

Audio Sermon: Preparing for Persecution

by Don Currin

Preparing for persecution requires a gospel-centered life, cultivating a mindset of joy, and living in sobriety and love.

Duration: 58:27

Scripture: 1 Peter 4

Topics: "Persecution Preparation", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

This sermon focuses on the importance of preparation for persecution, emphasizing the need to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ, be sober and watchful in prayer, show fervent love to one another, practice hospitality without grumbling, utilize our spiritual gifts, think providentially, rejoice in suffering for Christ, glorify God in persecution, and commit our souls to the faithful Creator. The message highlights the divine directives found in 1 Peter chapter 4 to equip believers for the challenges ahead.

Transcript

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For more messages, log on to our website, www.SermonIndex.com. Now here's today's program. Okay, tonight, if you would, 1 Peter chapter number 4, and I don't want to distort the text by not reading the entirety of the context, and I think it's so essential tonight as we look at the subject of preparation for persecution. Now I'm not here standing before you tonight to introduce in your hearing a conspiracy theory, okay? God knows we have enough of those today.

But there are some things that are coming down the pike in this hour that I'm not even going to introduce tonight because what it'll do is have a tendency to distract you from what is the most important thing, and that is to hear from God through His Scriptures. And so I want to read the entire context and then share with you some thoughts under the title of Preparation for Persecution. Follow with me, if you would, in 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse number 1. And I'm reading from the New King James tonight.

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lust of men but for the will of God. But we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the

Gentiles when we walked, we practiced lewdness and lust, 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. For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh but live according to God in the spirit. But the end of all things is at hand.

Therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another. For love will cover a multitude of sins.

Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.

If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies. That in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you. On their part he is blasphemed, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men'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 the idea there is the righteous judgment of God falling upon the church.

And if it begins with us first, what will be the end 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. It's a very interesting text. And certainly profoundly timely in the hour in which we live.

You see brethren, what Peter is giving us, what he is setting forth are divine directives that you and I can take refuge in as we prepare ourselves for the upcoming persecution. When I was with Brother Paul Washer about years ago in Atlanta, we were on a panel discussion and people were asking questions from the floor. And I remember Paul taking the liberty during the course of that time to share how he believed that within ten years in North America we would be experiencing extreme persecution.

That was seven years ago. With our coming election, you have no idea what potentially lies before you and before me. It is amazing, it is astounding, it is indescribable the things that we hear of behind the scenes.

Or suddenly at times you catch glimpses of on certain television networks and they don't have the information at the moment to elaborate on some of these astounding events that await us. But as we look at this text tonight, we find sure hope, sustained help during times of oppression and persecution. You see, persecution is inevitable for the church of Jesus Christ.

The church was born in fire. I believe it will be taken out in fire. And see, when I talk about the church these days, by and large the common church will not suffer.

But that's not the true church. That's not the body of Christ. Those that have been redeemed by the blood through the love of the dying lamb, they will suffer persecution.

For all they that live godly in Christ Jesus shall experience severe persecution. Now listen carefully for a moment. Here is Peter consoling.

And even we find in Acts 14 verse 22 where Paul does the same when he says that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God. What timely words for our generation as the probability once again of persecution increases daily. And recently a man who is a real thinker, he's very full of the wisdom of the Lord and he keeps abreast of a number of things and filters everything through the light of scripture.

But in his recent post he said, quote, hmm, Afghan troops missing from U.S. training centers. U.N. troops deployed to U.S. bases. U.N. saying it may need to protect the United States citizens from U.S. police forces.

Continual new evidence of crimes by one of the candidates. Widespread voter registration fraud by one of the political parties. The Fed destabilizing one of the biggest banks in Europe, in the European Union.

The president talking about the possible need for martial law if the election gets quote unquote unruly. Going to be an exciting 30 days. That was just two weeks ago.

So we look at this for voting theme and I want to stress how important it is for us to be prepared. For us to be on guard for what lies ahead. You know it says that in church history many men prepared themselves for persecution.

One of those men was a man by the name of John Huss who was martyred for his faith. We are told that when John Huss was arrested and informed that he would be burned to death for his faith, he purposely practiced holding his hand over a fire to prepare for the final test. He wanted to feel the heat and experience the pain from the burning to ready him for persecution.

