

Why to Rejoice when They Persecute You, Part 2

Luke 6:22-23

So we rejoice in persecution because it demonstrates we're the blessed of Christ, we're resembling Christ, we're therefore condemned by the enemies of Christ, which means we're favorably situated. Standing with Christ on the right side of history. And the king is going to say to us, those on his right come, "Come you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." That's reason for rejoicing is it not?

Here's a fifth reason, fifth reason to rejoice, number five: Rejoice because you are drawing close to Christ. Rejoice because you are drawing close to Christ. Here's where we come to verse 23. And the fact that Christ commands us to rejoice in the face of persecution. We're hated and despised. Where excluded, rejected, spurned in this world, and our Lord commands us here in verse 23, "Rejoice in that day, leap for joy." Look, when we feel the heat of persecution. When we feel the burning shame of social scorn and exclusion. When we feel that sting coming at us

of verbal attacks, the pain of being pushed away, even from former friends and family, blood relations. We look to our Lord's command to rejoice and we cry out, honestly, we cry out, How long oh Lord, how long? How can I rejoice in this pain, can you help me to rejoice in this pain?

We hear that echoed over and over throughout the Psalms. As psalmists are persecuted by God's enemies, and they cry out drawing near to him. Drawing close to God for help, for succor in their time of need. Many places we could turn, let's just look to one of them in Psalm 13, Psalm 13. If you'll just hold your place real quick in Luke 6 and go to Psalm 13. This is a Psalm of David, who was often chased and harried by enemies. It says in Psalm 13 verse 1, "How long oh Lord? Will you forget me forever?"

Now again he's not calling God's omniscience into question here, it's just from his perspective he feels set aside. He says, "How long oh Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider, answer me oh Lord my God? Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my

enemies say, 'I've prevailed over him.' Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."

Listen, in the midst of persecution we're pushed down to our knees. Those enemies out there, they are strong make no mistake. And if true, difficult, even violent persecution comes against us, if it's government persecution, there's some of us in this room who've served with that government. We know how they're trained. We can't stand against that; we're considered as sheep to be slaughtered. We're not going to run to our bunkers and get our guns and fight against the government. No, no.

We're going to drop to our knees, finding no strength in ourselves, but we're going to look upward to God as David did. We're going to look up to him, cry out to him to help us, rescue us, save us. Look how he answers in verses 5-6, "But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

That's a summary statement, your salvation, we now know what David didn't see clearly, we know that salvation is in justification by faith in Jesus Christ through the cross. He

just called it, your salvation. But he's looking to Christ here. He's looking to his own greater Son. "I trust in your steadfast love, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he's dealt bountifully with me."

Look when we cry out to God in the face of persecution. When our enemies multiply, our foes attack in overwhelming numbers, God turns our eyes toward Jesus Christ. To see his salvation, to rejoice that we share in Christ's sufferings, we are drawn ever closer to him. That's Paul's view of it anyway. Turn over to the New Testament real quick in Philippians, Philippians chapter 3 and verse 10.

Paul is recounting there the things that give him favor in this world. Especially that which commended him as something or someone in a Jewish context. And there in verses 5 & 6, Philippians 3, he recites his credentials "circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the Law a Pharisee, zeal I was a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the law externally I was blameless."

He was eager, though, to trade all of that for the

righteousness of Christ. That he might know Christ, and particularly through sharing his sufferings. Look at Philippians 3:7, "Whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, count them but rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ to be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law but that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness of God that depends on faith. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings. Becoming like him in his death, that if by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Listen beloved, when we share in the sufferings of Christ, we cry out to God who turns our eyes of faith to our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ suffered for us at the hands of cruel, relentless tormentors and persecutors. And when we enter into that suffering, even in the minutest degree, we feel some of the same persecutions and we're drawn closer to him in our persecution. Which is a reason to rejoice, again, when we're persecuted by the unbelieving world.

Here's a sixth reason to rejoice, number six: Rejoice because you're growing in Christ likeness. Rejoice because you're growing in Christ likeness. We have already made the point that persecution on account of the Son of Man means we are resembling Christ in some measure.

