

God's Plan for Persecution, Part 2

Luke 21:14-19

April 14, 2024

Luke 21, I have got a lot to cover this morning, so I'm going to violate all the principles of good homiletics, forego any introduction, so we can just get through the section that we started last week on persecution. I know you'll forgive me for that violation of homiletics, because you're Christians and you are prone to forgive. In the, in Olivet Discourse that we're working our way through, in Luke 21, Jesus is answering, his, the questions that his disciples asked in Luke 21:7, "Teacher, when, therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"

As we've learned, the disciples are asking about the Second Coming, about the Lord's Second Coming. They're asking about the times at the end, the consummation of all God's promises to Israel, which they've hoped for, prayed, or longed for. They

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want to see that happen. They've been living and that expectation, especially as the Messiah has come. Now they're seeing that there may be a time gap and they're trying to understand this and they ask their questions.

So starting in verse 8, running down through verse 36, Jesus not only answers their questions, he predicts the events that happened just prior to the end, just prior to his Second Coming, and he prepares them to live in the last days. I'm using that language of the last days intentionally, because the last days is a technical term in the New Testament, referring to the time between the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, where he is right now, bodily, at the Father's right hand, waiting for the Father to send him back, John 14, for the rapture; to rapture his church, bring the church to himself.

So it's really this time that we're living now, the church age, this is the last days. And one feature of this time, this is kind of what we're, we're, working our way through right now. One feature of this time, as we see in Luke 21:12 to 19, is this persecution. Persecution, the suffering of persecution. We're

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going to start our reading in verse 8, all the way through verse 19. This is Jesus' answer, "He said, 'See to it that you are not deceived, for many will come in my name saying, "I am He," and, "The time is at hand." Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end does not follow immediately."

That's the time he's referring to; is the time of the great tribulation, the beginning period of the tribulation. What the other two writers, Matthew and Mark, refer to as the beginning of birth pains. Verse 10, says, "Then he continued saying to them, 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

"But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will result in an opportunity for your testimony. So set in your hearts not to prepare beforehand to defend

yourselves; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be betrayed, even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your perseverance, you will gain your lives.'"

If you want a concise summary of verses 8 to 11, you can go back and listen to last week's introduction; the introduction for last week's sermon, that'll bring you up to speed. But what I want to do now is just continue on and pursue the outline that we started last time. The keywords I gave you: Purpose, power, pain, and promise.

Four words: purpose, power, pain, and promise. Those are the four keywords in the outline point. So we only got one, to one of them last time. The Lord is preparing his disciples to face persecution, which they will endure in the early church. We see the Book of Acts basically is a big long illustration of multiple examples of this taking place in the early church. And really what characterizes the time in the early church through

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the Book of Acts continues on through our day as well. It was obviously more severe at times in the early church, very severe.

In ten, ten waves of persecution that happened throughout the Roman Empire until 313, the Edict of Milan, under the Emperor Constantine, when Christianity really became the official religion of the Roman Empire. But even from that time to the current day, in various places in the world, at various times, there has been hostility and persecution against the church, against Christians and it's because of Christ's name.

Not all that's called persecution against Christians is truly persecution against Christians. We've got to be definitional and define the term, Christian. If we have some aberrant group or some non-Christian group or some sub-Christian group; Mormons out on, on, their mission or Roman Catholics who have anathematized what the Scripture teaches about justification by faith and true salvation. Eastern Orthodox, other different groups, who are undergoing some kind of a persecution, some kind of a rejection of them, and a, and a even violent opposition to

them. That is not persecution in the biblical sense. It's not being pursued for the sake of Christ's name.

So we want to be careful that we define our terms. I want, and I've been praying for you. I've been praying that the Lord would use this time in this section of Scripture to strengthen you, to embolden your heart so that you never, never shrink away from any persecution that might come to you. Any suffering for the sake of Christ's name. But instead, you will, with humble boldness, stand firm and proclaim the gospel that saved you; the hope of your salvation in Christ. And I know that God will give you that strength.

