

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

– *JEREMIAH 37. – AUGUST 20. –*

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake."

– **Matt. 5:11.**

PERSECUTION implies that the person or thing persecuted possessed some qualities or powers that are feared. When the persecution is for religion it proves that the persecutor realizes his own weakness to meet the arguments in a more rational way. It implies either that the persecutors are weak, or that the arguments of the persecuted are strong.

There have been persecutions from the earliest dawn of history. Cain persecuted his brother Abel to the death because the latter was right and the persecutor was wrong. It is safe to say that the persecutors are always wrong even if we cannot say that the persecuted are always right. The principle of persecution is a wrong one. Whoever, therefore, finds himself disposed to persecute another, either with physical torture or by harassings of slander and epithets should immediately inquire respecting his own heart condition, for there is surely something wrong. Whoever witnesses persecution, either physical or slanderous, should immediately decide that the persecutor is in error and should give his sympathy to the persecuted if he be able to do no more. He will thus be cultivating in his own mind a principle of justice – righteousness – which will make for his own character-development.

FAITHFUL JEREMIAH PERSECUTED

Today's study draws our attention to the persecutions endured by one of the Lord's faithful Prophets. He was a patriot in the highest sense of the word, namely, in that he looked for the highest good of his nation along the lines of Divine wisdom. His principle was "God

First," and he knew that only this procedure could bring Divine blessings to his nation. He was of course misunderstood by the king and his counsellors. They did not like him because he told the truth, and that fearlessly – they preferred prophets who would tell them of their own wisdom, greatness and the success of their policies.

At the time of this study Zedekiah was on the throne. He was a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Chaldeans, whose seat of empire was to the north. Hoping for assistance from Egypt on the south, Judah revolted, contrary to the warning of the Lord through Jeremiah. The Chaldeans laid siege, and the Egyptian army started for their deliverance.

The siege was temporarily raised and the hopes of [R4865 : page 236] Judah rose. Nevertheless, Jeremiah persisted in declaring as at first that the end of the kingdom was near, that they would be swallowed up in Babylon.

Selfwilled, the king and his princes esteemed Jeremiah as a traitor to the nation, and their opponent. Alas! they should have realized that the nation was God's and that Jeremiah alone was standing faithfully with the great King.

When the Chaldean army had withdrawn from the siege, Jeremiah concluded to cast in his lot with some of the nation living outside the city walls – in the portion of the tribe of Benjamin. Attempting to carry out this program, he was arrested on the charge of disloyalty, that he had given himself over to co-work with the Chaldeans against the interests of his own land. Although he denied the charge he was put into prison.

Jerusalem was honeycombed with underground cisterns and vaults, arched overhead, and these were called "cabins." They were designed to be reservoirs for water in time of drouth or in time of siege. The bottoms of these "cabins," or cisterns, after the removal of the water, were frequently deep with mud and slime. The next chapter tells

us of the terrible condition of the dungeon into which Jeremiah was put. We read, "They let down Jeremiah with cords, and in the dungeon there was no water but mire; so Jeremiah sank in the mire." When finally they drew him out, we read they took "old cast-off cloths and rotten rags and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah," who put them under his arms and was drawn up. In this dungeon the Prophet remained "many days."

FEAR OF SUFFERING DID NOT DETER THE PROPHET

Not from sympathy, not from righteousness, but from a desire to inquire of the Prophet respecting the future, the king had him taken out of the dungeon. However much the king despised Jeremiah and refused to recognize his words, he, nevertheless, in his heart, realized that he was a servant of Jehovah, and he feared that his message was true.

The Prophet's courage in answering the king's question is very praiseworthy. He altered not a word of what he had previously told. In a kind way he urged the king not to heed the contrary prophecies, stating that his own dire statements must be true because they were the Word of the Lord.

At his entreaty he was no longer put down into the mud bottom of the cistern, but was allowed to remain a prisoner in the court of the prison, and was granted daily a loaf of bread for his sustenance.

When thinking of prisons and of their forms of persecution, physical and mental, it is well that we remember **[R4866 : page 236]** that the mental attitude of the one persecuted has much to do with the amount of the sufferings. As, for instance, Jeremiah in his dungeon, with all those unhappy surroundings, had a mind at peace with God, whereas the very king who caused him to be put in prison, a little later, captured by the Chaldeans, had his sight destroyed and was put into a dungeon. Poor man! Disappointed in everything, with

no human sympathy and no fellowship with the Almighty, his must have been a terrible dungeon experience.

THE GRACE OF GOD GIVES POWER

We are reminded of others who were put into prison for righteousness' sake – Saints Peter and John, Saints Paul and Silas. The world can never understand the power which, operating in these men, enabled them to rejoice in persecutions. With their backs bleeding from the whips of torture and hands and feet fast in the stocks, most uncomfortable, they were yet able to sing praise to God for the privilege they enjoyed of suffering with Christ, suffering for righteousness' sake, and thus filling up a share of the sufferings of Christ. Such characters we are to emulate. We are to understand that such joy and peace in the midst of sorrow and persecution can come only from the Lord.

The Master's words in our text apply yesterday, today and tomorrow – so long as the reign of evil is permitted – "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake." But to be worthy of this blessing, and to receive it means to develop and possess a character which the enemies of righteousness would deem worthy of persecution. The Scriptures declare that persecution will be the portion of the faithful people of God throughout this Age – until the establishment of the Kingdom of Messiah. Under the new regime suffering for righteousness will not be possible. Mark the Apostle's words, "Whosoever will live godly in this present time shall suffer persecution." To live godly means, not merely to abstain from vicious and overt sin, but to be a hero in the strife, a defender of the right and an opposer of the wrong – a servant of righteousness, a soldier of the cross.

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