

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

INTRODUCTION: Today we begin a new sermon series where we will examine ten different Bible characters who suffered persecution for their faith in God: Joseph, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, & Jesus. We will not only discover how God uses persecution to purify His people & promote His kingdom, but also how to respond when faced with persecution.

MOTIVATION FOR SERIES: We are living in a post Christian era in America where hostility toward followers of Christ is intensifying and will become worse. The apostle Paul warned, “that in the last days difficult times will come” (2 Tim. 3: 1-5) &, as a result, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3: 16). Why is the persecution for followers of Christ inevitable?

- 1. The Christian belief that there are moral absolutes rooted in God’s character & revealed in God’s Word for which all men will be accountable to God. This is in direct opposition to a secular society which says “the only absolute allowed is the absolute insistence that there are no absolutes.” Therefore, there can be no tolerance of Christians who possess the absolutes of God’s Word by which all men will be judged.**
- 2. The exclusivity of Christ (Jesus is the only way to heaven), which is a death blow to the autonomy of man since Christianity requires man to turn from going his own way and submit to Jesus as Lord. Therefore, it is easier to attack Christians as being narrow bigots, than relinquish control and surrender to God.**
- 3. The godly lifestyle and witness of believers which serves as a light exposing sin and pointing to Jesus. Since men love the darkness more than the light they find it easier to extinguish the light than be exposed by the light (John 3: 19-20).**
- 4. The believers’ conviction that no person, authority, or government has the right to command what is contrary to God’s laws and, if they do, it is the duty of Christians to disobey (Acts 5: 28-32). Faith in God calls the believer to stand alone when necessary in obedience to God regardless the consequences.**

The time has come for the church in America to prepare for persecution in order to remain faithful to Christ and advance His gospel, and count it an honor to suffer for Him regardless the cost.

LESSON 1 : JOSEPH

OVERVIEW OF JOSEPH'S LIFE

- **BIRTH TO SEVENTEEN (Genesis 30: 24 - 37:2):** Joseph's father was Jacob and his mother was Rachel who was the favorite of Jacob's two wives, the other being Rachel's older sister, Leah. There was an intense rivalry between the sisters for Jacob's affections which created a childbearing competition. Leah birthed six sons and a daughter, while Rachel, who struggled with infertility, birthed two sons, one being Joseph. There were also two concubines who each birthed two sons. This all added up to one father, two wives, two concubines, four mothers, and thirteen children, with Joseph being the next to the youngest and Jacob's favorite child. Although the family enjoyed material prosperity and the twelve sons became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel, the home did not exemplify godly character, but was a picture of dysfunction filled with strife, envy, anger, lust, and deceit.
- **SEVENTEEN TO THIRTY (Genesis 37: 2 - 41:46):** Dark and painful years of intense suffering all brought about by the evil act of his brothers selling him into slavery. He is falsely accused of attempting to rape his master's wife and thrown into an Egyptian prison. When Joseph is instrumental in securing his cell mate's release from prison with the anticipation his kind act would be reciprocated, he is abandoned and forgotten by his friend to languish even longer in prison.
- **THIRTY TO DEATH (Genesis 41: 46 - 50: 26)** Joseph is suddenly elevated from prisoner to prime minister of Egypt, the most power nation on earth, as a result of interpreting Pharaoh's dream. The rest of his years are lived in prosperity under God's blessing. Although he has the authority and is given the perfect opportunity to exact revenge on his brothers for their cruelty & injustice which resulted in thirteen years of suffering, slavery, and imprisonment, he forgives and returns their evil with great kindness in providing for all their needs.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM JOSEPH

1. Choose God's **RIGHTEOUSNESS** when there appears to be no **EXPECTATION OF REWARD** (Genesis 39).
2. Hope in God's **PROMISE** when there appears to be no **HOPE FOR DELIVERANCE** (Genesis 37: 5-11 with Genesis 42: 5-9a).
3. Trust in God's **SOVEREIGNTY** when there appears to be no **PURPOSE IN LIFE** (Psalm 105: 16-24; Genesis 45: 3-8; 50: 15-21).