They also. I'm also praying for those in our midst who are not Christians. I want to see those who are not Christians be convicted by the Spirit, of sin and righteousness and judgment in their own lives, and that they give themselves to God in repentance and faith, because the time is short. The time is short. So as the Lord prepares, not only his disciples, in this text, but as he prepares us to face persecution without any fear, without any anxiety, but quite the opposite. As he fills

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our heart with confidence, and strength, and comfort, joyful anticipation, we will endure whatever he has chosen for us to face.

And so we return to the first point, that we started last time, number one: The purpose in persecution. The purpose in persecution. That's verses 12 to 13. "But before all these things," that's verses 8 through 11, "these things." "But before all these things they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony."

We saw, last time, that those verses 12 and 13 are inseparable. They're grammatically linked together, so that the, the, sense is that, even on the one hand, that they will lay their hands on you, persecute you, and all the rest; on the other hand, it will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. That is to say, the persecution and the testimony are connected. This is all according to plan. It's actually the exact pattern we read about

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in the life of our Lord, as we've been studying this gospel of Luke.

We study all the gospels. We see that the, the, enemies of the Lord laid their hands on him, and they persecuted him to the point of death by crucifixion. It's led to him winning our salvation. He died on the cross that we might be forgiven of our sins. He, he was raised from the dead because death could not hold him down, because it was not right that one who is sinless, perfect in every way, would remain in the grave; because he merited God's favor, and he received God's favor; as God raised him from the dead and he triumphed over death in the grave and he's won salvation for his people, for Jew and Gentile alike.

And now this suffering that has led to his death has turned into an opportunity for the testimony of the gospel throughout the world, throughout every time, in every single place, this gospel has been proclaimed. Even his people testified before Jew and Gentile authorities alike, they did what was completely unexpected. In overturning their expectations that their arrest and persecuting them would cause them to shut up and go away, be

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afraid and cower. But just as their Lord did what was completely unexpected, accomplishing the redemption of his people, him being the prototype, him being the, the, start of this entire Christian movement, he set the pattern for the Lord's people, the believers in the Jerusalem church.

Luke traces the record of them in the Book of Acts. In fact, as I said, the Book of Acts is one long illustration of this: That persecution leads to an opportunity for Christian testimony; over and over and over again, we see that. We talked about that last week; Acts 4:1 to 8, Acts 5:17 to 21, Acts 6:8 to 12, Acts 8:1 through 8. On and on it goes through the Book of Acts. We see illustration after illustration of this persecution leading to an opportunity for testimony.

The persecution that Jesus describes, which comes about end of verse 12, it comes about, "for My name's sake" is a very clear indication that everything is going according to plan. It will lead, verse 13, to an opportunity for your testimony. So when this happens to you, when you are doing what's righteous, when you are, when you're living out a transformed life before the

unbelieving world, when you're speaking truth, when you're holding people to account to Scripture, and it leads to instead of appreciation, instead of praise of God, appreciation of you, God's servant, when it leads instead to persecution, don't think you've done something wrong. Instead, know that you've done something right.

As Peter says, in 1 Peter 4, don't, "let none of us suffer as an evil doer." Let's not suffer for being jerks, right? Let's suffer for righteousness' sake and we can rejoice in that. It will lead for an opportunity for our testimony. Our, our teaching the gospel, preaching the gospel, living a holy life, pursuing sanctification in the world, that may sometimes lead to persecution, but so what? Because persecution leads to a testimony; further testimony, further opportunity to speak the truth.

The verb translated; It will lead to an opportunity. It will lead to an opportunity, that's a single verb in the Greek. Takes six words, English words to translate that: It will lead to an opportunity. It's *apobainō*. *Apobainō*, it literally, we could

translate that, to go away from, and, and that sounds, to go away from, it will lead to go away from. It sounds like an odd choice, at first. Going away from something, seems like avoidance rather than taking it up as an opportunity.

But the, but the verb, *apobainō*, it really pictures someone who has been like, on a ship at sea, going oversea on a long arduous voyage. Someone who finally arrives, after that voyage, at his destination. So the ship pulls into port, is tied to the dock, gangplank is lowered down to the dock, tied, secured, and the traveler's able to disembark from the vessel and go away from it. Okay, so that's the picture. It's a picture of arriving. And then having arrived, you're now able to get off the ship to go ashore and to move off into why you planned the journey in the first place. You go off into an opportune direction.

