



“Finding Reward In Rejection” - November 24, 2019

OPEN

Consider these three quotations...

“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 a token of his grace.” *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1906 - 1945)

“If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed. In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal.” *George Whitefield* (1714 - 1770)

“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....If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” *Jesus* (John 15:18-20)

DIG

The final of Jesus’ Beatitudes is found in Matthew 5:10. There we read, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Among all the eight Beatitudes, this is perhaps the most challenging when it comes to this important question: what does it mean to live in the present reality of God’s Kingdom?

How do members of God’s Kingdom learn to embrace the times of pain and suffering that comes upon those who follow Him?

As His followers we must be in a process of transformation – to be kingdomized, if you will.

We must adapt to God’s Kingdom, not the other way around. P. T. Forsyth challenged the notion that the Kingdom of God is something that a man can build by his own effort – he wrote that would be “a kingdom of man with God to serve in it, rather than a Kingdom of God with man to serve in it.” (William Neil, *The Difficult Sayings of Jesus*, Eerdmans, 1975, 86)

At this point in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount we have come to a close of “the bookends” of the Beatitudes. Notice that what we read in verse 3b and verse 10b provides “bookends” which show all eight beatitudes are to be a whole.

1. poor in spirit
2. those who mourn
3. the meek
4. hunger and thirst for righteousness
5. merciful
6. the pure in heart
7. the peacemakers
8. persecuted because of righteousness

theirs is the kingdom of heaven
 they will be comforted
 they will inherit the earth
 they will be filled
 they will be shown mercy
 they will see God
 they will be called sons of God
theirs is the kingdom of heaven

[1] Blessing Number Eight

There is much pseudo-suffering in our world today. The radio announcer said that an otter was terrorizing the coy! At the start of November an otter was again eating prized koi from the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen pond in Vancouver. But terrorizing?! Of course, many terribly true experiences pain and brokenness exist because of the sin-stained state of our world. But Jesus promised a blessing for more specific aspect of suffering.

a. What suffering?

The blessing that Jesus pronounced was on those who suffered for the sake of Jesus Christ – for their lives of obedience and dedication to God. Matthew 5:10a, in the NLT phrases it this way, “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right.” But it is not just right-doing, but right-being...in Christ. In the words of one author, it is living conspicuously as a Christian. As we read in II Timothy 3:12, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

What is the nature of persecution? It is defined in John 15:18-20. Jesus promised He and His truth will be rejected and hated. “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first....If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. We have always seen this situation. But in our post-Christian culture, we will see growth in this.

Example Without absolute truth, moral values are relative. If we claim otherwise (as the Bible teaches) there will be push back and Christians are branded as haters of those who practice immorality.

Example At the Christmas season baby Jesus is cute and quaint. But a crucified, risen, Lord Jesus?! No thanks, is the response of many.

b. What blessing?

Dallas Willard wrote, “The Lord is My Shepherd is written on many more tombstones than lives.” (*Divine Conspiracy*, HarperOne, 1997, 105).

If we are living in the present reality of God’s Kingdom we will be equally committed to our Good Shepherd who leads through green pasture and the valley of the shadow of death.

I Peter 4:12-14 tells us, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

We need a robust theology of suffering. We are told in James 1:1 to “consider pure joy” to suffer trials because of the character that is developed in our lives. But as the always insightful A. W. Tozer stated, “Modern religion focuses upon filling churches with people. The true Gospel emphasizes filling people with God.”

If we are not filling people with God, there will be no recognition of the blessing in the suffering. But filled with God, believers can see the honor of representing God before a hostile world – see Matthew 5:11-12.

[2] Sufferings Of Job

One OT character who exemplifies the final Beatitude is Job. Not only did he live a righteous life. But He was opposed and persecuted significantly – by Satan. So Job suffered greatly as a result of living faithfully for God. What was the result? In a series of visits from Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Job was presented with a timeless issue: the reason for his suffering was because of sin...it was God’s punishment.

In much of the book of Job we find a conversation between these so-called friends, Job, and God. In the end, Job comes to confess that only when he submits to God as King and himself as part of God’s Kingdom does his suffering have meaning. See Job 42:1-6.

REFLECT

Are we being kingdomized in regards to persecution? Do we have a response that (a) reveals we are walking in righteous ways and (b) that we are indeed being transformed for life in the Kingdom of God?

At minimum, do not fear! Isaiah 54:17 - “No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord.”

Recently I received a newsletter from my Bible College in which the president wrote, “I’m pondering the question, ‘What value does Prairie College bring to contemporary culture and our world?’ A critic recently told us that, ‘If Prairie closed tomorrow I fear the loss would be minimal for the kingdom of God.’” Now that is a harsh critique, worthy of Job’s friends. But it begs the question. Could that be said of Cornerstone?

Consider two action steps.

1. Walking

When we turn to Matthew 5:43-44 we learn that we are not just to endure our enemies, but we are to pray God’s blessing upon them! It is not enough to “walk away” but we must “move toward” our enemies.

Of course, the enemy of the Christian is Satan himself, not other people. It is the system and spirit of this world which opposes Christ. So we need to be compassionate and caring to people who have not yet said yes to Jesus.

We want to invite you into meaningful walking and praying. Get a book mark. Put a pin on the map where you live.

2. Witnessing

Baptism and communion are our key witnessing tools. Have you been baptized? You are commanded by Christ to demonstrate your faith in Him by means of baptism.

Communion is a church family celebration we must not neglect. It helps root us in God’s great story. It helps us to celebrate what Jesus has done to bring us into the Kingdom of God. Be sure to come to the communion table regularly, with great worship and thanksgiving.