

When Persecuted for Christ, Be of Good Cheer

The goal of the disciple is stated in the fourth beatitude: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:10). The means to righteousness are given in the first three beatitudes:

1. The destitute—poor in spirit—man seeks a righteousness not in himself, for he recognizes he has nothing. His must be what the reformers called an alien righteousness.
2. The destitute person breaks before God in repentance—he mourns—because of how far short he has come of ever manifesting the righteousness God requires.
3. The destitute and repentant person becomes submissive to God—meek—and acquires the discipline to act in a manner that pleases God.

These three means to righteousness are then followed with three consequences of righteousness:

1. Mercy comes from the one who has needed mercy.
2. Purity of heart comes out of the one who has been repentant and has mourned over his sin.
3. Peacemaking naturally follows in the life of one who has learned to be submissive and disciplined before God.

Too often our concept of Christianity involves a break in thought between the first seven beatitudes and the eighth because we never dream that the Beatitudes produce revolutionaries. But the connection of the eighth beatitude to the preceding ones is central to Jesus' logic.

His teaching, therefore, about being poor, mourners, meek,

hungry, merciful, pure and peacemakers does not result in individuals so namby-pamby and weak in character that no one in his right mind would even take the time to throw a stick at him.

If there is no persecution for Christ's sake directed against you at this present time, you should do one of two things. First, thank God that you are an exception to the rule and do not have to go through what your Master did. Or second, go back over the Beatitudes and inventory your life in the light of them.

Your motive—let me repeat—is not to suffer persecution, but to be like Christ. Persecution is the result of that commitment. The apostle Paul declares: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

You may say, “But who in the world would want to persecute little old me?” That's precisely the point. No one will persecute little old you; but the hosts of hell will persecute the new you that has Christ within. Look at what Jesus says:

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 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. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:18–20).

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