

# The Promise of Persecution

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This is our sixth week in John chapter 15. I'm going to title this section "The Promise of Persecution." Beginning in verse 18, Jesus said:

"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you.<sup>19</sup>If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.<sup>20</sup>Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.<sup>21</sup>But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."

*Heavenly Father, we do ask tonight Your blessings upon the reading of holy Scripture. And, Father, we pray this evening that You'll speak to us by Thy Holy Spirit, and, Lord, that we would consider the soberness of the text that we're coming to, for it's in Christ Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

You may be seated. Now, last week we looked at verses 16 and 17 in John chapter 15, and we found four promises in verse 16. We find that Jesus had chosen the disciples; He had ordained them; He told them that they would bear fruit; and He told them that He would answer their prayers.

Now, in this chapter, we've seen a number of thoughts and a number of promises. We saw in verse 11 the promise of our joy being made full. We also saw in verses 13 through 15 that Jesus said to His disciples, "You're my friends." Now we have another promise given to us in verses 18 through 21, and that is the promise of persecution. One of the reasons I slowed down and took verses 16 and 17 by themselves is because Jesus is assuring His disciples in verse 16 that He has chosen them, that is, He called them. He's assuring them that He has ordained them, in other words, placed His authority and His Spirit upon them. He assures them in verse 16 that they would bring forth fruit — that's a promise — and He also assures them that He would hear their prayer. So we actually find four thoughts given to us in verse 16.

As we come to this text tonight, we see that the disciples would be hated and they would be persecuted. Now, the reason that I want to take this section tonight is that we all, including myself, get a little shocked and surprised when things don't go our way and when people speak about us in a slanderous way or things of that nature.

There are many forms of persecution. Obviously, martyrdom is one form, but another form of persecution is prison. We find in chapter 8 of the book of Acts that the church was scattered, so that was also a form of persecution. They were scattered and had to leave their homes. Also, slander, insult, loss of property (as we see in the latter part of Hebrews chapter 10), and forsaken by friends and family and countrymen are other forms of persecution.

Now, we see that many of the apostles had some extreme forms of persecution. As we come to verse 18, the simple thing that Jesus is teaching His disciples here is that there is a promise that they would be hated by the world and that they would be persecuted, and this is one of the reasons why the Lord is spending so much time teaching them in the upper room. These teachings are very important, especially for the circumstance that is arising. So there's a cost in serving the Lord. There's a cost of discipleship. Christ was righteous, and He was persecuted and hated, so in this upper room the night before His crucifixion, He's preparing His disciples for persecution and the hatred that they would receive.

Coming back to verse 18, Jesus says, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated you*." So clearly the world is going to hate the disciples of Christ. Many times we want to try to be friends with the world or get the approval of the world. You ask, "What is the world?" Well, in our Galatians series just a couple of weeks ago we spent a little bit of time on that, and I'll just give you the verses instead of turning to all of them. John chapter 14, verse 30, tells us that Satan is the prince of this world, and then 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 4 says he's the god of this world. Satan blinds the minds of them which believe not.

So the world here represents that system that is in rebellion against God and His church and is headed up by Satan, the prince of this world. First John chapter 2, verse 15, says, "Love not the world, neither the things *that are in the world*"; in other words, you can't love the Father and love the world. James 4 and verse 4 clearly says that we can't be a friend of God and at the same time be a friend of the world. And there are three areas of temptation from the world; those are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,

and the pride of life. James 1:27 says that we're to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and Romans 12 and verse 2 says we're not to be conformed to the world. So we see in verse 18, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated you*," and verse 19, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

What I'm giving you tonight is just simply realities, and they're realities for all of church history. We find that Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the entire world. I preached a message ten years ago in 2009 titled "Persecution" where I went through several facts and statistics, and I gave you the top ten nations that are on the top of the list for persecution beginning with North Korea, Iraq, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Iran, China, Vietnam, Pakistan. That's nine. So we find that even to this day, there is persecution in the world. In John chapter 16, beginning in verse 1, Jesus says, "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended," that is, you would not stumble; <sup>2</sup>"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. <sup>3</sup>And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. <sup>4</sup>But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you."

