

Fame, or Rejection and Persecution

by Miki Hardy

The sermon emphasizes that being famous or well-known does not prove anything unless you are preaching the right gospel, and that the message of Jesus will always bring reactions, including persecution.

Scripture: Acts 8:1, Acts 17:6, Acts 28:22, 2 Corinthians 10:2, 2 Corinthians 11:22, 2 Corinthians 11:24, Galatians 1:10-11, Philippians 1:12

Topics: "Persecution", "The Cross"

Description

Miki Hardy preaches about the challenges and opposition faced by those who preach the true message of the Gospel, emphasizing the need for Christians to embrace the message of the Cross and live a transformed life. He draws parallels from the lives of Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the Early Church, highlighting how being famous for preaching the Gospel does not equate to being accepted or approved by all. Hardy stresses the importance of staying true to the message of Jesus Christ, even in the face of rejection and persecution, both from outside and within the Church.

Transcript

Christianity is a call, a ministry, a message - it's a way of life. It's not a religion or a book of law. It's about Jesus living in and through us. I would like to share about being famous, yet being rejected, opposed and persecuted. When we look at men of God in the early days, these are real things that men experienced. They are good examples showing us that somewhere down the line, when we preach the right message, we are not going to be popular. In the Old Testament, we see that God raised a man called Moses. Yes, he was famous because all the people of Israel knew who he was and that he was called of God. But when we look at his life, we see that he was rejected by God's people because he spoke what God wanted him to share. He confronted them each time they started drifting away from God, trying to worship other gods. Moses was the mouthpiece of God, the prophet who spoke on His behalf. Often he was opposed, rejected and persecuted, because he spoke the truth, which the people of God did not want to hear. They wanted to continue to live the way they were living; they were happy with their lifestyles. So although he was well-known because of his life and what he preached, what God had called him to say was not at all pleasing to the Israelites.

From Moses time right up to today the reaction in the spirit is the same. God called the prophets in the Old Covenant, and we can read about their lives. The prophet Jeremiah confronted the people of God for more than forty years. Everyone knew that Jeremiah was a prophet of God. He was famous, in that he was

well-known as the prophet sent by God but Jeremiah had a very hard time, because again, the people of Israel wanted to do their own thing. This was not the plan of God for their lives. That's why God raised prophets, like Jeremiah, who spoke on God's behalf, confronting the people of God, with the truth and His plan for their lives. The Bible says they opposed the prophets, and many prophets were killed by their own people because they did not want to hear the truth, and what God wanted them to do. They wanted to follow the desires of their flesh. It's not about being well-known. You can be famous, have a name, a title, a big church, and be well-known throughout the world. Moses, and the prophets of the Old Testament were well known, but they had very hard lives and were always opposed. Their message was clear and direct: come back to God; serve your God. They were opposed and killed for what they believed and for the message that they brought.

The message that the Church is bringing today is very important, because this will determine if the Church will grow, or stay in the flesh. The message is the key. When Jesus came after the prophets, what happened during His ministry? He came and taught a new way of life, which was completely different from what the Jews had heard previously. The Pharisees opposed Him, and yet, Jesus was famous. He was well known. He had crowds of people following Him at the beginning. He was feeding them and healing them. But many of them did not want to hear what He had to say. His message was different to that preached by the Pharisees. His message was contrary to what the people of Israel were living at that time. They were expecting a king to rule over them, who would favour them, fight for them, speak on their behalf and protect them. That is what they thought about the prophesied Messiah but when Jesus came, He was completely different. He had not come to be ruler of Israel in the natural realm. He had come for a mission, for a purpose. He came with a message, and right from the start His message was clear.

Jesus had many followers. They were happy until He became insistent about the message that God was bringing through Him. He had many disciples, but there was a time when even the seventy disciples following Him left because of His message. They did not leave Him because, suddenly one day, He changed or He didn't carry the same love. No! They didn't want to continue following Him because of His message. Yet He was well known everywhere. He was famous. So what happened? Why did they want to leave Him? Why did they oppose Him? Why did they want to kill Him? I know that this was all part of God's plan; that Jesus would come and give His life so that we could be saved. But we mustn't forget that His message was clear and direct. He talked about a new way of life, in relationship with God, that people didn't want to live. They opposed what He had to say. The message he shared on the mountain was completely different to the one the Pharisees had preached and taught the people of Israel. They were very happy at that time because they could bring their sacrifices, and that was enough. But Jesus was directing them towards a new way of life, a new heart, a new attitude, and His message confronted them. So the seventy disciples left Him. Suddenly, the message was too difficult for them to accept. They wanted a message that would suit them, a king that would be on their side and rule them as a nation. They failed to understand the very purpose of the coming of the Messiah.

