

Warning the Twelve

Matthew 10:16

### **THE PERSECUTION PRINCIPLE**

*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.*

*It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.*

*If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul,*

*how much more will they malign those of his household.*

*Matthew 10:24-25*

We begin with the end of the passage, with the principle of persecution.

Why are Christians persecuted in this world? Many unbelievers will say that it is because of the way we speak or behave. Some Christians say the same thing: Christians are persecuted because they do things that irritate or offend non-Christians. Some Christians have even said that if the church was *really* like Jesus, the world would love them!

Jesus had the opposite view.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away,” He said in the upper room. Why would His apostles – why would WE – fall away? “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me. But, I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.” (John 16:1-4)

The more we are like Jesus, the more the world will despise us.

Why? Because they despise *Him*. As Jesus says in these verses, we can expect to be treated like He was treated. Those who call Him evil will accuse us of evil as well. By the way, there are at least two ways Jesus can be blasphemed. Someone can point their finger at Him and say, “He is demonic and wicked.” Or, as so often happens today, Jesus is ‘redefined’ to suit the beliefs of the world. That modern Jesus isn’t against abortion, homosexuality, divorce, or anything thing the world wants to do. They have redefined Him in their own image. That too is blasphemous, and maybe even more blasphemous than a direct attack on Him.

I know we all know this, I just want to get it into the record: Jesus Christ is the best man who ever lived.

He is holy and righteous, full of goodness and mercy. He delivers men and women and children from demons and disease and death by the Word of His power, by His own divine nature. Jesus Christ is unlike anyone the world has ever known. And they hate Him.

Jesus gave His ambassadors, the Twelve, full disclosure about their future.

He did not just describe what would happen on this short-term trip, but for the remainder of their lives. Once the Spirit of God came at Pentecost, and their ministry began in full, they would be the focus of Satan’s hatred and the world’s contempt. They would face opposition and persecution throughout their lives. The world that screamed for Jesus’ crucifixion would not hesitate to put them to death.

Jesus knew this, and sent them anyway. He began by making their relationship to the world very clear.

CHAPTER TWO  
PREY & PREDATORS

*Behold, I am sending you out  
as sheep in the midst of wolves . . .*

*Matthew 10:16*

Jesus knew the Twelve, just as He knows all of His people.

He knows that we are His lambs, His sheep, His flock. We are the people of His pasture, precious to Him, purchased by His blood. He knows us by name, and always has. That's why our names are recorded in His book of life (Revelation 13:8, 17:8).

Jesus also knows the nature of the world.

It is wolfish, predatory, insatiable. He knew the world would see His sheep as prey, easy to destroy, nothing to fear. The New Testament writers were clear about this.

“After my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock,” Paul said to the elders of the Ephesian church. In fact, “even from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30).

The church would never be destroyed, but it would suffer at the hands of wicked, wolfish people.

The opposition of the world keeps the work of the Gospel from being easy, effortless, or safe.

What the saints suffer varies from place to place and from era to era. But the flock of God has always been the prey of the wolves of the world. Opposition might be subtle and coercive, or harsh and violent. It remains opposition. When subtle opposition stops working, it will become violent.

Do you see that Jesus gave His apostles, and us, full disclosure?

He made no attempt to hide the fact that the world that hated Him would hate us as well. As I said at the beginning, there are Christians who think that if we do it right, the world will love us. But they didn't get that idea from the Word of God.

## SUFFERING PROPHETS

*Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes,  
some of whom you will kill and crucify,  
and some you will flog in your synagogues  
and persecute from town to town . . .*

*Matthew 23:34*

The people of God have always suffered at the hands of the wicked.

Cain murdered his brother, Abel.

Saul relentlessly pursued David.

Haman sought the destruction of Mordecai.

Jezebel tried to kill Elijah.

The priests, prophets, and people laid hold of Jeremiah.

The leaders of Israel plotted to put Jesus to death.

The apostles of Jesus Christ would die at the hands of wicked Jews and Gentiles.

But why? God can clearly protect His people from harm, as He does from time to time. He delivered Abraham and Joseph, Mordecai and David, Daniel and Peter and Paul.

Why doesn't our God protect us ALL the time? Why do God's people suffer?

The answer Job's friends gave is that we must have done something wrong, or God wants to teach us a lesson.

To be sure, the Lord brings trials and difficulties into our lives to correct us, to strengthen us, to discipline us, and to mature us in Christ.

But the Bible is clear as to why God's people suffer at the hands of the wicked.

