



Sunday Sermons

Persecution

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SERMONS

SUNDAY SERMONS

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PERSECUTION

"And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" ([2 Timothy 3:12](#)); "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" ([Acts 14:22](#)); "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also" ([John 15:18-20](#)).

All In The Past?

It is tempting to look at the above passages and say, "Well, that is all in the past, and we live in a more civilized world today where such things don't happen". Yet, the Bible doesn't confine such passages just to a certain period of time. When Paul wrote [2 Timothy 3:12](#), he was imprisoned for his faith and Christians had already endured various persecutions ([Acts 8:1-4](#); [12:1ff](#); [2 Timothy 3:11](#)), yet Paul is speaking of persecution in the future. Verse 12 seems to just be a blanket statement that all faithful Christians can expect to experience some type of persecution. A common myth in Western culture is that man is naturally becoming more civilized with time. But the Holy Spirit sees something different, *"that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy..."* ([2 Timothy 3:1-4](#)). It is tempting to think that our society is more civilized and moral than all previous cultures. Typically, people will point to the fact that we have eliminated slavery, seem to be more concerned about the environment and have made some progress improving race relations. Yet, many other factors tell a different story: High divorce rates, overcrowded prisons, juvenile crime rates, legalized abortion, suicide, the number of people addicted to drugs and gambling, and the vast

happened, I was struck, not that what had happened had deeply upset her, but that she felt she had to *apologize* for the fact that it had deeply upset her....We can no more talk in terms of someone, say, defiling a virgin, so instead we punish the virgin for having any feelings at all" (*A Return To Modesty, Discovering The Lost Virtue, Wendy Shalit, pp. 11-12*)

Nothing New

We shouldn't expect to escape being persecuted for our desire to live a godly life, for one of the patterns that runs throughout the Bible is the theme of the wicked persecuting the righteous. *"not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you"* ([1 John 3:12-13](#)). Don't be surprised if people resent your desire to live a godly life, because that hatred has existed since the beginning! Look closely at the interaction between Cain and Abel. Cain was infuriated over the fact that Abel was obeying God, that Abel was obedient and refused to cut any corners when it came to what God expected. This is why the world often tries to get us to compromise or tone down our preaching. Points To Note: 1. This is one reason why a society will often tolerate a corrupt leader or leaders (as long as the economy is good), because the rest of us look pretty good when compared to them. 2. The world wants its heroes to have some deep dark secret, so that we don't feel like failures when we stand in their shadow. 3. This is why the world hates the man or woman of principle, *"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* ([John 3:20](#)). 3. The world likes everything to be gray and it hates the person who believes that there a good number of things which aren't gray([Galatians 5:19-21](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#)). 4. This is why a number of people will defend what they know is outright moral filth, because they fear that their favorite sin will be the next one exposed. 5. The world also hates "shame or embarrassment". Shalit reminds us that the first mantra of secular sex education is overcoming your embarrassment, or in other words, getting rid of your natural sense of shame ([Romans 6:21](#); [1 Timothy 2:9](#) *"Modestly"*, which means "a sense of shame....precedes and prevents the shameful act....would always restrain a good man from an unworthy act" (*Thayer p. 127*)). 6. The world also hates to have it's motives and behavior analyzed by an absolute standard. The more a society is becoming increasingly wicked, the more you will hear people argue that other people shouldn't judge them. Shalit observes, "All the questions a woman might wonder when it comes to the man she's about to become involved with —'Is he moral?' 'Is he good?' 'And does he know what it means to be a man?', have been reduced to this. For we are not supposed to care if he's moral (who knows what's moral?), or if he's good (who knows what's good?), and above all we are not allowed to ask if he knows what it means to be a man. That, of course, would be extremely uncool because that would be sexist" (*pp. 34-35*). Here is one of God's snapshots of what a culture looks like when it is about ready to hit bottom: *"Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They certainly were not ashamed, and they did not know how to blush"* ([Jeremiah 8:12](#)). Paul in [Galatians 4:29](#) pointed out that as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so Christians find themselves persecuted by unbelievers. Nothing has changed.

