Two Roads Lesson 9: Set Your Face Like Flint

The Road Less Traveled: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 5:10

Read: Hebrews 11

Persecuted for righteousness means suffering punishment or penalty for adherence to a particular religious belief. We haven’t experienced a lot of physical persecution for our Christian beliefs in the United States, although sometimes a story will emerge. One such story widely circulated after the Columbine School shooting on April 20, 1999, is that Rachel Scott and Cassie Bernall, two students at the school, were asked if they were Christians by the shooters, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. Upon their answer of “yes,” Dylan and Eric pulled their triggers. Whether or not the story is factual, it is inspirational to think that two young Christians could be so brave as to confess their faith as they faced death. And I, along with those who were familiar with the story, considered what I would do under similar circumstances.

We are called by God to profess our faith openly and without shame. While we can do that without fear of major repercussions here in the US, during the times of the prophets, it was a different story. Ezekial was called to speak words to a people who would not listen. Isaiah was given the same message. When he asked God how long he was to speak to the people who would not listen, God told him until the cities are destroyed and the people exiled. Jeremiah was also sent to a rebellious people. God told him he was to say to them what God commanded him to say and he was to stand against the whole land, the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land.

And what happened to these prophets? Ezekial himself suffered exile among the people he was preaching to. It is reported that Isaiah was sawn in two by the wicked king Mannaseh who didn’t like his message. Jeremiah suffered imprisonment, being thrown into a cistern and left to die, as well as being taken from his homeland.

Why or how did they endure such abuse? God told each of them that He would protect them. He told Ezekial, “I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house.” Ez. 3:8-9) He told Jeremiah: “Do not be terrified by them….Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land.” (Jer. 1:17-18) God enables us to withstand opposition.

Hebrews 11:35-38 recounts other types of persecutions endured by those speaking God’s Word:

they “were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountain, and in caves and holes in the ground.”

You might ask, where is the protection of God in these kinds of outcomes? In the book of Revelation written by the Apostle John, Jesus told John to write a message to seven specific churches. To the one in Smyrna, He told John to write that He knew about their sufferings and afflictions. “I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10)

First, Jesus knew about their suffering. God is always aware of what we are going through. Second, Jesus said it was the devil bringing the persecution. Ephesians 6:12 says “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” This “ruler of the kingdom of the air” is the spirit at work in those who are disobedient—the ones doing the persecuting.

Third, we must realize that the devil is already defeated. The devil thought he had victory when he incited the people to betray and crucify Jesus. But he was wrong. When Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, He defeated the power of Satan. While Satan is still active in the world, the power we have available to us to defeat him is like the power God used to raise Jesus from the dead. That’s a lot of power! And it is more power than Satan has.

Fourth, we must realize that God’s ways are not our ways. (Isa. 55:8) God has an eternal purpose in mind and works everything out for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) The “good” may not be visible to us, as Jesus’ death on the cross was not considered “good” by His apostles. Later, when Christ appeared to them and taught them how it had to happen that way to fulfill scripture, they believed that His crucifixion had been necessary. We probably won’t be so fortunate to have that understanding if our persecution leads to death, but by faith we know that our death means we will be with the Lord in our eternal home, which is far better than being on this earth.

How did those persecuted endure? Paul tells us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2) Isaiah tells us that Jesus knew the brutality that awaited him, that “he set his face like flint” knowing He would not be put to shame. Likewise, we can purpose to endure persecution, when and if it comes, because we too can set our faces like flint to endure to the death if need be. To die is to be with the Lord, thus, ours will be the Kingdom of Heaven! The road we are traveling will take us to its final glorious destination.