So this is a word that pictures anticipation, excitement over the opportunity. What started out as a hard, arduous, long sea voyage; and back then, it's not like booking a cruise on Princess Cruises. It was not that at all. It was, those ships were small, the cabin space was small, and hot, and stuffy, and

dank, and stinky, and you were cramped, and there wasn't good food.

It's not at all what we see today, so don't think cruises. It's not this. Isn't, journey at Sea was no fun at all, and often times it ended in terrible tragedy and death. Yet it's because of what comes after. What is unpleasant, turns into an opportunity. That is, how to think about persecution; being ferried along by those who pursue you, and arrest you, and put you in jail, to await local trials, synagogues, regional trials before governors, or even national trials before kings. That is as unpleasant as a long, difficult journey at sea. But what comes at the end of that journey is a great opportunity to be of use to the Lord.

The Lord intends to give the persecuted Christian this gift. That's how you need to see persecution, as a gift. This opportunity for testimony, that you get to, you're counted worthy to testify for God, to God, about the goodness and glory of God in his saving grace. You get to do that before more people, before people you would have never met. You get to be

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there and testify to the majesty of Jesus Christ, to speak about his Lordship, his kingship, to, to, to speak about the perfect sufficiency of his atonement, to speak about his resurrection, the fact that the tomb is empty and nobody can explain that except the writers of Scripture.

You get to speak about his ascension into heaven, his ruling from on high, his soon return to rule over the earth, and his coming in judgement. And to warn people that they can get right with God and bow the knee before him, if they'll humble themselves and put their faith in Christ. Now maybe you have not thought about Christian persecution like that before, maybe does the persecution and suffering seems frightening or scary. It is, of course, unpleasant, perhaps even painful.

But I understand why you may not have seen persecution as an opportunity, before, in the past, but now you know better. So you can walk out of here boldly, with confidence and courage because of what Christ has said. When our suffering is in Christ, when it's for his name's sake, suffering is the path to glory. That was the case for our Lord Jesus Christ, who, for the

joy set before him, endured the cross, despised shame, and has now sat down at the right hand of God. It's the, it's the same case for the saints before and after Christ.

One of the texts I thought of reading for this morning's Scripture reading is Hebrews Chapter 11. Hebrews Chapter 11, the Hall of Faith, Hall of Fame, and Hall of Faith. You see what people have endured for the sake of Christ, for the sake of the glory to follow. So before and after Christ's suffering and persecution allows the world to see God's power on display.

That is why, think about it, that's why he put his treasure of the gospel into us, jars of clay. Because those jars of clay really are not that valuable, in and of themselves. In fact, they're meant to be broken. And when they're broken open, that treasure shines forth, so you could see the glory of the gospel inside. So Jesus is saying, yeah, persecution is coming, but it is all part of the plan. It's all part of the plan.

Persecution presents an opportunity for your testimony. So it's your testimony, so it's nothing to fear. Persecution is not an

obstacle to avoid. It's an opportunity to be embraced. Now how can we have this kind of strong confidence, this kind of assurance? Because Jesus said, I'm going to help you, I am going to help you. This is Point two: The power in persecution.

Point two: the power and persecution, verses 14 to 15. We're armed, mentally armed, prepared mentally by understanding God's purpose in persecution. And so, now, we're ready for him to prepare us, because mentally we've got our, we've got our minds around this. We're thinking right. And now that we're thinking right, we're ready and eager for him to prepare us for persecution and to see his power in persecution. Look at verse 14, "So set in your hearts not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute."

Three observations about the Power that God gives us when we face persecution for the sake of Christ's name. There's three observations about the power here, how it comes to us, where it comes from, and what it does. So we'll talk about the conduit, the source, and the effect.

First, the conduit of God's power. The conduit of the power of God that, he makes available to us and the persecution is the conduit of faith. Faith, which is a gift of God. Faith strengthens us with the confidence of an assured heart, and a steadfast heart. Remember, biblically speaking, the heart has a threefold function. It has an intellectual function, it has an emotional function and it has a volitional function; so the mind, the emotions, and the will. That's why we say that the heart is the mission control center of the life, because of these three functions, the intellectual, the emotional, and the volitional function.

