

The Persecuted

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes the inevitability and significance of persecution for those who live righteously, encouraging believers to find joy in their suffering for Christ's sake.

Duration: 49:38

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, Romans 12:14, Hebrews 13:3, 1 Peter 2:23, 1 Peter 4:4, 1 Peter 4:12, 1 Peter 4:14

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having a meek and fearful attitude when facing persecution for the sake of Christ. He encourages believers to maintain a good conscience and conduct themselves in a way that brings glory to God, even when they are falsely accused. The preacher also highlights the example of Christ, who suffered in the flesh and calls believers to arm themselves with the same mindset. He reminds them that when they suffer for doing good, it is better to endure it according to God's will rather than for doing evil. The sermon also references Matthew chapter 5, specifically the Beatitudes, to remind believers that those who suffer for the name of Christ are blessed and will receive the spirit of glory and God's rest upon them.

Transcript

All right, we go to Matthew chapter 5, the last of the Beatitudes this morning, Matthew chapter 5, and if you can keep your fingers there because we'll keep referring back to Matthew 5 as we go through the various sections. Matthew 5 and verse 10. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. There's some that say that these are two separate Beatitudes because you find that verse 10 begins with blessed and verse 11 begins with blessed, but you'll see that it deals with the same subject, the subject of persecution.

And so the same pattern that you find in the others, blessed are the poor and spiritual, for theirs is the kingdom, so blessed for, that doesn't appear in verse 11. So we're going to deal with that all as one Beatitude and that verses 11 and 12 are just an amplification of the same one which we find in verse 10 which deals with persecution. And so you'll find there that there is a double blessing as it were because he says twice, blessed are those who are persecuted and then verse 11, blessed are you when they revile

and persecute you.

So there seems to be a double blessing on those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. And you'll see that he also then speaks about three aspects of that persecution because you'll find that he speaks about verse 10, he speaks about being persecuted, verse 11, he speaks about being reviled and persecuted and saying all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. And those are different aspects of opposition that will come to the Christian who seeks to live righteously.

All of the Beatitudes lead into each other as we've highlighted as we've been going along and so if we are poor in spirit then we will mourn, the one leads to the other. But we find that eventually if we become peacemakers then the thing that follows on that is persecution. And you remember that we spoke about that when we concluded that section that the Lord Jesus although he came as a peacemaker, as a true peacemaker based on righteousness, not peace based on unrighteousness or compromise but peace based on righteousness.

That the accusation that was brought to him or against him in Pilate's court was that he was a troublemaker. The same with Elijah and the same with many other great men of God. And you'll see that he says that it is for righteousness sake, now we'll deal with that in greater detail just now.

But you'll see that it goes back to blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness in verse 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And so when we hunger and thirst for righteousness and when righteousness becomes a reality in our lives that will bring persecution. And so then persecution follows.

And so when all of these Beatitudes have found their outworking in our lives, the one leading into the other, the final consummation of it all is persecution. Not great glory but persecution. And we see that in the life of the Lord Jesus.

We see that in the life of all who have sought to live godly right through the Old Testament and into the New Testament. And so we'll deal with that in greater detail as we go along. Now let's just explain these words and I'm sure we don't have to explain them.

But verse 11, blessed are you when they revile and persecute and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. The word reviling we find that concerning the Lord Jesus in the book of Peter. Though he was reviled, he reviled not again.

The word reviled literally means to cast into one's teeth, to cast into one's face. And you remember they said to the Lord Jesus on the cross, you saved others, you can't save yourself. Accusations that were brought to him in his face.

And so people will make accusations to us personally. But then you'll see that he speaks about bringing all sorts of accusation or saying all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. And that's exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus.

They said oh but he said that he would break down the temple and he wasn't speaking of the literal temple. And so false accusation but not brought to your face but that which happens behind your back. And then he speaks about persecution which literally comes from the word pursue or to hunt down, to track down.

The same way as you would hunt or track down a criminal. And so blessed are we when we are hunted down, when we are persecuted in whatever shape and form. When people say things against us face to face or when people say things against us behind our backs.

