

REJOICING IN TRIBULATION

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven; for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you." – Matthew 5:11,12.

THESE words of our Lord are addressed to His disciples – not merely His Apostles, who were chosen to be His special messengers, but all His followers throughout this Age. A disciple is a pupil – one who is being taught by another. All who are Jesus' disciples are to take the message of our text to themselves. "Blessed are ye," signifies that persecution is a favor from God. Consider it as a favor from the Father when men shall revile you – not because of the reviling, but because they shall say these things of you falsely, for Christ's sake.

No one would choose naturally to be persecuted or to have evil spoken against him. The Scriptures say that a good name is more to be esteemed than great riches. But if it is for Christ's sake that we suffer, we may know that the Lord will recompense us. In the Lord's arrangement there is to be a time of "evening up" for all we suffer here. Thus we lay up treasure in Heaven. All that we suffer now is storing up for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, if borne for Him.

From this standpoint we should really desire persecution. We are not to strive for it, not to endeavor to bring it upon ourselves unnecessarily; but realizing that if we lack persecution we lack one of the evidences of being true disciples of the Lord, we rejoice when in the providence of God it is our portion. Some, it is true, might be reviled for something evil or unwise that they had done. There would be no blessing in such an experience. The blessing

comes when the accusation against us is false and is for the Truth's sake.

"All who will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution." Hence we should investigate our lives to see whether we have this evidence that we are living godly. The Lord is the "True Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." We are the lesser lights. In letting our lights shine faithfully, we shall bring upon ourselves persecution. Let us not imagine that escape from persecution in our own case is the result of superior wisdom or tact on our part. "*All* who will live godly shall suffer persecution," is the promise, the assurance of Scripture. We should not court it, but should desire this evidence of our faithfulness, and should wish to be one of the "blessed" ones, of whom the Master speaks in our text. Then let us ask ourselves, Do I have persecution for Christ's sake? We should make a prayerful examination of our hearts to see whether we are fully loyal to God, to see whether we are letting our light shine out properly. If we lack this proof of sonship, we should inquire, What is the reason?

PERSECUTION A SURE RESULT OF FAITHFULNESS

A sister once said to the Editor, "I have no persecution, no opposition. Everything seems to be going favorably with me." She seemed troubled. We asked the sister to study her own heart to see whether or not she was as faithful as she knew how to be. Upon her reply we said, "Probably you take your persecutions with such grace that you are happy under them." The sister replied that she *would* be happy if she thought that was the case. Then we told her that the only other explanation we could think of was that the Lord was allowing her time to gain strength in order that she might bear what would come to her later. We told her to pray about it. A year or two after we again saw the sister. We recalled the circumstance, and asked her if she had yet had any persecution.

She answered, "Oh, yes. I have had plenty of persecution, but I am happy and rejoicing in it!"

It is impossible to rejoice in persecution until we get the right focus on the subject. We cannot do this of ourselves, and need, therefore, to take the matter to the Lord and confer with Him. After we have had "a little talk with Jesus," our faith takes hold on Him. The Apostle Paul tells us that we are to be exceeding glad and joyful in persecution and affliction for Christ. The Apostle Peter also declares, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. On their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as...an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters; yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him glorify God on this behalf." – 1 Peter 4:14,15.

The Master was not surprised at the attitude of the chief priests and religious leaders of His day. He knew from the beginning that he would have their opposition and hostility, and He warned His disciples not to expect otherwise. As to the reason why there should be persecution against the Lord and those who faithfully follow in His footsteps, He himself tells us, saying, "The darkness hateth the light." Darkness stands for Satan, for sin, for everything contrary to righteousness. God is represented as the great light, "and in Him is no darkness at all." Light is healing, beneficial, health-giving.

They who are of the darkness hate those who are of the light, because the light reproves the darkness, and the darkness does not like to be reprov'd. Wherever righteousness **[R5545 : page 292]** is, it is a rebuke to that which is sinful, dark. Our Lord stood for the light. He represented the Truth, the Heavenly Father. And those who were in darkness were in opposition to Him in proportion to their darkness – some of these knowingly, others in more or less of ignorance. "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of all

them which believe not." Satan has been skilful in putting darkness for light and light for darkness.

