

This Means You

November 7, 2021

Introduction

One of the more overused words today is persecution. Whenever a people group is discriminated against, they are said to be persecuted. I think this is happening for two reasons: thin skins and overuse of hyperbole. People have developed such thin skins, we can't even laugh at ourselves anymore. A couple weeks ago, I was watching a Mel Brooks movie, thinking how he wouldn't be able to make that movie now. In fact, Mel, himself has said so. People have gotten so used to overstating the point to make a case (hyperbole), that exaggeration is the normal way of describing things now. Things are either the "best" or the "worst." We have forgotten what real persecution is. So, when Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted*" (**Matthew 5:10**), we have difficulty connecting with it.

What Is Persecution?

Biblically speaking, persecution is *Harassment and suffering which people and institutions inflict upon others for being different in their faith, world view, culture, or race. Persecution seeks to intimidate, silence, punish, or even to kill people.* It is not merely offending someone or even teasing or bullying. Though bullying can develop into persecution if one is being bullied by a group of people. Persecution comes about when someone is different, and their difference is perceived to be a threat to society. The early Christians would not have been persecuted for their faith but because of their interaction with society their faith was seen as a threat to society's way of life. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas were hailed as gods until Jews came from Antioch and spread rumors about them (**Acts 14:8-19**). Then the people stoned them. In Ephesus, things were going well until the people stopped buying silver shrines to Artemis, threatening the economy of the town (**Acts 19**).

What Is the Persecution of the Beatitudes?

Persecution is a certainty for the faithful Christian. In **verse 11** of our Gospel lesson today, Jesus says, "*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you.*" He doesn't say "if", but "when."

A Perfect Attitude

The Beatitudes portray the Christian lifestyle. They are not a picture of a "Super Christian", nor are they items in a buffet we can pick and choose from, individual pictures of different people. Like the Ten Commandments, they are interconnected. The two blessings about persecution come at the end, showing completeness.

Falsely

In **verse 11**, there are two caveats regarding persecution: "falsely" and "on the account of Christ." Persecution is defamation of character. If what the person is saying is true, no matter how much it hurts, it's not persecution.

For Christ's Sake

Christian persecution is being persecuted for Christ's sake. The persecution of slaves in the U.S. was not Christian persecution. They were being persecuted because of their race. The persecution of

Juhana Pohjola for publishing a book on the biblical view of gender and marriage is Christian persecution, being persecuted for Christ's sake.

Persecution of the Church

In **Revelation**, we read about the *ones coming out of the great tribulation*. This isn't just a group of believers. This is the entire church, for these are the ones who *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*. They have repented of their sin and the blood of Jesus has cleansed them. This is what a Christian does.

Persecuted Today

Are we being persecuted for Christ's sake today? Yes, and it will get worse. We can avoid that persecution if we just keep our faith to ourselves. However, right after Jesus talks about persecution, He tells us that we are the salt and light of the world. He says we are to *let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16)*. Only if we let our light shine can others hear the Gospel and be saved. Our persecution is a small price to pay for that.

Means of Grace

How can we have the strength to stand up to persecution? How can we stand against any evil? Only by the grace of God. Through Word and Sacrament God gives us His grace to strengthen our faith and give us the will and ability to stand with the rest of those who have gone before. Then we too will join those who have already gone through the great tribulation and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.

*And the Peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