And particularly when those things are false. And so he then says that it is for righteousness sake. And we need to emphasize the fact that it is for righteousness sake.

And in 1 Peter chapter 3. Keep your finger in Matthew because we need to return there. Put some kind of mark in there so I can come back. And we'll come back to Peter a few times so you may want to mark Peter because Peter I suppose is the handbook on persecution, a manual on persecution.

1 Peter chapter 3 and verse 14. Even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed. So he is quoting the Lord Jesus.

Even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats nor be troubled. We've got to be sure that the persecution is for righteousness sake and not for any other reason.

Not for any other cause. That we are not being persecuted because we are obnoxious, because we are awkward, because we are difficult, because we are any of those things that often brings persecution. And many times Christians are like that.

Christians are awkward or difficult. And then that brings a reaction. And then we say I'm being persecuted for righteousness sake.

No I'm not being persecuted for righteousness sake. I'm being persecuted because I'm awkward or because I'm difficult or obnoxious. We should not suffer persecution because we are evildoers.

And Peter deals with this in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 20. What credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults that you take it patiently? For when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. And in chapter 4 and verse 15.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief and evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Verse 19. Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good as to a faithful creator.

And so our suffering should never be for unrighteousness sake. For unrighteousness sake. The problem is that we have difficulty in our own minds separating between the two.

I've seen Christians when you address them about some area in their lives. Turning around and say but you are persecuting me. But in fact because they are living in an ungodly way and you speak out against that.

They feel that they are being persecuted and that they are blessed in that. No we are not blessed when we are corrected for our faults. We are not blessed when people say things against us because we have acted in an ungodly way.

Yesterday afternoon I went into the house to have tea and the television was on and I saw the end of the Survivor series. Which I hadn't watched but it happened to be the end. And I understood that there were two young girls in the group who were apparently Christians.

And one of the people on the jury, I think most of you know how the thing works. But had been in the game with them. Stood up and were invited to ask questions and make some statements.

And one of the other people came up and said you two have claimed to be Christians. We are unbelievers. Effectively was what she, I can't remember the exact words.

We came to play this game to lie and to cheat and to deceive. But you claim to be Christians. But she says you Christians out cheated us.

Out lied us. And out deceived us. Now what a statement.

And I could see the two little girls, they are not little young girls, young women sitting there. Saying well we have been persecuted for our faith. No they were not being persecuted for their faith.

They were being persecuted because they were not true to the faith. And they deserved every kind of accusation that was brought against them. And all of the rebinding that was brought against them publicly internationally on international television.

They deserved it. Because they did not live godly lives. They were not righteous in their dealings.

And folks we need to be sure that when we are persecuted it is for the right reasons. And it is for righteousness sake and not for unrighteousness sake. If we are dishonest in our dealings with people and people reproach us for that.

We got what we deserved. And that's all there is to it. But if we live godly lives, if we do live righteous lives, that will attract persecution.

That will attract persecution. Now if we go back to Matthew chapter 5. And verse 11 says. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you.

When they revile and persecute you. Now we have dealt with the word for righteousness sake. And we can speak about that for long still.

But we just want to move on. But he speaks about when. Now that word when.

The way in which that is used. Means that it is something which is going to happen. It's going to happen.

It may not happen continually. It may happen from time to time. There may be times in our lives that we face persecution.

But it is something which is part. It does not say if we are persecuted. But when we are persecuted.

In 1 Peter chapter 4. You are still in Peter. 1 Peter chapter 4. And verse 12. Beloved do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.

As though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you are partakers of Christ's sufferings. Don't think it strange when you suffer.

Last Monday I was asked to go up to Boston. And to share with a Bible study up there. And they asked me specifically to speak about the prosperity teaching.

Which I've never preached about or against. But obviously I'm opposed to. And one of the things that I became aware of.

As I was preparing my heart to share with them. Is that the prosperity teaching does not prepare us for difficulty. So when difficulty comes into our lives.

We think it's a strange thing. This shouldn't happen. I'm a Christian.

And so everything should go well with me. I should be prosperous. And I should be healthy.

And everybody must be my friend. But Peter says don't think it strange. Concerning the fiery trial that will come.