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE MANY HAVE OPPOSED LIGHT

The fact that many of the world are in opposition to God and righteousness is not because as a rule they are evil of heart, but because Satan has succeeded in making the darkness seem desirable and the light undesirable. It was thus in the religious systems of Jesus' day, and we believe that it is the same in the religious systems of today. Saul of Tarsus was for a time one of those blinded by Satan. In persecuting the followers of Jesus he verily believed that he was doing God service. But when he was apprehended by the Lord and the light was revealed to him, he proved himself loyal to God.

And so we trust it is with some who today oppose the light and truth now being proclaimed. They are deluded; but if their hearts are fully loyal to the Lord, if they are true to their consecration vows, the Truth will be revealed to them before "the door is shut"; for "ye, brethren, are not in darkness; ye are the children of light." "The wise shall understand." Soon the knowledge of the Truth will come to the "foolish virgins," and they will wash their soiled robes in the blood of Christ – during the great tribulation shortly to come to the whole world. And soon, too, the light of the knowledge of God is to fill the whole earth. But so long as Satan is "the Prince of this world," and there are those in the world who have his spirit, and those who are followers of the Lord and have His spirit, just so long must there be conflict.

The opposition of the darkness to the light may be manifested in different ways. In the days of our Lord and the Apostles there were persecutions of Christians by Jews. Later, during the long centuries in which the Word of God was neglected and the Truth was obscured by gross errors, there were persecutions of

Protestants by Catholics and of Catholics by Protestants and of Jews by both – all because of failure to study the Word of God and to follow its teachings. But very few in these dark times had access to the Word.

Some of the opposition to our Lord was open, and some of it was hidden. Many of the Apostles, like their Master, suffered death by violence; and many of the faithful down through the Gospel Age have suffered violent deaths. At the present time, outward persecution is not sanctioned by law, nor is it tolerated to any great extent.

PRESENT METHODS OF PERSECUTION

Persecutors have all along used the weapon of reviling, slander, saying all manner of evil falsely against those who are God's true people. As the Bible declares, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Today slanderous charges are made and villainous, opprobrious expressions indulged in by opponents of the Truth, and this is the chief weapon, because the defamers have not the power at present to use open, personal violence. Public sentiment and law would not permit it. But the persecution is of the same brand, the same spirit – merely governed by circumstances and conditions. Those who would say all manner of evil falsely, knowing the charges are false, are the very kind who would crucify or burn at the stake, had they the power. Not being permitted to use personal violence by the present laws and the general sentiment, these are forced to content themselves with bringing all sorts of false charges – seeking to assassinate the reputation and destroy the influence of those who are proclaiming the Truth, the Word of God.

The right attitude of the persecuted ones is indicated in our text. Instead of feeling downcast and discouraged by these experiences, and thinking them strange, evidences that God is against us, we should conclude the very reverse. We should say to

ourselves, "This is the same kind of experience that the Lord had, and that His people of the past have had." So, "Marvel not if the world [especially the religious world – the world that hated Him] hate you. Ye know that it hated Me before it hated you," forewarned our Master. So far from being discouraged, we are to rejoice – not that any could rejoice in the persecution for its own sake, for persecution is grievous; but we are to rejoice because "great is your reward in Heaven." What we do not get here of prosperity, we shall get *there* – in the Kingdom.

The Socialists say that they intend to have some of the good things *now!* They have not sufficient faith in the future blessings to be willing to wait. But the class addressed in our text are those who have faith in God and His promises, those who are associated with Christ, who understand that the experiences of this time are working out for them "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and they are content to await God's time. These are rejoicing in their hearts, realizing that they are enduring for righteousness' sake, that they are on the side of God, the side of right, the side of Truth, and realizing that these afflictions are only momentary, as it were; for the present life is but a mere span compared with the eternal life, the glorious immortality, so near at hand, in which we shall receive the blessings promised – joy forever with the Lord.

"FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED"

The Master gave all His followers fair warning that they were not to expect the world to appreciate their attitude. One might well reason that if one gave up sin and adopted a righteous course, the world would esteem him; that all would see the worthiness of his character and would show him special deference. But we must not expect this under the present reign of Sin. It would be a very broad way into the Kingdom, and a great many then might take this course for the favor of man, for the prosperity which it would bring

them. The Lord could never demonstrate our fitness for the Kingdom honors under such conditions.