First John chapter 3, verse 1, speaks of the fact that we are the sons of God, and it says, "therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." We're followers of Christ. The world hated Christ; they persecuted Christ, and He said the world will hate us and they will persecute us. First John chapter 3, verse 13, says, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you," and verse 12 gives an illustration: "Not as Cain, *who* was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Now, think about that. Why was Christ hated? Because He was from Heaven; He was righteous; He came to not only die for sins, but He came to reveal sin and reveal righteousness. They hated Him, and we find in John 15 that they hated Him without a cause. Why did Cain murder his brother? Because Cain's works were evil and Abel's works were righteous. So there's that divide between the two.

So we find that there's a cost in discipleship, and I think that sometimes we ought to let people know that as we're witnessing. I've actually done that a number of times. I show people the grace of God, that salvation is by grace; it's through faith; it's not of works. But I'll also sometimes tell people, "Now, let me show you a few other things in

here if you accept Christ." I've actually done that. I don't want them to be shocked when they become a Christian and find out, "Oh, this is what God wants us to do?"

In John chapter 17, verses 14 through 16, Jesus says, "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup>I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Then in verse 25 we see this mentioned again. Jesus says, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." As I said, Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world. And it's not that we look for persecution; it's just a fact that it will come, and it comes because of our identification with Jesus Christ, and that's very clear as we read these verses and probably a few hundred other verses in the Scriptures.

Now, let me give you an example of this in the Old Testament. In Daniel 3, verses 16 through 18, we find the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and they're told to bow before an idol, and they gave some amazing statements. Verse 16 says, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter." They're saying, "We don't have to pray about this; we don't have to think about it. Our minds are made up. We will not compromise." Then in verses 17 and 18 it says, "If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king. <sup>18</sup>But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." And as we drop down to verses 28, 29, and 30, we find that they yielded their bodies — not just their minds and souls, but they yielded their bodies. Verse 28 says, "*Then* Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed *be* the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God."

So we find that when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are confronted with a compromise, they basically say, "We don't have to think about it; we don't have to discuss it; we don't have to pray about it. We know what we're to do." And then the king testified that they trusted in their God and they yielded their bodies. And here's the result of all of that: Verse 29, "Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall

be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort." So we have the testimony of the king. And not only that, verse 30 says, "Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon." You heard me say a few weeks ago that the victory was going into the fire, not necessarily coming out. They were willing to go into the fire knowing that there was a possibility that they would not be delivered, but they were going to trust their God — and they were delivered and they yielded their bodies, and they were promoted in the kingdom. In other words, God continued to use them in a very mighty way. You can never lose by being faithful to God and never compromising His truths.

In John 15:19, Jesus said to His disciples, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Now, the disciples were not of the world. They were chosen out of the world, and yet they were left in the world to minister to those who were around them. So without any doubt, Jesus is telling His disciples that the world will hate them because of Him, and the same is still true today.

I'll not read all of these, but I kept some examples from ten years ago when I preached on this subject of persecution, and I'll give you just a few of these. "*What it Cost the Apostles*" is something I clipped out a number of years ago, and we also did a series not too long ago on the twelve apostles, and we tried to look into what actually happened to them. We have some Scripture but we also have tradition, as well, that speaks of what happened to the apostles. I'll just read this to you:

*"You've not resisted unto blood striving against sin (Hebrews 12:4). Easygoing Christians today who stand for and appreciate the beneficial influences of the church but are bored to death in a prayer meeting and find it perfect martyrdom to sit through a preaching service will do well to read the following record and see how times have changed."*

I'm giving you this writer's quote — and, again, some of these things are based upon tradition:

- **Matthew** was supposed to have been slain with a sword;
- **Luke** was supposedly hanged upon an olive tree in Greece;
- **Mark** was dragged through the streets of Alexandria, Egypt, until he expired;
- **John** was put into a pot of boiling oil at Rome but escaped death, and he afterward died a natural death at Ephesus;

- **Peter** was crucified in Rome head downward;
- **James the Great** was beheaded at Jerusalem;
- **James the Less** was thrown from a pinnacle or wing of the temple and then beaten to death with a fuller's club;
- **Philip** was hanged up against a pillar in Hierapolis;
- **Bartholomew** was flayed alive at the command of a barbarous king;
- **Andrew** was bound to a cross from which he preached to the people until he expired;
- **Thomas** was run through the body with a lance in India;
- **Jude** was shot to death with arrows;
- **Simon the Zealot** was crucified in Persia;
- **Matthias** was first stoned and then beheaded;
- **Barnabas** was stoned to death by the Jews;
- **Paul** was beheaded at Rome by the tyrant Nero.