And notice he's not just saying the trial. But he says the fiery trial. The fiery trial.

Which is to try you. And Chris spoke this morning a little bit about the fire. And so it's not a strange thing.

When we are tried. It is not a strange thing when we are persecuted. It's not a strange thing.

When we go through times of difficulty. It is something that will definitely happen. And definitely come.

John chapter 15. And verse 20. John 15 20.

Remember the word that I said to you. A servant 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.

And so he says it's going to be with you. The same way as it was with me. And remember we said that persecution is not necessarily an ongoing thing.

Yes some Christians are persecuted from. Because maybe of the political environment in which they have grown up. Will suffer persecution all of their lives.

But if we look at the life of the Lord Jesus. There were times even of popularity. There were times when everyone said this is a great teacher.

And yet there were also many times of persecution. Persecution by his brethren the Jews. Persecution by the Romans.

Persecution by the world. But most of the persecution that Jesus experienced. Came from the religious people.

From those who were supposed to be religious. And that is where a lot of the persecution comes from. The persecution of the first church.

Came from first of all the Jews. From those who were part of the faith originally. Eventually it came from the Romans.

And right through the history of the church. Much of the persecution that has come against true Christians. Has not come from the world but has come from the church.

We think about the dark ages. We think about the Inquisition. We think about even at the time of the Reformation.

When Christians were martyred for their faith. Because they did not go along with the teachings of those who were popular at the time. And so right through the history of the church.

Most of the persecution or a lot of the persecution for Christians. Comes from other Christians or from other religious groups. Not so much from the world.

And so Jesus says it's going to happen. 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 12. I'm sure you know the verse well.

All who will live godly will suffer persecution. All who will live godly will suffer persecution. It's not some.

And it's not maybe. But will. Because when we live godly lives.

It brings a reaction. It brings a reaction from those whose lives are not just. When we live righteously.

Those who are unrighteous are shown up for what they are. Now it should never be as I said in a way. In which we act as though we are better or superior than anyone else.

But if we live truly righteous lives. Those who are unrighteous will be aware of their unrighteousness. And Jesus just needed to come into an area.

Into a room. And the genuineness of who he was. And of his faith.

Showed up the falseness of those who were hypocrites. He didn't even have to open his mouth. But just by who he was.

And how he acted. That brought a reaction. On the part of those who were in opposition.

And you remember Cain. Right in the beginning. The first martyr.

Can we. Or Abel sorry. The first martyr.

Right at the beginning. It doesn't seem that he said very much to his brother. But just the way that he served God.

Just the way that God blessed him and approved of his life. Brought a reaction. And Cain rose up and slew his brother.

The very first man. And so we can go right through the history of the church. And right through the history of the Old Testament.

And you'll find that if we live righteously. It brings a reaction. It brings a result.

And that result is often a lashing out. To destroy. And to kill.

And to persecute. In some way or the other. And one of the books I was reading this week.

I don't remember. I think it was Martin Lloyd-Jones. But says that if we do not suffer persecution.

There is a question mark as to the genuineness of our walk. There is a question mark as to the genuineness of our walk. Now that's a strong statement.

And it makes us think. And do we compromise in order to keep peace? Do we compromise what we believe? In order to avoid difficulty. And in order to avoid persecution.

And we know that Jesus never did that. None of the prophets in the Old Testament avoided that. But simply did what God had called them to do.

And so we need to draw a clear distinction. Between what is righteous and unrighteous in our own lives. And we must not seek out persecution for the sake of persecution.

The blessedness is not in the persecution. The blessedness is not in the persecution. We can get that wrong.

And we can get a sort of a martyr attitude. And so because I'm being martyred. So I'm wonderful.

I'm this sort of persecuted person. No, the blessedness is not in that. The blessedness is in what God bestows upon us.

As a result of that. The blessedness does not come. The persecution is not the blessing.

The blessing is what God gives us. In terms of joy and peace and great rewards. The martyr's crown.

All of these things that are laid before us. And that are part of being associated with him. And we'll refer just now to some of the blessings that are ours.

And so we must not pursue persecution for persecution's sake. We've got to be careful about that. There are Christians who do that.

