

Sermon Notes & References

The Persecuted Church
John 15:18-6:4

February 12, 2017

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^A Genesis 1:27
^B Revelation 12:4, 13, 17; Numbers 25:13; Acts 26:9
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^D Luke 5:8; Psalm 35:19, 69:4
^E Acts 5:41
^F 1 Peter 4:12-14
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A. Today's Topic of Persecution

1. Its Reality Today

a. Voice of Martyrs Prayer Map –{2}–

- (A) each of those circles indicate a location where there is significant persecution of the believers that form the local Christian church
- (B) clicking on one will give details for that location
- (C) some less severe persecution, most of them critical persecution
- (D) there may be some omissions of places receiving less publicity

b. Canada for example

- (A) John Baptist, who was our co-pastor for a brief period in the early 1990's, believed that persecution would soon come to this land
- (B) I agree with him, for we can both remember then Ernie Keefe and Murray Heron were imprisoned for preaching the gospel in the streets of Val d'Or & Rouyn-Noranda in northern Quebec
- (C) more recently the government of one western province sought to shut down a home schooling association on a technicality but were obliged to cease from their efforts
- (D) we know what is going on in our own province respecting the sex education of our children
- (E) Tanya Granic Allen the President of Parents As First Educators (or PAFE) commented recently respecting the federal bill C-16 which is in the next stage of going through the legislature:

- (1) In a nutshell, if passed, Canada will become hostile to anyone who disagrees with or doesn't subscribe to "gender theory."
- (2) C-16 amends the Canadian Human Rights Act to add "gender identity" & "gender expression" to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination, amends the Criminal Code to add "gender identity" & "gender expression" to the list of protections in the Code.
- (3) Individuals who disagree with or don't subscribe to gender theory, including failing to address individuals by transgender pronouns (zhe, zer, zim) could face criminal charges.
- (4) This is a direct attack on our belief as Christians that "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27)

2. The Lesson of History

- a. but such attacks are not new – they date back to Jesus' time – and they have continued as He prophesied

- throughout history
- b. frequently organised religion has been the source of such persecution against those seeking to worship God in Spirit and in truth
 - c. Revelation 12 portrays how if Satan is thwarted in his persecution one way that he then turns to another
 - (A) v 4: "... the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child."
 - (B) v 13: "... the dragon ... persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child."
 - (C) v 17: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."
 - d. The book of Acts records some of the persecution of believers by the Jewish authorities, in the name of religion
 - (A) the Midrash commentary on Numbers 25:13: "whoever sheds the blood of the godless is as one who offers a sacrifice"
 - (B) Christians were considered godless, as denying the one, true God, because they believed that Jesus, a man, was indeed God
 - (C) and Paul confesses that before his conversion, "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." (Acts 26:9)
 - e. the state church of the middle & later ages, which was really a political rather than a Christian organisation ruthlessly stamped out any group of true believers as being a threat to their power, as for example,
 - (A) the Spanish Inquisition established in 1472
 - (B) the Huguenot massacre, St-Bartholomew's Day, 1572
 - f. the violence in recent years against Christians, such as, Islamist attacks in August, 2002 on Christian Mission School in Murree and on Presbyterian Christian Hospital in Taxila (within 50 km of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad) – Michael Nazir-Ali, the Pakistani-born Bishop of Rochester, condemned the latest attack, saying Christian hospitals in Pakistan pioneered medical care in the country and provided for "the poorest of the poor". – one reason for the return of our own missionaries Mike & Janet from there.
 - g. but let us not hate these peoples & nations: their acts merely evidence the international, world persecution of Christ in the last 2000 years
 - h. persecution that led Isaac Watts to write as in our closing hymn,
 - "Is this vile world a friend to grace,
to help me on to God?" –{3}.
 - (A) to which the answer expected is a resounding "NO!"
 - (B) for that term, "world", in this context in John means, "the godless world; the world as organized in

opposition to God.”

B. Reason for Persecution 15:18-25

1. Since We Belong to Jesus (15:18-21)

- a. 18 “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”
- b. The exclusivity of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ is the one and only way to come to the Father God is gall in the crow of unbelievers
 - (A) add to this the claim that Christians have been chosen by God – that is what election means – is a burr in their saddle
 - (B) in verses 18 and 19 the word “world” is repeated five times
 - (C) and the key point which gives rise to this persecution
 - (1) is that those who were at one time part of the world
 - (2) “... dead in your trespasses and sins,” (Ephesians 2:1)
 - (3) are now “... made alive together with Christ ...” (Ephesians 2:5)
 - (4) “... delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,” (Colossians 1:13)
 - (5) Jesus “out-chose” believers from the anti-god world
 - (6) and Satan does not give up his citizens without a fight
- c. The person who is in Christ is in persecution territory
 - (A) as the world rejected his master, so it will reject the servant
 - (B) the Christian is no longer part of the world, the world that lies under the power of the evil one, and he cannot expect its friendship
 - (C) indeed, James 4:4 tells us that the “friend of the world is the enemy of God” – there are two rival camps, two armies in battle, and you cannot be at peace with both at the same time
- d. in a sense there is nothing personal – apart from the matter of our faith – on any other subject they may be friendly workmates, neighbours
 - (A) but on the matter of Jesus of Nazareth, Saviour
 - (B) on the question of who is Jesus Christ

- (C) on the opinion of what constitutes right & wrong; of what is sin
- (D) they are poles apart from the disciple of Jesus
- (E) these people may be
 - (1) good living in the eyes of men
 - (2) religious, expressing belief in God
 - (3) but they have never been confronted by the holiness & majesty of the God who revealed Himself in Jesus
 - (4) so they respond with antagonism when meeting the believer who shows them Jesus, ...