This is really critical to understand for all people, because all people, including unbelievers, have a heart. They've got an intellect and emotions, and they've got a will. But the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked for the unbeliever. The unbeliever can't know his own heart. That's what Jeremiah 17:9 says. But for the born again, regenerate believer in particular, it's crucial for us, critical for us to understand; that the process of our hearts, it makes all the difference for us to understand these three functions of the heart. Because when the

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heart receives divine grace through faith, faith is the channel of that divine power, that enables us to stand and to endure even during times of persecution.

In the Christian, intellectually the heart apprehends the truth, receives the truth, apprehends the truth, ascends to the truthfulness of the truth, the verity of the truth, the validity of the truth. Emotionally, the heart responds to the truth with righteous affections. The heart responds to the truth, with, by loving the truth and embracing the truth, eager to receive the truth, eager to do the truth, and even, corresponds to that, emotionally the heart responds to what the truth teaches by hating sin, by having a revulsion to sin, and all that is against God. That is also part of the emotional function of the heart.

And then volitionally, it's the heart. It's informed by the intellect. It's motivated by righteous affections, both a love for truth, a love for all that's righteous, and a hatred of all that's unrighteous. That's what actually provokes our repentance, to put off evil behavior and put on good and

righteous behavior; so formed by the intellect, motivated by righteous affections, it's the heart that wills to pursue the truth. So when facing persecution, for Christ's name's sake, the only way to obey what Jesus says there in verse 14, when he says, "So, set in your hearts," it's not a suggestion. That is a command. He says, "Set in your hearts." And the only way you can obey that command is by faith.

By faith. The threefold nature of faith opens up the channels of grace to the threefold functions of the heart. Faith becomes the conduit of divine grace. It's that which channels the power of God to empower the threefold functions of the heart. Faith settles the mind. It calms the emotions. It steadies the will. And all of this drives us through even the most difficult of circumstances, including persecution for the sake of Christ.

So with a settled mind, calmed emotions, the steadied will, to what point and what purpose are all these? Jesus says there, "Set in your hearts not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves." Notice that he does not say don't defend yourselves, but rather don't rehearse for that. Okay. There's a

difference. The verb there, to prepare beforehand, refers to premeditation, the idea of rehearsals. You know, actors do rehearsals. Performers practice their rhetoric, their mannerisms. Lawyers prepare speeches for the courtroom.

Why all that? Well, because all three, all these examples, they're anticipating the performance. They're anticipating the challenge. They're anticipating the courtroom. Whatever that is. They need to prepare. They need to rehearse. They need to get ready, because they're expecting to go through that. They're expecting to have to be on stage. They're expecting to be in the middle of a courtroom and have to make their case. Someone's life may depend on that.

Disciples of Jesus Christ, though, they need no such premeditation. They need no such prior preparation. Why? It's because we don't need to think as Christians. No! Obviously, we do! Jesus is assuming, in this, that we are living as Christians, that we are always girding up our minds with the truth; that we all are, always, like Paul says, in Ephesians 6:10 to 20, we're always putting on the full armor of God every

single day. We're always wanting to be saturated with the truth, growing in the truth, pursuing sanctification.

That's all, a given, for the Christian that Jesus says no premeditation necessary, no prior preparation, no rehearsal necessary for the sake of trials of persecution in particular. Why is that? Because he doesn't want his people, his disciples, walking around on edge, fearful, on guard all the time. Persecution is something that comes to us often, as a bit of a surprise. So when it comes, don't worry, God will help you. You don't need to fear it. You don't need to stress for it. You don't need to rehearse for the moment.

This is one of those tests that you come into the testing area, not having any, prear, prior study other than everything you've ever actually lived through. And then God will bring what you've already put into your life. He'll bring that out in that moment, for that time. The verb, to defend, this is the verb, *apologeomai*. For which we get our word apologetics, apology. So the word does not mean, saying sorry. It doesn't mean apologizing.

