

To God Alone Be The Glory

Think about how people use the term “persecution.” Some have said, “Stop persecuting me; I want to live my life the way I choose; leave me alone.” They felt pressure to change a social behavior that they didn’t want to change. That’s not persecution, at least not the way the Bible uses the term. In the Bible persecution happens when those who hate the true God try to quiet the message God wants them to hear. Usually persecution has meant a violent loss: loss of life, loss of property, loss of job. Today persecution includes any pressure, be it ever so subtle, to change the Bible’s message or pressure to live less than holy lives. Ridicule can be a tool for the enemies of the Lord to pressure the Lord’s followers. It’s effective on anyone who feels an inner need to be liked or well thought of.

Since almost all of us care what others think about us, ridicule brings a heavy burden. Think about it. Jesus gave the church one thing to do—share the good news about forgiveness of sins through his life and death for us. Share it with each other here. Share it with people we meet out there. You’d think every Christian would be happy to share the gospel. We live in a country where we are allowed by law to say anything we want. But people aren’t as tolerant as they claim to be. What the apostle Paul said in today’s epistle is still true today: “*Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ...their god is their stomach*” (Philippians 3:18-19). In

other words, they want to do what they want to do, even if their loving Creator and Redeemer says “No.”

Now in your mind skip backward in time all the way to 600 years before Christ. Look at the Lord’s people during Jeremiah’s time. It’s the day of worship. God’s people have come to God’s house. They are praying. They even brought an offering. They don’t look like they are in any spiritual danger. But because the Holy Spirit recorded for us what is in their hearts, we are able to see that they are just going through the motions. Their lips are in church, but their hearts are elsewhere. If we follow the Lord’s people around during the week, we can see that they have let themselves sink into all kinds of sinful practices.

It’s kind of like watching a video of our own lives. There have been Sundays we were here, but we weren’t really here. And during the week, we were letting ourselves get away with something that we knew wasn’t right: maybe worry or ‘overindulging our appetites’ or quarreling or laziness or pride or bad words. Because God loves us, he sent someone into our lives to call our attention to the sin. And what did we do? We were so angry that we felt justified to react. We shot back a snotty answer. We said, “My relationship with God is my business,” as if church members are not connected to each other like a family. We pointed out the faults of the person who pointed out our error. Maybe we assaulted or

assassinated their character. In other words, we engaged in persecution. We've done it to someone God loves, and you know it. We didn't repent right away when called upon to do so. As a result we can see this sermon text from the point of view of Jeremiah's listeners.

Now let's look at this text from Jeremiah's point of view. The Lord sent Jeremiah to proclaim a very specific message: If you don't listen to me and follow my Word... If you don't listen to the words of my prophets, I'm going to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple (see 26:4-6). God told Jeremiah to proclaim this message in a high traffic area of the Temple. He was aiming for maximum impact.

My friends, God has seen to it that you also have heard his message. He loves you. Always has. That's why he sent Jesus to pay for all our sins. And now he wants us to follow his dos and don'ts, as laid out in Holy Scripture. Don't be anxious about the consequences. Trust the Lord instead. Children, honor and obey your parents. Husbands, be considerate of your wife and treat her with respect. Wives, line yourself up under your husband so as to catch all the blessings the Lord wants to give you through him. Don't use too much alcohol, food, or tobacco. Grow in your knowledge of the Lord by reading your Bible regularly. Bring a generous offering with you for worship—something proportionate to your income. Forgive one another from the heart. *If you don't listen to the Lord, he

will withhold his blessings from you.

Guess what. The people listened to Jeremiah. Oh, they listened carefully alright, not because they wanted to hear what their Savior-God had to say and then actually make a change in their lives, but because they wanted to make sure they had all the evidence they needed to convict Jeremiah. They didn't even want to change. They were like a cat crouching near a hole in the wall waiting to pounce on the mouse that ventures out for an excursion. ⁸*As soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, "You must die!"* ⁹*Why do you prophesy in the LORD's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?* They asked Jeremiah the question, but they didn't want to know the answer. They were insinuating that he had no right to preach the message he had preached. Unwilling to recognize their sin, the people could not fathom why the Lord would threaten to destroy his own Temple. Therefore Jeremiah must be lying, right? * Shiloh, by the way, was the town where God's house stood during the days of the judges. But the people in those days also refused to repent. One day they even grabbed the ark of the covenant and took it into battle against the Philistines, superstitiously hoping it would bring them good luck. But they lost the battle anyway, and they lost the ark of the covenant. And when Israel got the ark back, it did not return to

Shiloh. So Shiloh was deserted and disgraced. Jerusalem would become like that if the people refused to listen to Jeremiah.

