

## **Children of the Prophets**

**Luke 6:20-26**

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### **Blessed Persecution**

We have all experienced the sting of rejection. In the human experience, the pain of betrayal, abandonment, slander, and even violence, is all too familiar. But in today's text, Jesus speaks of a type of rejection for which we ought to rejoice, even leap for joy! He says when His disciples experience hatred, reviling, slander, and exclusion, they are blessed.

What is it about this form of rejection that makes the disciples blessed?

First, make note that Jesus says, "when," and not "if" people persecute you. It will happen. Second, this hatred is directed toward the Son of Man. It is not personal to the disciples; it is directed toward Jesus—the Son of Man. That doesn't mean you don't experience it personally. How could you not? After all, you are the target of hatred, exclusion, and reviling, and it is your name they are slandering. The disciples are the target, but not the object of the hatred. The object for this hatred is Jesus. And the blessing is found in that the hatred is directed at you because of your union with the Son of Man, and your place in the lineage of the prophets.

Now, let's consider this term, "Son of Man." This was our Lord's favorite term of self-reference. What does it mean? The term Son of Man refers to our Lord's humanity. He is the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. And as the Son of Man, Jesus represents a new Adam, a new humanity. Undiminished deity clothed in unblemished humanity. And those in Him are made anew after His image; they are a new creation. As the Son of Man, Jesus is the first of a new humanity. And those who abide in Jesus see things through His eyes, and not as the world sees things.

What is more, Jesus' disciples are also made partakers in the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). The church is a new humanity, created in the image of the Son of God, and subject to the same hatred He endured. And Jesus says this a blessed state. Remember what the risen Christ said to Saul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul had been persecuting the disciples, with "threats and murder" (9:1), but Jesus said Saul was in truth, persecuting Him. This is a testimony to the wondrous union of Christ and His Church. Christ is the head, and believers are members of His mystical body, and of one another. Disciples experience persecution because they are in union with the persecuted One.

So, my point is this: to be a disciple of Jesus means to be so identified with Him *in character* as to become subject to the same hatred He endured. It is not simply talking about Jesus in propositional points of doctrine that poses any threat to the present evil age; rather, it is an increase in Christlike character that poses the threat to this present evil age. Jesus embodied holiness, and He suffered at the hands of sinners, and so will those who share in His holiness of character. You may have noticed that holiness is in short order in the world, and tragically, even in the church. If we witness little persecution in America, it is because there is so little genuine holiness in American Christianity.

So, the disciples are subject to the same hatred Jesus endured. But our Lord's words are not designed to evoke terror. Rather, Jesus commands "rejoice in that day and leap for joy!" Rejoice in what day? That day when the world sees Jesus in you to the degree that you experience the same hatred He did (John 15:17-16:1-14). If you live and worship like Jesus, you will attract the hatred of the world. When (not if) this occurs, rejoice for your reward is great in heaven. You are to leap for joy for you are on the right side of redemptive history.

### **Why the World Hates Jesus**

So, what does the world hate about Jesus? To answer this question, one must go back to the beginning, to the fall of Adam and Eve. The sin of Adam, both then and now, is to seek God-like autonomy in the world. Sin's influence is revealed in the rejection of accountability to the Creator. Show me a self-willed individual, and I will show you sin. Sin tells you to rule your own world and kingdom. Sin says, "I will do what I want, with whom I want, whenever I want, and no one can stop me, especially the Creator." And no one represents a greater threat to this worldly delusion of self-reliance and autonomy from God than Jesus Christ. Into the world of "My will be done," came Jesus who prayed, "Not mine, but thy will be done." No one shined a brighter light upon fallen humanity than did Jesus. Jesus is the perfect human, the new Adam. The life of Jesus was characterized by holiness, love, and obedience. Likewise, the holy, loving, obedient life of a disciple will also testify to the world that its deeds are evil—and the world will react.

Many professing Christians seek the approval of the world in order to avoid rejection. They may call it marketing or even evangelism, but it is nothing more than placating the demands of sinners. And one cannot have it both ways. "For if I seek to please men," Paul told the Galatians, "I should not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). There is one Lord, and seeking to please people in order to avoid rejection is a clear denial of Christ. Don't get me wrong here, we are to strive to be congenial and kind to all, but we must never tremble before people for fear of rejection. The child of God grovels before no one.

On the other hand, some professing Christians suffer because they are mean, self-righteous, and lawless. And when society responds to them, they may cry, "Persecution!" but it is not what Jesus is referring to here. Instead, it is the just reaction of society upon the hypocrite's evil deeds. We all know professing Christians who are chronically selfish, childish,

mean, immoral, gluttons, lazy, and undisciplined, and they suffer justly. This ought never be confused as persecution for the Son of Man's sake.

The question before you is: Does the world see Jesus in you?

"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" says Paul to Timothy (II Timothy 3:12). The implication is clear. Seek to be like Jesus, and you will suffer rejection, or worse; seek to be like the world and you will escape persecution. It is this latter stance many have taken throughout church history. Paul exposed the false teachers in Galatia as those who sought to escape persecution by not preaching the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:12). Even during our Lord's ministry, some professed belief in Him, but secretly, in order to avoid rejection (John 12:42-43). This is not the way of the disciple. No one seeks rejection, but the rejection of people is not worthy to be compared to the glory of union with Jesus Christ.

