

## Sermon – 27/02/2011 pm

### Shame for His Name

Study Text: Luke 6:22-23

‘Jesus promised his followers that they would be absurdly happy but also that they would never be out of trouble’. This quote makes clear the paradox of the Christian life. Many think that as Christians they should have a trouble free life. They think that God should give them everything they want and that because they are honest and loving everyone will love them in return.

But this was not the life Jesus promised his disciples. It is far from the life that Jesus experienced in this world. Jesus told his disciples that he had chosen them out of the world, and they were not of this world. For this reason the world would hate them just as it hated him. For this reason they would be persecuted just as Jesus was persecuted (John 15:19, 20). If Jesus had trouble in this world, all who truly follow him will also have trouble.

Jesus said *the Son of Man has no place to lay his head* (9:58). Jesus did not belong to this world. Though without sin Jesus was persecuted in this world because this world is a fallen world. *In this world you will have tribulation* he told his disciples. *But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* he concluded (John 16:33). Absurdly happy in the midst of poverty and persecution. This is the life Jesus promises.

#### 1. Rejected and Reviled

*Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you, and insult you, and reject your name as evil for the Son of Man's sake* (6:22). This does not sound like a very happy life does it? To be ostracized, hated and insulted sounds a bit like being bullied in the schoolyard.

The problem of bullying seems greater today than ever before. Nowadays we have cyber bullying, with rude and offensive words being sent through mobile phones and computers. How can young people do this? Society told their parents their child was born perfect and that they should let him/her be themselves. These parents who thought their child was a ‘perfect little darling’ suddenly find their child telling lies and using offensive words.

There was a saying ‘sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me’. It is no longer p.c. but there was some truth in this saying. Names do hurt of course, but only as far as we allow them to hurt. The Bible says *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13). Paul wrote these words while he was in prison awaiting trial. Even his friends had deserted him. It is possible to rejoice in the Lord always.

What does it mean to be persecuted? Some children, and adults also, are hated and reviled because of bad things they have done. Some Christians are hated and reviled because of bad things they have done. Lloyd Jones reminds us that Jesus did not say ‘blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable’ or ‘blessed are those who are persecuted as Christians because they are seriously lacking in wisdom, and are really foolish and unwise in what they regard as testimony’.

Some Christians make a nuisance of themselves by being over-zealous. They may even be persecuting their pagan neighbour by their behaviour. Some people want to be martyrs. Jesus is not speaking to such people in this verse.

Nor is he speaking to people who get into trouble for doing wrong. *Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer or as a busybody in other peoples matters* (I Peter 4:15). A busy body! A meddler! Are you being persecuted, not because of your faith in Jesus but because you are a meddler?

Lloyd Jones also warns about mixing politics and religion. If we do so ‘we must not be surprised if we receive persecution’ he writes. There may be Christians in prison and even being killed in the ME uprising at present. They want democracy and have every right to seek this, but are not suffering for their faith specifically. For those who were attacked while worshipping in church it is a different matter.

You may know Christians who are active in politics. You may be active yourself in lobbying for good and moral causes. You may get insulted for doing so, but is this the persecution Jesus is talking about? Is this suffering for the name of Christ? We must be discerning and carefully distinguish between political matters and spiritual principles.

We look to Jesus and his life. His persecution had nothing to do with politics – even though some today claim he was a revolutionary. We can also look at Daniel. Did he suffer for his political stand? When the law prohibiting prayer to any man or god other than Darius was declared, Daniel did as he always did. He went home and prayed to his God. He was thrown into the lion’s den because of his faith and worship.

Peter and John likewise were beaten and thrown into prison because they healed a man and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. They rejoiced at being counted worthy to suffer shame for his name (Acts 5:41).

Not all persecution comes from unbelievers or from the pagan world. History shows that most persecution of believers comes from within the church. Think of the Reformation and the inquisition. Think of the Puritans and the way they persecuted – not by the world but by the church. ‘Formal Christianity is often the greatest enemy of the pure faith’ (M. Lloyd-Jones).

Jesus spoke of the fathers persecuting the prophets (6:23). Who persecuted Elijah? Who persecuted Jeremiah? The Jewish leaders! It was the formal church as it were, the church that had strayed from the truth. False prophets were never persecuted – they were praised by the formalists and legalists.

Who persecuted Jesus Christ? It was the same formalists and legalists. It was not Gentile unbelievers who were after Jesus – it was the legalistic Pharisees. Have you suffered persecution for your faith in Jesus; for your adherence to the true faith? If so was it persecution from within the church?

## **2. Rejoice**

What is your response to being insulted or hated? Do you retaliate and give back as good as you get? Do you resent the insult and the person or persons who insulted you? Do you bear a grudge against them? Do you become depressed and withdraw? Some people stop coming to church if they are insulted. Others become stoical and hardened.

Jesus clearly tells us we are not to retaliate. We are not to curse those who curse us. We are to do good to those who hate us (6:27). He does not want us withdrawing or cutting ourselves off from the church or society either. In fact he says *rejoice in that day and leap for joy!* (6:23).

But how can I do this you ask? How can I leap for joy when I am hated and insulted? Remember we are talking about persecution for the name of Jesus not because you have been foolish. We are talking about suffering as an ambassador for Jesus; suffering insults because you are His representative. The insults are actually aimed at your king, namely Jesus.

The apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name (Acts 5:41). They rejoiced because this was confirmation that they belonged to Jesus. If you suffer for the name of Jesus it means you belong to him. This is not seeking martyrdom but it is a proof of your faith.

The apostle Paul was in prison for preaching the truth that Jesus Christ died and rose again. He rejoiced because his suffering was evidence that his message was heard and understood. The world does not like to hear the truth. People get upset when they are told they are sinners before Almighty God, and that they will go to Hell if they do not repent and believe in Jesus. They block their ears and turn upon the preacher of righteousness.

### 3. Reward in Heaven

Jesus promised everyone who has left home, parents, or brothers for the sake of the Kingdom of God that they would receive *eternal life in the age to come* (18:29). He promised everyone who was persecuted because of their faith in him a reward in heaven – a great reward (6:23).

What Jesus says about persecution is in the context of a beatitude or blessing. Here he spells out this blessing. He tells of a great reward in heaven. He has made clear that persecution is something a believer must expect. And it is something a believer must accept. We must accept it with rejoicing, not with resentment. We can do this if we focus on the Lord and on our home in heaven.

Do you ever think about heaven? If you are not sure about going there you will not find any comfort in such thoughts. You can be sure and must be sure about your destiny if you are to rejoice in suffering. Jesus said *I go and prepare a place for you* (John 14:2). Paul writes *our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly await the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ* (Phil 3:20). Paul desired to be with Christ *which is far better* (Philippians 1:23). Did he express any uncertainty about his destiny?

Jesus knew where he came from and where he was going. With this knowledge he approached the suffering of the Cross (John 13:3). Paul knew who he was, where he was going and what awaited him when he got there. He desired to depart and be with Christ.

Is this the focus of Christians today? Many seem to be focused on the things of this world. They want Jesus to come and give them a happy life here. To be happy they need a big house, big TV, new car, etc. Paul wanted to go to where Christ now is. There is a fundamental difference here? What is your desire? Your focus will determine the way you respond to suffering and persecution.

What is the nature of the reward that Jesus promises those who are persecuted because of his name? Firstly it is in heaven. Some start to speculate what they will find in heaven. With our earthly minds we cannot begin to comprehend the glory of heaven. We will always come up short. Paul focused on the one thing he was sure about with regard to heaven. Christ is there! He desired to depart and be with Christ. Can there be any greater reward!

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