And as we draw closer to Christ, in and through that persecution, the more intimate our exposure to him, the more it is that we grow in Christ likeness. The more that results, though, in being despised and rejected by the world. We preach Christ crucified, 1 Corinthians 1:23, a stumbling block to Jews, it's folly to the Gentiles. If we're proclaiming the gospel, living out the implications of the gospel, with unmistakable clarity in our lives, then the world is going to count our message and us as absolutely useless.

1 Corinthians 1:24 though, "To those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." Through our proclamation, through our transformed living, as we grow in Christ likeness, we are, 2 Corinthians 2:15 and 16, "We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Same aroma,

two different ways of taking that aroma.

To the one we're a fragrance of death to death, so they hate us and persecute us. To the other we are a fragrance from life to life, being hated, rejected, persecuted for the sake of righteousness on account of the Son of Man. It casts us before Christ. We pray to him for comfort and help which we receive with his eager abundance. The closer we come to him the more we're like him. The more we are like him the more we become persecuted. The more we draw near to him, the more it just continues in the same process, we'd become like the one we worship.

We rejoice in the increase of Christ likeness in our lives. We're the aroma of Christ in this world, we're a fragrance of death to those who are perishing. We're a reminder of their condemnation and their guilt before God. We're a reminder of their accountability and future judgment. and we do become weary in the opposition, don't we?

As we become weary, we look to the seventh reason to rejoice. Number seven: Rejoice because you're longing for heaven. You're longing for heaven. The weariness and the

opposition and the persecution causes us to long for heaven. Listen there is nothing like persecution to turn our hearts away from this world.

To make us long for heaven and our eternal reward. Here's where I'd like you to look at verse 23 again Luke 6, "Rejoice on that day and leap for joy," Jesus says, "For behold." "behold, your reward in heaven is great." The word, behold, there is meant to grab our attention. To arrest our attention, snap us into the right perspective.

It's as if here, our Lord, like a loving but firm parent, he takes a hold of our little heads. And he turns our little eyes away from the world and all of its enmity. Where we're so anxious, where we're so troubled, and he swivels our heads around so that our eyes can focus upward, so we can look heavenward. Which is where our great eternal reward is located.

As John says, "The world is passing away along with its desires." And we might add, along with its wrath, along with its rebellion, along with its iniquity, its hubris, its persecutions; we don't need to worry about any of that. Let the dead bury their own dead right?



1 John 2:17, "Whoever does the will of God abides forever." Jesus is not giving us, in Luke 6:23, a method to cope here. That's not, this is not a coping mechanism. He's giving us a perspective here that is going to cause us to be utterly unshakable. He commands us to fix our eyes on heaven. He commands us to think God-centered eternal thoughts. Because that's what shapes our perspective and sets our expectations.

Same thing we find Paul saying, Colossians 3:1-4, "Since then you have been raised up with Christ seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. So when Christ, who is your life, when He appears you also will appear with him in glory."

Listen, take all the wrath of the ungodly, the human the demonic alike, and combine them throughout all of history and all of time. Our heavenly reward is more certain and more fixed and more bounded and anchored than any of those ungodly are. When God visits the wicked, they're like smoke that's driven away, Psalm 68:2. David writes in Psalm 37, he says "I have seen

a wicked worthless man spreading himself out like a green laurel tree. But he passed away and behold he was no more, though I sought him he could not be found. Mark the blameless, behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace.”

Look, the promise of Christ is certain and fixed, because it's grounded in the unchanging character of God. If there exists a reward in heaven for us, and there is, as Christ has said; there is indeed such a reward. His promise assures us not only of the reward, but that we're one day going to be there to behold that reward, to claim it and enjoy it forever.

1 Peter 1, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has caused us to be born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that's imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away.” Reserved where? In heaven for you. What is that reward? What is that inheritance? It's God. It's the God who saved us. And if we have him, don't we have everything else besides.

Again that's the benefit of persecution, it just peels away our affections from this world. It centers them where they

should be on Christ and his kingdom. The reward of his kingdom which is the eternal living God. God is the reward of the righteous. 1 Peter 3, "Christ died to bring us to God."

