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Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

My hairdresser was out of town, so I made an appointment for a Saturday morning with another woman in our church who owns a salon. The next day, at church, Anne asked me, “Libby, did you sense a strange atmosphere in my shop yesterday?”

“No,” I answered, startled. “Should I have?”

“When you walked in, a woman who was getting her hair shampooed in the bay next to mine said, ‘Is that Libby Handford? Hide me quick! She’s tried to save me twice, and I don’t want her to try to save me again.’”

“Oh, dear! Then what happened?”

“She covered her face with a newspaper and lay there the whole time you were in the shop.”

I was humiliated. That’s not the way I want people to react when I talk to them about Jesus. We are always to be ready, according to First Peter 3:15, to tell people why we have hope, and we are to do it with meekness and fear, not with arrogance.

Evidently I didn’t do it very well, if she hid for an hour under a newspaper to keep me from talking to her!

I asked Anne to please tell the woman, the next time she came in, how sorry I was that I had offended her. I don't want to trample recklessly over someone's feelings, no matter how eager I am to share the Gospel.

As I grieved over the incident, God reminded me of someone else who spoke to me in the salon that same afternoon.

Just as I was leaving the beauty shop, she stopped me. "Mrs. Handford, you won't remember me. But one day I had an accident in front of your house. You brought me and my little girl into your home while your husband went to get my husband. My little girl fell asleep in your bed, and so you and my husband and I talked for a couple of hours while she slept.

"I've never forgotten what you told us about Jesus that day. I am so grateful. I've thanked you in my mind so many times, and now I can tell you face to face. Thank you."

Then the Lord Jesus reminded me how that particular passage in First Peter 3:15 ends:

**Having a good conscience,
that when they defame you as evil doers,
those who revile your good conduct
in Christ may be ashamed"**

1 Peter 3:16

This seems to say that sometimes, when we're expressing "a

reason for the hope” in us, we may be misunderstood. Others may be offended when we are only trying to offer grace and peace with God. But God grant that it never be because we are clumsy or hateful or unloving! And God grant, too, that someday they’ll understand what we were trying to express about His immeasurable love and grace!

1. It isn’t persecution if people dislike you because you are mean and argumentative.

A woman might feel she was standing up for Jesus by being very vocal in her criticism of a neighbor's clothing or life style. If her neighbor was offended, she might think she was “being persecuted “for righteousness' sake,” when actually she had been cantankerous!

Let's make sure we are truly being persecuted for righteousness' sake, because we are trying our best to do right, to help others come to a knowledge of God, not because we are critical and unloving.

2. If you've never lost a friend because of your testimony, then perhaps you have not been strong enough in your witness for Jesus. What did Jesus say about this in Luke 6:26?

And how should we react when people criticize us for doing right? (Luke 6:27,28)

Why are we blessed, or truly happy, when we are reproached for the name of Jesus? (1 Peter 4:13,14)

How should a Christian react when he is persecuted for being a Christian? (1 Peter 4:16)

3. Why do people hate someone trying to do right? Is it perhaps because they want to justify their own sin? It may be a desperate effort to protect their self-image.

Have you noticed how often someone trying to defend homosexuality, or same-sex marriage will use the Bible to try to justify his views? What does Jude 1:10 say about this?

You'd think that people would be glad to help you, to encourage you, when you are trying to do right. But that isn't always the case. Often ungodly people not only try to justify their own wrong-doing by the Scripture, but they seem to delight in helping other to do wrong! What does Romans 1:32 tell us both about what they know is true, but still do?

I remember a woman and her husband who came to know Christ years ago. She had a terrible, constant thirst for liquor. Her husband made good money as an engineer, but he was bankrupted by her drinking. She stole his income tax refund, and spent it all within the week.

But if her husband somehow was able to cut off her funds for drinking, the bar-tender would give her drinks on credit, and then, once again, I'd see her staggering down the street from the bar toward home.

Once I stood in the hallway of the federal court building in Greenville, at a recess in the midst of a trial, trying my best to explain the way of salvation to the man being tried.

