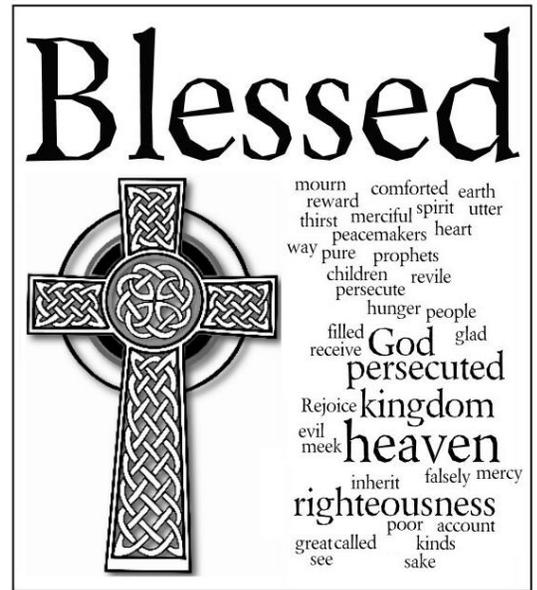


Facing Opposition

Reward for Living According to God's Word

Things went very wrong in Germany. Defeated in World War I they were humiliated and embarrassed on the world stage. Germans vowed it wasn't going to happen again. "Adolf Hitler capitalized on economic woes, popular discontent and political infighting to rise to absolute power in 1933. Hitler came to believe the country's devastating defeat in World War I could be attributed not to the Allies, but to insufficiently patriotic 'traitors' at home." To rectify this he sought to build a dominant race of Germans. Obsessed with the idea of ethnic "purity," Hitler desired an order that placed the so-called "Aryan race" (German) at the top. As Hitler's power grew Jews were especially oppressed and executed only because of their ethnicity. The 1935 passage of the Nuremberg Laws officially deprived people of the Jewish faith of German citizenship, and barred them from marrying or having relations with persons of "German or related blood." Hitler also addressed the Christian faith. Fearing that Christianity would revolt against Hitler's barbaric ways, his appointees took over leadership of the German Christian church, pressuring it to change its theology to one of allegiance to the state, rather than to God.

According to the biographical book, Bonhoeffer, Hitler opposed the church of Germany, the home country of Protestant Reformation leader Martin Luther. As you may remember, in 1517 Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg. The Reformation emphasized that the Bible is the central religious authority and salvation comes only because of faith and not good deeds. The Bible's 40 authors focused on a central theme of salvation through faith in Christ, directly contrary to Hitler's position. Hitler's view was that salvation was a result of loyalty to the government.



Hitler felt that the Christian church preached "meekness and flabbiness," which was opposite to the National Socialist ideology of "ruthlessness and strength." In contrast, the Bible teaches acceptance of all people, which infuriated Hitler. Many clergy, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, became martyrs as they stood up for the Word of God. Even though many were executed for their dedication to biblical principles, they stood their ground.

So, where am I going with this history lesson? Jesus faced oppression as He walked the earth. We face opposition, too, although certainly not as extreme. A faction in our world today resists biblical teachings. The culture of our time views life much differently than what Jesus taught. We face an uphill battle as we try to uphold the Word of God against our changing culture. It is a difficult path. Thankfully, we need not be martyrs as we stand up for what scripture teaches us but we do face opposition from people outside of the faith. Don't back down when challenged on the principles of your faith. *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.* (Deuteronomy 31:6) Rest assured that the Word of God is unchanging and God wins in the end.

The "meekness" that Adolf Hitler scorned is not a weakness but a strength that comes from God. Christian martyrs put their faith in strength from the Lord. Rely on God for strength as you stay strong in the faith and defend the Word of God in our contemporary culture.

So how did things end up? Hitler's goal and vision was a "Thousand-Year Reich", a reign that would endure for a millennium. It didn't end up well for Adolf Hitler. Hitler took his own life on April 30, 1945, as an act of despair. In contrast, Jesus sacrificed his life on earth for an eternal reign. It was a triumph. Jesus died so that we could live.

What are the rewards of living our faith in spite of opposition and persecution? As you face resistance know that you are not alone. Not only are others facing opposition but God is with you as well. So, how do we stand up to resistance? In standing up to the greatest evil of the 20th century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said we need an "uncompromising discipleship, following Christ according to the Sermon on the Mount." We can follow Jesus teachings that are part of the Sermon on the Mount. It describes in Jesus' own words how God rewards us as we live out our faith, in victory, even in the difficult circumstances of our time. This part of the Sermon on the Mount is called the Beatitudes, which lists the values of life that lead to salvation as its reward. Each phrase has two parts: the conditions faced and results of these values. They echo the highest ideals of Jesus on spirituality and compassion. We face the same conditions and can reap the same rewards.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:3-11).

Prayer: Dear Lord. We know you will stand with us as we face people who do not believe and want to impose their unbelief on us and our communities. Give us the strength to stand up for your Word and teachings. Comfort us to know that people who reject your Word aren't rejecting us, but themselves. Instill within us the ability to love our detractors and all people as we seek to grow your Kingdom. Amen.

Note for further study: The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11) is only the first part of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount continues with Jesus' guidance on many key topics, such as murder, adultery, divorce, oaths of allegiance, love for enemies, prayer (including the Lord's Prayer), treasures, worry, judging others, true and false prophets, Jesus as fulfillment of God's plan, asking God and His response and the gates of heaven. The entire sermon can be found in Matthew 5:1- Matthew 7:29.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer quotes are from the book, Bonhoeffer, written by New York Times best-selling author, Eric Metaxas. The book outlines the struggles of Germany during the rise and fall of Adolf Hitler and how it relates to the church.