Now, again, a lot of that is based upon tradition and word of mouth and things of that nature, and yet when we read through the New Testament, we do know that the Lord told His disciples that some of them would be put in prison, some would be put to death, and according to Acts chapter 12, we know that James, one of the twelve disciples, was killed. Stephen was not one of the twelve, but he was martyred in Acts chapter 7, and we do know that persecutions took place.

I've got a lot of stories of individuals in North Korea, Somalia, Nigeria, Vietnam. In 2003, 350 churches closed and leaders were jailed or they came up missing. In one providence, 50 pastors were arrested and disappeared. Laos, Sudan — again, several, several testimonies here. In the book of Revelation we read about the church of Smyrna, and later Polycarp pastored at Smyrna, and he was burned by fire for his faith in Christ. He was accused of being an atheist because he refused to acknowledge that the emperor of Rome was a god. Polycarp knew the apostle John, the last witness of the disciples. He was supposed to have known John and wrote about him. He was 86 when he died at Smyrna, and here's what he said right before his death: *"The fire you threaten burns for a time and then is extinguished, but there is a fire you know nothing of, the fire of eternal judgment, the fire reserved for the ungodly."*

Again, I went through some church history when I preached on this subject back in 2009, and I mentioned to you John Bunyan, William Tyndale, Tertullian. Tertullian is the

one, I believe, who said, "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.*" In other words, the church took root through the blood that was shed. William Tyndale was burned at the stake so that we could have a Bible. He's supposed to have said in prison, "*Lord, open the king of England's eyes,*" and he was then strangled and burned to ashes. So there have been many who have been persecuted over the years for Christ's sake, not just in the first century. But we've got a record in the book of Acts that persecution did take place in the first century.

In John 15, verse 20, Jesus said, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord." You'll find that statement again in chapter 13, verse 16, where Jesus washes the disciples' feet. You'll also find this statement in other places. In other words, Jesus is saying they will do the same thing to the servants as they did to the master. He's saying expect the same thing. And Jesus also says in the latter part of verse 20, "if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also," and we find this to be true as we read through the Acts of the Apostles.

Now, notice in verse 21 of John 15. Jesus said, "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake..." Do not forget that, "for my name's sake." The core controversy is the name of Jesus Christ, because His name represents His character; it represents who He is and what He accomplished — the Son of Almighty God as He went to the cross. As we go through the Scriptures, "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). We pray to the Father in Jesus' name, and those who are saved call upon His name to be saved. We see the importance of this name.

So Jesus said in verse 21, "But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake" — and, again, that represents who Jesus is and what He accomplished — "because they know not him that sent me." Verse 23 says, "He that hateth me hateth my Father also," and verse 25, "But *this cometh to pass*, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" — and they'll hate us the same way. If you haven't seen that in your Christian life, maybe you need to pray about that. I see the opposition. I feel the opposition. I'm not talking about as the apostles or as those in North Korea and Indonesia and places of that nature, but yet I see the resistance of people not wanting the Word of God. As we hand out tracts even in the Deep South, I can see the resistance in the eyes of many people. Even though most of them will take a tract,

many of them do not want it. We see the animosity because they know not God. That is the foundation of all religious persecution.

I preached on a subject in a mission last Friday night, and I said, "If the Lord mentions this subject hundreds of times, then I think we need to go to it often and consider this." You've heard me say this a lot, but when something is repeated often in the Bible, we need to repeat it often, as well, and when we come to this subject of opposition to the Gospel and persecution and hatred by the world, you cannot read a book in the New Testament without reading about this subject. For example, five chapters in 1 Peter deal with the subject of the church and persecution, and it's mentioned many times in the book of Revelation.

Now, I have about 35 verses dealing with persecution, and I want to give you at least some of those. In Matthew chapter 5 is the Sermon on the Mount, The Beatitudes, beginning in verse 1 down through about verse 12, and notice with me in verses 10, 11, and 12: "Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" — again, for Christ's sake, for the Kingdom's sake — "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." We wouldn't need anything more than just these three verses, but we have several hundred verses dealing with this subject.

In Matthew chapter 10 is where Jesus sends His disciples first to Jerusalem and the Judaea area only, and notice what He said beginning in verses 16: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. <sup>17</sup>But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils..." Now, we'll actually see this happen in the book of Acts as we get into the Acts of the Apostles. And He said, "...and they will scourge you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup>And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles." And He continues to speak on down through verse 23, but in verse 22 He said, "And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake..." It's not that they wanted to be hated or we want to be hated, but when we follow the Lord, there is a difference between the saints of God and the world — and when I say "the world," I'm not talking about the bees and the birds and the mountains and the sky and the stars. We're talking about that system that is in rebellion against God led by Satan and his demonic force.