So, let us not be weary of well doing. For in due season, we shall reap if we fade not. For those whose eyes are heavenward. For those whose affections are centered on God. We have this promise from Hebrews 6:19, "A sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters in to the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf." What is the inner place? What is the holy of holies? God, God. In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within that veil.

That brings us to an eighth reason we rejoice in the face of persecution. Number eight: Rejoice because you are growing in holy boldness. Rejoice because you are growing in holy boldness. Go ahead and turn over to Acts chapter 2, we're just going to run through this very quickly, track this in Acts 2. The Apostles, they really turned Jerusalem upside down with their testimony about the risen Christ. Do you know what happened first before they started turning Jerusalem upside down with their testimony about the risen Christ? Oh yeah, Pentecost. Oh

yeah, the Holy Spirit strengthened them, entered into them. They were men of holy boldness, absolutely fearless in their proclamation.

Peter said in Acts 2:36, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ." Get this. "This Jesus whom you crucified." That's bold. Again, in Acts 3:14-15, "You denied the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and you killed the author of life, who God raised from the dead, to this we are witnesses."

Oh yeah, we were there, we saw it all, we're witnesses. You can't get away from this, we're not going to keep quiet about it. Again Acts 4, the priests, the temple guard, Sadducees, they'd finally had enough of all this preaching, all this condemnation on them. Hey, you're judging us, Peter. Judge not lest you be judged. Better keep my mouth shut.

All this questioning, the Apostles were not intimidated at all. They looked directly into the eyes of the persecutors, those who took them into custody and they said this: "This

jesus, whom you crucified, this Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone and there is salvation in no other name." In no one else.

They were released, they kept on preaching. It says in Acts 5:17 that this time the high priest rose up and all who were with him filled with jealousy they arrested the Apostles, put them in the public prison, Christ sent an angel to release them and it says in verse 21, "They entered the temple at daybreak and began to teach." Silence us will ya, here we go! Officers went and arrested the Apostles again, brought them to the high priest who scolded them, no, no, no, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name and yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. And you intend to bring this man's blood on us."

Didn't they say, "let his blood be on us and our children forever." Didn't they say it? Wasn't that their words? Peter let them off the hook? No, not for a minute. Look at Acts 5:30, "The God of our Fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins." Incredible boldness. Moral courage here, because they believe the Gospel, and that Gospel was anchor for their hope

and bold courage.

High priest, Sanhedrin, absolutely perplexed, verse 40 they called the Apostles in, had them beaten, charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus any longer; let them go. What did they do? Did they heed the warning? No. They left the presence of the council, verse 41, "Rejoicing they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name."

Every day in the temple, from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that Christ is Jesus. Listen, like the Apostles, they're just men of like nature with us. They're nothing, I mean physically humanly speaking, they're nothing; they're just us. But they were filled with the Spirit.

Our assurance, like them, the bolder we become in the cause of Christ. Listen beloved, I sympathize with this, but if you have no Christian courage. If you have no boldness in your gospel witness. Look you've got to examine the ground of your assurance. You've got to really think through, do I believe this to such a degree that I'm going to stake my life on it, that I'm going to step out in it, that I'm going to trust this word and let the chips fall where they may. That's what the Apostles did.

At the heart of the question there, is to examine what do you really fear; Man or God? Jesus said, Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Listen if you fear God, you will fear no other.

If you revere God, you will not regard yourself, you will entrust your life into his powerful omnipotent hands. There is no reason for spiritual cowardice; none whatsoever. By God's grace we know the truth, Proverbs 21:30, "There is no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel against the Lord." We've become possessors of the kingdom of God. We stand in God's favor as the blessed ones. We know the true king. There is no reason at all for cowardice, every reason to show good courage, to be strong and courageous as we grow in holy boldness.

Brings us to a ninth reason, immediately for rejoicing when persecuted. Holy boldness is what steeled the resolve of the Prophets. Rejoice because you are counted among the holy. Rejoice because you are counted among the holy. Verse 23, "The Apostles and Prophets stood fast in holy boldness and even persecution. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy for so their

fathers did to the Prophets.”