It means, to give an adequate answer, to offer a fitting, or appropriate argument; to make a defense. That's why I never tell my kids growing up. Hey, apologize to your sister. Because what I'm just telling him to apologize to your sister is really give a defense to your sister for why you smacked her in the head. You know, that's not what I want to teach my kids to do is defend themselves and give an excuse or a reason for why they did a wrong thing. I want to teach them instead to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness.

Apology, is to make a defense. That's what the word is here. And the verb, *apologeomai*, is often used in a courtroom context where the situation warrants that a defendant has to answer charges made against him. So to defend yourself against unjust charges, that's a righteous thing to do. This is what persecution for Christ's sake always is, by the way. This is always appropriate because any persecution we receive for Christ's sake is not warranted. It's not. It's not a good thing. It's not a righteous thing.

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It's unrighteous for the ungodly to persecute us for the sake of Christ. When we speak the truth of Christ, it's a good and godly thing. It's for their benefit. It's for God's glory and for their good. Why would they persecute? Well, because they hate Christ. They hate the one we're speaking of. They hate the God that we serve. They hate anyone who represents him. But we are supposed to make a defense when the persecution comes to us for the sake of Jesus name. Because this is our opportunity after all, for our testimony.

Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 3:15, that we're to, "sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts." That is, we're to set Christ apart in our hearts as our Lord, obeying him from the heart. That is, as we go through the persecution or we go through anything, we're to answer according to the truth. We're to speak according to the truth. We're to do what he says. We're to do it in the way that he says it. It includes setting him apart as Lord. We obey him from the heart.

It includes his instruction here in Luke 21:12 to 19. "And we're always to be ready," Peter says, "To make a defense," or

to make a defense, give an apology, an apologetic, "to all who ask us to give an account for the hope that is in us," and especially so in times of persecution. So is Jesus commending us, commending to us, kind of a cavalier attitude about persecution, about facing persecution? No, he's not telling us to be flippant about it.

I mean, obviously in this prophecy about the end, he says, "But before all these things," let me tell you something important. So obviously he's not flippant about persecution. He's giving us these verses, this section to prepare us for it. So it's not flippant. It's just that we know power, that our persecutors and tormentors are going to face. We just know that whatever they do to us, whatever persecution they bring us through, whatever they cause us to suffer, they have no idea of the power that God has given to us to give them an answer. They have no idea of the judgment that they will face. They have no idea about the consequences of their actions. That's why Jesus could pray on the cross. Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

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We look with our persecutors in the same way, and say, man, they have just, they just have no idea. Father, forgive them, but just excuse this, because I really want to get the gospel to them so they understand you. We know where that power comes from. We know its source. I'm gonna give you secondly, the source of the power. The source of the power in persecution is God Himself.

Our hearts are assured and steadfast, because we stand by God's grace, by his power, not our own, not our own power, not our own strength, but in his. And we believe the promise of the God, who said, I am with you, I will help you, I am there with you. Jesus said, beginning of verse 15, "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom." It's emphatic there, *ego doso*. I myself will give to you, or better, I myself will surely give you a mouth and wisdom to overcome your opponents.

Now, here in Luke 21:15, we see that Jesus is the source of the power. "I, myself will give you a mouth and a wisdom." But comparing this with, as we did even last time mentioned it, when we compare with parallel teaching in Matthew and Mark, we find

out that the entire Godhead, each member of the Trinity, is at the source of this power. You don't need turn there for the sake of time, but just jot it down; Matthew 10:19 to 20, which is a parallel section to this teaching, here.

Matthew 10:19 to 20, we see that the father is the source of the power. Jesus says, "when they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you." Mark 13:11, Same thing; the Spirit here is the source of the power though. Different person in the Trinity, "When they arrest you, deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say. Say whatever is given to you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit." Jesus says much the same thing in Luke 12:11-12, "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense." There's that word again, *apologeomai*. "Or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

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And now we read in, 21 verse 15, the son, Jesus, himself is the source of the power, "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute." Again, what is the power for? It's to speak and to think and especially in the most harrowing of situations like this, when there is no earthly reason to expect someone would speak and think, well. You say, I'm kind of like Moses, I don't, I ah ya, choose somebody else. My brother Aaron can speak really well. I'm not eloquent. Don't put me in that situation.