Well, perhaps we will not go that far, but I think we need to be in a ready position, a posture, if we are going to be prepared for what God is going to allow to come down the pike. These in the text here tonight, these words that we just read, the background is that Nero with his insatiable appetite for more. What he did is he himself set the city of Rome on fire.

The only way that he could build more was to destroy what already existed. And so he is, he is burning the city of Rome. And suddenly the rumor gets around that it was their emperor that had burned their homes and their idols and their icons.

And they begin to rise up corporately, the citizens of Rome, and begin to criticize and were in a spirit of aggression to come against Nero. So Nero, his strategy to divert the attention of the people whose focus was upon him to take his life, was to blame the Christians for it. And suddenly they begin to shift their hostility to Gentile and Jewish believers.

It's with this backdrop that persecution is on the horizon. And so as we read further here in what we have looked at tonight so far, there are six key words, brethren, that afford us encouragement for persecution in

our own hour. You'll note the words.

They are arm, love, think, rejoice, glorify, and commit. First of all, we find the first divine directive in verse number one. Peter says, arm yourselves with the mind of Christ.

Notice it says once again in verse one, for as much then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. Now what does the phrase there, arm yourselves with this mind, mean? It means that we are enabled by contemplating those very sufferings, the passion of the Christ, we are enabled to weather the storms of persecution. And he should die.

If we should die for Christ, the benefit is, according to the context here, is that that person ceases from sin in glorification. Look at the text once again, verse number one. Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, you arm yourselves also with the same mind.

In other words, we cultivate that mentality. For he, not speaking of Christ the he, it's not a reference to the Lord, but he in general, the believer who has suffered in the flesh to the extent that he even cost him his life has ceased from sin. That he no longer should live the rest of his life in the flesh for the lust of men, but for the will of God.

So as I face persecution and the potential even of martyrdom, my mentality is one of joy. Because if they take my life and I pass from this life to the next, the benefit of that is I have ceased from sin. I no longer grieve him.

I no longer reproach his name. Listen carefully here. John MacArthur said, the worst that can happen to a believer suffering unjustly is death.

And that is the best that can happen, because death means the complete and final end of all sins. He goes on to say, if the Christian is armed with the goal of being delivered from sin, and that goal is achieved through his death, the threat and experience of death is precious. So you're going to kill me? You're going to take my life? You're going to hang me from the gallows? Burn me at the stake? Take my head off? That's the best thing you can do for me as a believer.

For I will encounter it next, in the next world, the living presence of He who gave His life for me. Peter says we are to arm ourselves with this same mind of suffering that Christ endured on our behalf. Now here is the practical implication, and we really seek to make it very practical here.

How often do we think on the gospel again? Is it perpetuated in our thought life? Do we take the time each day to allow our minds to be fixated upon the good news of what Christ has done on our behalf, and specifically His sufferings for us? Do we allow Christ and Him crucified to drive our thoughts, ministry, and lives in everything that we do? To preach the gospel, you see, to yourself will afford you innumerable benefits. Some of you have been under my preaching the last few years. You know that this is a part right now of my present spiritual pilgrimage of what it means to be gospel-centered or gospel-driven.

But listen to what it does. It will give you incentive to mortify sin and walk in humility. It will lift your head from depression and cause you to rejoice in adversity.

It will motivate you to love and forgive your enemies. And it will prepare you for persecution and death if God should cause your life to be imperiled for the gospel's sake. I ask you, Finn, is the very gospel that you believed on as the power of God unto salvation, is it having a sanctifying power over your life? Does it

improve your relationships? Does it restore your relationships? Does it cause you to see sin from God's perspective that you might subsequently mortify to the praise of His glory? The gospel can do all those things as we allow it to salivate in our minds.

But listen to this. Nothing dispels fear and emboldens the saint of God any more than the sufferings of the dying lamb. As a handsome communist soldier after his conversion testified, with great reality and empathy, he says, Think about it, Finn.

Let it sink down deep into your heart. Let it take hold of you. There is nothing that will help you in life and sustain you in every trial than the gospel of Jesus Christ, namely His passions or His sufferings.