But we must live righteous lives. And that will bring and will attract. So blessed are you.

When men persecute you. That little word when. It's a promise.

It's something that's going to happen. Now go back to Matthew 5 if you're still there. And verse 12.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And so one of the comforts and the consolation we have when we are persecuted. Is that we are not alone. We are not alone.

Many others have gone through the same experiences. The prophets in the Old Testament. Remember Jesus says to Jerusalem.

Woe to you Jerusalem. You who killed the prophets. You who killed the prophets.

And so in Jesus' mind one of the things he associated with Jerusalem. Was that Jerusalem had killed the prophets. And so that happened right from the beginning.

From righteous Abel. Right through to the last martyr who will die. That is something which is common to those who live righteously.

And when we are part of that crowd. That cloud of witnesses so to speak. Of those who have suffered for the faith.

We are not on our own. Sometimes we get that feeling. We say but why me? I'm the only one who seems to be suffering.

No we are not the only ones. There are many many others. Who have suffered and who do suffer.

And according to open doors ministries. There are more Christians being persecuted for their faith today. Than are not being persecuted.

And that is in an official political sense. Where they are living in countries where they have no freedom of worship. And where they are locked up and killed.

And physically persecuted. Not speaking about spiritual persecution or emotional persecution. But physically being persecuted.

More Christians are being physically persecuted today. Than are free. And so we think about Christians in China.

We think about Christians in India. In all of the Islamic states. In large parts of Africa.

Who are suffering for their faith today. And so whatever small way in which we suffer for our faith. We are only part of the great church.

Which is suffering in a big way. Jesus suffers with us. And you remember when he meets with Paul on the road to Damascus.

In Acts chapter 9. And what was Paul doing? He was persecuting the church. He was going about giving permission for Stephen to be stoned. Seeking to throw Christians into prison.

So that they may be brought to the Sanhedrin. To the religious courts. And Jesus arrests him.

And Paul says, who are you Lord? And Jesus says, I am Jesus. Whom you are persecuting. Whom you are persecuting.

But Paul wasn't persecuting Jesus. He was persecuting the Christians. But Jesus says, if you are persecuting the Christians.

You are persecuting me. And so when we suffer. Jesus suffers with us.

If one member of the body suffers. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us. The whole body.

1 Corinthians 14. The whole body suffers with it. And so when Jesus, the head.

Or when we as the small finger suffer. Jesus is in those sufferings with us. And a very strange verse in Colossians chapter 1. And verse 24.

Maybe we need to turn there. Because folk have difficulty in understanding this verse. Colossians 1 verse 24.

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you. And fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. For the sake of his body.

Which is the church. Now Paul is not saying that Jesus' sufferings. Or what Jesus suffered was not sufficient.

And so he had to add to those sufferings. In a sacrificial way. Or in a sacerdotal way.

In a way in which he was buying our salvation. That's not what Paul is speaking about. What he is simply saying is that the sufferings of the Lord Jesus are not finished.

Jesus' sufferings were not completed when he died on the cross. Yes the work of salvation was complete. The price was paid.

We are clear about that. There is no more sacrifice that needs to be made. But that was not the end of his suffering.

He continues to suffer. Through the church. He continues to suffer.

And to suffer affliction as the church suffers. And there is no way we can separate the church from him in this respect. That we can say well the church is suffering in isolation.

And he sits in heaven. And he is just a distant observer. He is intimately involved with every Christian.

Who is in pain this morning physically. And emotionally and spiritually. Because of the faith.

He is touched with the feelings of their infirmities. And you remember the first martyr Stephen as he lays down his life for the faith. He looks up into heaven and he sees Jesus standing at the right hand of the majesty.

Now we know that he is normally seated. That is his position because Hebrews tells us. He has finished the work and he is seated at the right hand.

But for that moment it seems that he stood in recognition and in solidarity with Stephen. Who became the first one, well the second martyr after Jesus obviously. And so Jesus is touched with our infirmities.

And particularly when we suffer for righteousness sake. And so he is with us in that experience. And so Paul says the experiences that I continue to have.

