WATCH THIS VIDEO

What if it happens to me?

DISCIPLES.AWANAYM.ORG/PERSECUTION

CORE VERSES

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.

Matthew 5:11-12

Why should we be happy when people are persecuting us? Jesus gave us two reasons. First, we are storing up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21) when we are persecuted. Second, we just joined an exclusive club. The prophets of the Old Testament, people who wrote the very words of God to His people, were an esteemed group of people to Jesus' listeners. To be considered among them was to be on God's dream team. And to be included in the list of saints who have been persecuted and martyred for Jesus since then should be considered an equal honor for us.

USE THE SPACE BELOW TO HELP YOU REMEMBER THESE VERSES. FEEL FREE TO WRITE, DRAW, OR DESIGN IN WAYS THAT MAKE SENSE TO YOU.

READ JOHN 15:18-25.

The world hated Jesus. He said so Himself in this week's passage, and history proved it. Not only was Jesus tortured and killed for His claims to be the Son of God—for being the Son of God—many of the people who followed Him were also harassed, mistreated, mocked, arrested, fired, forced to run for their lives, or killed.

It's true that not every Christian in the world is being persecuted all of the time. In the West, especially, it's hard to make the case that all Jesus-followers are hated and mistreated. But Christians have been persecuted—and continue to be persecuted—in many different places around the world.

Doubtful? Look up International Christian Concern, Christian Freedom International, or Open Doors for stats and information about people being killed for their Christian faith right now. The numbers are staggering. How can so many people be so hateful, so committed, to hurting and killing those who trust in Jesus?

We're tempted to think it's just the nature of humanity to persecute and kill those different from them. But what Jesus teaches here is that Christian persecution is not the same as the persecution of other religions, ethnicities, or types of people. Christian persecution happens because people are rejecting the one, true God.

Jesus told His disciples they would be hated because they followed Him and the world hated Him (v. 18). But it's not just Him. Jesus said that to hate Him was to hate His Father (v. 23). Nobody can rightly claim to love God while hating Jesus or the people of Jesus.

Yes, many other groups have been killed and persecuted. All of us who love God and follow Jesus should refuse to participate in any kind of hatred. We should love everyone in the name of Christ.

But according to Jesus, we should also not be surprised if real and terrible persecution comes our way because we take the name of Christ. When we received God's gift of grace and salvation, the world lost its right to own us. Jesus said that's why the world hates His followers (v. 19).

In fact, much of the rest of the New Testament is about suffering and being persecuted for belonging to Jesus. For a true disciple of Jesus, we are taught that it is a high honor to be allowed to experience pain for staying true to Christ (Acts 5:41), that it is one way we get to know Jesus better (Philippians 3:10), and that suffering with joy and hope is an opportunity to show the world around us that Christ really is in us (1 Peter 3:14-17).

It's not that we want to suffer; nobody does. But the idea that following Jesus might lead to suffering shouldn't surprise or scare us—any more than it should surprise us how much strength, hope, peace, and comfort He will give to us at every step along the way (John 15:26-27).

CORE CONCEPTS

The followers of Jesus were told to expect persecution.

PERSECUTION:
Cruel or hostile treatment due to your faith in Christ

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE OVER THE NEXT TWO DAYS

- WHICH STORY OF PERSECUTION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT STANDS OUT TO YOU THE MOST?
- HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED FOR BEING CHRISTIANS IN THE LAST YEAR? WHERE IN THE WORLD IS IT MOST DANGEROUS TO BE A CHRISTIAN?
- WHY DO YOU THINK THE NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS OFTEN INCREASES IN AREAS WHERE CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION IS THE WORST?
- WRITE YOUR OWN QUESTION: