

Could We Handle Heavy Persecution?

by Ed Hicks

The sermon challenges believers to evaluate their readiness to endure heavy persecution in light of their current spiritual commitments and practices.

Duration: 35:18

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the commitment and faith of believers in comparison to the dedication of a Russian comrade. He questions whether believers today could handle heavy persecution, suggesting that their commitments are not strong enough and their faith is not pure enough. The speaker then provides a list of suggestions for believers to strengthen their commitment and faith, including clearly expressing their Christianity, pursuing lost souls with the gospel, and confronting those who can bring about change. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to make holy and sacrificial vows unto God and to deepen their understanding of the Word of God.

Transcript

I want to deal this morning with the subject, Could We Handle Heavy Persecution? Could We Handle Heavy Persecution? Now, when you read this verse, think about the idea of an invading army and captivity. Now, the book of Jeremiah, you might take some time to read it and consider its context and history, but just think about an invading army and captivity. Now, imagine if a man was taken captive by an enemy army and he was forced to march along with that enemy army for a while.

In fact, march with that enemy army all day long. And finally, imagine if that weary captive was given an opportunity to rest at the end of the day. Camp was made, and then the next morning, imagine if a commanding officer said, take that captive over to the cavalry, and imagine if the captive was taken over to the cavalry and all of them mounted on horses, but instead he was left on foot.

And then imagine if the weary, aching captive, after having marched the day before and having trouble keeping up with the trained and disciplined soldiers, then was told that he had to run with the horses. Now, if thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? Imagine if a person had a piece of property there near the Jordan River, and it was a peaceful and a prosperous place, and yet the person that lived there complained much about how hard it was and was fearful about things, fearful about the enemy on the other side of the Jordan. Imagine if that person was in that state of mind, and then the Jordan began to swell.

The rains fell, and the Jordan began to swell, and the lions came out of the thickets. In fact, the Bible says in the book of Jeremiah 49, 19, Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong. Now, imagine if that person complained about how hard it was and was fearful even though he was on a prosperous and a peaceful plain.

Imagine what it would have been like if there was a swelling of the Jordan, the coming in of the lions, or if there were the coming in of an enemy army and then him being taken captive. Now, we might ask ourselves, if we can't keep up with the footmen, how will we contend with horses? If we are wearied in a peaceful and prosperous plain, how will we do in the swelling of the Jordan? If we're having a hard time now, what will it be like if in the time to come we face harder persecution or more troublesome times? In the book of II Corinthians chapter number four, the Apostle Paul said in verse number 17, For our light affliction, our light affliction. In the book of II Corinthians chapter number six, a few verses later, the Apostle Paul said, But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love and pain.

And the scripture goes on. But let me ask you this. Have we approved ourselves as the ministers of God? Have we approved ourselves as the ministers of God? Peter wrote these words, For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow in his steps.

He said, Hereunto were ye called, and were to follow in the steps of Christ. Have we missed our calling? We are called to suffer. Have we missed our calling? Have we purposely avoided our calling? Now, could we with holy success handle the persecutions of the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter's time? Could we with holy success handle the persecutions of the Dark Ages and the Reformation time? Now, if you've ever read the Fox's Book of Martyrs or a portion of it, most of us may never read the whole thing, but if you've ever read it, you may have been sickened by some of the things in the book.

Here's one section. It says, These cruelties used by the imperial troops under Count Tilly and Saxony are thus enumerated, half strangling and recovering persons again repeatedly, rolling sharp wheels over their fingers and toes, pinching the thumbs in a vice, forcing most filthy things down the throat. It goes on and on, and I don't know that you would enjoy me reading it.

So many terrible things. Could we with holy success endure the sufferings of the Dark Ages and the Reformation period? Could we with holy success endure the sufferings that went on in Communist Russia? Could we with holy success endure modern-day suffering in countries like China and in Muslim countries? Could we handle heavy persecution? Now, I think the fact is, no, we would not with holy success handle heavy persecution. Now, as far as our day-to-day lives, I think there's evidence that we would not with holy success handle heavy persecution.