And he mentions all of his many, many difficulties. Beaten with rods two times. And beaten with 39 stripes five times.

And shipwrecked and stoned and left for dead. All of these things he says these are just part of the suffering of the Lord Jesus. Which the Lord Jesus continues to suffer through his church.

And through his saints. And so we are not alone. He is with us.

Hebrews chapter 11 lists for us the heroes of faith. And it tells us about some of the things that these men experienced. Now again we have been fooled by some teachings that Christians should always be victorious.

Christians should always be healthy and happy. And everything should go well with them. And yet it tells us in Hebrews 11 verse 36.

That still others speaking of Old Testament saints. Still others had trials of mockings and scourgings. Yes and of chains and imprisonment.

They were stoned. They were sawn in two. They were tempted.

They were slain with a sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins. Being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

Of whom the world was not worthy. They entered into deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth. And all these having obtained a good testimony through faith.

Did not receive the promise. And so one of the problems we experience when we suffer. When we are persecuted in one way or the other.

Is we sometimes feel that God has rejected us. That we have somehow missed it. That we have somehow failed.

And yet he says that even though these men seem to be disasters. If you look at them from the way that modern Christians are supposed to act. They were never victorious.

They were hunted down. They were defeated in many, many ways. And yet it says they obtained a good testimony.

They obtained a good testimony. And so the persecution that comes for righteousness sake. Is not an indictment against us when we are persecuted.

It is in fact the commendation of the Lord. Through that we obtain a good testimony. So the Old Testament experienced that.

The church suffers with us. The Lord Jesus suffers with us. And so we are not alone.

For so they persecuted the prophets of old. Now we go back to Matthew 5 and verse 12. And it deals with our reaction.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad. For great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad. Not because you are persecuted. But for great is your reward.

That is why we rejoice. And that needs to be our reaction. Now this is one of the areas in which we all struggle.

What is my reaction when persecution comes? How do I respond? And remember that one of the easiest ways to respond is to revile and return. To justify ourselves. To defend ourselves.

To attack in return. But though he was reviled, he reviled not again. Now our response cannot be correct.

Unless the third beatitude has become real. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the meek.

And so only when we have handed our faith into the hands of God. Only when we are no longer trying to live our own lives. But we have committed ourselves totally to him.

Only then can our reactions be the right reactions. And Romans chapter 12 tells us that we are to bless. Romans chapter 12 and verse 14.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Now that is quite a challenge.

It is one thing to just not curse. It is one thing to just not retaliate. It is another thing to actually bless those who persecute us.

To bless those who say evil against us. To bless those who hurt us in whatever way they choose to do so. That is very very difficult.

And yet we remember that that is what Jesus did. That is what Stephen did. Father don't hold this to their account.

They don't know what they are doing. And even in the death of the Lord Jesus he was blessing in the sense that he was buying salvation. Even for those who were persecuting him there.

And if Pilate and the Roman soldiers and Caiaphas and all of those who were involved in that. If they would only believe on the Lord Jesus there was grace and forgiveness. And so he blesses even in the process.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Next book. Corinthians 12 and verse 26.

Sorry wrong verse. We are told to endure suffering. We are told to endure suffering.

It is obviously not something we enjoy. But we need to see it through. We need to not give up.

And we know that there are records of those who were physically tortured for their faith and recanted. And the easiest way to stop the suffering is to recant. To say well sorry I don't believe that.

But we can never do that. That is not an option. We have to see it through.

We have to endure it. And that was one of the very temptations that was posed to the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary. If you are the son of God save us and yourself.

Did Jesus have the power to pull himself out of that situation? To take himself off the cross? Yes he had that power. That was part of the suffering that he had to endure. Because for one word, one expression he could call upon the angel to deliver him.

He could destroy all of his enemies. That was within his power. And yet he never does that.

He endures it. He patiently endures that. And he goes through the experience until it had been completed.

And so we need to find grace to endure. In Acts chapter 5 we find that the apostles are persecuted for the first time. The first time that it is recorded that they are brought before the Sanhedrin.

Acts chapter 5 and verse 41. So they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Rejoicing over suffering.

