

ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

BIBLE STUDY, 04/06/2008

STUDY 8

LONGSUFFERING AND FORGIVING SPIRIT

Matthew 5:10 – 12

The carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7), and the more His children are conformed to His image the more they will bring down upon themselves the spite of His foes. Being "persecuted for righteousness' sake" means being opposed because of right living. Those who perform their Christian duty condemn those who live to please self, and therefore evoke their hatred. This persecution assumes various forms, from annoying to oppressing and tormenting. In this study, the Lord prepares us to expect that loyalty to Him and His Gospel will result in our own peace being disturbed, introducing us to the prospect of strife and warfare. It is *service for God* that calls forth the fiercest opposition. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

1. The case of suffering saints described

Matthew 5:11; I Peter 2:19–24; Acts 8, 9; Psalm 35:11; Jeremiah 20:18; Acts 17:6–7; Jude 15; Hebrews 11:35–36; Psalm 69:9; Romans 8:36

In this verse, Jesus mentions three sorts of suffering that His disciples should expect to endure in the line of duty. The first is *reviling*, that is, verbal abuse. *Reviling* the saints is *persecuting* them, and will be found so shortly, when *hard speeches* must be accounted for and *cruel mockings*. The second is *persecution*. This means "to pursue, which means, in this case, "to harass, trouble, or molest" (either physically or verbally). It may include the sort of *handling* or *hunting down* to which Saul of Tarsus subjected the Church before he was apprehended by Christ. Christ sets forth the third type of suffering as follows: "Blessed are ye, when men ... *shall say all manner of evil against you falsely*" Thus describing the defamation of character to which His saints must be subjected. They will say *all manner of evil of you falsely*; sometimes before the *seat of judgment*, as witnesses; sometimes in the *seat of the scornful*, with *hypocritical mockers at feasts*; sometimes to their faces, as Shimei cursed David; sometimes behind their backs, as the enemies of Jeremiah did. There is no evil so black, which, at one time or other, has not been said, falsely, of Christ's disciples and followers.

2. Persecution for righteousness' sake

Matthew 5:10 – 12; I Peter 4:15; John 16:2; Romans 14:17; Revelation 1:6; I Peter 2:23

Persecution has ever been the lot of God's people. Cain slew Abel. "And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). Joseph was persecuted by his brethren, and down in Egypt he was cast into prison for righteousness' sake (Genesis 37, 39). Moses was reviled again and again (see Exodus 5:21; 14:11; 16:2; 17:2; etc.). Samuel was rejected (1 Samuel 8:5). Elijah was despised (1 Kings 18:17) and persecuted (1 Kings 19:2). Micaiah was hated (1 Kings 22:8). Nehemiah was oppressed and defamed (Nehemiah 4). The Saviour Himself, the faithful Witness of God, was put to death by the people to whom He

ministered. Stephen was stoned, Peter and John cast into prison, James beheaded, while the entire course of the Apostle Paul's Christian life and ministry was one long series of bitter and relentless persecutions.

"*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake* calls upon us to honestly examine ourselves before God when we are being opposed: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters". "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf": this is a most necessary caution, that the believer see to it that he is buffeted for *right doing* and not on account of his own misconduct or foolish behaviour. It is to be observed that persecution is often so disguised that those guilty thereof are not conscious of the same, yea, so deceitful is the human heart, they imagine they are doing God a service. But "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs *is* [not "shall be"] the kingdom of heaven"; its privileges and blessings are theirs even now: though hated by men, they are "kings and priests unto God".

Those who are identified with Christ will be falsely accused, reviled and persecuted. "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20), Jesus said. "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before you" (John 15:18). "In the world you have tribulation" (John 16:33). "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted". When we are wronged or mistreated, slandered or falsely accused, ridiculed for His sake, we are not to retaliate or seek to escape. Peter advises that Jesus "while being reviled, did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" and His consistent character will seek to do the same in the Christian.

3. Blessedness in suffering for Christ's sake

Matthew 5:10, 12; Philippians 3:10; Romans 5: 3-5; Hebrews 11:25; Romans 8:17; Acts 5:41; 16:25; Hebrews 10:34

The Lord Jesus pronounces *blessed* or happy are those who, through devotion to Him, would be called upon to suffer. They are *blessed* because such are given the unspeakable privilege of having fellowship in the sufferings of the Saviour. They are *blessed* because such "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed". Children of God should not become discouraged because their efforts to please Christ make some of those who call themselves Christians speak evil of them nor imagine that fiery trials are an evidence of God's disapproval. The kingdom of God will include "those persecuted for the sake of righteousness" who are reviled and falsely accused because of their identification and spiritual union with Jesus Christ.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad." The afflictions are not only to be patiently endured, but they are to be received with joy and gladness. This we should do for three reasons. (i) These afflictions come upon us for Christ's sake; and since He suffered so much for our redemption, we ought to rejoice greatly when we are called upon to suffer a little for Him. (ii) These trials bring us into fellowship with a noble company of martyrs, for to meet with afflictions associates us with the holy prophets and apostles. In such company, reproach becomes praise and dishonour turns to glory. (iii) We who suffer persecution for Christ's sake are promised a great reward in heaven. Verily, we may rejoice, however fierce the present conflict may be. Having

deliberately chosen to suffer with Christ rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, we shall also reign with Him, according to His own sure promise. Remember Peter and John, who "departed from the presence of the council, *rejoicing* that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name". So, too, Paul and Silas, in the Philippians dungeon and with backs bleeding, "sang praises unto God". We are told that others "took joyfully the spoiling of [their] goods," knowing in themselves that they had "in heaven a better and an enduring substance".