And Peter says, We don't fight with physical weapons. Carnal weaponry will never win the day. But we are to take to ourselves this weapon called the gospel that Christ has so beautifully set forth in His example in bearing the cross and bearing our sins upon it.

Secondly, notice something else, another key verb here in the text. And that is, you'll notice in verses 8 and 9, he speaks of being sober. Being sober.

Look at verses 8 and 9. But the end of all things is at hand. In other words, the persecution is coming. The aggression is on the horizon.

I mean, the threat of martyrdom, it looms, it's impending before you. And he says this, Sober and watch unto prayer. He says in verse 8, And then he gives us the outworking of that fervent love, that extended love.

As he says in verse 9, Verse 10, The word gift there means endowment encompassing many physical resources and spiritual gifts. He's not talking about one specific thing. He's talking about us being the beneficiaries of an abundance of gifts physically and spiritually.

And he says, Now let's elaborate on this. When Peter says that the end of all things is at hand, there's different opinions from different commentators. Some believe that he is referring to the end of the world.

While others believe that he refers to the end of their fiery trial. Therefore, Peter exhorts them, though, to be serious minded and not be given to frivolity or levity. In this frame of mind, brethren, this is significant to note now, in this frame of mind, we must understand that they are to watch in prayer and so are we, meaning that as the end approaches, they should be serious and prayerful.

You say, well, if the end's coming, if it's going to come to an end, why pray? But he says, even in that context where your life is being threatened, where the prospects of being taken captive and tortured, perhaps, are real. He said, our response should be one of sobriety. And in that, we should be praying.

Listen, from this mindset, brethren, he instructs them to do three things. This is very, very important now. Do three things in love to strengthen faith, family, relationships.

First of all, he says they are to express a non-hypocritical love to one another. In other words, listen, they are to convey an extended love among themselves because the very word fervent means in the Greek extended. They say elaborate.

In other words, friend, I don't just say I love you. I show you how much I care. I affirm my love through my deeds.

It's what John said in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 18. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. So in other words, if I say I love you, Dan, I'm not just saying that casually at a distance, but I'm showing you how much I love you in reality by extending my love to you.

I'm there for you. I care for you. I help you bear your burdens.

I'm coaching you in persecution. I'm affirming you, you see. And this is the picture that Peter portrays here.

Now, here's another thing. Number two, they are to use hospitality toward each other without complaining. You say, you've got to be kidding.

We're supposed to demonstrate, convey hospitality toward our brothers and sisters in Christ when we're running for our lives? May I remind you that this is the very thing that God has used to produce such a colossal bomb of healing and encouragement and consequently has used it to reproduce believer after believer in oppressed China? In that context, where the threat of death looms daily in the lives of so many of those believers, they are driven to use hospitality toward one another and that method of evangelism, which we call house-to-house or oikos evangelism, in that context, friend, suddenly, because of the threat of persecution without, it drives them within and they build stronger bonds with each other. They're greatly edified and many people are being brought into glory as the consequence. Listen, he says on top of it, we shouldn't complain.

Now, friend, if we can't use hospitality when things are well, what makes us think that we're going to extend hospitality when our lives are on the line? It's interesting, but the Greek word for hospitality has the idea of pursuit. In other words, I'm literally chasing down strangers to drag them into my home to love them and minister to them and comfort them and help them any way I can. I'm stalking strangers.

That's the idea of biblical hospitality. It's not like, I like you, you like me, I'll have you in my home, I'll have you to eat and you have me in your home to eat because we have this special friendship. No, friend, we're literally looking for opportunities to extend hospitality.

We are searching, pursuing, stalking people to bring them into our homes. And this is what he says that we're to do. Listen, use hospitality and don't complain about it.

Don't gripe and say, well, you know, I'm not sure I can afford it. All glory goes to God, but we were moved years ago outside of Atlanta in Lawrenceville, Georgia, and before my wife got up to speak at this women's conference, just a little mini women's conference, the pastor's wife stood up and said, you know, years ago Cindy invited us to come to their home and we got there and she just had sweet tea and pimento cheese sandwiches. And even though it wasn't very elaborate, the food, she said, that really impacted me because nobody had ever asked us to come to their home before.