From the beginning, Jesus was clear, His message was pure and it challenged the Pharisees. He spoke words they didn't want to hear. They wanted to stone Him, and yet, at the same time He was well known everywhere. He had healed thousands of people and had given food to the needy. Thousands knew of the Messiah yet, when He spoke about deep things and insisted on a new way of life that people would have to accept and live, they rebelled. The same Jesus who had done them so much good and had loved them, shared a message that was too strong, too hard to live, too difficult to accept.

That is why Christianity is a message about a life that you live. It's more than words; it's your life. It's what Jesus needs to do deep in your heart. It's a total change and a new way for mankind. It's not just a teaching or new things. What Jesus was asking of them, and challenging them on for this future lifestyle, brought rebellion and anger to their hearts, followed by a rejection of the message. They could not accept the challenge. When the seventy abandoned Him, He turned to His twelve disciples and asked, "Do you also want to leave me?" And what was their answer? "No. Where are we going to go? You have the words of eternal life." They, at least, were ready to accept the challenge.

We know the life that Jesus lived was perfect. And yet, several times He had to flee to save His life. People talked about Him negatively; they tried to make false accusations against Him, to put Him to death. His message was too hard!

I believe that Jesus never asks us to do things we can't, because He will always give us His grace to accomplish what He is asking. Jesus' life was not easy. He had the Spirit in full measure. He knew what people thought; He knew their minds and plans. He knew everything. He knew He had to give His life on the Cross. Jesus brought a clear message. And the seventy left Him.

What happened in the time of the Early Church? The Old Testament is one scenario. The New Testament is another. Under the Old Covenant the people of Israel had to conquer the land under Joshua. Moses had died and Joshua was going to bring the people of God into the Promised Land. That's all they had to do. Under the New Covenant, when Jesus died and rose again, He was asking for a new life, a transformation. He left His disciples, the first apostles, to start the Early Church and what happened? The Bible says they shook the world everywhere they went. They were famous! They were known by everyone, everywhere, as they preached the Gospel. They went from one town, city, country, to another. They were well known because the message they preached brought many reactions. Many good things happened through their ministry and yet they were persecuted.

In the Early Church, we see persecution both from within the Church and from without. The Bible says the apostles were persecuted: "Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." (Acts 8:1) This message will bring persecution from those outside. As the Early Church, we too preach the Gospel to people of many religions and traditions and it's normal that it brings persecution from those outside, because we preach Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. People get born-again, and there's a lot of reaction and persecution against the church. This is what we see in the Early Church. They were persecuted because they preached the Gospel; it's totally normal. The disciples and the apostles were renowned for being a sect. That's what the Bible says; we will be opposed from those outside because of the message that we bring to the world. In the book of Acts, it says that the apostles turned the world upside down; "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too'." (Acts 17:6) This is a normal reaction in the spirit when you preach Jesus Christ. So, not only were the apostles and disciples well known and famous because they turned the world upside down, but what they preached and lived also brought persecution against the church. We cannot think we can build the Church of Jesus Christ without opposition and persecution from outside.

If the Church is alive, preaching this message, and reaching out to others, it's normal that it will come up against persecution. A church that is alive and preaching the right message is always going to be persecuted. We see that the first Christians were persecuted by those outside, which is normal. Acts 24:5

speaks of Paul: "For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." The same thing is said in Acts 28:22: "But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." You see, there are some things that you and I cannot fight against, and we've got to accept as truth because Christianity is a message and a life. We cannot expect people to speak well of us. We cannot expect the world to pat us on the back and say, 'Well done!' They will reject us, speak against us, and oppose and persecute the Church. Rejection and persecution are to be expected when the Gospel is being preached.

