our belief in Christ, like they do in the Muslim world, among others. Our persecution most often comes through verbal harassment and social exclusion from people we know.

- ❖ Q: In what area of your life have you experienced direct persecution or suffering because of your faith? How have you dealt with it?

4. HOW DO WE ENDURE PERSECUTION, HOW DO WE SUFFER WELL?

- Read Matthew 5:12, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, John 15:18-20 & 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

- I. We keep our eyes on the reward to come.
- II. We remember that we are not alone in the persecution and suffering, as there has been a long line of those who have already gone before us and have endured the same.

Jesus suffered and was persecuted for us and so he knows exactly how it feels. He has not left us alone in it. When we are weak and feel as though we cannot endure it, he gives us enough grace to continue. We do not need to do it in our own strength. He will enable us. And so as we go to him for strength, he gives us rest *in him*.

- ❖ Q: Why does it help us to know that there is a reward for us for enduring the suffering and persecution?
 - ❖ Q: What does it mean for us practically that God's grace is sufficient?
 - ❖ Q: In what way have you experienced the sufficiency of God's grace in suffering or persecution?
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