

Session 2 Persecution: The Seminary of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:1-4)

“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)

I. REVIEW: THE APOSTOLIC VIEW OF PERSECUTION

- A. Persecution is both a demonic attack to hinder our spiritual growth and a divine gift to enhance it. God “granted” that His people be persecuted (Phil. 1:29) that they may be transformed in context to it for their benefit in this age (Dan. 11:35; Rom. 5:3-5; 1 Pet. 4:1) and the age to come (2 Cor. 4:17).
²⁹For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ...to suffer for His sake... (Phil. 1:29)
¹⁷Our...affliction...is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:)
- B. The apostles rejoiced in being “counted worthy” to suffer, knowing how it transformed them and how valuable it is to have it in their testimony when they stand before God in the age to come.
⁴¹They departed...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer...for His name. (Acts 5:41)
- C. The Lord uses persecution to transform His people and to cause them to cease from sin (1 Pet.4:1). Peter assured believers that the spirit of glory will rest on those who are persecuted (1 Pet. 4:14).
¹...he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ²that he no longer should live...for the lusts of men...¹⁴If you are reproached...the Spirit of glory...rests on you... (1 Pet. 4:1-2, 14)

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING GOD’S PEOPLE FOR PERSECUTION (JN. 16:1-4)

- A. On Tuesday (Mt. 24-25) and Thursday (Jn. 13-17) of Jesus’ final week of ministry, He elaborated on what discipleship includes—highlighting *the joyful and painful aspects*. In 15:18-16:4, Jesus prepared His disciples to be hated and persecuted and called them to remember it (15:20; 16:4).
¹⁹“...the world hates you. ²⁰Remember...I said ...if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you... ²⁶When the Helper [the Spirit] comes...He will testify of Me [reveal more of Me]. ^{16:1}These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble [fall away]. ²They will put you out the synagogues...[and] kill you...⁴these things...remember that I told you...” (Jn. 15:19-16:4)
- B. *He will testify of Me* (15:26): In the context of persecution, the Spirit will teach God’s people to understand and align themselves more to Jesus’ heart, leadership, and eternal values—so they *grow in love* for God and people by growing in *purity, humility, mercy, generosity, gratitude*, and in seeing Jesus as their *primary reward* (Gen. 15:1) and *source* of promotion, security, and provision, etc.
- C. *Remember* (15:20; 16:4): Jesus emphasized the importance that His people “remember”—that persecution was sure to come to all nations (Mt. 24:9), and to remember why God allows it, what benefits result to His people from it, and what God promised to do as He intervenes to help us. John urged us to anticipate being hated for standing for truth and not be shocked when it happens. If we are shocked (taken off guard), we are more vulnerable to be overcome by fear and offense. Our faith is strengthened knowing what happens is not outside His knowledge and control (13:7, 19; 14:29).
¹³Do not marvel [be shocked or surprised], my brethren, if the world hates you. (1 Jn. 3:13)

- D. **These things** (16:1) This refers to Jesus' words about being hated by those of the world (15:18-27). He said, "These things I have spoken," 4 times to identify several sections (14:25; 16:25, 33; 17:1).
- E. **That you should not stumble:** Our greatest danger is not in being persecuted but in falling away. The spiritual failure of denying Jesus is far worse than physical harm. His reason for emphasizing persecution (15:18-25) was that they not *fall away* from the faith (16:1; cf. 6:61; 1 Jn. 2:10)—that they not *fall away* (RSV), *stumble* (NRSV), *be offended* (KJV), or *go stray* (NIV). The Greek verb, "stumble," (*skandalizmao*) means to fall from one's faith—to be forewarned is to be forearmed.
- F. We are prepared by seeing what the Scripture says about the certainty of persecution and by talking to God often about *how we seek to respond* to it (by grace) and *the benefits that we receive from it* by being empowered to be transformed and being found worthy to participate in the privilege of glorifying Jesus in it in several ways (Acts 5:41) which results in great eternal rewards. We glorify Jesus by *magnifying how attractive He is* by trusting His leadership while being persecuted.
- G. Paul said that we enter into or experience more of the kingdom when persecuted (Acts 14:22). Many young believers are being trained in a way that is opposite of what Paul taught—being taught that they should expect to escape persecution and told it is best and more effective to speak about Jesus without saying anything offensive so that unbelievers will like them and listen to them. The Christian culture in the West teaches young people that physical safety and financial prosperity are primary signs of God's favor and grace rather than making choices with eternal values in view.
²²...[Paul] ***strengthening the souls of the disciples ...saying, "We must through many tribulations enter [experience more of] the kingdom of God."*** (Acts 14:22)
- H. One of the primary weakness of many believers in the West today is the deep commitment and strong expectation to enjoy the lifestyle of "the Gospel of the American dream" which presents our primary goals as personal comfort, financial prosperity, and social prominence (and popularity).
- I. 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). Several "persecution watch lists" identify 60+ nations that have a high level of persecution against believers. About 300 million believers regularly face "the possibility" of persecution.
- J. There are important reasons to understand end-time prophesies about persecution—3 applications
1. **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 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...***Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind...*** (1 Pet. 4:1)
 2. **Application #2: Prepare young believers:** We must be intentional to prepare them for this.
 3. **Application #3: To help the persecuted Church:** We are to help other believers by our prayer, financial support, encouragement. Do a YouTube search of "persecution of Christians."