In order to turn the world upside down, you've got to be famous. You will automatically be famous when your message is spread everywhere. Paul, the apostles and Jesus were all famous. What made them famous was their message and the life they lived. Being rejected and persecuted was normal for them. The disciples and the Christians of the Early Church didn't see persecution as something strange; it was a part of their lives. This is what we, the Church, have got to grasp and accept, and not fight or rise up against it when it comes. We must accept that this is part of God's plan. Jesus said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, rejoice when you are persecuted! He also said, when people persecute you, pray for them, love them and bless them. We cannot rise up against persecution because that would be acting in a different spirit. We've got to accept it and continue to serve the Lord, and not lose the vision and get distracted, trying to counteract it. We are not called to counteract persecution or seek acceptance, but to continue in the vision that God has given us, and not try and find a way of escape.

Moses accepted what he was called to as part of God's plan for his life. The prophets didn't complain. It was hard, but they accepted it as part of their ministry. It's a call, a ministry, a message, a life. You cannot try to remove part of it. You've got to accept that through it God will work deeply in your life and you'll grow as a result. When you read the Gospels, and what Jesus said, you understand that God Himself has used people to persecute the church so that it could rise up and serve Him in a deeper way. It's God's plan. Why else would He have told us to rejoice when persecution comes our way? He would have given us another option. But He said, 'Rejoice!' You see, there's always something greater coming in the spirit when opposition occurs. There's always something we can look forward to in the spirit when persecution or rejection comes our way. Jesus accepted it. Remember when He said, "I could call on My Father, and He would send one thousand angels to fight for Me." But He didn't do that. He had to go to the end of His mission. He had to go through it. That's the way that God, His Father, had ordained for Him, and that's the way that God has ordained for the Church today. We cannot try to find a way out. What can we do? Nothing, except expect greater things!

Being famous because you preach the Gospel does not prove anything, unless you are preaching the right gospel. When we look at the history of the Church - Moses, the prophets, Jesus, the Early Church - we see the same pattern. That's why we've got to question the ministry, the message, and our life today. If everything is 'cool' and we're simply regarded as being famous and are satisfied with that; if we are happy with the things we are doing and we only look to the people who are following us, we may well be deceived. Because when you look at historical trends, and at those who have left a mark on the Church, in the Old Covenant - those witnesses of the faith, whom we read about in Hebrews 11, who left a mark in Israel's history, they were not simply famous for being who they were. It was not their title of 'Prophet'. No. It was the message they brought and the reaction that came with it. That was the mark left by their ministry, their call, and their lives; and it seemed to be proof of a successful call and ministry.

We have talked about the reaction from outside. Now let's look at reaction from the inside... from within the Church itself. Christianity starts with a message for people to be saved, and every single Christian in the Church approves of that message. Everyone is happy when Christians go out and preach the message of salvation, and evangelists have become famous because of it. They will expect to receive opposition and persecution from outside the Church, but they won't receive persecution from inside because everyone in the Church is happy. But on the outside, the spirit of the world and satanic powers will rise up against the message. Satan will oppose it and he will persecute the preaching of the message of salvation. That's why there are some great evangelists, anointed men of God, who are famous, and approved of by the whole church, but who are rejected and opposed and persecuted by the world. It's the same reaction that we see in the book of Acts. Peter was preaching the Good News and people were being saved and healed, and as a result he was put into prison. It's normal.

What about the reaction that we see from inside the Church then, when we preach a message for God's people - Christians? What message do Christians need to hear? I want you to see that Moses and the prophets were often not well received or approved of by the people of Israel. Jesus, when He walked on earth and spoke the truth to His people, was not approved of. He was rejected and opposed. All those who were called by God, who brought the truth, whether it was Moses, Samuel, any of the prophets, or Jesus, were all opposed for the message they brought to their own people.