If our great Master was called Beelzebub, we cannot expect that the members of His Household will be treated any better. If He who was perfect was held up to scorn as the Prince of Devils, we may expect similar treatment to be meted out to His followers by those whom the Adversary has blinded; for we are less able to uphold the standard of righteousness than was He. When His enemies attempted to make His character appear vile in the sight of others, He did not retaliate. Jesus did on proper occasions point out the wrong-doing, the wrong character, of those who were the religious leaders and teachers; but He did not do this in a retaliatory sense. On various occasions He accused them of being untrue, unholy, hypocritical; but He said nothing with a view to injuring them, but with the desire to show them their improper condition of heart, that they might profit by His instruction. He endeavored to help others to see the real condition of these blind leaders of the blind, in order to prevent them from falling into the ditch toward which their leaders were hastening.

THE MASTER'S CRUCIAL TEST

When the Scribes, the Pharisees and the Doctors of the Law tried to trump up charges against the Master and **[R5545 : page 293]** to put evil constructions upon what He said, He was patient under all these trying conditions. He submitted to the treatment. It might be asked, Why did God permit His Holy Son to suffer such revilings? Why did He not smite down those who did so wickedly? The answer is that the Father wished to demonstrate the kind of character that was pleasing to Him, and He wished to test the loyalty of Jesus Himself. Would He be submissive and obedient or would He resent these affronts? Would He say, "I will have none of this! I did not come into the world to bear such indignities"? His painful experiences were thus tests of His loyalty to the Father.

Jesus knew that it was the Father's will that He should submit Himself, even unto death, and He had agreed to do this. Now the crucial test was: Would He continue loyal to the Father and carry out His purposes? If so, He would be worthy to be the Messiah, worthy to be the Divine Son of God throughout eternity. Our Lord's experiences had all been foretold in prophecy. In order to fulfil these prophecies it must be that He receive revilings, and He must accept them properly. The Apostle Peter shows that in this He was a worthy Example to all of His followers. As He who was holy, harmless, undefiled, did not seek to have the Father bring upon the revilers some punishment for their misdoings, so this is an example for us; so we should walk in His steps.

SPIRIT OF PERSECUTION STILL HERE

We realize that in our case there is none righteous, not one who is perfect. So we see that our enemies might have some cause to revile us. They might see some of our imperfections and have something that they could pick at and exaggerate. The Apostle Peter says, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which shall try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." As they said all manner of evil against our Lord falsely, we may be sure that they will say all manner of evil falsely against us. And as He bore it patiently, so are we to take patiently everything that comes to us, and to recognize that nothing can possibly happen to us except what the Father will foreknow and permit for our good and for His glory. Our Master left us a portion of His cup that the Father poured for Him. After the cup has all been drained, then will come the glory and the honor – but not now.

We might naturally expect under the changed conditions of the present day, that those who are loyal to God and His Truth would not be maltreated and persecuted as in Jesus' day. But we believe there is another way of viewing the matter. We believe that Jesus, if He were here in the flesh today, would be persecuted and

maligned by the worldly-minded, especially in the nominal Church systems. Now, instead of crucifying Him literally, or roasting Him at the stake, they would "roast" Him before the public – a more refined form of persecution – for the spirit of persecution is still here.

In proportion as the followers of Jesus are faithful to the teachings of the Master, in that same proportion they will be out of harmony with everything opposed to the spirit of Christ, and in that same proportion they will be misrepresented and persecuted. In Jesus' day there were plenty of people who did reverence to the Doctors of the **[R5546 : page 293]** Law, who made broad their phylacteries and were very exact as to the letter of the Law, the paying of tithes, etc. Jesus did not seek honor and high position. But He appealed to the people to turn from sin, to walk in His steps, to stand for the Truth as against all unrighteousness and untruth. This appeal touched no responsive chord in the hearts of the worldly-minded.

For this reason, we say that the world has not changed, that the world is still in opposition to the Word and its spirit – particularly the religious world. It is still true, however, as in the days of our Lord in the flesh, that the common people are inclined to hear the Gospel gladly, if not blinded by the religious leaders. But today, as in Jesus' time, many are influenced by the false representations of those to whom they have been accustomed to look as their spiritual shepherds. If then the world should come to be in sympathy with us as a people, and should speak well of us, and we should become popular, we should come under the condemnation expressed in the Master's words, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you; for so did their fathers unto the false prophets."