Persecuted and happy

Typically when many Christians today experience some form of persecution because of their faith, they become discouraged, are really hurt, and they wonder if preaching the gospel is really worth it. I have experienced the same reaction myself. So why is it that Christians in the First Century, are not only told to have a different reaction, but they actually did react differently? *"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness....Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* ([Matthew 5:10-12](#)); *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and*

cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy" ([Luke 6:22-23](#)); "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" ([Acts 5:41](#)); "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" ([Colossians 1:24](#)).

Applications

1. These Christians were convinced that they were doing what was eternally right. They were convinced that they had the truth and that without that truth the world didn't have any hope. They knew that their preaching would save souls ([1 Timothy 4:16](#)). These Christians knew that they were the only ones who had a real message of salvation ([Romans 1:16](#)), and that the non-Christian religions surrounding them were devoid of salvation ([1 Corinthians 10:20](#)). In like manner, we face the same thing today and if not more. Not only are we surrounded by paganism, but the world is also filled with many "Christian" counterfeits.
2. They considered it a great privilege and compliment that God would allow them to suffer. Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh came to this world to give His life for us: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" ([1 Peter 3:18](#)). If Jesus suffered so that I could be saved, then shouldn't I be willing to suffer so that others hear the message of salvation? If Jesus really is our role model and hero, then we will count it a blessing when God allows us to walk in the footsteps of His Son even when it comes to suffering for righteousness ([1 Peter 2:20-23](#)).
3. There is something very noble, romantic, and exciting about the idea of refusing to give into evil. The world returns evil for evil, but Christians are to do the opposite ([1 Peter 3:9](#)). The world counters insults with insults, but not us. The world loves only those who love them, but we are to love our enemies ([Matthew 5:44-48](#)). Isn't it wonderful that God doesn't want us to be average!
4. What is the value of a good conscience? "And keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" ([1 Peter 3:16](#)).
1. Being persecuted is evidence that I am doing something right! I am making an impact, my light is shining and my salt is having a definite affect on the people around me ([Matthew 5:13-16](#); [1 Peter 4:4](#)). Unfortunately, some are under the impression that we shouldn't make any waves or preach anything controversial. That the way to win people to Christ is remove everything that would possibly offend someone. Yet, Paul pointed out that the very heart and soul of the gospel message is naturally offensive to any sinner who remains arrogant, "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness...but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness" ([1 Corinthians 1:18,23](#)). Paul pointed out that we need to do our best to be at peace with all men ([Romans 12:18](#)), and that we need to preach the gospel without becoming rude or argumentative ([2 Timothy 2:24](#)). And yet, after we have done all these things, a good number of people are still going to hate us ([Matthew 7:12-13](#); [Luke 6:26](#) "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets"). Abel had the truth and a good attitude, and Cain killed him. Noah preached the truth with the right attitude and saved seven other people. The prophets preached the word of God with the right attitude and were constantly ignored, mocked and persecuted by professed believers. John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles all preached the truth with the right attitude and most of them were killed for it. Which is more important? For people to like you and consider you a loving person? Or for God to approve of you? ([John 12:42-43](#))

in the midst of my enemies

"Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" ([Psalm 23:5](#)). By experience David had found that even during trials and persecutions, God had not merely or barely provided for him, but rather, even in tough times, he had found himself extremely blessed. When Absalom was pursuing him, God providentially provided for him ([2 Samuel 17:27-29](#)). When Paul was imprisoned, he found that such only provided

another sphere in which the gospel could be spread ([Philippians 1:12-14](#)). In addition, while in prison, a supply of gifts came from the Philippians (4:14), and he would convert individuals such as Onesimus, the runaway slave ([Philemon 10](#)). It seems natural to shy away from persecution, but David and Paul would argue that the person who shrinks away from doing the right thing because they are afraid of the fallout, is actually depriving themselves of many blessings. Many of the greatest stories in the Bible are when people like Joseph and Daniel refused to compromise, and out of suffering came not only great rewards for themselves, but also for others. *"But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God"* ([1 Peter 4:16](#)).

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