When we look at the life of Apostle Paul, we know this man received the revelation of Christ in its fullness. In Galatians 1:11, he talks about the revelation he received. He had not heard it from man, he was not taught about it, instead he received it directly from Jesus Christ. Even the first apostles acknowledged that. It's good for us to look at the life of Apostle Paul so that we understand his call, ministry and message. I believe that when he preached the message of Christ and Him crucified, he was not applauded. He was not given a warm, happy welcome. The first ones to oppose him, to try to undermine his ministry, were ministers of the Gospel! That's why, when he speaks to the Corinthians, who had been deceived by other ministries, he tries to tell them about his own ministry and what he's been through, in order to show the reality of his ministry. He emphasises the message, and then he tells of his life to show God's approval on his ministry. And yet, he was opposed by many preachers of the Gospel because of his message and his way of life.

We must not believe that if we have the right message and the right lifestyle according to Scripture, everyone will approve of us. That's why I am sharing with you the history, the trends, and the reactions inside and outside the Church. Philippians 1:12, "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the Gospel."

Here we see two groups of preachers: one group who were with him and acknowledged that he was called to defend the Gospel, and the other who were undermining his ministry and trying to destroy and pervert the Gospel. They brought another gospel to the church where Apostle Paul himself had laid the true foundation of the Gospel. When preachers of the gospel do not want their lives to be known because they don't want to be exposed or confronted; they will oppose this message. That's how opposition comes into and rises up from within the Church. It's a question of what message you bring. In the same way that

evangelists preach a message to those who need salvation and receive opposition and persecution from the world; we who preach the Message of the Cross and defend this message will most certainly face the same reactions and the same experiences as Apostle Paul. This is a reality.

That's why it's dangerous to listen to men of God from behind the pulpit when you do not know their lives. Because the right message exposes your life. It was not just jealousy that turned these people against Paul. It was not because Paul had the revelation that they rose up against him. No! It was the message he brought. They were not ready to accept it, live it, defend it, and embrace it with their lives. They were not ready to live the reality of the Gospel.

In 2 Corinthians 11:22, we see Apostle Paul addressing the Corinthians and defending his ministry. He has to explain to them what was happening because people were speaking against him, trying to destroy his ministry and to suppress his message. And the only way for someone to try to stop a message spreading is to attack the man preaching it. If you attack the instrument that brings the message, you will suppress it, and stop it from being preached. That's why they attacked Apostle Paul. This is why Jesus says to the people, in John: "You want to hear what I have to say, but you don't want the life." It's good and wonderful to hear, but there comes a time when you need to allow the deep work to be done in your life, and your heart to be exposed, and to humble yourself. If you don't want it, the only way to stop it is to attack the preacher. You undermine him. Those opposing him waited for Apostle Paul to be in prison (Philippians 1). In prison he could not defend himself. He could not say anything. What did God do? The Bible tells us that when Paul was in prison, the Church rose up in the spirit and preached the Gospel all the more. So on the one hand, you've got those who want to undermine the ministry and destroy Apostle Paul and, on the other hand, God, by His Spirit, speaks to His people and works in them and they are set on fire for Jesus. No one can stop God's work!

2 Corinthians 11:22 asks: "Are they Hebrews?" He's talking about other ministers of the Gospel who had put themselves on a pedestal saying 'Believe in me, don't believe in him. Follow me, follow what I say. But don't listen to that man'. Now he says to the Corinthians, "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more a minister of Christ than they; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure". Here he describes his life that is proof of the call of God, the ministry, and the message. Do you see? He's talking about what he's been through. These men were trying to destroy him; they were not prepared to live the way Paul was prepared to live. They were not prepared to identify their lives with Christ in His sufferings and in His death. That's why Apostle Paul reminds them: 'Remember what I preached to you, the foundation I laid, the message I brought to you; how you must identify your life with the sufferings and the death of Christ. Now I'll show you my life to prove to you that I have embraced the message, and I'm presenting myself to you as a minister of the Gospel, because what has happened to me is as a result of the message I preach'. Do you see how he's trying to counter what has been said against him? How does he do it? Does he say, "These guys are liars and fools, these guys are destroyers"? No, he does not enter into that kind of fight.

In 2 Corinthians 10:2 it says: "But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh." Here he shows the way that he meets this challenge and he says, in verse 3, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh." In other words, he says, 'See what these guys are accusing me of, and how they are trying to destroy me; but, I'm not going to sink to the same level as them. I'm not going to react in the flesh to try and speak against them or attack them. The way I'm going to defend my ministry is

to show you my life as an example. That's all! I'm not going to talk about him, what he said about me, no. I'll leave that to him. But, here is my life..."

