On Persecution

Matthew 10:16-23 (New American Standard Bible 1995)

*[16] "Behold, I send you out as **sheep in the midst of wolves;** so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. [17] But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; [18] and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, 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 it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. [20] For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

*[21] "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] **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.***

Before the sermon: read seven prayer requests from the Voice of Martyrs Prayer Calendar 2026, October (Comoros, Honduras, United Arab Emirates, Eritrea, Nigeria, Libya, and Iraq)**.**

When asked what the global body of Christ can do for them, all those persecuted believers say, *Pray for us*. Please remember them in your prayers so that they may be strong and courageous in their faith.

Introduction

Today is the International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians (IDOP). Each year, it is observed on the first Sunday in November so that the global Church may unite in prayer for our persecuted Christians. I urge you this morning to show your solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are already suffering persecution.

On this day, every year, I preach on the topic of persecution against believers. We may want to avoid the topic because it sounds negative and depressing, but Jesus wants us not only to be aware of it, but also to be prepared for it, because persecution against us is real in America as well.

Persecution Is Real

Persecution against Christ's followers is nothing new. It is everywhere. It is in the East. It is also in the West. We may experience it in in different ways: from social hostility, exclusion to imprisonment, torture, and death. But it is real.

Persecution has been with the Church from the beginning. According to tradition, all the apostles of Christ (except Judas and John) 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 throughout the Church's 2,000-year history. Today, faithful believers still go through persecution, some of them become martyrs. Old and young. Male and female. All experience persecution. All because of their faith in Jesus.

Here's the truth: no faithful believer is exempt from persecution. Even Jesus Himself was persecuted 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.*

Here's a burning question: why does the Almighty God allow His people to suffer persecution? Why doesn't He keep us exempt from it? The Bible does not answer every question we have about God's purposes, but it teaches us how to understand persecution, how God sustains us through it, and how we should respond when it comes. God does not promise that following Christ will keep us from persecution. When we face persecution, He calls us to remain faithful, to trust His sustaining presence, and to respond with courage and love.

Listen to Jesus who says, [16] *"Behold,* ***I send you out*** *as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.* [17] *But* ***beware of men****, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;* [18] *and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as* ***a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.*** *…*

[21] *"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] ***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 are faithful to Jesus and bear witness to His name, we will experience persecution until Christ comes. Persecution is inevitable.

I searched God's Word for the word 'persecution' and discovered four biblical explanations for the reasons and benefits of persecution.

1. Persecution Tests Our Faith

First, why and when do we experience persecution? It happens when we take our faith seriously and refuse to abandon our convictions in Christ. It doesn't happen if we compromise with the world and blend in with it. It happens when we obey Christ and His Word without compromise.

Know that persecution is the devil's primary weapon against God's children. He has only one goal: to keep us from being saved. To derail us from our heaven-bound journey, he also uses other means such as temptation, lusts, greed, hate, deception, fear, and anxiety.

Let me say it again: the devil doesn't want to lose us from his grip. So, he uses persecution to turn us away from our faith (Matthew 13:21). Persecution falls upon those who faithfully follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

2. Persecution Refines Our Faith

Next, here's one positive note on persecution: it 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 and non-committal beliefs. It reveals the depth of our faith. It can expose where our trust is weak. It calls us to depend more fully on Christ. It builds up endurance and perseverance in our character (1 Peter 1:6-7, 2 Corinthians 1:6).

3. God Sustains Us through Persecution

Third, God never leaves us alone during the time of persecution. Sometimes He delivers us from danger, other times He gives us strength to endure it. Whatever happens, no persecution can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35). He is always 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). Furthermore, God uses us to strengthen and comfort fellow believers who undergo persecution with the comfort that we received from Him (2 Corinthians 1:4, 6). With our support and prayers, they know that they are not alone in persecution.

4. We Must Respond to Persecution with Prayer and Love

Finally, persecution brings us an opportunity to obey Jesus' commands concerning our persecutors. He commands us not to hate them, but to *love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us* (Matthew 5:44). Paul echoes by saying, *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse* (Romans 12:14).

This does not mean that we approve of injustice or remain silent about wrongdoing. It means that we refuse to let hatred control our hearts. We entrust justice to God while overcoming hatred with love. By the way, God will reward those who suffer in Jesus' name. Furthermore, He will avenge the persecuted in due time: *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).

Persecution Is a Disguised Blessing

Being persecuted for Christ's sake looks like a curse outside, but it is a disguised blessing. A true blessing. An eternal blessing. Otherwise, why did Jesus say this? ***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 we need not be afraid of it. It's worth it. It is a witness to His name. It results in a growth in our faith. And there's a reward in heaven in the end. Paul says, *Our momentary affliction is nothing compared to the glory in the future* (2 Corinthians 4:17). Therefore, he urges us, "Be strong" (1 Corinthians 16:13). Folks, we may not fully realize it now, but on the last day, God will reward with eternal glory and honor those who endured persecution for Jesus' sake.

Pastoral Advice

As your pastor, I urge you to be prepared for persecution against your faith in Jesus Christ. Scripture says, "*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 to freely express our faith in Jesus Christ let alone to witness? Gideons are no longer allowed in many public schools to distribute Bibles. Some leaders, political and religious alike, pressure us not to share our faith with others saying, "*Christians, keep your faith inside the church. Don't bring it out or*

share with others." That's the devil's scheme on us. It is also a counterattack against Christ's command to go out and preach the Word (Matthew 28:19-20).

Remember Christ says to *be shrewd as serpents* (v. 16). We need to prepare for persecution in one form or another. At work, at home, even by your own family members. Whatever forms it may take, remain faithful to Christ. 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.* For example, during the Cultural Revolution in China in the 1960s, countless believers were handed over to the authorities by their own children, imprisoned, and lost their lives.

Conclusion

We have talked about how persecution tests our faith, how God can refine us through hardship, and how He sustains us when we suffer. But there is one more question we need to ask. Are we preparing the next generation to remain faithful when following Jesus becomes difficult? We naturally want our children and grandchildren to enjoy good lives. We want them to be safe, successful, and happy. But we must also prepare them to love Christ more than the approval of the world. Let me tell you the story of a young girl named Zoya (written by Rev. Richard Wurmbrand in *The Voice of the Martyrs,* Vol. 56, p. 11).

She was about 10 years old. 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."* Her story ends there, but Rev. Wurmbrand continues.

"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."

Let us pray.