

Sunday Centerpoint

Key Takeaway:

1. The way Jesus uses the word "blessed" is fundamentally different from how culture uses it. Culture equates blessing with comfort and favorable circumstances. Jesus connects blessing to faithfulness under pressure.
2. Righteousness shines a light on unrighteousness, and that light often makes people uncomfortable enough to push back, slander, or persecute.
3. God sometimes delivers us from the fire, as He did with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Other times, He delivers us through the fire, as He did with Stephen. The blessing does not change in either case.
4. Jesus never promises physical safety, but He does promise His presence for all of eternity. That presence is the blessing.
5. A cruciform, or cross-shaped, life means not only being willing to suffer for righteousness but being willing to love and pray for those who cause the suffering.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you typically use the word "blessed" in everyday conversation? How does that compare to the way Jesus uses it in Matthew 5:10-12?
2. Before this sermon, what did you assume following Jesus faithfully would protect you from? Has that assumption ever been challenged by real life?
3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told King Nebuchadnezzar that God was able to deliver them, but that even if He did not, they still would not bow down (Daniel 3:16-18). What does that kind of resolve look like in practical, everyday terms for someone in your season of life?
4. The sermon describes Stephen as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," full of grace and power, with a face like that of an angel (Acts 6:5, 8, 15). What would it mean for those kinds of descriptions to be true of you? What would have to change?
5. The sermon makes a distinction between God delivering someone from persecution versus delivering someone through persecution. Have you experienced either of these? How did it shape your faith?
6. The sermon states that righteousness shines a light on unrighteousness and that this is often what triggers persecution or social pushback. Can you think of a time when living according to your values made someone around you uncomfortable? How did you respond?
7. Corey Trevathan's quote from the sermon says, "Cruciformity isn't just asking, can I die on a cross? It's asking, can I love the one who put me there." How does that definition challenge or expand your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?
8. Stephen's final words were a prayer asking God not to hold his killers' sin against them (Acts 7:60). Who in your life right now would be the hardest person to pray that kind of prayer for? What makes it difficult?

Practical Applications:

1. Identify an area of your life where you have been quietly compromising your values to avoid conflict or discomfort. Make a specific decision now, before the pressure is on, about how you will respond when that pressure comes.
2. Think of someone who has spoken poorly of you, pushed back on your faith, or made your life harder because of how you live. Pray for that person by name every day this week. Ask God to give you genuine love for them, not just tolerance.
3. Reflect on whether the way you are living would give anyone a reason to push back. Ask yourself honestly whether your life is reflecting Christ clearly enough that it would make someone uncomfortable. If not, consider what might need to change.
4. Read Acts 6 and 7 in full this week and pay attention to the details of Stephen's character, his speech, and his death. Write down what stands out to you and bring it to share with your group next time.