



Coping With Persecution

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VCM-SOTM09

4 October 2017

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Persecution is going through insult, abuse, suffering, rejection, discrimination, pain and even death for doing good or living right. Used about 76 times in the Bible, the word has a strong meaning of being followed or chased after. It is like a continuous, ruthless chase to hunt down the prey! These may not always be physical persecution as we could sometimes feel being constantly chased after by the enemy of Christ. When we pursue righteousness, we may find being constantly running or fleeing from the spiritual forces, who are after us to knock us down.

REASON FOR PERSECUTION

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (vs 10). Jesus said many times that those who follow Him will be persecuted. "If they persecute me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20-21).

REALITIES OF PERSECUTION

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (vs 11). For the first century Christians, persecution was a norm rather than an exception. Stephen, Peter and Paul, nearly all of the Apostles, and many Christians in the Roman era suffered martyrdom. Oppressive governments and endless conflicts throughout the ages have seen their share of martyrs.

REWARD FROM PERSECUTION

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (vs 12). Great reward await those who go through persecution with the right attitude and fortitude. We find it difficult to grasp rejoicing in suffering because we have not seen the complete picture. Even among many Christians, there is a growing tendency to focus on earthly blessings.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven..." (Matthew 5:12).

It should be noted that it is not in the suffering or pain, we rejoice, but it is in the hope of God's glory to be revealed. A good example of this is a 'child-birth'. Mother goes through immense pain and struggle, with pain intensifies as the time comes nearer. For her, the present pain is not worth comparing with the joy she will experience in her child. Her focus is not on the suffering, but on the joy that her child will bring.

Jesus promised that those who suffer for his sake will be rewarded with the Kingdom of Heaven! Note the following scriptures:

- 1 Peter 3:13-14 – "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed."
- 1 Peter 4:12-14,16,19 – "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that 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...However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name....So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."
- Phil 3:10-11 – "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."
- Romans 8:18 – "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Jesus offers those who are persecuted for his name, the inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. At present, we don't see it, yet we believe in it and we rejoice in that hope and future. (Romans 8:24) Paul rightly say that our present sufferings are not even worth comparing with the glory that will be manifested when Christ will return.