Are we given to hospitality, brethren? And even people, maybe at times, that we don't particularly like. This is the thing that God's going to use to give us strengthening and sustaining grace in the face of persecution is learning to build relationships through this grace of hospitality. Furthermore, we also find there to use every available gift.

As we said, the word gift there in the context means endowments. And it denotes multiple gifts. Not just physical gifts that God has given you benefits through your lot in life, physical resources, but even spiritual gifts.

You're the beneficiary of many things. And we're to use those things as good stewards to build our relationship with one another. Now, why is this so important? Listen.

Because one of the greatest deterrents to cowering under the threat of persecution is the strength of body life. I had some friends the other day that said, well, thank God that there's a good church three hours from here that we can go and take refuge in among those people if the persecution does come. And I said, well, what about your own faith family? Well, yeah, but, you know, those people up there are a lot more spiritually minded.

I said, first of all, a lot of us won't have the advantage of going to a church that we feel like is a spiritual colossal church that's really going to be able to feed us and affirm us. And I said, furthermore, if you're getting your input of body life through a televangelist, you'll never find hope and affirmation from him when the oppression comes. You see, right now, friend, it's so important, whatever faith family that you're identified with, that you're a part of, strengthen the relationships within that family.

You see, the truth of the matter is, when the mortars are flying over your head and you're in a foxhole with people that have glitches and idiosyncrasies in your eyes, those things really don't matter anymore. It really don't matter that you're bunkering down with an Arminian. As long as they love Jesus and they've proven their love for Christ by virtue of the fact that they're willing to endure persecution for Him in that bunker with you.

But I tell you, to have any saint of God, I don't care how poor he is or immature he may be, to be with me during those times of horrific aggression from satanic influences that will seek to snuff out our life, I tell you, will be a tremendous consolation. So we need to build relationships. Years ago, I was working, and quite honestly, I've done everything in the local church, everything in the ministry.

I mean, I've been associate pastor, I've been a jail minister, I've gone into the prison regularly, I've worked with youth ministry, I mean, I've been a custodian, I've cleaned toilets, you know, in the church, and I've been in mission work, everything I've done. And I was working at a youth camp years ago, and we used to have toward the end of the camp a game that we called the persecutors. And all of a sudden, all the staff, they dressed in army fatigues, and they dressed up their face with all these black marks.

And our whole personality took on a different demeanor. We were harsh, and oppressive, and rude, and we had no patience whatsoever for the campers. And so here we've got 200 campers with their youth leaders, and we create this scenario that the whole land is under persecution.

You've got to survive. Well, the first 30 minutes, they think it's a cool game. We can't touch them, we can't inflict any harm to them, but we can speak very roughly to them.

And if they're caught, of course, we take them to two different places that have been set up as prisons. It's amazing, after 30 minutes, suddenly something begins to take place. They recognize that the reality of this may indeed come down the pike.

We may one day be running for our lives. And what was amazing is some of these kids, they start singing to the Lord. And you can imagine in the woods of northwest Texas, or northeast Texas, I mean, it just pierced the darkness there.

They're singing to the Lord. They're singing choruses. They're singing hymns.

Back in the day, it was hymns. It wasn't contemporary choruses. It was hymns.

And they're singing to the Lord. And then some of them begin to turn to us, and they start witnessing and sharing Christ with us. Others are starting to cry.

They're cowering down under the pressure. Nobody comes forward and says, I deny Christ in that context. But see, friend, the purpose of that game was to convey the reality that one day you may suffer for the cause of Christ.

And it had tremendous implications in their own experience. You think about tonight. If suddenly you went home and you heard the news report that some things have changed in government, and there are certain maneuvers and strategies that they're imposing that's going to make life very uncomfortable for you as a professing believer in Jesus Christ.

And friend, don't you dare for a minute say, it'll never happen in my lifetime. It's coming. It's coming.

I'm not a prophet of doom. But I tell you, there's too much, as I see in the Scripture now, with what I am hearing on the horizon that confirms the fact that this potential is about to occur. So we need each other.