I'm going to begin reading now in Luke chapter 21 beginning with verse 12. The first 11 verses in that chapter, especially verses 5 through 11, are a prophecy centered around the destruction of the temple in AD 70, but beginning in verse 12, Jesus said, "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake." What comes to mind when you read this? The book of Acts in chapter 4, chapter 5, chapter 12, and all through chapter 16. And the Lord says in verses 14 through 16 of Luke 21, "Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: <sup>15</sup>For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. <sup>16</sup>And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and *some* of you shall they cause to be put to death." Have you been betrayed by relatives and kinfolk and people like that? I probably should have shown you some of the hateful emails I've received from kinfolks, especially when we've been back home maybe doing a funeral or witnessing to those folks, but I threw them all away. We have a lot of Christian kinfolk too, but we have a lot of relatives who hate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and they take their hatred out on us.

Notice how this persecution is played out in the book of Acts. We're going to see that what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount and what He said in the upper room is literally coming to pass in the book of Acts. I made a point to highlight, underline, or make a list of certain Bible verses on persecution so that I don't lose sight when I experience opposition or when I see people reject the truth and they want to hurt you with words — and if they could get by with other things, they would probably do that as well. I've seen a lot of that over the years, especially trying to preach. But Romans 8, verse 36, tells us that we're counted as sheep for the slaughter. Meditate on that for a while. Philippians 1:29 and also chapter 3 and verse 10 of that same book tell us that we're not only to believe on the Lord, but we're also to suffer for Him. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, verses 4 through 10, we find that the church there in Thessalonica received the Word of God in much affliction, and in chapter 2, verse 14, and also in chapter 3, verses 3 and 4, we read that the church was persecuted. So persecution and afflictions were not isolated occurrences.

Now, in four chapters in the book of Hebrews we find the persecution of the saints in the first century. In Hebrews 11, verses 35 through the end of the chapter, the apostle is going back to the Old Testament and drawing a picture for the New Testament saints who are going through persecution, and he's encouraging them. In Hebrews chapter 12,

verse 1, he calls those in the Old Testament who obeyed God and suffered for their faith “a great cloud of witnesses,” and he says in Hebrews 12:4, “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” And then in chapter 10, verses 33 through 39, they had the spoiling of their goods. Think about that — jobs, homes, possessions, things of that nature taken away from them. And then chapter 13, verse 3, speaks of praying for those who are in prison. So we find clearly that in the first century, the church was going through much persecution. In fact, the first 300 years the church was going through persecution. Sometimes it was isolated in certain cities, and sometimes it was throughout the entire kingdom and especially when Nero was on the throne. Christians began to be persecuted by apostate Judaism immediately — I mean, immediately — and then around 54 AD or so, we find that the Christians began to be persecuted by the Roman Empire under Nero.

So there was tremendous persecution. And throughout church history — the Dark Ages, the Inquisition and things of that nature — there have been many times where thousands upon thousands were killed. And even today in many countries around the world Christians are suppressed. They can't have the good jobs, and others are in prisons. There are probably at least a few hundred thousand in North Korea and other places like that that are in prison for their faith. So this is why when I ask you to pray, we pray for missionaries and we also pray for the persecuted church.

Now, in 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 12 through 14, Peter tells us not to think it strange when suffering comes our way; in other words, he's saying don't think this is something out of the will of God. And, again, in all five chapters you'll find the suffering of the saints. In James chapter 1, verses 2 through 4 and verse 12, you find the suffering of the saints. Now, 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” And even the apostle Paul said in the latter part of Acts 14:22, “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” See, I'm not just picking out verses. You can't read in any book in the New Testament without reading about the suffering of the saints.

