

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

SESSION 9: RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PERSECUTION

INTRODUCTION:

As we consider this final Beatitude, it is important to remember that the motivation to embrace these character qualities is the promise of blessing. The Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through Jesus' words that we will be happy and fortunate if we learn how to interpret all things in the light of the coming of God's Kingdom.

This perspective requires that we develop the ability to re-define our experiences with a long-term, eternal view in mind. In order to live well in this present age, we must fix our minds on the payoff that will be ours in the coming Kingdom. We learn to see the situations of this life as preparatory for the true life that is yet ahead, and we learn to interpret our circumstances as strategically and lovingly directed by our Father for our eternal benefit.

I. THE REALITY OF PERSECUTION

A. The Pursuit of Righteousness Leads to Persecution

We have a dilemma. Jesus said that the only way to be blessed, or fully happy and satisfied, is to hunger and thirst after righteousness – that all things would come in line with God's plan and desire. But then He said that this pursuit will inevitably result in persecution by the spirit of the age.

Quote from Rick Warren in *"The Purpose Driven Life"*

Since God intends to make you like Jesus, He will take you through the same experiences Jesus went through. That includes loneliness, temptation, stress, criticism, rejection, and many other problems. The Bible says Jesus "learned obedience through suffering" and "was made perfect through suffering." Why would God exempt us from what He allowed His own Son to experience? Paul said, "We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with Him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with Him!"

1. God used the tool of persecution in the life of His own Son Jesus
 - a. To demonstrate His perfection and adequacy as our High Priest

Hebrews 5:8-9 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. (9) And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 2

Hebrews 2:9-10 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. (10) For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Hebrews 2:14-16 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (16) For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

- b. To let us know that God understands everything we endure

Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- 2. We are not talking about difficulties we encounter because of our own issues:
 - a. Laziness and compromise in pursuing the character of Jesus
 - b. Unredeemed personalities – “God made me the way I am”
 - c. Unrighteous behavior arising out of our own rebellion or sinful responses
 - d. Self-righteousness and pride
- 3. This Beatitude speaks of persecution that comes precisely because we are wholeheartedly pursuing Jesus, that His character would be developed in us.
- 4. This is illustrated in the journey of the Shulamite in Song of Solomon

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 3

Song of Solomon 5:5-7 I arose to open for my beloved, And my hands dripped with myrrh, My fingers with liquid myrrh, On the handles of the lock. (6) I opened for my beloved, But my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. (7) The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; The keepers of the walls took my veil away from me.

Example: Bonnie Witherall, missionary in Sidon, Lebanon

- B. It is only in true righteousness and holiness that we will be able to stand in the Presence of the One we love, whom our hearts long for

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Psalms 24:3-5 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? (4) He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. (5) He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Hebrews 12:14-17 Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: (15) looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; (16) lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. (17) For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

- C. God allows difficulty and persecution to bring our true condition into the light, so that we might be healed and made ready for His Kingdom
1. To reveal the character – the internal reality – of His people

Proverbs 17:3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts.

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 4

Deuteronomy 8:2-5 And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you . . . in the wilderness . . . to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. (3) So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna . . . that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. . . . (5) You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD your God chastens you.

2. To purify His children and prepare us for glory

Psalms 105:17-22 He sent a man before them – Joseph – who was sold as a slave. (18) They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. (19) Until the time that his word came to pass, the word of the LORD tested him. (20) The king sent and released him . . . (21) He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, (22) To bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his elders wisdom.

2 Chronicles 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

3. To prepare us as the priests who will bring acceptable offerings to the Lord

Psalms 24:3-4 Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? (4) He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.

Malachi 3:3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

4. To allow us to have a share in Jesus' ministry of reconciliation. When we embrace the suffering of persecution with faith and understanding, God accounts it to us as intercession and participation in the redeeming work of Jesus.

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 5

Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (8) We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (10) always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (11) For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (12) So then death is working in us, but life in you.