The Gospel, and the cross of Christ, and Jesus Himself, are dividing lines that separate vessels of wrath fit for destruction on the one side, and vessels of mercy prepared for glory on the other.

*Vessels of wrath hate the Gospel*, because it announces the judgment of God on them. *But vessels of mercy love the Gospel*, because it is the power of God for their salvation.

*Vessels of wrath hate the cross of Jesus Christ*. Those who are religious are offended that they cannot save themselves. Those who are irreligious mock the idea that anyone needs saving. *But vessels of mercy love the cross of Christ*, because there Jesus defeated sin and death, provided for their forgiveness, satisfied the wrath of God, and put an end to their sin nature.

*Vessels of wrath hate the resurrection of Jesus*. They understand that if Jesus really did rise from the dead, not just in the memories of His disciples, but physically, then He has the right to both worship and obedience. *Vessels of mercy love the resurrection of Jesus* for exactly the same reason vessels of wrath hate it: it confirms the Saviorship and Lordship of our Mediator, High Priest, and Precious Friend. "God has highly exalted Jesus and given Him the name that is above every name," our brother Paul wrote, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11).

*And, vessels of wrath hate Jesus Himself*. Sometimes their hatred is open and direct, and they accuse Him of being evil. Much of the time their hatred is subtle, and is seen in their attempts to redefine who Jesus was, what He said, and what He did. *Vessels of mercy love the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bible reveals Him*, because while we were still dead in our sins, He died in our place. "This is love," our brother John wrote,

“not that we loved God but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (First John 4:10).

So in the end, the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected creates a vast canyon between vessels of wrath fit for destruction and vessels of mercy prepared for glory.

The same Gospel is taken in two ways.

For those who are being saved, the Gospel is the fragrance of salvation. For those who are perishing in their sins, the Gospel is the aroma of death. (Second Corinthians 2:16). The Day of Judgment is the day of *final* judgment. Nothing in the Bible says that God has to wait until the Day of Judgment to begin judgment, and He doesn't wait.

Just as those who believe in Jesus and are saved by the Gospel find themselves growing in sanctification, those who reject Christ and are condemned by the Gospel find themselves increasing in wickedness. The difference between the two brings about increasing conflict, even among family members.

We suffer for the same reason the apostles suffered: Jesus Christ is hated.

If they hate Jesus, they will hate us. Is it that simple? Yes, it is. That's what the Lord Jesus tells us. Our Father can deliver us from the hatred of the world, and once in a while He does. Most of the time He allows the wicked to vent their hatred of Him in our direction.

In the end, they can't actually harm us.

Oh, they can put us to death. Isn't that harm? Not for a Christian. Not for someone who believes in Jesus Christ, who has defeated death, and has promised to raise us from the dead. Not for someone who believes that the instant we close our eyes in death here, we open our eyes in eternal, glorious, abundant life in the presence of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, they do harm themselves every

## BRINGING IT HOME

*I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away ...*

*I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes*

*you may remember that I told them to you.*

*John 16:1, 4*

Persecution will happen. It's not always violent. It's not always even obvious. It might be simply in the way people dismiss us for truly worshipping Jesus Christ. If you bow your knee to Him, not just in principle, but in surrender of yourself, and you confess Jesus Christ to be Lord of your life and Savior of your soul, then unbelievers will hold you in contempt. They will reject your tight grasp on the cross of Christ. They will dismiss you as a Jesus freak or one of those "born again's". They will pity you for being so simple-minded. They will accuse you of ignoring all the contradictions in the Bible (usually without being able to identify what they think is a contradiction).

Jesus made full disclosure to His disciples, not to discourage them from serving Him, but to strengthen their faith. In the midst of their suffering they could say, "The Lord told us this would happen." Our brother Peter writes to us, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. Instead," he says, "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." (First Peter 4:12-13).

We proclaim the saving message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If the world shouts us down, who suffers? Not us; we've already believed. Who suffers if the Gospel is drowned out by the wicked? The wicked!

It's really an odd thing. Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life, and we have believed in Him and have come to know that He is the Holy One of God. Those words are meant for sinners, those who are in rebellion against Him. He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. The Gospel is His

call through us. We are His ambassadors; God appeals to them through us. In His name we implore sinners on behalf of Christ, “Be reconciled to God!”

They will listen, or they will plug their ears. They will believe, or they will reject. They will be saved by the Gospel, or they will be condemned by the Gospel. They will find themselves children of God through Jesus, or they will remain children of wrath.

Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we don't lose heart, but rather continue to preach Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected, as the sole hope of the world!