

Happy Are Those Who Are Persecuted

Sitting at the Feet of Yeshua

In my last post, we began looked at the how happy are those who are peacemakers. In this post, we will explore the last Beatitude regarding the persecuted.

“How blessed are those who are persecuted because they pursue righteousness! For the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. How blessed you are when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of vicious lies about you because you follow me! Rejoice, be glad, because your reward in heaven is great – they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.” ~ Matthew 5:10-12

Yeshua saved His toughest teaching for the last. Only those who have gone through all the previous steps are qualified for advancement to this stage. Oh joy, oh rapture! Surely, this must be a misprint. Being insulted and persecuted sure don't sound like a good time to me. But, these verses teach us that we can choose to be happy in spite of our circumstances. They say, *“I can remain positive and pardon those who persecute me, even when all else fails.”*

If, after applying all of these previous positive attitudes to the best of my ability, I still find myself the abused victim in human relationships, I shall choose to believe that God can settle the score in His way and in His time. I shall be blessed by knowing that my hurts, borne quietly, patiently, and positively, can be turned into halos.

Once again, Yeshua takes this lesson from King David. Psalm 143:3,11-12 says, ***“For an enemy is pursuing me; he has crushed my life into the ground and left me to live in darkness, like those who have been long dead. For your name’s sake, Adonai, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of distress. In your grace, cut off my enemies; destroy all those harassing me; because I am your servant.”***

Yeshua goes on to teach us, ***“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would have loved its own. But because you do not belong to the world – on the contrary, I have picked you out of the world – therefore the world hates you. Remember what I told you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours too. But they will do all this to you on my account, because they don’t know the One who sent me”*** ~ John 15:18-21.

One of the outstanding qualities of Yeshua was his sheer honesty. He never left His talmidim with any doubt what would happen to them if they chose to follow him. He was clear that he had come ***“not to make life easy, but to make men great.”***

The Lord is upfront in telling us that we will suffer and that the world will not react in love and kindness towards us (Matthew 10:16-25; Acts 9:1-16). To be righteous is to be like Messiah. To be like Messiah, means that we, too, will be persecuted as He was.

As Believers we are taught to face persecution:

- by not retaliating against our persecutors (see Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60);
- by not holding resentment against them; and,

- by rejoicing in the fact that this proves that we are God's children and have a great reward in heaven (see Romans 8:7; Acts 5:40,41).

Because we are His children, our position in His kingdom is secure. We need to remember that we are His ambassadors on earth, and we represent Yeshua. We need to remember where we are going (see 2 Timothy 4:8). The prophets were persecuted (see Acts 7:52). All of the emissaries were persecuted for Yeshua' sake. They persecuted Yeshua. Why do we think we will not be persecuted? Persecution has strengthened the Messianic Community (see Romans 5:3-5).

It is hard for us to realize what the first Believers had to suffer. Every aspect of their life was disrupted.

Their belief in Yeshua might well disrupt their livelihood. Suppose a man was a stonemason. That seems a harmless enough occupation. But suppose his firm received a contract to build a temple to one of the heathen gods, what was that man to do?

Suppose a man was a tailor and his shop was asked to produce robes for the heathen priests, what was that man to do?

There was hardly any occupation for the early Believers in which they might not find a conflict between their business interests and their allegiance to Yeshua.

Their Messianic belief would certainly disrupt their social life. In the ancient world most feasts were held in the temple of some god. In very few sacrifices was the whole animal burned upon the altar. Part of the meat went to the priests and part of the meat was returned to the worshipper. With his share, the worshipper made a feast for his friends and his relatives.

Could a Messianic believer share in a feast held in the temple of a heathen god? Again the answer was clear. The Believer must cut himself off from his neighbors rather than by his presence give approval to idolatry. A man had to be prepared to be lonely in order to be a Messianic believer.

Worst of all, their Messianic belief was liable to disrupt their home life. It happened again and again that one member of a family became a Messianic believer while the others did not. A wife might become a Messianic believer while her husband did not. A son or a daughter might become a Messianic believer while the rest of the family did not. Immediately, there was a split in the family. Often the door was shut forever in the face of the one who had accepted Yeshua. Unfortunately, this is still true today for many Jews who accept Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah. They are cut off from their families and treated as dead.

There are many of us who have never made a real sacrifice for Yeshua. To have to suffer persecution is, as Yeshua himself said, the way to walk the same road as the prophets, the early saints, and the martyrs have walked. The man who has to suffer something for his faith can throw back his head and say, *"Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod."*

When a man is called on to suffer something for his Messianic belief that is always a crucial moment; it is a great occasion; it is the clash between the world and Yeshua; it is a moment in the drama of eternity. To have a share in such a moment is not a penalty but a glory. *"Rejoice at such a moment,"* says Yeshua, *"and be glad."*

To suffer persecution is to make things easier for those who are to follow. Today, we enjoy the blessings of freedom and liberty because men in the past were willing to buy it for us at the cost of their blood, sweat, and tears. They made it easier for us and by a steadfast and immovable witness for Yeshua we may make it easier for others who are still to come.

For most of us, it is not likely that death awaits us because of our Messianic faith. But insult surely awaits each of us who insist on living out that faith. Mockery awaits those who practice true love and forgiveness. Yeshua still needs his witnesses; he needs those who are prepared, not so much to die for him, as to live for him. Yeshua needs those who will build bridges even in spite of the persecution they will endure.

This final beatitude might read: **"O how blessed are those who give it all up for the sake of their fellow man!"**

We conclude our study of the Beatitudes with these reminders. Our happiness does not depend upon circumstances for its existence. Circumstances can make us happy, but there is only One Who can make us **"blessed"** and that is Yeshua.

Happiness fluctuates with circumstances, but blessedness remains unaffected by circumstances. Happiness requires us to rise above our circumstances - to soar as eagles.

Blessedness involves an inward condition of the heart no matter what is taking place around us. It requires a radical change in how we think.

May each of us go forth and experience what it means to be truly blessed!

In my next post, we will continue to sit at the feet of Yeshua by examining what it means to be the salt of the earth.