5. The result of this purification is the full presence of the Lord in the midst of His people, coming with all grace and power to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 21:12-14 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. (13) And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a 'DEN OF THIEVES.'" (14) Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

- D. God's Strategy is to use the Anti-Christ Spirit of the Age as His Refining Tool

1. Media and Culture
 - a. Mockery and active resistance

1 Samuel 18:20-21 Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. (21) So Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him."

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 6

2 Samuel 6:20-21 Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" (21) So David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the LORD.

b. The presence of options – passive resistance. The overwhelming amount of “options” in our culture wage war with us for our time, energy, and money.

2. Demon-inspired Hatred of Those who Pursue Righteousness

Psalms 37:32 The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him.

Example: Andy Comiskey conference in Boston

II. TO FOLLOW JESUS IS TO WHOLEHEARTEDLY PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. This contradicts the “lazy-friendly” atmosphere of the Western church today

1. “Seeker-sensitive” as a communication style is good

2. “Lazy-friendly” culture that does not pursue righteousness (the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle) is not Biblical Christianity

B. Jesus is Exclusive in His Claims to be Bridegroom, King, and Judge

1. He is the only way to the Father

2. He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords

3. He is returning with power and glory to establish His Kingdom on the earth

4. Every knee will bow to Him on that day

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 7

5. Righteousness will be the atmosphere of that Kingdom, and He will rule with a rod of iron

III. THE CENTRAL ISSUE – THE WORLD HATES JESUS

- A. Contemporary examples of the world’s hatred of Jesus
 1. Columbine High School – Cassie Bernall and Rachel Scott
 2. Mel Gibson’s movie “*The Passion of the Christ*”
 3. The reaction against Sarah Palin
- B. Jesus is Just So Right!
 1. He has no flaws, yet He is patient and kind – He “breaks the curve,” His mere presence exposing the true condition of those around Him
 2. He confronts compromise and hypocrisy in every system, calling us into the righteousness of the Kingdom of God
 3. He welcomes sinners, refusing to act according to religious protocol, thus exposing the hypocrisy of the religious leadership
 4. He refuses to be manipulated according to the agenda of the people, exposing their self-centered motives and their angry reactions
 5. Rather, He absolutely pursues righteousness – living in response to the Father’s will and purpose for His life all the time

IV. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT PERSECUTION

- A. ***Psalm 11:2 – “the wicked . . . make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.”***
- B. ***Psalm 37:32 – “the wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him.”***
- C. ***Proverbs 29:10 – “the bloodthirsty hate the blameless”***

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 8

- D. *Isaiah 29:20 – “all who watch for iniquity are cut off”*
- E. *Isaiah 59:15 – “he who departs from evil makes himself a prey”*
- F. *Jeremiah 2:30 – the sword of those who resist the Word of God “devoured the prophets like a destroying lion.”*
- G. *Amos 5:10 – “They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly”*
- H. *Matthew 10:22 – “You will be hated by all for My (Jesus’) Name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”*
- I. *Acts 5:41 – the disciples were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name.”*
- J. *Acts 7:52 – “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One.”*
- K. The Apostle Paul speaks of persecution more than 20 times in his letters

V. SO WHAT’S THE PAYOFF?

- A. We Get to be Numbered with the Prophets of Old

James 5:10-11 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. (11) Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

- B. The Reward of the Heavenly Kingdom is for Those Who Endure in Patient Hope

Hebrews 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, (25) choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, (26) esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

Hebrews 11:35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

GRACE-EMPOWERED LIVING: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

– GARY WIENS

Session 9: Righteousness and Persecution

Page 9

C. The Heroes of Faith are not Complete Without Us

Hebrews 11:39-40 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, (40) God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

CONCLUSION:

Righteousness – total conformity to God’s perfect plan for His creation – will be the normal reality as the Kingdom of God comes to the earth. It is our privilege and honor to pursue righteousness now, and to begin to enjoy the benefits of Jesus’ blessing in this age, before He returns.