Rejoicing over persecution. Rejoicing over misunderstanding. Because remember the accusation was you guys are preaching a false message.

You are preaching the wrong message. We have the right message. And they said this is wonderful.

That we have been found worthy to be partakers of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. That we have been found worthy to be identified with him in this way. And so we need to bless.

We need to endure. We need to rejoice in suffering. And then finally we must not fear suffering.

In Revelation chapter 2 he writes to the church. Revelation chapter 2 and verse 10. And he says do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

Indeed the devil is about to throw some of you into prison. That you may be tested and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.

Now that seems to be scant comfort. Don't fear because you are going to be thrown into prison. Don't fear because they are going to kill you.

But he says it is going to be for ten days. For ten days. And the only understanding I can get, the only interpretation I can find for the ten days.

Because it doesn't relate to any kind of period of time. Obviously it wasn't ten literal days. And it wasn't ten years and it wasn't ten times ten years.

I believe all that the Lord Jesus was saying to the church is it is for a while. There is an end to it. It's not going to be forever.

And so how long will the church suffer? For two thousand years until Jesus comes again. But it's going to come to an end. How long can I as a Christian suffer? Well at the most eighty years.

Ninety years. But it has to come to an end. It's not going to be forever.

In the light of eternity it will be like a short while. But he says do not fear those things that come upon you. One of the greatest fears that many Christians and I have had to counsel many many Christians who say but you know when persecution comes I don't know if I am going to be able to deal with it.

Speaking particularly of sort of political kind of being imprisoned for the faith. I don't know how I will cope with it. People read Fox's book of the martyrs and they read the terrible experiences that Christians have gone through and they say but if I had to be in that situation I would never be able to deal with that pain or to deal with that suffering and the most vicious devices that men have thought up against other men and against Christians.

I don't know that I could ever go through that. Jesus says do not fear those things. And he says to his disciples he says don't premeditate what you will say when they bring you before councils and before courts.

I will tell you what to say. In other words I will be your defense. I will be your advocate.

I will be with you in that time. And God will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are tested above what we are able. But with the testing or the trial will also bring a way of escape.

And so if he is going to call you to suffer in one way or the other whether that is being imprisoned or whether it is suffering reviling or suffering false accusation or whatever it is he will give the wherewithal to see it through. He will not put you through something that he is not going to equip you to deal with. That is a comfort we can have.

And that is an assurance we can have. And therefore we must not fear it. God is never going to put us through experiences that he is not equipping us for.

And that he has not given us the fortitude and the strength of personality and character and of comfort and all of the things that we need in order to endure those situations. And so we can be comforted and it is not something we must fear. And yes greater persecution will come as Christianity becomes more and more compromised more and more watered down.

There will be greater difficulty from other Christians. There will be greater difficulty from the government. And again we need to be careful here about defining the lines between being persecuted for righteousness sake and for political reasons.

And in the history of our own country there are many religious people who were imprisoned because they opposed the political system and they say we were persecuted for our faith. No you were persecuted for your political beliefs. Not for the faith.

There is a difference between the two. But the time may well come in this country that we will suffer for our faith at the hands of an atheistic government. Or even an Islamic government.

And when that time comes we must not fear. Because God will see us through. It will be for a time.

He will not test us above that which we are able. And so there is if we go back to Matthew chapter 5 and we are running out of time. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 10.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And so there is a comfort.

There is a reward. And again we tend to say well you know we shouldn't be serving God for the reward. But there is nothing wrong with serving God or being faithful because there is something ahead of us.

Even the Lord Jesus. It says who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. He didn't enjoy the cross.

He didn't find fulfilment or satisfaction or blessing in the experience of the cross. But what kept him going was the fact that there was an end to it. And that there was a consequence which was the birthing of the church.

And so that was what kept him going. And so there is an end. And so we have a promise that the suffering is going to bring forth fruit of some kind or the other.

In Romans chapter 8 and verse 18. Romans 8 verse 18. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.

The sufferings of this present time. Now what were the sufferings of this present time? You find again another list at the end there. And these are only some of the things.

But verse 38. I am persuaded that neither death nor life, angels nor principalities, powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God. These are just some of the things at the hand of which we suffer.