I preached a message a while back, Are We Avoiding Opportunities to Suffer for Christ? And I gave some suggestions, and I have failed. This is one of those messages that God dealt with me about, and I don't know how many times it came back to me, some from the message, but I hear some suggestions. Number one, let your Christianity be clearly known.

Number two, press people past ambiguous professions. Number three, pursue lost ones with the gospel. Number four, push yourself out of your comfort zone for ministry.

Number five, confront people that can and should help bring about change. Number six, state clearly your convictions behind your decisions. Number seven, lay down the law when it is your rightful place to do so.

Number eight, move further from the fence of compromise back away from the border of sin. Number nine, make yourself pray more, study more, use your time more efficiently. Number ten, be truthful.

Number eleven, take time, money, talents from selfish pursuits and direct them to sacrificial and spiritual pursuits. And then number twelve, make holy, costly vows unto God and proper public confession of professions and commitments. Now, there are just some things in our day, as easy as it is in our day, there are some things that we might do in our day that may actually bring suffering in our day.

Could we handle heavy persecution? If thou hast run with the footmen of our day, and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou do? If horsemen in time to come, if you are forced to run with horsemen in time to come, if you are forced into harder times in time to come, could we handle with holy success heavy persecution? Now, let me give you a few things that I think are facts about most believers today. Number one, our commitments are not strong enough. Could we handle heavy persecution with holy success? I think for most of us, no, because our commitments are not strong enough.

Commitment is something that's not very popular in our day, and so often people, they may just simply join up with something or be a part of something if they feel like it, if they think it benefits them, and then pull away when they get ready. Our commitments are not strong enough. Let me read you something that came, says it was printed in the Presbyterian Survey, and a statement of a young communist.

It says, the socialist cause is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. It is my alter ego.

Therefore, I can't carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating to this horse, which both drives and guides my life. I've already been in jail because of my ideas, and if necessary, I am ready to go before a firing squad. A genuine radical lives in virtual poverty.

He turns back to the party every penny he makes above what is absolutely necessary to keep them alive. We constantly look for places where the class struggle is the sharpest, exploiting these situations to the limit of their possibilities. We lead strikes.

We organize demonstrations. We speak on street corners. We fight cops.

Radicals don't have the time or the money for many movies or concerts or T-bone steaks or decent homes and new cars. We've been described as fanatics. We are.

Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, the struggle for socialism. We communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life.

We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity. We have morale and a spirit de corps as no capitalistic army ever had. We have a code of conduct, a way of life, a devotion to our cause that no religious order can touch, and we are guided not by blind fanatical faith but by logic and reason and by a never-ending education of study and practice.

We are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us is, in his small way, helping to contribute something new and true, something better to mankind. Now, with that kind of devotion, loyalty, should it surprise us that the communist movement has been so strong? By the way, the bear is not dead, and the bear shall rise again. And China is dangerous, and China is communist.

There's a story along this line. In 1935 in Red Square, there was an American newspaperman there, and he watched a parade of 40,000 communist youth. And it was bitter cold, and there was snow, and there was a bottleneck in the parade, and there was something being chanted.

He didn't know what it was, and he said something to a Russian, and the Russian said, Oh, comrade, it is nothing. They just sing, We may be cold, we may be hungry, but we change the world. It is nothing.

Cold, hungry, but we march to change the world. What a difference between that kind of commitment and the commitment of so many so-called believers today. Could we handle heavy persecution? I believe that in most cases, no, because our commitments are not strong enough.

Number two, our faith is not pure enough. In the book of I Peter, chapter number one, the Bible says, wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold, that perisheth though it be tried with fire. Trials by fire.

I believe that most of us could not handle heavy persecution with holy success because our faith is not pure enough. If gold was put into the fire, the refiners fire, and the gold got hot enough, that eventually, number one, it could try the gold, prove the fact that it was really gold, and then as well cause impurities to come to the surface. But then, if gold was pulled from the fire before it reached that point, then what may happen is the impurities be trapped within, perhaps having partially risen, some impurities may coat the surface, and the gold be hidden by the impurities lying on top.