Interestingly, this historical context of Nero's reign of terror, the apostle exhorts the Christians to serve one another. Once again, look at verses 8-10. And then he says this.

Use that hospitality toward one another without grudging. Listen, body life is of utmost importance. Faith, family is essential.

Build it. Strengthen relationships. For in so doing, you will draw a grace of courage that will help you withstand the coming storm.

Thirdly, look at another verb, if you would, in verse number 12. Verse 12. You find here that he exhorts them to think.

Think providentially. Notice the words in verse 12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as some strange thing happen unto you.

Now listen, brothers and sisters, carefully. We must get beyond our feelings and our fears and learn to think. Thank you, brother Dan.

Thank you, brother. Very good. Thank you, brother.

We must get beyond our feelings and our fears and learn to think biblically. I don't know what you're going through tonight. I don't know what your struggle is.

It may be something domestic. It may be something relational. It may be something financially oriented.

But listen, friend. We would solve every problem that we have if we would think biblically. And in this context, it must needs be that we think providentially.

The tendency is, is we look upon the circumstances and we say such things as, I never thought it would happen in my lifetime. I never anticipated these things occurring while I was living. You know what we're admitting? This is strange.

This is strange. Listen, the phrase, some strange thing happened means to fall to chance. We must never think of any tribulation as an accident, brother.

Listen, when we hear of new government regulations that will affect the future of our children, born or unborn, we must refuse to see them as happening independently of divine intervention. The Apostle Paul had a providential perspective. No matter what he incurred for the gospel's sake, he said, I realize that all these things have fallen out, have occurred to the furtherance of the gospel.

This is what makes the gospel so savory and effectual to the salvation of sinners, is persecution. You see, nothing will give us peace and stability any more than resting in the ordained promises of God. Someone said years ago that contentment is an embracing of the sovereignty of God.

So how is your reaction? When things happen, do you allow your feelings to govern your life? Does fears, would they begin to shut down your exercise of faith? Or would you look beyond the pressure and the difficulty and see the sovereignty of God in it all? This passage is, brethren, like Ephesians 1.11, that God works all things after the counsel of His will. In Romans chapter 8, verse 28, as Thomas Watson put it, God's divine cordial, that He's working all things together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose. It's taking refuge in those promises, thinking biblically, thinking providentially, that we are buoyed up in hopeless situations.

I remember Spurgeon talking about this prophet who ultimately became a martyr himself. And the guy had one message everywhere he would go. At least this was his premier message.

All things together for good. Everywhere he would go, this was his testimony. All things together for good.

All things together for good. It was always all things together for good. And over and over again, he had that reputation.

That was the reputation of his ministry. And one day, Bloody Mary, it was during her terrible reign, she took him captive. And the soldiers that put him in chains, they began to taunt him.

And they said, all things together for good, huh? How is this going to work together for good? Talking about his persecution. He said, I do not know, but I believe that even this will work together for good. Well, in the process of terrorizing and buffeting this guy, they broke his leg.

As a result, it delayed their entrance back into the city where he was scheduled to be executed two additional days. Because of the delay, this man was set free. The order was given for all the prisoners to be released because Queen Mary, Bloody Mary had been dethroned and Queen Elizabeth had been enthroned.

A great revolution. And liberation swept over England. He looked at his tormentors and said, did I not tell you that all things will work together for good to them that love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

You see, we must understand the importance of seeing things from a providential perspective. But brothers and sisters, notice a fourth word here in our text, and that is in verse 13. Rejoice.

Rejoice. But rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. Now watch verse 14.

For if you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you for the spirit of glory. The idea is the presence of God rests upon you. The spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

On their part, He is evil spoken of, but on your part, experimentally, He is being glorified. Now watch this. Suffering for Christ gives us much reason to rejoice.

When's the last time someone shared a cynical remark in your presence, said something under their breath, or perhaps even overtly, loudly blasphemed you because of your faith, and you walked away from it rejoicing? Do you realize that there is a grace that accompanies those who rejoice in the fact that they are worthy to suffer for His name? Listen. To recognize that our good and all-wise Father is orchestrating every detail according to His predetermined plan affords us peace and the grace of courage and gives us every reason, brethren, to rejoice that He has ordained us to be a part of it. You see, there are certain things we see in these verses that we just read.