In verse 4, he states, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal..." He's saying, 'I'm not going to fight in the flesh. I'm not going to enter that discussion of 'I'm right, he's wrong... I'm going to prove it to you...' No. That's the flesh! Verse 4 continues, "...for pulling down strongholds." Allow me to point out something: He's not referring to spiritual warfare here. He's talking about his way of life. He's saying the weapons of our warfare... He's talking about himself and them. He's declaring, 'I'm not going to use the flesh, my weapons are not carnal; they are mighty through God for pulling down strongholds'. In other words, I'm going to tell you about my way of life, what I live, what I preach. And this is enough to pull down every stronghold in your life. God Almighty, by His Spirit, through what I'm going to show you about my preaching and my way of life, is mighty enough to pull down all the strongholds in your mind. He's saying, 'You have believed lies about me, but I'm not entering that battle, instead I'm going to talk to you in the spirit.' His message is clear. God Himself, will deal with all the arguments, all the lies that these men are saying about him. And God will bring every high thing that exalts itself, and every thought into captivity, to the obedience of Christ. Can you see the fight that the man is facing because of the message? Can you see how they are throwing darts at him and making plans to destroy him?

In chapter 11:24, he states, 'I am more of a minister of Christ than them and I'll prove it to you': "...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness" He is describing his life. Do you notice how he has totally surrendered his life and it is lost to him? He's ready for every situation because in his heart he is very clear: 'My life is no longer mine. I'm ready to identify my life fully with Christ. That is his weapon. He doesn't once speak ill of those who are against him but says, 'Look at their lives and then compare them with mine. That will be enough for you to see the difference.' He isn't going to get into arguments. No! He protects his ministry by showing them his life.

Paul was very well known throughout Europe, Israel and the region as a preacher of the Gospel. Today you can be famous if you have a big church but that's not the point, it doesn't prove anything. It's your message, and your way of life that counts. But unfortunately the right message is not popular. It was not popular in the time of Jesus, nor was it popular in the time of the Early Church. Why should that have changed today? How do people become famous without the message? It's easier today to have a big church without pure and sound doctrine, than when you preach the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That's the truth. It has not changed, it's the same pattern and it's not going to change.

My question is: Is the message of the Gospel not strong enough to build spiritual people who can stand in all situations, in different tests and trials? Is this gospel not powerful enough to enable you and I to finish the race on the day of His return? What else then can we use to establish God's people and make them strong? There is nothing else because Jesus has given us one tool: the Message of the Cross. That's the only message we need to take people from a carnal lifestyle into a spiritual lifestyle. There aren't two, there's only one. But it won't make you famous except in the sense that people will hear about the message you preach. You will not be popular or congratulated for it; you'll have opposition and persecution from within the Church! You can't change that, because those who don't want to hear this

message will oppose you.

So what can we conclude? What do we need? How do we define a successful church? How do we evaluate a spiritual church? If the church is full, that's wonderful! But what kind of Christians is it full of? People holding onto their lives, carnal, living in sin, in adultery, in immorality; having bad attitudes, anger, and never able to grow up spiritually? Is this what Jesus is looking for? Is this what He died for? Or is it for a strong, spiritual church that can stand, that the world sees shining? We've got to know what message we preach; otherwise we can become famous for the wrong reasons. You become famous because you've got fifteen thousand people in your church, but what message do you bring? This is the key. You can be famous because of your title. You can be famous because there are many letters in front of, or after, your name. This means nothing. Paul was known by his first name only - Paul! He had nothing else. Yet, he was one of the most famous, and also one of the most opposed, persecuted and undermined preachers ever. Others wanted to stop him and tried to destroy him. Why? It was the message he preached. This is what will determine whether you're popular with God or with man. What did Paul say in Galatians? "If I am a man pleaser, I'm not a servant of the Lord." Do we want to please man? Then tell him everything he wants to hear, tell him everything is right there for him. Tell him that all of God's promises are at his disposal. If you want to be popular among men, don't preach the message of the Cross. But if you want to be popular in God's eyes, stick to one message: Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

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