Now, I wrote this down last year in my Bible because I wanted to have it close by. You know how many times I turn to the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is one of my favorite books. I find great comfort from the book of Revelation even though it was written in the first century to the seven churches of Asia because they were going through tremendous persecution under Nero. But here's what I wrote down. I started with Revelation 1:9. The apostle John said, “I John, who also am your brother, and

companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." And here are some verses in the book of Revelation that mention the suffering of the saints, and I'll just call these out quickly: In chapter 2, verses 8 through 11, the Smyrna church; and then in verse 13, Antipas with the church at Pergamos. Antipas was a martyr; chapter 3, verse 10; chapter 6, verses 9 through 11; chapter 7, verse 14, and in verse 9 there is a great multitude that comes out of great tribulation; chapter 12, verses 10 through 17; chapter 13, verse 7; chapter 15, verses 2 and 3; chapter 17, verses 5 and 6 speak of the martyrs; chapter 18, verse 24; chapter 21, verses 3 through 5; and chapter 22, verses 3 and 4. In those last two chapters you don't see the word "persecute" or "suffer" but you see that there shall be no more tears and sorrow and pain and so forth.

So John gives us the Gospel of John and writes about the upper room. In 1 John chapter 3 he tells us again about this persecution and uses the example of Cain and Abel, the unrighteous and the righteous, and he tells us that the reason Christians are hated is because of our righteousness in Christ. And then John gives us the book of Revelation, and while on the Isle of Patmos, he says to the seven churches of Asia that he is their companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. So the book of Revelation was written to bring comfort to the seven churches, and it applies to you and me today as well. A lot of people are fearful and disturbed about the book of Revelation, but I've learned over the years that it is a great comfort. If I want comfort, there's usually a couple of places I go: the book of Psalms and also the book of Revelation, because in the book of Revelation, we have the risen Savior in His priestly robe, and He's standing in the midst of His church.

All right. I'll read in Acts chapter 4 and chapter 5, but first I'll give you a few verses in the book of Acts where we see this persecution being played out:

- **Chapter 7, verses 51 through 60**, Stephen is stoned;
- **Chapter 8, verses 1 through 5**, the church is scattered after Stephen is stoned. They're scattered because of persecution, and the leader of that persecution, Saul of Tarsus, gets saved in the first seven or eight verses of Acts chapter 9;
- **Chapter 12, verses 1 through 4**, James is put to death;
- **Chapter 16, verses 19 through 31**, Paul and Silas are put in prison for the Word of God;

- **Chapter 28, verses 16 through 20**, as the book of Acts closes, Paul is at Rome chained to a soldier, and he's ministering to those even in that condition.

You see, it's not that we want to be morbid, but you can't read very many chapters without running across this subject. So a time or two a year I'm going to read these for us so that we do not forget them.

Reading in verse 12 of Acts chapter 4, it says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." I'm skipping a lot of verses, but I read that for the sake of the name. Jesus said they'll persecute you for My name's sake. Verse 18 says, "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." See, this is exactly what Jesus said was going to happen in the upper room and the Sermon on the Mount. And verses 19 through 21 say, "But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. <sup>20</sup>For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. <sup>21</sup>So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all *men* glorified God for that which was done." You'll see the threatening of these disciples in chapter 4, verses 29 through 31.

Come down with me, please, to chapter 5 beginning in verse 28, "Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. <sup>29</sup>Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. <sup>31</sup>Him hath God exalted with his right hand *to be* a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>And we are his witnesses of these things; and *so is* also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Now, come to verses 40 through 42, and we'll close. Do you see the emphasis, though? Peter and the other apostles are witnessing. They're preaching in the name of Jesus, and the council is trying to stop them. Now, they had a discussion about this, and in verses 40 through 42, we have these statements: "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup>And they departed from the presence of the council..." That word "council" is used in Matthew chapter 10 and Luke also. <sup>41</sup>"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy

to suffer shame for his name. <sup>42</sup>And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”

So I'll leave with you tonight that not only did Jesus prepare His disciples to have fullness of joy and friendship with Christ, He not only prepared them to bear fruit and be able to pray and receive answers, but He also prepared them for the persecution that was coming. As the people hated Christ and persecuted Christ, they also hated the disciples and persecuted the disciples, and down through church history, there have been millions who have suffered in the same way. Now, again, there are different forms of suffering. Some may be martyred; some may be put in prison; some may be hated; some may be slandered; some may not be able to have the good jobs in a particular city or country that they live in or they may not be able to function as others would. There are many, many, many forms of persecution.

Would you stand with me, please.

*Heavenly Father, we do ask tonight for Thy blessings to be upon the remainder of the service. Lord, help us to not lose sight of these truths and these principles that You've given to us in Thy holy Word. Lord, help us to realize that we're not friends with this world and this world hates the Gospel message. And, Father, we pray tonight in Christ's name, Lord, that Your presence will be among us as we come to sing and kneel together to pray again, for it's in Jesus Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

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