III. TWO SOBERING DETAILS ABOUT THE APOSTLES FUTURE PERSECUTION (JN. 16:2)

- A. Jesus prophesied two details about the persecution in order to prepare them to stand strong (16:2). He knew it would be shocking news that some would be excommunicated from their spiritual families or killed by religious leaders and not merely by secular governments punishing them for crimes against the state (in refusing to be loyal to atheistic polices) or hate crimes against society.
- ²They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. (Jn. 16:2)***
- B. ***They will put you out of the synagogues***: Inclusion in the synagogue was very important since most of Israel’s relational, social, economic, and spiritual life was deeply connected to the synagogue. Being censored from the synagogue or “shunned” left Jewish people in a very difficult position. It was painful to be “put out” of the community that their family had been deeply connected to for years. All the apostles were cast out of the synagogue (“the national church”), killed, or imprisoned.
1. Many leaders in Israel believed in Jesus, but they would not speak up publicly out of fear of being censored (Jn. 12:42). The parents of the blind man whom Jesus healed feared to speak out about Jesus in fear of being excommunicated from the synagogue (Jn. 9:22, 34).
- ⁴²Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue... (Jn. 12:42)***
2. Betrayal from one’s family or spiritual community is a very painful type of persecution.
- ¹⁶“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends...” (Lk. 21:16)***
- C. ***Whoever kills you will think he offers God service***: Jesus prophesied a time when religious leaders would be so deceived that they will think they are serving God by killing followers of Jesus. End-time persecution will come from religious authorities as a jihad (holy war) that is considered an act of worship. Jewish leaders who killed Christians as heretics were inspired by Phinehas who killed a Jewish man cohabiting with a Moabite woman—who “made atonement for Israel” (Num. 25:13).
- D. There is a great reward for those hated and killed for their loyalty to Jesus (Lk. 6:23; Rev. 20:4). When people face death for their loyalty to Jesus, then the truth of what they really believe about Him comes to light. What people are willing to die for indicates their deepest values. We must settle the “death issue” to gain a godly kingdom perspective of this life. The end-time persecution will discourage ministries from the showmanship spirit and zeal to be popular. Some who seek to have a popular ministry today will run from it when governments put prominent ministry leaders in prison.
- ²³“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven...” (Lk. 6:23)***
- E. When Jesus prophesied His disciples would be hated (Jn 15:18), He was referring to Isaiah’s prophecy about ungodly religious leaders hating godly believers (66:5) and casting them out of the synagogue (66:5). The wicked sarcastically said, “Let the Lord be glorified,” thinking of themselves as being faithful to God. God promised to judge such ungodly religious leaders eventually (66:6).
- ⁵Hear the word of the LORD, you who tremble at His word [vs.2]: “Your brethren who hated you, who cast you out [of the synagogue] for My name’s sake, said, ‘Let the LORD be glorified...they shall be ashamed [judged by God]’”...⁶[says] the LORD, who...repays His enemies! (Isa. 66:5-6)***

IV. DAVID IS A MODEL OF HOW TO RESPOND TO GOD AS ONE WHO LEARNED HIS WAYS

- A. Scripture gives far more information about how to rightly respond to God when being persecuted by religious leaders in the life of David than in any other person. Jesus understood that David was the main example in the Scripture that the apostles had as a reference for responding to persecution. David is a witness or model of how to respond to God in being trained to be a leader after God's heart (Isa. 55:4). David's life as a "witness" of one who learned God's ways and leadership.

⁴I have given him [David] as a witness [model] to the people, a leader... (Isa. 55:4)

²²"...He raised up...David as king...and said, 'I have found David...a man after My own heart.'" (Acts 13:22)

- B. God raised David up as king after His heart, teaching him to understand and align himself to God's leadership—that David would learn to love God and grow in *purity, humility, mercy, generosity*, by seeing God as his *primary reward* and *source* of promotion, security, and provision. God trained him in the "*seminary of the Spirit*" using a wicked King Saul and many others who betrayed him. My "go to" passages when I feel mistreated or overlooked are 1 Samuel 24 and 26 and Psalm 31.

⁴Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. ⁵Lead me in Your truth... (Ps. 25:4-5)

- C. David refused to yield to his natural human response to fight back or even complain against the errors of Saul or many those who betrayed him and blocked his godly promises, plans, and goals. David invoked God's intervention by saying "*let God judge or decide*" (1 Sam. 24:15) knowing that in God's timing wrong things would be made right without David taking matters into his hands.
- D. David found Saul sleeping in a cave in En Gedi and refused to harm Saul. He even stopped his men from harming Saul (1 Sam. 24:6-7). David entrusted his cause into God's hands (1 Sam. 24:12, 15).

⁷David restrained his servants...¹⁰[he said to Saul]..."the LORD delivered you today into my hand ...¹²Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you...¹⁵Let the LORD be judge, and [decide; NAS] between you and me..." (1 Sam. 24:7-15)

- E. Later, David committed his cause into God's hands again after finding Saul sleeping (1 Sam. 26). Again he refused to harm him (26:9-12) but committed his cause into God's hands (1 Sam. 26:24).

***⁷Saul lay sleeping within the camp...⁸Abishai said to David, "...please, let me strike him..."
⁹David said..."Do not destroy him...¹⁰the LORD shall strike him..."¹⁸[David said to Saul], ²³May the LORD repay [me]...the LORD delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed...²⁴let Him deliver me out of all tribulation." (1 Sam. 26:7-24)***

- F. In Psalm 31, we see how David interacted with the Lord when he was mistreated and betrayed. By trusting God to intervene and by refusing to retaliate, *David brought God into the conflict*. To *commit our spirit* into God's hands is to commit to God all that deeply touches our spirit—our reputation, money, safety, etc. Jesus as the "greater David" entrusted Himself to God (Lk. 23:46).

⁵Into Your hand I commit my spirit...¹⁵My times are in Your hand. (Ps. 31:5, 15)

²³While being reviled, He [Jesus] did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Pet. 2:23; NASB)