

Persecution for Righteousness

by Dwight Pentecost

Believers who are persecuted for righteousness' sake will receive double blessing and great reward in heaven.

Duration: 34:00

Scripture: Matthew 5:10, John 15:18-20, John 16:7-8, 1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:6-7

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on John chapter 15, specifically verse 18, where Jesus warns his disciples that the world will hate them because they are not of the world. The preacher explains that when a person becomes a believer and leaves behind their old ways, the world cannot understand or accept this transformation. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin through believers who live according to the teachings of Jesus, which challenges the world's religion, morals, and ethics. The preacher emphasizes that believers who choose to follow Christ are reproofing and rebuking the world by showing that they have found something better and cannot stay in the world any longer.

Transcript

We regret the very poor quality of this recording. The original master copy which came to us from the USA has a very loud crackling hum in the background. We have removed it in all the gaps between the words and sentences, but it cannot be removed from behind the actual speech.

We trust, however, that the Lord will bless you in spite of the problems with this tape. And now let me invite your attention in the word of God to the gospel by John chapter 15. John chapter 15 at verse 18.

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ in the upper room discourse. John 15 18. If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own. But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you.

The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin. But now they have no coke for their sin.

He that hateth me, hateth my father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin. But now have they both seen and hated both me and my father.

But this cometh to pass that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law. They hated me without a cause. But when the comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the father, even the spirit of truth which proceedeth from the father, he shall testify of me.

And ye shall also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning. I have pleased the Lord to bless unto our understanding the reading of this portion of his own holy word. I heard some time ago of the experience of a young man during his freshman and sophomore years in college took employment in the lumber region of northern Minnesota to provide expenses for his second year at school.

He had come from a Christian home and a sheltered background, and his parents were somewhat apprehensive as he went to live among those wild and rugged and unrestrained woodsmen of the north country, and they attempted to prepare him for the persecutions that they were sure would come to him from these godless men. His parents heard little from him during the summer, and when he got home before the opening of school, they began to interrogate him about what he had suffered for Christ's sake from these men during the summer, and to their amazement he said he hadn't suffered anything. In fact, he said, they didn't even find out I was a Christian.

That, in the light of our Lord's promise of double blessing, blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

A man's instinct to self-preservation is so strong that he resists any opposition or persecution, and by so doing he is robbing himself of that double blessing that our Lord pronounced upon those who are willing to endure suffering for his sake. In these beatitudes that our Lord has given as the characteristics of a righteous man, our Lord has pronounced blessing on those who are humble, those who are penitent, those who are submissive, those who have a passion for righteousness, those whose lives are characterized by purity or holiness, those who are kind, those who are righteous in all their ways. Blessing upon those who reunite the alienated, but he pronounced double blessing upon those who are persecuted.

For two beatitudes are devoted to this subject. Our Lord was addressing a nation that was a sinful nation. God had revealed His holiness to the nation through the Mosaic Law, and Israel knew the demands that a holy God made upon those who would walk in fellowship with himself.

But they had deviously found ways to circumvent the requirements of the holiness of God, they had violated the Word of God, and they had systematized their violation into an acceptable religious system. When John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, appeared to that nation, as his word is recorded in Matthew chapter 3 and verse 7, when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come. He pictured Christ in verse 12 as the one with a fan in his hand, who would thoroughly purge his floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but he will burn up the chap with unquenchable fire.

And John had issued a clarion call, summoning people who acknowledged their sinfulness and their need of a Savior out from that religious system to identify with him as they awaited the appearance of the

Redeemer, whom the prophets had said would come to remove transgression from Israel. Those who accepted John's message concerning themselves and acknowledged that they were guilty, and believed John's promise that a Redeemer was coming who would purge away their sins, received baptism at John's hand. That baptism was a public repudiation of their citizenship in the nation Israel.

It was a public repudiation of their own righteousness. It was a public repudiation of their religion. It was a public repudiation of their merit in the sight of God.

It was a confession of guilt and acknowledgement of sin. And they left that old system and all those old relationships because they found something of superior worth. And they were willing to stand out and stand alone because of what they believed, the message of John.

Because these had by this act repudiated their citizenship and had repudiated the religion in which they had been brought up. They were hated, and they were despised, and they were reviled, they were persecuted, and their faith was tested. But they were willing to endure that persecution because of the satisfaction that came to heart and mind in the message that was brought to them, that Messiah would come, would grant forgiveness of sins, and fulfill all that had been promised to them as a nation.

And to these who were thus enduring the persecution at the hands of their own people, our Lord said, Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad.