2. Since Jesus Reveals Sin (15:22-25)

- a. 22 "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. 25 But they have done this in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their Law, 'they hated me without a cause.'"
 - b. Jesus did so throughout His ministry
 - (A) to His own disciples so that at one time, "... when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8)
 - (B) while when the religious ruler were told of their sin & hypocrisy they responded by planning to kill him
 - c. yet this was prophesied in the law that these rulers claimed to follow
 - (A) prophetic words "they hated me without cause" are found in psalms
 - (B) Psalm 35 concerns the enemies who forgot David's past favours to them: so this Jewish people forgot all of His healing of their diseases when they shrieked at Pilate, "Crucify Him!"
 - (C) the Messianic Psalm 69 concerning enemies who cannot bear to be witnesses of the burning zeal which David manifests for the cause of Yahweh; when Jesus spoke out zealously against all that He saw these religious rulers doing that was an insult to God, earned their undying hatred
 - d. theologians have, on the basis of the Word of God, distinguished between two classes of sin
 - (A) there is that falling short of what God would have us to do, this being for example the unintended or unconscious sin for which the OT sacrifices were a remedy for cleansing and forgiveness
 - (B) and in contrast, there was that deliberate disobeying of God's will when it had been revealed, for which no such remedy existed
 - (C) before Jesus came and by His word and His works – and those works involved not only the miracles He did but indeed His whole manner of life – revealed the will of His Father, the sin of these religious rulers fell

into the first classification

- (D) but once it was revealed to them by Jesus the Son of God through His teaching what they should do, then they deliberately turned their back upon it their sin fell into that second classification – for God in Jesus had revealed to them their sin
- (E) that is why the Bible warns that when the Holy Spirit brings to us a conviction of our sin how dangerous it is to ignore that message

C. Response to Persecution 15:26-16:4

1. Witness by the Holy Spirit (15:26-27)

- a. 26 “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, 27 and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”
- b. Lord willing, next Sunday we shall return to these verses again as we teach upon the ministry of God’s Holy Spirit from them, as well as from other verses in the Lord’s discourse in that evening
- c. but let us just note that the response to persecution is to give witness to the Jesus for whom and along with whom we are being persecuted
- d. that was the case with the disciples throughout the book of Acts, so that at one point after being flogged for doing so, “... they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.” (Acts 5:41)
- e. which example has been emulated throughout church history
 - (A) as by Archbishop Cramner whose speech of repentance at his martyrdom by burning at the stake should be read by Christians
 - (B) or of Bishop Latimer’s words to Bishop Ridley as they were martyred the same way: “Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out.”

2. Understand & Be Ready (16:1-4)

- a. 1 “These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling. 2 They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or Me. 4 But these things I have spoken to you, that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

- b. Jesus has left instructing His disciples in these things until this final hour
 - (A) previous to the He has been present with them
 - (B) He has been their good shepherd to protect them from evil
 - (C) up until now the forces of evil of this world and the spiritual world have been focussed against Jesus
 - (1) from when Herod sought to kill Him as the new-born King
 - (2) to these last days when the religious rulers coolly plotted it
- c. but now, they must be made aware of it
 - (A) to be prepared for it
 - (B) so that when it comes, it does not take them unawares
 - (C) for their opponents, as we said previously, thought they were doing the work of God, whereas it was really the work of the devil
 - (D) in reality they had never known God or they had listened to Him
- d. "12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." (1 Peter 4:12-14)
- e. Jesus knows all about it; and Jesus can carry us through.

D. Conclusion

1. What Do We Expect?
 - a. to be "carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease"?
 - b. to spend our lives in serene contemplation of our own Christianity
 - c. if so, then Bishop Philip Loyd has a word we should consider: "How good it would be for us sometimes, when we are worrying about our feelings and about our 'prayer-life,' if an angel were to appear to us and say, 'Don't waste time worrying about these things. What you need to do is get on with the business of being persecuted! Not that we are to go out of our way to invite persecution; but we should examine our lives more seriously to see if they are free from compromise with the world.'" ^{-{4}}.
2. With this come Jesus' words of encouragement to all His disciples
 - a. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)
 - b. let us prayerfully consider these things as we sing in closing that hymn of Isaac Watts, which questions, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?"

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NLT	New Living Translation © 1996 Tyndale Charitable Trust
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 National Council of Churches of Christ
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

Bruce	-	<i>The Gospel & Epistles of John</i> , by F. F. Bruce, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; 1983
BM	-	<i>Biblical Museum</i> , Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
Gill	-	<i>Exposition of the Old Testament, Exposition of the New Testament</i> , by John Gill, D.D.
NICNT	-	<i>The New International Commentary on the New Testament</i> <i>The Gospel according to John</i> , by Leon Morris
NTC	-	<i>New Testament Commentary</i> , by William Hendriksen; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI; 1954
RWP	-	<i>Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament</i> , by Dr. A. T. Robertson

2. To be found at <http://www.persecution.com/public/prayermap.aspx>
3. From '*Am I a Soldier of the Cross?*', by Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
4. NICNT, quoted *in loc.*; originally from his book, '*The Life according to S. John*'