

**Session 13 The Certainty of Persecution in the West & Its Blessing (Jn. 15:18-24)**

**I. THE WORLD HATES BELIEVERS WHO ARE FAITHFUL TO SAY WHAT JESUS SAYS**

- A. Persecution is both a demonic attack to hinder our spiritual growth and a divine gift to enhance it. God granted and appointed that His people endure persecution (1 Thes. 3:3; Phil. 1:29) that they may be transformed by it for their great benefit in this age and in the age to come. We do not make persecution happen to us in the will of God—it is granted as a divine opportunity that we don't have unless God grants it to us. The apostles rejoiced in being "counted worthy" to suffer knowing how it transformed them and how precious it is to have it in their testimony when they stand before God.

<sup>29</sup>*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ...to suffer for His sake... (Phil. 1:29)*

<sup>3</sup>*...[to not be] shaken by these afflictions...know that we are appointed to this. (1 Thes. 3:3)*

<sup>41</sup>*They departed...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer...for His name. (Acts 5:41)*

- B. There is a tension in rejoicing when God *grants* persecution to us as a gift (Acts 5:41; 2 Cor. 12:7-12; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; Col. 1:24; 1 Thes. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:21) while being exhorted to pray for protection and deliverance from prison (Acts 12:5) or from the evil one (Jn. 17:15; Phil. 1:19, 25; 2 Thes. 3:3).
- C. Those who faithfully proclaim the truths that Jesus taught will be hated by those who hate Him (Mt. 24:9). Jesus told them to know this hatred is actually against Him and not them. We must settle it in our heart that we will not escape their hatred if we speak the truth about Jesus and His message.

<sup>18</sup>*"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.*

<sup>19</sup>*...therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>...If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you...*

<sup>22</sup>*If I had not...spoken to them, they would have no sin [national guilt for rejecting Me]...*

<sup>24</sup>*If I had not done among them the works...they would have no sin..." (Jn. 15:18-24)*

- D. *If I had not spoken to them*: The world hates Jesus' teaching on man's sin and guilt, His claim to be their God, judge, and the only way of salvation, and their need for His death on the cross.
- E. *They would have no sin*: Jesus is not making a theological statement contrary to Romans 3:23. He is not saying that they were saved or without sin, rather that Israel would not have had national guilt related to rejecting Him as Messiah if He had not spoken to them with confirming miracles.
- F. John urged us to anticipate being hated for standing for truth and not be shocked when it happens.

<sup>13</sup>*Do not marvel [be shocked or surprised], my brethren, if the world hates you. (1 Jn. 3:13)*

- G. John 15 is the "intimacy with God" chapter (15:1-17). Intimacy with God is essential to being empowered to walk in joy when being persecuted (15:18-25). Two days earlier, Jesus prophesied that, in the end times just before He returns, "all nations" will hate His disciples (Mt. 24:9). Hatred with lawlessness is the context in which the gospel will be preached to all nations (Rev. 7:9). In AD 197, the church father Tertullian said, "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*"

<sup>8</sup>*All these are the beginning of sorrows [birth pains]. <sup>9</sup>Then...you will be hated by all nations...*

<sup>12</sup>*lawlessness will abound...<sup>14</sup>the gospel...will be preached...to all the nations..." (Mt. 24:8-14)*

- H. Some focus on understanding the end times but without prioritizing intimacy with God, while others focus on intimacy without interest in understanding Jesus' end-time plan—both are essential! The promise of the seal of divine love in Song 8:6 includes the Lord giving the worldwide body of Christ grace to give our lives for love even unto martyrdom—"love as strong as death"(Rev. 12:11). Specifically, this love is love for the Bridegroom King who loved us and gave Himself up for us.

