

Persecuted Believers

Matthew 10:16-23 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending you out as **sheep in the midst of wolves**; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ But be on guard against people, for they will hand you over to the courts and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸ and you will even be brought before governors and kings on My account, as **a testimony to them and to the Gentiles**.¹⁹ But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who are speaking, but it is the Spirit of your Father who is speaking in you. ²¹ “Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² And **you will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved**. ²³ “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, **you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes**.

Introduction

One of the things that we ought to be prepared for today is persecution, because we are living in the end times. To be more specific, the persecution against believers in Christ. You may want to avoid the topic because it sounds negative, but Jesus wants us not only to be aware of it, but also to be prepared for it, because persecution against us is real.

Content

Persecution against Christ’s followers is nothing new. It’s everywhere. It has been with the Church from the beginning. Here’s a burning question: why does the Almighty God allow persecution against His children? Why doesn’t He keep us exempt from it forever? Listen to what Jesus says, ¹⁶ “Behold, I am **sending you out** as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ But **be on guard** against people, for they will hand you over to the courts and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸ and you will even be brought before governors and kings on My account, **as a testimony to them** and to the Gentiles...²¹ “Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² And **you will be hated by all** because of My name,...²³ “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; **for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes**.

Why does Jesus send us (the sheep) out to the world (in the midst of the wolves) knowing that people will hate us? Why will the persecution against us continue until Christ comes again? *As a testimony to them*, right? Folks, that's the reality of our faith. As long as we believe in Jesus, and as long as we bear witness to His name, we will experience persecution until Christ comes. Persecution is inevitable.

Here's the list of **the biblical reasons for persecution**. First, it is the devil's major weapon against the followers of Christ (along with others such as temptation, lusts, greed, hate, deception, fear, and anxiety). He uses persecution to bring us down from our faith (Matthew 13:21). Persecution happens when we believe in God's Word. It falls upon us when we faithfully follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior, because the devil doesn't want to lose us from his grip.

Next, here's one positive note: persecution burns away the dross in our faith and practice. It refines us. It purifies and makes our faith strong. Consider how we refine gold and silver. By fire, right? Likewise, persecution strips away superficial belief. It sifts through "false and fair-weather Christians." It builds up endurance and perseverance in our character (2 Corinthians 1:6). Please know that no amount of persecution can separate us from Christ's love (Romans 8:35). During persecutions, God never leaves us alone. He is with us (Psalm 23:4, Isaiah 43:2). He comforts us (2 Corinthians 1:4) and rescues us (2 Timothy 3:11, 2 Corinthians 1:10). The comfort that we receive from God strengthens fellow believers who undergo persecutions (2 Corinthians 1:4, 6). They know that they are not alone in persecution.

Finally, persecution helps us to obey Jesus' command on our enemies. *Pray for those who persecute you*, Jesus commands (Matthew 5:44). *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse* (Romans 12:14). There will be a reward for those suffered in Jesus' name. Furthermore, God will avenge for the persecuted: *And the Lord your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you* (Deuteronomy 30:7).

The Scripture shows that no faithful believer is exempt from persecution. Even Jesus Himself went through persecution by the unbelieving Jews (John 15:20): *Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well*. Every good believer will experience persecution. If you want to be faithful to the Lord Jesus, expect persecution in one form or another. At work, at home, even by your own family members. Hear Jesus again: ²¹ *"Now brother will betray brother to*

death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. E.g. The Cultural Revolution in China in 1960s.

All the apostles (except Judas Iscariot) were martyred due to their faithful witness to Jesus. Think of the countless Christians who suffered torture, imprisonment and even the loss of their lives. All throughout the history of the Church in the past 2000 years. Today, faithful believers still go through persecutions. Both in the East and the West. Old and young. Male and female. All experience persecution. All because of their faith in Jesus.

Get this: outside, persecution looks like a curse, but inside, it is a blessing. A true blessing. Listen to Jesus. *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10).* He continues, *Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great (Matthew 5:11-12).* Please don't misunderstand Jesus. He is not glorifying or advocating persecution for the sake of suffering. No. Rather, He knows everything about faith and what it entails. He firmly reminds us that persecution is inevitable yet do not be afraid of it. Jesus says it's worth it. It is a great witness to His name. There's a great reward in heaven in the end. *Our momentary affliction is nothing compared to the glory in the future (2 Corinthians 4:17).* Therefore, Christ urges us, take it like a man (1 Corinthians 16:13). Folks, we may not fully understand it now, but in the last day, we will see God reward with glory and honor those who endured persecution for Jesus' sake.

As pastor of this congregation, I urge you all to be prepared for upcoming persecution against our faith in Jesus Christ. We are living in the end times, aren't we? *All who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).* Wouldn't you agree that even today it is getting harder and harder to freely express our faith in Jesus Christ let alone witnessing? Some leaders, political and religious alike, try to suppress us from sharing our faith with others saying, *"Christians, keep your faith inside your heart / the church. Don't bring it out or share with others."* That's a devil's attack on us. It is also a counterattack against Christ's command to go out and preach the Word (Matthew 28:19-20). I urge you this morning to show your solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are already in persecution. Read today's insert from the Voice of the Martyrs to know how to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. I also recommend you supporting 'The Voice of the Martyrs' which I have been supporting over the past 30 years.

Conclusion

Finally, I am speaking to the parents who are raising their children at home now. I hope and pray that you raise your children to be cross-bearers who are not ashamed of Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord or the suffering thereof. Let me tell you a story of a 10-year-old girl whose name was Zoya. During the Soviet Union era, “her parents, grandparents and brothers were sent to concentration camps because of their Christian faith. Zoya was first placed in a home for children whom the government thought needed “re-education.” Refusing to part with the cross pendant her mother had given her just before being taken away, Zoya tightened the cord of her necklace at night to prevent Communist authorities from taking it. As a result of her stubbornness, she was sent to a home for developmentally disabled children, where she continued the fight for her cross and the Savior it symbolized. When other children encouraged her to blaspheme and steal, she replied, ‘My mother should not have a criminal child.’ Sentenced to death at age 14, Zoya’s punishment was later reduced to a long imprisonment. Her parents and brothers had long since been freed while she remained in prison.”

“When we read in the Bible that blessings are promised to children of the faithful, some of us expect a good position at work, a happy marriage, academic success or some position of honor. But the Bible often defines ‘blessing’ another way. The Lord Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account’ (Matthew 5:10-11).

As parents and grandparents, we search our hearts to determine what is best for our children and grandchildren. But what we should desire most for them is that they would ‘share his sufferings’ and become ‘like him in his death’ so they ‘may attain the resurrection from the dead’ (Philippians 3:10-11). ...

Do you wish for your children earthly possessions, fun, enjoyment and good careers, none of which are to be entirely despised? Or do you think primarily about preparing them for the highest blessing—to become like Zoya and thousands of others, partakers of Christ’s Passion? It is not enough to take children to Sunday school and church or to have devotions with them in the home. They must come to understand what it means to be a Christian, a cross bearer who views suffering with Christ as a pure joy.

Obey the Word of God and prepare real blessings for your children. Instead of giving them riches and recreation, prepare them to endure suffering gladly while sharing in the sorrows of Christ. There is no higher blessing than this. This is the path to glory” (Richard Wurmbrand, *The Voice of the Martyrs*, Vol. 56, 11). Let us pray.