First of all, our union with Christ. You'll note once again, but rejoice in as much as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings. Certainly that validates this union that we have with our Head, the Lord Jesus.

Secondly, we are assured that when we behold His glory in His death or His return, we will have the joy of knowing that we have suffered for Him. Once again, verse 13, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. We have no idea, friend.

The presence of God comes to the rescue of those who suffer for Christ. And with that said, thirdly, we encounter the manifest presence of God in suffering for the Savior. Verse 14, watch this now.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. I don't know if you've read Richard Wurmbrand's account of the suffering under Ceausescu, the Romanian communist leader, but when Richard Wurmbrand was held captive in the prison, he said the glory of God so filled his cell that he was dancing with the Lord in the cell. His presence was so rich, so pronounced, that the presence of Jesus was in the cell.

He was dancing before the Lord. This is something, friend, that is significantly subjective. We're not talking about some academic knowledge of Christ here.

We're talking about Christ's presence being manifest in the midst of suffering. I believe a couple of years ago, I may have shared this with some of you, but if you've read Francis Chan's book, Crazy Love, it gives the story of how these South Koreans went up to Afghanistan to minister to the people. The country was ravaged by war.

Poverty was abounding. And so they saw an opportunity to share with these people the gospel. When they got there, they were taken captive by the Taliban, the terrorist group.

And so the Taliban saw the opportunity of getting a lot of money, so they sent word back to the Korean government. The only way we'll return the people is for you to send us X amount of dollars. The South Korean government refused to do that.

So they said, if you don't send us money, we're going to start killing them one by one. Once again, the government did not respond. They found out later, the ones that were fighting over the privilege of dying first for Christ were the two leaders.

Both of them were martyred for their faith. And when the Taliban found out that nobody was going to yield and no one was going to pay a ransom for the rest of the people, they let all the people go and sent them back to South Korea. When they got back to South Korea, these Christians were perplexed because they had experienced such a rich manifestation of the presence of Jesus when they were held captive, that they wanted that same presence.

They fasted, they prayed, they sought the Lord, but still no manifestation of His presence. You know what those almost 30 people did? They scrounged up any amount of money they could to get their airline flights back to Afghanistan because they wanted to be held captive for the cause of Christ again to encounter the presence of the Savior. Now brothers and sisters, call it mystical if you want, but you can't deny the Word of God.

The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon those who suffer upon Him. You think He's going to ignore what you will endure for His namesake? I tell you, you may know more of the tangible presence of Christ in the midst of oppression than you've ever known in your life before. Look at something else.

Number five, very quickly. Verse 16 is the word glorify. The verb glorify.

He says, Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. Now the word, friend, the word glorify means to put on display by showcasing, embellishing. In other words, it's placed upon a pedestal.

So in the midst of our persecution, our suffering for Christ, we are putting on display our allegiance and devotion to God. And God is magnified. He's glorified in our suffering.

First of all here, we believe that if we suffer for Jesus, we are assured. Here's one reason we should rejoice and glorify Him. We are assured that we belong to Him.

The greatest thing that could happen to the church in North America is intense persecution. Because there are some preachers and there's a lot of people in churches that you thought were really devoted to Christ who loved loving Jesus, but they didn't love Jesus. And they're going to fall away.

That is the ultimate apostasy, is to fall away when the oppression comes. Persecution, friend, validates our profession. If we are reproached by the world for being a believer, then more than likely, we are a Christian.

Paul is clear on this point in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 12 again. If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him. And Jesus said, listen, in Matthew 5 verses 11 and 12, Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My namesake.

He says, rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in Heaven for so persecuted the prophets which were before you. Secondly, if we are chosen to suffer, we must remember it's a very high and honorable privilege. Such a privilege.

There are those in the book of Acts who rejoiced in knowing that they had been counted worthy to suffer for His name. Acts chapter 5 verse 42, And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing once again that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Why? Why was that? Listen, the Jewish rulers there did not beat these believers to create fear in the people to keep them from following these men.

They did it to disgrace the disciples of Christ. But rather than feeling shame, they overcame evil with good. By seeing that God had honored them with the opportunity to identify with the sufferings of Christ.