***6Set Me as a seal upon your heart...for love is as strong as death... (Song 8:6)***

***11They overcame him [Satan]...they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)***

## II. MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS ARE ENDURING PERSECUTION TODAY

- A. Several "persecution watch lists" identify 60+ nations that have a high level of persecution against believers. Thus, about 300 million believers regularly face "the possibility" of persecution.
- B. Common elements of the persecutions seen in these 60+ nations include people being thrown in jail without a trial or being given a long sentence in a reeducation camp. Many are raped, beaten, or killed. Christian villages, churches, homes, and crops are burned, leaving families to starve. Many nations have "anti-conversion laws" that are enforced by the death penalty—when Muslims turn to Jesus, it is considered blasphemy against Allah. China is a surveillance state that has 500+ million cameras using A.I. with facial recognition to create *social credit scores* that penalize believers.
- C. Pope John Paul II established the *Commission for Martyrs* which researched and cataloged all those who were killed for their faith in Jesus in the 20th century. They claim that the "20th century has produced double the number of Christian martyrs than all the previous 19 centuries put together." "The Esther Project" reports that about **1,000,000 Christians were martyred between 2000-2010.**
- D. Christians enduring persecution in end-time prophecy is a sober reality (Mt. 10:21-22, 28; 24:9; Lk. 21:16-19; Jn. 15:18-25; Rev. 6:9-11; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 13:7, 10; 16:5-7; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4).

***9He opened the fifth seal; I saw...the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God...***

***11They [were to] rest...until the number...who would be killed...was completed. (Rev. 6:9-11)***

***6I saw the woman [Harlot Babylon], drunk with the blood of...the martyrs of Jesus. (Rev. 17:6)***

## III. RESPONDING TO END-TIME PROPHECIES OF PERSECUTION: 3 APPLICATIONS

- A. ***Application #1: To arm ourselves to suffer:*** Peter gave a "military call" to arm or equip ourselves for battle. First, by developing a biblical understanding of persecution—why God allows it to happen, what are the benefits for our personal life and for those who observe it, and what are the eternal rewards that follow. Second, by cultivating an intimate relationship with Jesus (Mt. 25:4; Jn. 15:1-17). Third, by cultivating deep kingdom relationships with wholehearted believers.

***1...since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind... (1 Pet. 4:1)***

- B. ***Application #2: To prepare young believers:*** We must prepare young believers for persecution.
- C. ***Application #3: To help the persecuted Church:*** We are to help other believers by our prayer, financial support, encouragement. Do a Google or YouTube search of "persecution" of Christians.

#### IV. HOW PERSECUTION BENEFITS A BELIEVER

- A. The Lord uses persecution to transform His people and to cause them to cease from sin (1 Pet.4:1). Persecution does not leave room for sin that is so easily tolerated in the Western Church at this time. Peter assured believers that the spirit of glory will rest on those who are persecuted (1 Pet. 4:14).  
***1...for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men...14If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory...rests on you...[and] He is glorified. (1 Pet. 4:1-2, 14)***
- B. Tribulation (persecution) produces perseverance and godly character (Rom. 5:3-4). Persecuted believers grow in dependence on Jesus with more prayer with fasting in seeking discernment—on who and where to meet, etc. The “oil of intimacy” is cultivated best in the fires of persecution.  
***3We glory [rejoice] in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [deep resolve to pursue and obey God] 4and perseverance, character [godliness]... (Rom. 5:3-4)***
- C. Paul spoke of persecution as evidence or proof of God’s righteous judgment or wise leadership (2 Thes. 1:3-11). Paul identified 4 ways that give evidence that persecution benefits God’s people.  
***3...your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds...4so that... [we boast of]...your patience [perseverance] and faith in all your persecutions...that you endure, 5which is manifest evidence [proof] of the righteous judgment of God [good leadership], that you may be counted worthy of [prepared to experience more of] the kingdom...6since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7and to give you rest... when the Lord Jesus is revealed... (2 Thes. 1:3-7)***
- D. **Evidence #1:** The fact that they had *patience* or perseverance when persecuted is proof that God’s good leadership provided them with grace or supernatural ability to endure with faith and love.
- E. **Evidence #2:** Persecution rightly responded to results in being “*counted worthy*” or equipped to experience more kingdom activity. “Worthy” doesn’t mean “deserving of,” but “suited for,” or “prepared for.” Persecution purifies us by leading us to align more with God’s leadership. Persecution is an effective “accelerant” to maturing in godliness which in turn increases our spiritual capacity to enjoy God and experience more kingdom activity in our lives.  
***35Some of those of understanding shall fall [martyred], to refine and purify them... (Dan. 11:35)***
- F. **Evidence #3:** God’s wisdom in *repaying with tribulation* those who persecute His people becomes evident as their evil deeds and love of darkness are manifest (Jn. 3:19). Their murderous desires come to the surface as they persecute people—a dark dynamic occurs in them as they become “drunk with blood” (Rev. 17:6). The greatest criticism of God in history is that His judgments are not fair. God’s judgment of the wicked is vindicated as their love of darkness comes to the surface.  
***28...[be] not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation...29To you it has been granted...to suffer for His sake. (Phil. 1:28-29)***  
***19[The verdict is]...men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (Jn. 3:19)***