THINK IT NOT STRANGE

If, on the contrary, we find that in spite of our best endeavors we are beset by opposition, and are viewed with suspicion, if unworthy constructions are placed upon our unselfish efforts to do good and to carry to others the glorious light which has so blessed our own hearts, let us not be surprised or feel aggrieved; for undoubtedly it is for the same reason that Jesus was opposed.

The spirit of light is the spirit of Christ. The spirit of darkness is of the world. All who have sympathy for that which is evil, or have been so blinded that light appears as darkness, will oppose the light. There has been so much of selfishness in the world, and the people have been so often taken advantage of and duped, that we cannot wonder that they are slow to believe that there are any who can be actuated solely by the motive of blessing their fellows.

It will be to the interest of some to promote priestcraft, and they will, therefore, seek to break down whatever is inimical to their interests. They say, "You are opposing us." We reply that we are only holding up the light. But they feel that the light that is reaching the people is undermining their influence. We believe that this is the secret of much of the strong opposition to the Truth that is prevailing in some quarters. There is a large number, we believe, who in many respects are good men, but who are fighting the light. We may suppose that they do not realize what they are doing – that unwittingly they are holding on to the ignorance of error, in bondage to Sin and Satan. For this reason they are in antagonism to those who are lifting the veil from before the Lord's people and showing them the character of God, that He is Love. Hence the conflict which is going on.

Another phase of opposition is in respect to financial matters. When we claim that what is given to the Lord should not be obtained by cajoling the people, should not be pulled out of them, worked out of them, extorted from them, but that whatever is given

should be a free will, voluntary offering, we are running counter to the custom of centuries. As one Baptist minister said to two of our brethren, "Think of Pastor Russell's advertising 'Seats free and no collections!' Where would *we* be if we did not have collections, or if the people got the thought that it is not the proper thing to pass the collection baskets?"

THE REBUKE OF HIS PEOPLE SOON TO VANISH

As our Master was hated *without a cause*, so let this be our experience, as far as possible. Let us see to it that the hatred, the malice, the envy and spirit of murder which is heaped upon us is entirely undeserved. Let it be our earnest endeavor that our lives, as fully as we are able, shall reflect the light of the Truth, shall be as noble and upright as possible in all things; that our words and actions shall glorify the Lord whom we serve, and be eloquent of our love for all mankind, especially for the Household of Faith, whether enlightened by Present Truth as yet or not. [R5546 : page 294]

In a very little while, we believe, we shall be glorified with our Lord, if faithful. Then a new Dispensation will be inaugurated; and those who hate us now, chiefly because blinded and misled by the Adversary, will bow their hearts before us as the Anointed of the Lord, and we shall have the blessed privilege of uplifting them, of enlightening and forgiving them, of helping them to attain the perfect image and likeness of our God.

HOW FAR ARE OUR EXPERIENCES SUPERVISED?

The question might arise with some, To what extent does God supervise the experiences of His children? The Master said, "The cup which My Father hath poured for Me, shall I not drink it?" Then how would it be with our cup? Is God not also our Father? Are not we members of Christ? Who, then, but the Father pours our cup? But we know that God is not a participator in any evil

thing: how, then, has He anything to do with the evils that come to His people?

We answer, There are all manner of evil forces and influences surrounding us. These evil influences are of Satan and the fallen angels. "Our Adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," and the fallen angels also go about seeking how they may assault the children of the Lord. But they can have *no power whatever* against us except as the Father shall permit it. He will permit no evil influence to touch us to our injury as New Creatures, if we keep close to Him. And He will prevent harm or injury to our persons, unless he sees it will outwork good to us, if we are rightly exercised by it.

