

The Blessings of Adversity

Third in a Series on the Ten Blessings

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*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' 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,*

For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Matthew 5:10-12)

In Parts I and II of this series we discussed the blessings for the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (or justice), the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. The sequence is beautiful—and important! The first four blessings in the series address our attitudes about ourselves, the next three our attitudes toward others. Now we turn to the final three blessings, all of which deal with those who are persecuted for righteousness' (or justice's) sake.

The Eighth Blessing

This is one of the apparent contradictions in the Word. How can anyone be blessed if he is being persecuted? The answer lies in understanding the teaching on a deeper level. Remember, the persecution is not for just any reason, it is on account of justice, “for justice’s sake.” This means the person is being attacked for taking a stand for justice. It reminds me of the apostle, John, who described himself at the beginning of the book of Revelation as “your brother and companion in tribulation,” and who said he was “on the island that is called Patmos for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” He was being persecuted for justice’s sake.

Now remember, you can’t get to heaven unless you know the truth, or at the very least love what is good so that you can learn the truth in time. But those who are in evil and falsity hate the truth, and they hate what is genuinely good. So when they see or feel it they attack it. This is especially true of evil spirits who, as a result of their confirmed states, have no inhibitions about their evils or their desire to attack the good. And because they are spirits, in a sense there is no escaping them. Wherever there is good, they will attack and persecute it, just as they did the Lord Himself.

What does this mean for us? Look at the positive side: if we had no sense of justice we couldn’t be attacked “for justice’s sake.” If we are so attacked and persecuted, it is a sign that we have this quality and that it is working within us. The fact that we are caught up in temptations does not mean that we are worse than other people; it means that we have a good, working conscience, and in this conscience we *are* blessed! We know what is right. We actually have the kingdom of heaven within us. So here the kingdom is not promised at some future time, we read simply that it *is* theirs. All we have to do is maintain the effort to hold on to it.

The kingdom of heaven is theirs because it rests in the good and truth they have and in the effort they make to live according to it. They are persecuted because evil hates good and fights against it everywhere, but they are saved from any spiritual harm from evil because the Lord is with them, in them, fighting for them to maintain the order of heaven. It is hard to believe at first that we could be blessed in a state of temptation (which is spiritual persecution), but the Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the Lord is actually closer to us at such times than at any other, defending us, protecting us, and preserving our freedom.

In a sense the series is already complete—in the abstract. Blessed are those who recognize and acknowledge their needs. Blessed are those who love and care for others. Blessed are those who love the truth and love sincerely to be guided by it. Blessed are those who work to apply that good and truth together in the uses of life. Blessed are the persecuted, for they have something precious from the Lord to be attacked. But the Lord is with them, and He will protect them.

In the last two blessings the Lord takes up this final all-important point and drives it home in a terrific climax. The Eighth Blessing spoke in general of those “who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” In the final two blessings, we find a more personal conclusion: “Blessed are *you* when they revile and persecute *you*... Rejoice... for great is *your* reward in heaven.”

The Ninth Blessing

“Blessed are *you* when they revile and persecute *you*, and say all manner of evil against *you*—*falsely*—for My sake.” What a blessing! The most bitter Psalms in the Old Testament are the ones where David complains about the lies and slanders of his enemies against him. We know how difficult it is to be accused and condemned for things we *have* done wrong; how much more difficult is it to face the lies and deceptions of those who wrongly accuse us! And yet this is typical of the evil spirits who are with us every day. They insinuate their *own* evil thoughts and intentions into our minds and then turn right around and blame *us* for them! How wrong! How cruel! And, therefore, how vital it is for us to know that the Lord is still with us, fighting for us, helping us maintain our equilibrium.

Notice the phrasing in this blessing, by the way: “Blessed are you *when* they revile and persecute you...” “When” is the key. The evil may do this but they cannot do it unless the Lord is with you to provide the balance. Nor would they care to otherwise, for it really is the Lord’s own good and truth that they are attacking in you. The blessing of the Lord’s presence is real. Without it we would simply dive headlong into hell. But because we have it, though it may be an unconscious thing, we can grow in our enjoyment of it day by day. We *are* blessed when the hells attack; the hells attack us when we’re blessed.

The Tenth Blessing

And so we come to the final blessing. Some people don’t even consider this a blessing because the literal word isn’t there. But remember, “blessing” means happiness. The Lord has now described all the qualities that provide for real happiness. He has also urged us to recognize these spiritual qualities in anyone who may suffer outwardly on account of them. Finally, He has addressed each one of us directly, anticipating His words in John when He said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be

troubled, neither let it be afraid” (14:27). He also said, “In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (16:33).

Persecution may come, indeed we know it *will* come, “for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Prophets represent prophetic truths, teachings we need to know in order to find our way to heaven. These truths *will* be challenged, as they always have been. But as long as we remain confident and true to the Lord’s Word we are never left alone. The Lord’s love and mercy are all around us, and His wisdom and the understanding of His Word protect us.

The Lord concludes the Ten Blessings with a tremendous personal exhortation in the imperative voice: *You*, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” This is more than simple happiness!

What possible comparison can there be between worldly and eternal blessings! How ultimately disappointing the joys of selfishness are compared to the delights of knowing the Lord and doing what He says! This *is* heaven: knowing the Lord, seeing how He works, being confident in His providence, feeling His love, and acknowledging His presence from day to day as we relate all the things that we experience in this world to His eternal plan.

Of course we are not *in* heaven every day; we are a mixture of good and evil as long as we live on this earth. But we can have heaven in *us* any day that we choose, for it is not “out there” somewhere far away and difficult to get to, it is here, now, in the thoughts and feelings that a famous preacher once called the “be happy attitudes”—the beatitudes. So, rejoice and be exceedingly glad!

The Ten Blessings are all about eternal values, unchanging principles, the delights of real love, real wisdom, and real fulfilling usefulness to others. This is the experience of heaven, and the reward, the blessing of it, is great indeed.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 18:1-17; *Arcana Coelestia* 8403