Now think with me for a moment as we wrap things up. The third thing here we find in this thing of glorifying Him, it gave them a significant platform to advance the Gospel. Advance the Kingdom of God.

You see, persecution, friend, affords a unique opportunity like none other to validate our Christian message and to exalt the God of the Gospel. Matthew Henry was accosted on one occasion by thieves. And after the whole ordeal was over, he said he would be thankful for four things.

This is what he recorded in his journal. He said, first of all, he said, I'm thankful that I was never robbed before. Secondly, he said, I can be thankful that though they took my purse, they did not take my life.

Thirdly, I can be thankful that though they took my all, it was not much. And fourthly, he said, I can be thankful that it was I who was robbed, not I who did the robbing. God is magnified in our persecution.

But number six and finally, verse 19, look at this. This is the sixth verb that's very significant in the text for providing a divine directive for preparation. He says, Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit.

You see that? Commit. The keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator. You're faithful.

A faithful Creator. You see, brethren, the word commit here in Psalm 31 and verse 5 means to yield for the keeping. It's important.

You say, why should I do that? I'm going to die anyway. I mean, it's inevitable. I mean, why should I do it? Because God requires it.

We are to yield for the keeping. To commit the soul is to devote the entire being to God. Lord, come what may, whether it's the anguish through being tortured or martyrdom, Lord, I commit my entire existence to You.

Listen, because of the imminent danger of persecution and possible martyrdom, friend, Peter exhorts them to commit themselves to God as they continue to do well. For listen now, for their God has promised that He would be faithful to them even unto death. Alborn says this, they were to leave everything in His hand, faithfully performing every duty and not being anxious for the result.

The Lord Jesus, in Luke 23 and verse 46 says, And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, in Thy hands I commit, I commend my spirit. The word there means I entrust my spirit to Your keeping. Why is this important? As I say it, I'm closing.

Listen, we must not underestimate the importance of committing ourselves to God. You should be doing it now when all is well. When there is no impending threat of persecution, still be doing it now.

But even when persecution does come, especially, He said, You should be conscious of committing your soul to that faithful Creator. We are not to underestimate the importance of committing ourselves to God, for in so doing we see some significant things. First of all, it's an acknowledgement of our faith.

You're not going to cower under persecution, are you? You're not going to wither under what they'll threaten you with, are you? For me to commit my soul is a statement that I believe. I commit my soul to this faithful Creator. I acknowledge, with an exclamation point, that I'm not my own.

I'm bought with a price, therefore I commit myself to Him that already has purchased me with the blood of His Son. Secondly, it is the final obedience in a saint's perseverance. Dear people, in persecution, only those who persevere will inherit eternal life.

If you do not persevere in this life, you will perish. Understand, we're not talking about perfection. Even a believer sins.

And sins at times in a way that grieves the Master that maybe we would assess when we look at our own sin as a regular sin pattern. But let me tell you something, friend. You're troubled about it because you're not your own.

You've been redeemed through the merits of Christ. But in that, we continue to keep picking ourselves up. The just man falls down seven times.

He keeps rising. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord God shall deliver them out of all of them. And by virtue of your perseverance, it's an evidence of the fact that you are being kept by the power of God.

So when we finally, the ultimate exercise is, Father, into Your hands, I commend my spirit. I commit myself. Then it's the final act once again of our perseverance.

But then this, if you do suffer, and it results in death, martyrdom, you're not going to die. You're not going to die. For the believer, the world looks at your corpse and says they died.

But from God's perspective, it's a triumphant transition into glory. You want to know why? Because Jesus said in John 8 and verse 51, He that keepeth My saying shall never see death. You're not going to encounter death.

It's just a transcendent, triumphant transition into glory. So while they're killing you, and your life is ebbing away in their eyes, you're committing your soul to a faithful Creator. And guess what, friend? You're not going to really draw a last breath.

First thing you know in that transition, there's a Savior, Stephen, standing on the right hand of the throne of God. He's there. He's there.

What a blessed reality. What an exceeding great and precious promise. Preparing for persecution.

It's coming. It's coming. Let's pray together.

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