Literally Jesus says, “For their fathers,” that’s the fathers of your contemporary persecutors, “they did according to the same practice.” That is the same hatred, exclusion, reviling and spurning, they did all that to the Prophets. Jesus is saying, now it’s your turn. Now it’s your turn. Hebrews 11, great hall of faith, we read in the exploits of the holy, many of whom were Prophets, lived and died by faith. That great chapter, Hebrews 11:36 and following, some of those suffered mocking, flogging, even chains and imprisonment, they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword, they went about in the skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy. Wandering about in deserts and mountains in dens and caves of the earth.

Look, when we experience the same persecutions in our day, we stand in the company of the prophets who bore the reproach of Christ in their own generations. We have the biblical record. We have the testimony of God, who does not lie, that suffering for the sake of righteousness is worth it. Not only that, but we can read the warning, Jesus himself directed to those who like



their fathers before him would persecute the Prophet of God.

Luke 11:47 and following, Jesus administering some pretty severe and harsh woes to the religious leadership. "Woe to you, for you build the tombs to the prophets whom your fathers killed, you are witnesses that you consent to the deeds of your fathers. For they killed them and you build their tombs."

Look if you're persecuted for the sake of Christ, you're counted in the company of the holy prophets of old, as well as the New Testament apostles and prophets, as well as Christ himself, who was persecuted and killed by ungodly men. It may not seem now, but you are blessed. You must rejoice over the honor that's been granted to you, to suffer for his name's sake.

That brings us to a final point, tenth reason to rejoice: Rejoice because you will be fully vindicated. You will be fully vindicated. The record will one day be set straight. Not by any man, not by any counsel, not by any government except the government of Christ. By God himself. Peter encourages us, 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Beloved do not be surprised at the fiery trial but rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." If

you stand with Christ, acknowledge him before men, Jesus promises you, Luke 12:8-9, "I tell you everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God."

Word of warning, "The one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." But for us who acknowledge him before men, he'll acknowledge us. Like the prophets of old, like the Apostles, like every martyr of Church history, when we endure rejection for the sake of the Son of man, we will be fully and eternally vindicated by divine testimony and final judgment. Romans 8:18-19, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to compare with the glory that's to be revealed in us."

The Apostle John says the same thing, encouraging the faithful saints to stand firm in the sanctifying hope. 1 John 3:1-3, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God. And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him. Because we shall see him as he is and everyone who thus

hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

You know the sweeping, overarching beauty of this entire beatitude? It’s totally counter intuitive. But we see here that persecution actually becomes, for us, a source of strong assurance. To the eternal consternation and frustration of our enemy the devil, rather than causing us to fall away, the fires of persecution actually drive us closer to Christ, which is what he hates. The more we’re drawn closer to Christ, the more we resemble him, the more we long for heaven, the more we grow in courage and boldness, the more we draw fire from the unbelieving world, which drives us back to Christ to find more comfort from him, which causes us then to be like him. Persecution for the sake of Christ, one of the greatest sources of Christian assurance, producing in true Christians exactly what the Devil hopes to wither, love and devotion for Christ, love and devotion to the source of our faith and the end of our hope.

Well, there you have it, ten reasons to rejoice when we’re persecuted on account of Christ. Because you’re the blessed of Christ. Resembling Christ, condemned by Christ’s enemies, on the right side of history, drawing close to Christ, growing in

Christ likeness, longing for heaven, growing in holy boldness, counted among the holy, fully vindicated, and I've run out of fingers. May that encourage us, though, to obey our Lord's clear gracious command in the day of persecution. Rejoice in that day, leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven. For so their fathers did to the prophets. Let's pray.

We thank you our God for this word from the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you that we are righteous in him. All our sins are forgiven in the cross and all of his righteousness covers us like a wedding garment. We, like him, now stand before you spotless with no condemnation. And as we think about the opportunity we have to share in Christ's sufferings, we, we must admit that our frail human hearts are weakened at times and anxious. Let that drive us to our knees in prayer. That we may find from you strength by the Holy Spirit to lift us up again and stand in the face of persecution with Christ like virtue.