Blessed, doubly blessed, are the persecuted. The fifteenth chapter of John's Gospel, our Lord in parallel circumstances talked to a small group of disciples gathered together to observe the Passover in the upper room. The shadow of the cross is falling across their pathway, for in a few hours the despised and rejected and persecuted one will be put to death.

He is speaking there to a small group of men who had severed themselves from their former economic pursuit. They had left their businesses and had followed him. They had repudiated the religious system in which they had been brought up, and they surrendered their confidence in Phariseeism to trust Christ for salvation.

They had given up the traditions of their fathers and the accumulated lore of what rabbis taught in order that they might accept the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have given all that up and have become an alien and an estranged people to their own people because of the superlative worth that they found in the person of Jesus Christ. Now they are the despised, the rejected, the vilified, the lied about.

Some of them shortly will be the ones put to death for Christ's sake. And as our Lord sat on the eve of his crucifixion with this rejected and despised small group, our Lord explained why they were so hated by the world that they had left. And in John chapter 15, verses 18 to 24, our Lord gives four reasons why they would be hated by the world.

There is no question in our Lord's mind but that a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be and is hated by the world. He assumes that to be true. If the world hate you, and the original text implies they most certainly will, you know that it hated me before it hated you.

The world is no more capable of loving a believer than the believer is capable of seeing any real worth in the world from which he has been separated by his faith in Jesus Christ. The reasons given are first, verse

19, the fact that the believer has been separated from the world. Our Lord said, if ye were of the world, the world would love his own.

But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. The world has no capacity to understand the believer. He can't understand how he thinks.

He can't understand why he acts as he does. He can't understand his motives and his goals in life. He can't understand his morals and his ethics.

There's nothing about heaven that the world can grasp. And when heaven is translated into life, it is a foreign world with which they are being confronted, and they fear that which is foreign to them. When the worldling was once a part of the world, the world was perfectly at home with him because he acted just like the rest and talked like the rest and thought like the rest and sinned like the rest, lived like the rest.

Everything about him was understandable. But a transformation has taken place, and the world can't figure it all out. It's a mystery to them because they are not introduced into the things of heaven.

And it leads to utter confusion. And what they can't understand, they reject. What they can't reason out, they repudiate.

And what does not conform to their norms, they consider abnormal or insane. There is a further thought that when one leaves all the good things that the worldling delights in, he does so because he has found something better. And when he follows that which is superior, he by so doing passes judgment on that which is inferior.

And when the believer takes his stand with Jesus Christ, he by so identifying himself with Christ is saying to the world, you can have what you have there. I have something that is far better. He has tasted and seen how good the Lord is.

And he doesn't want the God of this world. He has tasted living bread and he's lost his appetite for that on which he used to feed. He's found a new power in his life, a new goal, and it supersedes that which he had found in the flesh and in catering to the flesh.

Holiness is more appealing to him than godlessness. By turning his life to those superlative things, he says to the world, I have found something that is better than that which you have, and I cannot stay there any longer. The world will hate the one who by leaving passes judgment on that which he has left.

The second reason is given to us in verse 20. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

If they have kept my sayings, which they never did, they will keep yours also. And all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake. And our Lord says that the world, 2,000 years after it showed its hatred of Christ by putting Christ on the cross, has not lost its hatred for Christ one iota.

The world's hatred for Christ is as virulent today as it was when the world crucified Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago. The world's hate does not diminish. And since Jesus Christ is not personally present so that their hatred can be poured out upon him personally, we'll seek out those who are identified with Jesus Christ that they may pour out their hatred on those who belong to Jesus Christ.

The world's hatred of the believer is a continuation of the world's hatred of Jesus Christ. A third reason is given at the end of verse 21. They know not him that sent me.

All these things will they do unto you because they know not him that sent me. Ignorant. Because the world is alienated from God.

The world does not know God, cannot understand the truth of God. It is foreign to the life of God. Because of ignorance, they hate the believer.

The last reason given is in verse 22. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak or pretext or excuse for covering for their sin. The world, until the coming of Christ, had never seen an example of absolute godliness, of holiness, of righteousness live before them.

They could plead ignorance. We've heard about holiness, but we've never seen it. Therefore, we are excusable.

When Jesus Christ came as the eternal Son of God and translated the holiness of God into a life that the world could observe, he no longer could plead ignorance and claim he was excused because he was like the rest of man. Jesus Christ exemplified in daily life the absolute unalterable holiness and righteousness of God. And instead of the world responding in thanksgiving that they now understood what holiness was and saw their sinfulness, to plead for salvation from the Savior, they turned in hatred to the one who is light, who by letting his light shine exposed their darkness and the sinfulness of their hearts.