I knew he lived a life of exceeding regret, in bondage to his sin, and I felt if I could make the way of salvation plain, this court case would have done its good work in the man's life.

But as I was talking to him, I noticed his lawyer, standing a few feet away and within hearing distance of our conversation, sneer as he listened to what I was saying. Later on he said to one of my children, "I heard your mother preaching again the other day in court."

But of all the people in the courtroom that day, you'd think that man's lawyer would have been the one who wanted his troubled client to get spiritual help!

No, this world is not a friend to grace! How does James 4:4 express this?

4. What is the Christian's difficult but essential role in this wicked world? (James 1:27)

Jesus is our wonderful example of how to do this. Notice what He tells us in John 15:17-21: "These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.'

"If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me" (John 15:17-21).

In this passage of Scripture, John 15:17-21, what does Jesus command us to do?

Why does the world hate us (John 15:17-21)?

Why should we not be surprised that they hate us? (John 15:17-21)

Why do they persecute us? (John 15:17-21)

Who is our example in this? (John 13:15,16)

So if you are being persecuted for righteousness' sake, welcome to the blessed inner circle, with the Lord Jesus Himself!

Paul wrote, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). It seems there is a special fellowship, a heart-knit understanding, we have with Jesus when we suffer for His sake.

How did the Apostle Paul feel about what he had suffered for the cause of Christ? (Romans 8:18)

What was the response of the disciples when they were jailed for preaching the Gospel? (Acts 5:41)

There are wonderful compensations when you suffer for Jesus. How did the Apostle Paul describe these in Second Corinthians 1:5-7?

5. Are you persecuted for righteousness' sake? Then suffer in the knowledge that one wonderful day Jesus will be vindicated, and you will rejoice with Him.

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27,28).

What will it be like, when we at last experience what God had in mind for us through the long ages? The aged Apostle John, exiled on the barren Isle of Patmos, got a glimpse of what is ahead for Christians who have suffered for Jesus:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

“He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'

“Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.' “

Revelation 21:3-7

I will be courageous when criticized
because of my relationship with my Father
and King,
for His is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory
forever!

The Ultimate Fulfillment of the Blessings Jesus Promised Us in the Beatitudes

We were bankrupt, deprived,
but we will find ourselves forgiven and welcomed
into the Kingdom as the King's own child.

We were forlorn and mourning
because of the terrible losses we endured,
but we will be comforted forever
by the God of All Comfort,
and will worship Him with those
whose loss we'd mourned.

We sought to be meek, not proud, not self-seeking,
but following the steps of the Lord Jesus,
but someday we will own the Kingdom
and enjoy all the glories of God's creation.

We did deeply hunger and thirst
for holiness and righteousness,
only now to find absolute satisfaction in the presence
of our all-sufficient God.

We sought to show mercy, sometimes to our loss,
but received unmeasured mercy from God ourselves.
Now we will worship the King with all those who are
in Heaven because we shared God's mercy with them.

How we longed to be pure in heart,
and now we will look, unashamed and holy,
on the face of Him who is Holiness incarnate.

We lived in a broken world
with people who didn't know how to find peace,
and we tried to be peace-makers.
Now God calls us His "bairns," His born-ones,
and we bear His likeness,
ruling in His Kingdom.

And all those insults and deprivations we experienced
because we tried to live righteously?
They're completely forgotten, meaningless in the
glory of God's Kingdom.
But we will enjoy the indescribable rewards of
Heaven because we endured them for Jesus' sake,
because we entered into the fellowship of
His suffering.

Dear Friend,

Thank you for joining me in this exciting adventure through the "upside-down" life of the Beatitudes. We've learned that the experiences that we, humanly speaking, dreaded most in life often turn out to be the most wonderful things God could give us.

Yes, He's the high king of Heaven and Earth, but He's also our dear, loving Heavenly Father who delights in giving His children all the eternal riches of His glory!

Elizabeth Handford

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever, Amen.

Jude 1:24,25