In the desired process, the gold may be pulled out in that molten state, and the dross skimmed off the top. So oftentimes I believe that in the midst of trials, we may have that tendency to pull away instead of letting ourselves be tried as we ought to be tried, and instead of the impurities being skimmed off the top, the impurities may actually, because of our hard-heartedness, coat the surface. Instead of putting on the new man, we put on the old man.

Now, read the book of Hebrews, chapter 11. Read the faith chapter. Read about the men and the trials that they went through.

See over and over again men whose faith was in the fire. Whose faith was in the fire, and in the last part of that chapter, read about the persecution, quite a section about persecution, faith in the fire. I think probably most of us wouldn't have holy success in the midst of hard persecution, because our faith is not pure enough.

If we shrink from, if we withdraw from and try to wiggle out of times when God wants to try our faith, how would we do in heavy persecution? If it's hard now, how would we do in heavy persecution? Then as well, I think probably we wouldn't do very well because our love is not perfected enough. In the book of 1 John, of course I've dealt with this lately, but the book of 1 John, and chapter number 4, verses 17 and 18, the Bible says, Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear hath

torment.

He that feareth is not made perfect in love. Our love is not perfected enough. I think that if hard persecution came, we may, as I, along the line of what I was speaking about this morning, we may faint, we may faint in the midst of the trial.

Faint because of fear, and fear because of a lack of love. Instead of loving Christ, instead of being so committed to Christ, instead of so trusting Christ, that we go on regardless, and we don't let our fears that may come up arise to stop us, I think that in many cases we may find ourselves frozen with fear, if heavy persecution came. Then let me say as well, I think probably, most of us, our convictions are not settled enough.

The Bible says in Daniel 1, verse number 8, that Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank. Purposed in his heart. In the book, booklet, Conviction Versus Preference, by attorney David Gibbs, Jr., there are some interesting things.

In fact, the idea I think more than once is brought up, about how would you do, how a person would do if they were actually put on the witness stand, and tried about something they say, or perhaps they say they have a conviction about. Now, let me go through a few things. This is under the area, what is a conviction? Number one, a conviction is something that you purpose in your heart.

The courts say that a conviction is not something you merely discover. It is not something at which you accidentally arrive, but it is something that you purpose in your heart as a fabric of your belief system. Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. often said that he had never seen a man made by a crisis.

Number two, a conviction must be predetermined. Now, think about these things from the viewpoint of a lawyer. A conviction must be predetermined.

The courts say that your convictions must be determined beforehand to be convictions. Number three, a conviction is a personal belief. The court says that it is required for other people to stand with you.

Your beliefs are preferences and not convictions. Number four, a conviction is non-negotiable. Courts say that if you can sit down and discuss the negotiation of your faith, then your faith is a matter of preference and not conviction, because convictions are non-negotiable.

Number five, a conviction is not contingent on victory. Courts have said that if you must be assured of victory before you will stand, then your beliefs are preferences and not convictions. Number six, a conviction will always show up in a person's lifestyle.

Then the court is looking for consistency. Before you state that something is a conviction, you must be prepared to say that the opposite is a sin. Then number seven, a conviction is consistent to itself.

Now, I think in many cases we wouldn't do well in hard persecution because our convictions are not strong enough. Then, number five, I believe in many cases we would not have the holy success in hard persecution because our prayer lives are not powerful enough. It's one thing to be an apostle Paul and to be in a jailhouse and to pray and to sing praises unto God and an earthquake come and set you free.

It's one thing to be an apostle Peter and the church be praying without ceasing for you and the chains fall off and an angel leads you out. It's one thing to be an Elijah praying earnestly that it might not rain and the rain stopping for three years and six months and then praying again and the rain starting again. Then, not only is there the idea of deliverance from the trial, and notice some wonderful things, deliverance from the trial, but there are so many testimonies of those who have been delivered in the trials.

