

Suffering, A Blessing

Mark 10:29-30

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Jesus taught His disciples that anyone who leaves house and family for His sake and the gospel's would receive many houses and family members in this life. One who follows the Lord Jesus is never without a family, a spiritual family which is willing to share its houses and material prosperity with those in need. What wonderful blessings these prove to be for the believer in this life! But after this life, the most wonderful blessing of all - life eternal.

Jesus' words here, however, are not what we would expect. Right in the middle of listing these wonderful blessings, He mentioned the persecutions that believers must suffer. Why would He speak of persecutions in the same breath with blessings?

It seems odd to us because of the physical, worldly orientation of our thinking. To a truly spiritual mind persecutions *are* a blessing! Before you object, notice what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:13-14. "Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." What greater blessing can you imagine than that?! The Spirit of glory and of God resting upon you!

Lest you think Peter was alone in his view of persecution, listen to what James has to say in James 1:2,3 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." The word "trial" may seem a little mild compared with "persecution," but what is persecution but a trial. A trial of faith. Such trials test our faith, and as we overcome, increase our patience that we might handle a greater trial. This is not the way faith comes, however. Romans 10:17 says, "...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith comes by study of God's word, but it is tested and made strong by trials and difficulties the believer must face.

Did you notice that James said "count it all joy" when you are tried? And Peter said "rejoice" when you suffer? Paul had the same concept of opposition to faith. In Romans 5:3 he said, "...we...glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." We *glory* in tribulations! In Romans 8:17 Paul even predicates our heavenly inheritance on having suffered in this life. He said we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, *if* indeed we suffer with Him,..."

Dear Reader, persecution for our faith and suffering for the cause of Christ are wonderful blessings which we have as believers in Jesus Christ who suffered for us.