Hatred and animosity came to Jesus Christ because he stripped away every pretext for their sin. I read in the 16th chapter of John's Gospel, in verse 7, that our Lord promised the Comforter, that is, the Holy Spirit, would come. In verse 8, when he has come, he will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

One of the major methods that the Spirit uses to convict the world of sin is through a believer. And a believer who leaves the world because of what he finds in Jesus Christ is reprovng the world's religion and the world's morals and the world's ethics. The one who leaves the world and says, I could not save myself, but I trust Christ for my salvation, is reprovng and rebukng the world of sin and of righteousness.

The one who leaves the world because it is a sinking ship under judgment and flees to the refuge of Christ is warning the world of judgment to come. The world does not respond to the convicting, reprovng, rebukng message of a child of God with thanksgiving and appreciation. They turn on that one that reprovng and rebukes as though by exterminating the witness for Christ they could absolve themselves from any responsibility to Jesus Christ.

Our Lord is warning that believers in an unchanging, Christ-rejecting, God-hating, sin-loving world can only be hated by that world. I can tell you very simply how to escape persecution. I can tell you businessmen how to escape any persecution for Christ's sake in the office.

I can tell you young people how to escape any persecution in school. I can tell you wives and mothers how to escape any persecution at home. You approve the world's righteousness.

Lead them to believe that you find no fault in their conduct. Let their sin become acceptable to you, and they won't persecute you. Accept the world's standards, the world's morals, the world's ethics as your standards and morals.

You live just like a worldling. They won't persecute you. Approve a man's religion.

Don't tell him he's lost and without Christ is bound for an eternal separation from God. Don't let on that you know that he's under divine judgment. Don't let on that you know the wages of sin is death.

He won't persecute you. Don't separate yourself from the world. Do everything possible to ingratiate yourself to the world and make yourself acceptable in anything from the Word of God that is an offense to the world you hide in your life.

Practice your religion in a closet, not out in the open. You can escape persecution. Hide the fact that you are a Christian.

Don't let them know. Don't rebuke sin when it's open and public and offensive to you. Countenance it.

Go along with it if necessary. Don't show any shock at the jokes that are passed around. Don't be incensed when in your presence they take the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in vain.

Don't say no when you're invited to participate in that which is ungodly. Be just like them and they won't persecute. May I remind you what our Lord said? I'm reading in Luke chapter 9 and verse 26.

Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he shall come in his own glory and in his father's and of the holy angel. Our Lord did not say that the one who to escape persecution, hid the fact that he was a believer, will not be saved. But he says that such a one who is not willing to publicly identify with Christ and to accept the persecution from the hatred of the world that such identification entails, when Jesus Christ shall come, Christ will blush in shame that the conduct of such a child was that.

This that our Lord taught the disciples in the upper room burned itself into the consciousness of Peter, and Peter writes in his first epistle, chapter 1, and tells us in verse 3 that we have been begotten unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold trials, that the trials of your faith be much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Persecuted now, yes, but approved, honored, glorified at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Blessed are they which are persecuted, for great shall be their reward in heaven. This principle is illustrated over and over in the Word of God. My mind goes back to Joseph.

He was persecuted for righteousness' sake by his brethren, and in his persecution he was thrown into a pit and left to die. But blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and God lifted Joseph out of that pit, made him a prime minister in Egypt. Or I think of Daniel, who was persecuted for righteousness' sake and was thrown into a den of lions.

But blessed are they that are persecuted. Daniel became second in authority to the empire of Babel. Or I think of Jeremiah, persecuted by his nation because he called them to repentance and to faith in God.

He was thrown into a slime pit and had sunk to his armpits in the ooze, despair of life. But God raised him up, gave him a name of honor among those who were God's prophets, the Old Testament. Jesus Christ bore the name of the despised and rejected one.

Isaiah so described him in Isaiah chapter 53. And this respected, despised and rejected one. We read in Philippians 2-9, God hath highly exalted and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Christ was not exempted from the blessing promised to those who were persecuted for righteousness' sake. And we are tempted to identify with the world that hates Christ. In order that we can be esteemed and accepted and respected by the world, let us call to mind that he that is a friend of the world is an enemy of God.

And that there is no blessing pronounced in Scripture on the spiritual chameleon who identifies with the world and hides the fact that he has been separated from it by identification with Jesus Christ. But there is double blessing for those who are willing to take their place with Christ, the rejected one, to be despised and rejected of man, that they may be approved of God. Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We pray our Father that God the Holy Spirit may be pleased to bring the truth from this our Lord's word to our hearts. May we who covet the praise and the acceptance by man be willing to identify with him in order that we might be blessed of him. Dismiss us with the riches of thy grace and mercy and peace abiding upon us, we pray in Jesus' precious name.

Amen.

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