ALL THINGS WORKING FOR OUR GOOD

We have also the opposition of the world. But Satan, the Prince of this world, succeeds in blinding the minds of men, putting error for Truth, and darkness for light, in order to make the way of righteousness and obedience to God appear foolish and undesirable and extreme. Those who have more or less of the spirit of the world bring against the Lord's children in a perfectly natural way, aside from the direct influence of the Evil One and his cohorts, a certain amount of opposition. For instance, our Lord, as the time of His death drew near, was speaking to the Apostles about the great climax of His experiences – that He would go up to Jerusalem, that men would crucify Him, etc. Then Peter said, Lord, Lord, do not allow your mind to run in this channel! You have come to earth to be the great King! Do not let the thought get into your mind that you are to be crucified! And the Lord turned to Peter and said, "Get thee behind Me, adversary!" He was the Lord's adversary for the time.

So the world often become adversaries of the children of God in their zeal for what they think the more honorable and advantageous course for us. They urge, Do not take such an

extreme view of things, and you will get along better. This is opposition to our consecration vow; and when we resist their well-meant efforts, they seek to thwart us and to bring us back to their views and ideas. The ideal of the world for us as Christians would be, Do good, and work for social uplift, for civic reform; build hospitals, establish orphanages, etc.; but do not spend so much time studying that old Bible, or they will call you an extremist or a heretic. So the world tries sympathetically to influence us. And our Father permits these influences to be brought to bear upon us for our proving. We may be sure that the Lord so supervises our experiences that nothing can come to us in any way whatsoever but what will work for our spiritual good so long as we keep ourselves in His love – so long as we wholly abide in Him. And death itself is powerless to touch us until God's time for us shall have come.

Our flesh is our constant, ever-present adversary. It tries to say, No, no! Do not carry this thing so far! Our flesh is inclined to be in harmony with the world. But our New Creature replies, Jesus walked the way of sacrifice and suffering – and St. Paul, St. Peter and St. John. Then the flesh suggests that *they* were *special* persons. But we know that the Bible teaches us that the same course is to be followed by all of the Lord's faithful people, and that *all* these will receive persecution. – 2 Timothy 3:12.

All will not be crucified, nor will all be thrust in a caldron of boiling oil or be sawn asunder or beheaded. We shall probably not have any of these experiences; but we *must suffer*. So we bid our flesh be silent, and we rejoice in the experiences that we do have; for "if we suffer [with Him], we shall reign with Him." (2 Timothy 2:12.) Of course we rejoice! And the *world* says that we are going *insane!*

THE PRECIOUS PROMISES OUR STRENGTH

We are to remember, dear brethren – and this is to be a parting thought with us – that nothing can by any means harm us, aside from our Father's will. We are promised that not one hair of our heads shall be hurt – figuratively. And we have the guarantee from the Lord that "all things shall work together for good to those that love God," who put *their trust* in Him. Whatever would not be a blessing to us will not be permitted. Our trials and tribulations, rightly received, are to work out for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." – 2 Cor. 4:17,18.

As we look back, we can see that all who have walked in the narrow way have received persecution. Whoever has been in accord with God has been out of accord with the course of this world. There were the Baptists, and then the Methodists, who in the early days had persecution because they had more light than others. The Presbyterians also for a time, because they had greater light than others, received persecution. [R5547 : page 294]

THE NIGHT ALMOST OVER

And we must expect the same today. Persecution will come to those who have the courage of their convictions. The Lord tells us that the anointing that we have received of Him is for the very purpose that we may show forth His praises. (1 Peter 2:9.) We must examine ourselves to see if to any extent we have kept our light under a bushel. In the 11th chapter of Hebrews, St. Paul recounts the sufferings of the Prophets and worthies of old. Some of them were stoned to death, some sawn asunder; they were killed and persecuted in a variety of ways. These godly men endured much for righteousness' sake. "And *all* who will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall suffer* persecution."

But the night is almost over. Soon the Lord will rise up. He will stretch forth His hands – His Power – and His children shall

be delivered. Soon will come the glorious Reign of Messiah. Then all who will live righteously shall have peace. Altogether, dear friends, our text is very precious – one that should encourage our hearts and help to guide us on our way, and bring us comfort and rejoicing in these closing days of our pilgrimage.

"Our God is love; He loves to hear our voices;
In Christ we share the riches of His grace;
He loves to fold His arms of comfort round us,
And let us nestle in the children's place.

"He loves to answer prayer, though not it may be
In just the way that we should think the best;
But in His own prospective, perfect judgment
He gives the *blessings* and withholds the rest."

