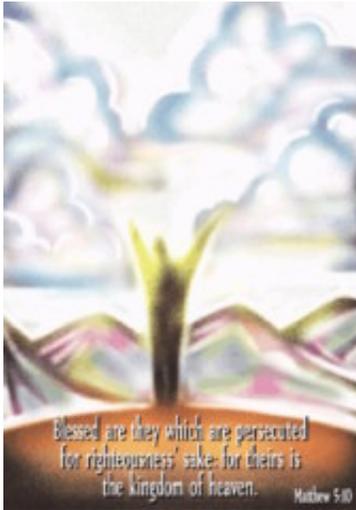


LESSON 8



SUFFER FOR CHRIST'S SAKE

Scripture Texts: Matthew 10:28-37; 1 Peter 4:12-16

We have been studying the provision God has made for us to grow in grace and become strong in spirit. The same spiritual provision which enables one to live godly under the common temptations of daily life will enable him to endure the trials of persecution and suffering. We need to be firmly established in the Lord so that sudden pressure will not shake us loose.

Some things are established if one is to live a victorious life for God. (1) There is sure to be hatred and persecution from the world. (2) We must not complain, but rejoice. (3) Persecution can kill the body, not the soul. (4) God sees all persecution and will give strength to go through it. (5) We must love Christ above all and confess Him boldly.

MEMORY VERSE: *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

— John 15:18

Not Fear, but Boldness

Matthew 10:28. **Fear not them which kill the body.** Earlier in the chapter Jesus told His followers that if they treated the Master with disrespect, the servant would be treated with more disrespect by the unsaved. **Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.** This is not a reverential fear such as saints feel for God, but the fear of terror. God does not destroy souls and bodies. God will turn some away, but they are already dead in sin. When God "kills," He only makes final the separation the sinner has already made. See Revelation 2:23. God has life, not death. Jesus has life, not death (read John 1:4; 5:26; 10:10). It is Satan who destroys souls and bodies. Therefore, we are to avoid with fear any sin or denial of Christ or compromise with His enemies. This takes boldness. The saint's business is to speak the Gospel message publicly and without being ashamed.

Matthew 10:29-33. **Two sparrows.** Compared to the worth of a human being, sparrows are of very little value, yet God is concerned in the fall of each one. **Hairs of your head**—God has each one counted, identified, and classified. God goes to great detail in showing His care for all humanity. **Therefore**—based upon the fore-going—**fear ye not** opposition, abuse, slander, persecution, or death. Why? **Ye are of more value** in God's sight, since a human life embodies an immortal soul for whom Christ died. God sees, cares, and will act. He will not prevent the suffering, but He will give grace to bear it. **Whosoever . . . shall confess me before men**—relate to Christ, acknowledge Him—**him will I confess also before my Father**—confess and be confessed. He will relate to and acknowledge us. His acknowledgment gives entrance to all the joys and benefits that the Father has for His people. This includes Heaven for eternity. Is this worth suffering and dying for? Denying Him brings denial from Him and a closing of Heaven's door. We confess Him by holding to Him without doubting and own Him without cowardice or shame. To attempt to hide our relationship to Christ in order to escape pain or ridicule is to deny Him. See Mark 8:38.

Love Christ First

Matthew 10:34-37. **A man's foes shall be they of his own household.** Jesus knew that the life of His followers would be filled with trouble, suffering and persecution, and that they would sometimes meet their greatest opposition within the circle of home and friends. He meant that loyalty to Him always costs the believer dearly. **He that loveth father or mother . . . son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** No one in all the history of the human race has done so much to enrich the family relationship as Jesus, yet He said that relationship with Him comes before relationship with the dearest on earth. To us, the counsel is that we are to be prepared for opposition as we take our stand in behalf of Christ. Let us

neither be amazed nor discouraged if men jeer and oppose us when we stand for Christ against their love for comfort, their spiritual indifference, or their evil ways. Often one's greatest peace is experienced when one has turned from those he loves most to serve Him who demands all. This is a peace which the world cannot give, neither can their threats take it away.

No Strange Thing

First Peter 4:12-15. **Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.** Because there is a divine purpose in the trials which we experience, we are commanded to count it all joy, **be glad also with exceeding joy.** The purpose of the trial of our faith is our eternal blessing, in that it is for our spiritual strength and good. Suffering, alone, brings no reward; it is suffering for Christ's sake which is rewarded and blessed. **Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.** When we stand for Christ and are reproached for His sake, we have assurance that we do not stand a-lone but have with us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God far outshines the glory of men and this world. This is the ground of our victory.

First Peter 4:16. **If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.** We must be ashamed if we are branded as a lawbreaker by the courts, but if we are condemned as believers, then we can rejoice that we are charged with standing against the world.

If our crime is Christianity, then we can praise God. If God be for us, who can be against us? Saints are not in a popularity contest. They are in a spiritual race which each must finish in order to gain the victory. It is essential for men and women when they are experiencing severe persecution or suffering to prevent discouragement and gain the victory. In Matthew 10:22 Jesus promised persecution to the true Christian, but He also promised a rich reward.

JUST A THOUGHT

**You can live in this world only once,
but if you live right, once is enough.**

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