The Myth of Smooth Sailing

“Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—skip like a lamb, if you like!—for even though they don't like it, I do... and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company; my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this. And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your self will not satisfy you for long. And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.” (Luke 6:22–23, 25 The Message).

Some of you “count yourself blessed” many times over! Church workers seem especially vulnerable to cut downs, smears, and discredited names! Yet, Jesus, in His world-famous beatitudes, says this is a good thing.

Many of us would prefer a life devoid of conflict. Wouldn’t it be smooth sailing if our students treated us as if we were important persons in their lives, people whom they appreciated because we work so hard for them? Wouldn’t it be pleasant to cruise through life buoyed by compliments and appreciation from parents, people who truly recognized us for the sacrifices and dedication we bring to their children? And wouldn’t it be wonderful to float on the integrity of each young person in our youth group, confirmation class, or choir?

That’s a wave few church workers ride. At least for long. Smooth sailing does not happen on seas roiled by Satan. And that’s exactly where we serve. But that’s a good thing. Well, maybe just an okay thing. Truth be told, it can really dampen our spirits. But we persist.

Why? Why persist? Because while some we serve are hissing, heaven is applauding! The angels don’t cheer only for our happy days or our seeming successes. They praise God for giving us a role to play, despite obstacles and adversities, in the lives of people He loves. They applaud because the Holy Spirit has enabled us to be like the proverbial, old Timex watches, which “took a lickin’ and kept on tickin’.”

Lest the myth of smooth sailing (because you work for Jesus) not be enough to influence your attitude, Jesus had more to say that doesn’t exactly brighten our day. He warns against self-satisfaction. Is He trying to squeeze out the last drop of joy in an otherwise difficult ministry?
Not at all. Were we to rely on ourselves for satisfaction, the feeling wouldn’t last long. Sin—ours and that of others—would soon flood us with waves of crushing reality. But what does this leave us with? (Besides a naughty preposition at the end of a sentence.)

It leaves us with guaranteed, total satisfaction! Our success, our satisfaction, and other elements of our sanctification lie within the driving currents of Jesus’ promises to bless us. He is with us, and He is all we need. He will not taunt us or disrespect us. He will not punish our failures or take advantage of our frailties. Instead, He forgives and soothes and keeps us focused on serving Him despite odds against it. So go out and “skip like a lamb, if you like.” Just don’t skip class!

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Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24–25)