Here's a quotation from Foxe's Book of Martyrs. After joining together in humble petition to the throne of grace, they rose, went to the stake, and were encircled with their chains. To the great surprise of the spectators, Hudson slipped from under his chains and came forward.

A great opinion prevailed that he was about to recant. Others thought that he wanted further time. In the meantime, his companions at the stake urged every promise and exhortation to support him.

The hopes of the enemies of the cross, however, were disappointed. The good man, far from fearing the smallest personal terror at the approaching pangs of death, was only alarmed that his Savior's face seemed to be hidden from him. Falling upon his knees, his spirit wrestled with God, and God verified the words of his Son, asking it shall be given.

The martyr rose in an ecstasy of joy and exclaimed, Now I thank God I am strong and care not what man can do to me. And with unruffled countenance, he replaced himself under the chain, joined his fellow sufferers, and with them suffered death, to the comfort of the godly and the confusion of Antichrist. Now, we may rejoice about deliverance from trials.

Oh, but what about the wonderful accounts of people delivered in trials, delivered from sin, delivered from compromise, delivered to be holy and godly right in the midst of the trial, even if it meant unto death? Would we handle, could we handle heavy persecution with holy success? I think in most cases, no. Our prayer lives are not powerful enough. Let me give you this from Mr. J. Edgar Hoover.

It says, First, the Communists emphasize the importance of continually returning to the original source of their beliefs to secure inspiration and power. They daily study the Bible of Communism. Yet, how few Christians take any time daily to read our Bible.

How often each day do we quench our spiritual thirst by digging deep in the wells of our faith? Pressured and troubled by tensions and anxieties, do we turn regularly to the scriptures for strength as the Communists turn to Das Kapital and the Communist Manifesto? Second, Communists stress not only the reading of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, but also read them constantly on a daily or weekly schedule, never neglecting the habit. They say that to be a good Communist calls for a lifelong devotion to studying Marxism, Leninism. Yet, as Christians, most of us read the Bible only on special occasions.

How many of us set aside a certain amount of time each day in the week to make a consistent study of the Word of God? Do we regard the Communists have no use for ceremonial avowal of Marxism or a shallow intellectual acceptance of its ideas? Every Communist is under ceaseless pressure to deepen his insight, knowledge, and comprehension of Communism. Yet, in contrast, how many Christians are Church members in name only and know nothing and care less about the doctrinal undergirdings of their faith? Fourth, at all times the Communists test the relationship between theory and action. They say, we study for the sole purpose of putting into practice what we have learned.

Yet, here is the big gap in the Christian community, the wide gap between faith and action, between profession and practice. Finally, the Party stresses the development of the politically mature comrade, the specialist who will be charged with the supreme missionary task of the Party. These specialists are recruited, trained, supported, and sent out as missionaries in the Communist revolution to win the world.

We, as Christians, also seek to win the world. We, too, are working for a revolution not of the sword but of the spirit. But our cause gets only a token of our money, little of our time and interest, and only a very few talented and trained young people.

Could we handle heavy persecution with holy success? Well, we might ask ourselves the question back in the book of Jeremiah, or make application of the question back in Jeremiah chapter 12, verse number 5. If thou hast run with the footmen, they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? If you think it's been hard up to this point, if you think it's been hard in America, if you think it's been hard with all the freedom that we've got and all the luxuries that we've enjoyed, if you think it's hard now, how would you do under heavy persecution? That's a great text. God impressed me with it years ago, and perhaps God will impress you with it, but bring it back to your mind over and over again. If thou hast run with the footmen, they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? It shall wax worse and worse.

We are not evolving upward. We're on a downhill slide. Could we handle heavy persecution? Now, thank the Lord that God gives grace in the time where it's needed, but if you fail and fail and fail and fail in the training time beforehand, then don't expect to rise as a super spiritual success just because hard times come.

If we're having trouble with the footmen, how do we deal with horsemen? How do we deal with horses? If you will please stand, and let's go to the Lord in the word of prayer.

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