### **Children of the Prophets**

Jesus tells the disciples to rejoice and leap for joy in response to rejection, hatred, and slander! Why? Because such hatred means they have a heavenly connection. Your reward is great in heaven. This means you know your citizenship is in heaven, not this world. This means also you are in the company of the saints throughout the ages. Leap for joy, therefore, for you are in the spiritual lineage of the prophets! This also means the community of disciples is a prophetic community living apart from the world and its values, and speaking truth to power when it is neither convenient nor popular. Listen please, every Spirit-born child of God is a citizen and an ambassador of the kingdom of the God. We derive our world-view and values from this future kingdom as we live it out here in the present. The now and not yet is our present station in life. We are here, but we do not belong here, we belong to that future kingdom, and we are to live like it, today.

Remember, the first point of discipleship is to see things as Jesus does. And this means we walk in step with the divine vision of reality, and not as the world defines reality. Our words, our actions, and our very character are to be so identified with the Son of Man that our very presence in the world exposes the darkness and the evil that lurks within it. A prophetic community exposes evil by their Christlike presence in the world. The Spirit's power is released to perform the continuing work of the incarnation into the world.

I dare say, however, the evangelical community of today represents little or no threat to the kingdom of darkness. Indeed, the Christian community today serves too often as a lapdog for the present evil age and its rulers, and not as God's alternative community speaking and acting for God. Almost every revival in church history eventually died because it sought respectability with the world and its ways. The evangelical community is now a voting block rather than a prophetic voice into the world. There is no shortage of self-righteous moralism

and/or political activism in churches. But social liberalism and social conservatism is a cheap, counterfeit for the true prophetic voice of the church.

The disciples upon whom Jesus looked that day had renounced all the world offered in order to fully identify with Jesus—the “Son of Man.” In their day, Jesus and His disciples stood as a true humanity in the midst of a fallen humanity. And every professing Christian stands in one of these two places.

### **The Ancient Prophetic Witness**

The question arises then as to whether or not we are a prophetic community. Let’s examine our case. We have an example of this prophetic heritage in the preaching and lifestyle of John. As John preached and baptized from the wilderness, he openly renounced the vile hypocrisy of the religious leaders of Jerusalem, calling them a brood of vipers! He warned the smug and comfortable of the wrath of God. He told the crowds to share what they had with those who had nothing, and he admonished soldiers (the police officers of that day) and tax-collectors to not use their authority to extort, rob, and otherwise intimidate the people. And John lived in utter simplicity in the wilderness. Listen to what Jesus said about John:

<sup>24</sup> When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>25</sup> But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. <sup>26</sup> But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> This is *he* of whom it is written:

‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,  
Who will prepare Your way before You.’

<sup>28</sup> For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (Luke 7:24-28).

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets—the period on a long line of truth tellers who suffered because they saw things from God’s perspective, and then spoke and acted in accord with that divine reality.

The writer to the Hebrews provides a brief review of the lives of those who saw things as God did and acted accordingly.

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy

the passing pleasures of sin, <sup>26</sup> esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward (Hebrews 11:24-26).

And,

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: <sup>33</sup> who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. <sup>35</sup> Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth.*

<sup>39</sup> And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, <sup>40</sup> God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us (Hebrews 11:32-40).

Men and women of whom the world was not worthy. This is our spiritual heritage. We must stop seeking to win the world's approval, and return to being people of whom the world is not worthy. Those who so lived are our spiritual ancestors—our forefathers and mothers in the household of God.

### **The Supreme Example of Christ**

So then, we are blessed to share in the sufferings of the Son of Man. He is our head, and we, as His body, are the prolongation of the incarnation into the world. It is therefore a blessed affirmation of our union with Jesus when the world reacts to us as it did Him. Let me close with perhaps one of the greatest summaries of the life and obedience of our Lord. It is found in Philippians, chapter two.

<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Let this be your way of thinking and acting, says the apostle. Don't seek reputation or attention, but behave as a servant toward others. And remember, the appropriate response to being human is to humble oneself and become unconditionally obedient. This is the way of Jesus, our supreme example. This is path to glorification.

### **The Path of the False Prophets**

But there is an alternative path. If the heritage described above does not appeal to you, you can join the lineage of the *false* prophets. It is a much wider, easier, and softer path to follow, but it is a path of woe, says Jesus. Woe, for you will belong to a world that is quickly passing away (I John 2:17). It is a path of woe because the only consolation available is temporal wealth. If you find your consolation not in God's protection and care, but in temporal worldly riches, enjoy them now, for this is all the consolation you will ever know.

If you choose to walk with the false prophets, you will feast upon the world's goods until you are full—but you will be left hungry. You will laugh and delight in fleshly indulgences along with those who do the same, and even applaud the behavior (Romans 1:32), but in the end, there will be only eternal mourning and weeping. You may succeed in fooling the world by appearing very pious; the world may love your religious teachings and offerings, but there is no validation in the world's approval. It is fleeting at best. The world's people have always approved of false prophets. And the world, with its prophets, will all perish together.

What should also be made clear here is that those who persecute the disciples are those Jesus declares to be in the lineage of the false prophets. Those who hate and reject Christ's disciples are not necessarily the atheists, but those who also name the name of Christ, though in vain. The persecutors are those who say "Lord, Lord" and yet find their consolation in wealth, whose god is their belly, and who market Jesus as a commodity to religious consumers. And America is a breeding ground for such religious mischief, and for the woe it brings upon millions.

How then are the disciples of Jesus to respond to persecution, especially by those who name the name of Christ? This will be the topic of next week's sermon. **AMEN.**

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