All the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD—making sure he couldn't escape. ¹⁰When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the LORD and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD's house. It sure doesn't seem to take the king's officials long to assemble at the gate for a court hearing. Makes you wonder if they too were ready and waiting for Jeremiah to open his mouth. After all, Jeremiah had been in the ministry for 20 years, faithfully preaching the same message. Yet his congregation kept shrinking in size. Today church consultants would tell him to soften his message so he didn't drive away any more members.

¹¹Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!" It's ironic, don't you think, how the priests, who were supposed to be teaching the people God's truth, were in reality the first to condemn God's truth and God's man. Note well the charges against Jeremiah: not false doctrine, but treason.

Have you ever sat on a tack or something sharp? Youch! One of the first things

through your mind is, "Who left that there!?", right? There's a reason why they call it a "pricked conscience." The people were acting the way anyone with a pricked conscience reacts. People will do anything to silence the one who calls them to account. The unbelieving world conspires to silence the Bible's call to repentance any way it can, because it refuses to face up to its sin, especially the sin of treating God's Word with disdain.

Did you ever play the childhood game of flinch? Not the card game. The I'm-going-to-fake-hitting-you-in-the-face game to see if you'll flinch. The people were playing flinch with Jeremiah, only it wasn't a flinch they wanted, it was a retraction. 'To retract' is such an alluring temptation WHEN PERSECUTION THREATENS. But, like all temptations, it promises more than it can deliver: "Just soften your message and all this trouble will go away." No, that's not really true. A whole new set of troubles sets in. Instead of gaining everyone's respect and admiration for softening your message—"Well, okay, Jesus isn't the only way to heaven. Okay, we can relax God's standards on sexuality."—no, you will still have their hatred. Not only will seeing your face raise their hackles, you won't have any integrity in their eyes because you changed your beliefs for them. Not only that, but now you're in trouble with the Lord for changing his message. Jesus said, "*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this sinful and adulterous generation, the Son of*

Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). On the flip side, Jesus also said, *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32).

What a great example Jeremiah is for us. He knows exactly what the people would like to do to him, and when they give him a chance to back down, turn tail, and run, he shows what it means to have backbone. Under the crushing weight of a threatened death sentence, Jeremiah stands up. With brave brevity, he repeats the message he received from the Lord. ¹²*"The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. ¹³Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you."* Wow! How could Jeremiah be so brave? Three reasons. First: the Lord had promised Jeremiah: *"This people will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you"* (15:20). Second: the Lord told him to tell the people the exact message He gave Jeremiah: *"Don't omit a word"* (v 2). Third: since it wasn't his message, Jeremiah knew that the people's beef wasn't really with him but with the Lord.

That's why Jeremiah could plead innocent of the charges with a brilliantly simple defense. Here it is: *"By proclaiming the truth, I am obeying God. ¹⁴As for me, I am*

in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. ¹⁵Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

The defense worked. They couldn't prove that God did not tell him these things. The secular officials wouldn't go along with the priests and the prophets. Jeremiah was spared. But the people did not reform their ways. So, as God promised, eventually Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, totally.

Persecution will always be a part of the life of anyone who wants to live by God's Word. Your life may never be threatened, but even if it is, don't back down from God's Word. In fact, no matter what form it takes, **WHEN PERSECUTION THREATENS**, don't back down. Stick with God's Word. If you experience a loss, your loss will last only a short while compared to the eternity in heaven waiting for you because Jesus lived and died for you. Hold on to Jesus. Come what may, talk about sin and then talk about Jesus who paid the penalty for all sin. You're only sharing God's Word. You're not hurting anyone, and you just might rescue someone from hell.

Stand beside us, O Savior. We want to please you with our whole lives.