

Imitate the Loyalty of Perpetua

Westview Church | Matthew 10:37 | Pastor David Stabley | February 25, 2024

Continuing on in our theme of looking back through church history, we look this morning at the exemplary life of another Christian — a young martyr born at the end of the second century named Perpetua. And here's my focus: *Imitate the loyalty of Perpetua*. Listen to Jesus's words from Matthew 10:37, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." The only account we have of Perpetua is a handful pages, written firsthand about the events leading up to her martyrdom. The account begins with the imprisonment of several young Christian catechumens, recent converts who were under instruction in doctrine before their baptism. There's much we aren't told, but what we do hear about Perpetua is that she was well-educated, recently married, and about 22 years old. She also had a newborn son that she was nursing.

While in prison upon arrest for being a Christian, she was visited by her family members, including her father, mother, and her brother, who were "languishing on her account" because of her certain death if she persisted in her confession of Christ. Her father's appeals to her are the most moving. His concern for her life comes through several appeals where he seeks to get her to recant her faith to avoid being put to death.

Have pity my daughter, on my gray hairs. Have pity on your father, if I am worthy to be called a father by you. If with these hands I have brought you up to this flower of your age, if I have preferred you to all your brothers, do not deliver me up to the scorn of men. Have regard to your brothers, have regard to your mother and your aunt, have regard to your son, who will not be able to live after you. Lay aside your courage, and do not bring us all to destruction . . .

He said these things as he threw himself at her feet, weeping and kissing her hands. He pleaded with her another time as well, pulling out his beard and uttering words which Perpetua said

would have “moved all creation.” Her reply was resolute and firm, “On that platform whatever God wills shall happen. For know that we are not placed in our own power, but in that of God.”

While the prisoners were at dinner one day, they were suddenly taken away to be brought before a tribunal and tried. A mass of people were gathered, and as Perpetua was about to step on the platform for interrogation her father took her off the step, her infant son in hand, and said to her, “Have pity on your son.” Seeing this, the procurator then appealed to Perpetua: “Spare the gray hairs of your father, spare the infancy of your boy, offer sacrifice for the well-being of the emperors.”

She refused, and the procurator said, “Are you a Christian?” Perpetua answered, “I am a Christian.” Judgment was then pronounced on all of them and their sentence was to be thrown to the wild beasts. In a matter of time the day came where they were led in procession from the prison to the amphitheater. With people cheering all around them, Perpetua was tossed by a wild animal, and finally was killed by a young gladiator whose sword she guided to her own throat because he was trembling so much in fear of putting to death such a holy person.

For Perpetua, it was either Christ and the wild beasts, or a long life enjoying her family, a comfortable life of noble birth, and the satisfaction of seeing her little boy grow up. Her choice was Christ. And though you may not be called upon to demonstrate the same intensity of loyalty to Christ as Perpetua, every disciple is nonetheless called to the same kind of loyalty — a loyalty which sets Christ as our preference above friends, relatives, and even our closest family relationships.