- G. **Evidence #4:** God gives them *ultimate rest* when they receive “all the good pleasure of His goodness” (2 Thes. 1:11) in the age to come related to their spiritual maturity resulting from persecution. Thus it helps us grow unto being worthy (prepared) to receive the fullness of our calling.

<sup>6</sup>...it is a righteous thing with God...<sup>7</sup>to give you rest...when the Lord Jesus is revealed...

<sup>11</sup>We pray always for you that God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness...<sup>12</sup>that...Christ be glorified in you, and you in Him... (2 Thes. 1:6-12)

- H. Oh, to be counted worthy of a full reward (2 Jn. 8) on Judgment Day without any loss (1 Cor. 3:15)!

<sup>14</sup>If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:14-15)

<sup>8</sup>...that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. (2 Jn. 8)

- I. Paul wrote of his passion to obtain a heavenly crown around AD 54 (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He was zealous not to be disqualified from receiving “the prize” or an imperishable crown (9:25).

<sup>24</sup>...[I run to] receive the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain...<sup>25</sup>an imperishable crown...<sup>27</sup>I discipline my body...lest...I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

- J. Near the end of Paul’s life, he *pressed* for the prize of the upward or heavenly call (Phil. 3:14). He wrote this around AD 62 or 8 years after he wrote of “running to win the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24). He lived for 6 more years, dying in AD 68 “with assurance” of obtaining a crown (2 Tim. 4:8).

<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already attained...I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me [fullness of his calling]...<sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call [the fullness of his heavenly calling] of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12-14)

<sup>7</sup>I have finished the race...<sup>8</sup>there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness. (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

- K. The genuineness and maturing of our faith through persecution is more precious than gold.

<sup>6</sup>...though now for a little while, if need be, [if necessary] you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>that the genuineness [maturity] of your faith, being much more precious than gold...may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus...<sup>8</sup>whom...you love. (1 Pet. 1:6-8)

<sup>12</sup>...do not think it strange [to be persecuted]...<sup>13</sup>rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may be glad with exceeding joy. (1 Pet. 4:12-13)

<sup>17</sup>Our light affliction...is working for us a far more exceeding...weight of glory... (2 Cor. 4:17)

- L. The afflictions of Christ are not lacking in terms of accomplishing redemption. Paul rejoiced in the opportunity to magnify how attractive Jesus is to an unbelieving world by loving and trusting His leadership while being persecuted. Believers who faithfully love Jesus even when persecuted are a “living portrait,” giving a public display of how glorious Jesus is to them (Song 5:8, 16).

<sup>24</sup>I rejoice in my sufferings...and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ... (Col. 1:24)

<sup>10</sup>That I may know Him and [His] power...and the fellowship of His sufferings... (Phil. 3:10)