But he says it's not worthy to be compared. In other words he says there's just no comparison. You can't say I suffered so much and there's going to be so much reward.

Or there's going to be so much blessing. Or there's going to be so much glory. He says the two are not even in the same league.

They're not even in the same ball park. And so it's not even worth comparing. Because the suffering is insignificant in comparison to the glory that will be revealed in us.

And that's what keeps us going. That's what should encourage us in times of difficulty, in times of persecution. Because we say we understand.

And in fact this suffering is only a very small thing in the light of the glory that will be revealed in us. The glory that will be revealed in us. Now there's a whole message which we won't get involved in.

2 Corinthians 1 verse 7. And that first section of 2 Corinthians 1 deals also with the fact that when we are comforted and when we have found consolation in times of suffering we're able and we're equipped to comfort others when they go through the same experience. But then he says in 2 Corinthians 1 verse 7. And our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation. In other words, God will comfort us.

God will comfort us. He will not press us down in that situation. But he will comfort us.

And so there's a glory that is to be revealed. We are partakers of the consolation. We're able to rejoice together with the apostles that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake.

Now, do we have a choice in the matter? Do we have a choice as to whether we will be persecuted or not? And I suppose we could argue that and we could debate that. But clearly we do have a choice. And the Galatians, one of the accusations that Paul brings against them was because of the reproach that had come because of the cross.

They chose to be circumcised. It was easy to compromise on that area. And so they become religious and they adopt the traditions because that lessened the persecution.

But Paul says, I'm not prepared to go that way. I will stand for the truth even if it brings great rejection, even if it brings great difficulty. And so he's alluding to the fact that the Galatians were trying to get out of the reproach that came with going God's way and not going the way of the religious system.

In Hebrews chapter 11 we read that Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather than the treasures of Egypt. It's a choice that he made. He could continue in Egypt as a son of Pharaoh with great power and great privilege and great opportunity.

And yet he chose to be identified with his brethren, the Israelites. It was a choice that he made. Why? Because he esteemed the reproach of Christ.

He esteemed the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. And when we see that it doesn't matter what this world offers, it cannot be compared with the glory of God. We need to choose His way.

Hebrews chapter 13, and I don't have too many more scriptures. Hebrews chapter 13, and you'll see that one of the things that, as I went through the study again, one of the things that struck me was how much of the scripture speaks about persecution and suffering for Christians. There's not a book in the New Testament that doesn't deal with it.

And there is extensive teaching right through the scriptures. Teaching us, warning us, encouraging us concerning the issue of suffering and of persecution. And yet it's something which we choose to believe is something that is strange.

But Peter says, don't think it's strange when it happens. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 12, Therefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp bearing his reproach.

Let's identify with the Lord Jesus. As he identifies with us when we suffer, let's identify with him in his reproach. And there is a reproach attached to the cross.

Now, I want us to go back to Peter. And I'm going to conclude by just reading for you some of the scriptures that we find in Peter. Some of the verses in Peter that deals with the subject.

And you'll see how this really sums the whole thing up. And remember that Peter was written to strengthen the believers who were facing tremendous persecution at the hands of Rome at the time. And so 1 Peter deals extensively with suffering and with our response and our reaction in that situation.

And so let's read 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. Notice again, though for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Chris touched on some of that. For this is commendable, if because of conscience towards God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults you take it patiently, but when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

For to this you were called. Notice that. To this you were called.

Now there are right now this morning there are preachers who are preaching about the great destiny to which God has called you as a Christian. To which God has called you the great purposes of God to control the world and to do all sorts of amazing things. But look what Peter says.

For to this you were called. To what? To suffering. To this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps.

Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in his mouth. Who when he was reviled did not revile in return. When he suffered he did not threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.

Chapter 3 verse 13. And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed, and do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Notice the attitude. With meekness and fear, having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Chapter 4 verse 1. Therefore since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind. For he who suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walk in licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. Verse 12.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. And if you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you.

For the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, as a busybody in other people's matters.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it begins with us first, what will the end be of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good, as to a faithful creator.

Amen.

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