Don't do that. By the way, if you keep reading, you'll find out that God just kind of got a little irritated with Moses. So don't, don't do that for yourself. But listen, he's telling us right here. Even when you go through the most difficult, it doesn't matter if you're not eloquent. In fact, he takes pleasure and joy in using the least eloquent among us for the most difficult of situations. Why? Because in that case, everyone knows it's not that person. It's God getting the glory. It's God working in them. It's God's power at work. That's what the power's for.

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Even the most difficult of circumstances like persecution, and there's no earthly reason, no human reason, to expect that this person will perform well, and speak well, and reason well. Well, that's exactly when we see God's power shine forth in what we say and how we say it. We see this in Christ all through his earthly ministry, as you look beyond suffering to glory.

He was always demonstrating, I, this is something that I marvel over with every text I go through. It's just been such a joy for me to observe the Lord Jesus Christ, who in every situation was absolutely perfect, brilliant beyond human explanation, how he could silence every single one of his enemies. And these are not stupid people, but he makes them look foolish, every single time. The most brilliant people on the planet, and Jesus tied them up in knots every time.

That's what he will give his people. That's what he does give his people. He demonstrated the power to think truthfully, to speak truthfully with unstoppable speech, irrefutable arguments. Jesus saw way past, in that moment of suffering and persecution. He saw way past his death, his burial, past his resurrection. He

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saw to the time of his ascension. This age of victory, that's what he's speaking about now. This victory age, when he shares this power with his people. He's seated there at the right hand of the Father, even now. He's reigning in heaven from on high, and he sends his Holy Spirit to indwell us, to empower us for this unstoppable, irrefutable testimony, in times of persecution.

That's what he promised, the end of the Great Commission. Behold, he gives the Great Commission, "to go make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, then teaching them to observe everything I've taught you from the first day till now." And then he says, this promise, "Behold, I'm with you always. I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This whole church age that I'm talking about, that could be characterized by this, the flaring up of persecution throughout this age. Don't worry, I'm with you. You see how I handled all the trouble, all the persecution? I came through it and there was glory. I'm going to help you, too. I'm with you. Again in

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Hebrews 13:5, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." Which means that we can respond and confidently say the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Nothing.

The abiding presence of Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, is really nothing less than the abiding power of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom." A mouth and wisdom. So words, that's the mouth; words, speech, ability to communicate in the moment. And then wisdom is using knowl, knowledge and words in a right way. So it's correct speech. It's applying the knowledge of revealed truth, that's what wisdom is, applying it righteously in a, in a, fitting way and appropriate for the moment. It's, it's, it's fitting and meet for the argument that's required in that time.

So a mouth and wisdom; sound words, valid arguments. And the source of this power for testimony and persecution is the Triune God. The Father decrees our testimony, as we confess this morning; he decrees all things, including our testimony in the moment of persecution, the Son authorizes our testimony, and the

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Spirit empowers our testimony. The Triune God is working through us in times of persecution. So, we said, the conduit of this power from God is faith. The source of this power is the Triune God.

Let's thirdly, talk about the effect of the power, what it does, what it accomplishes. The effect of the power, as we see here, is this unstoppable, irrefutable testimony. End of verse 15, "God will give a mouth and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or to refute." You say, you know, I've been in little debates with people at school and times of witnessing and things like that, and I've gotten tongue tied. I haven't had good answers. How does this apply?

Well, let me tell you how it applies. If you're in that testimony, that time of sharing the gospel down on campus and all of a sudden, those students you're talking to get offended, turn, turn away, run to the administration, the administration calls the police and the police come and arrest you and throw you in jail. And then they, they put you in jail, and you're there till your, your time of trial, and they bring you to your

trial. Okay? Now you can look at this promise and say, oh, I can expect this is what's going to happen.

But don't look at the fact that you don't always get your words right, in an, in a gospel encounter, in an evangelism encounter, and say, I don't think this is true. That's not what it's talking about. It's talking about times of persecution.

Persecution, the word being, pursue you for the sake of Christ, because you have lived holy, spoken righteously to them. If you're arrested, thrown in jail, you're called into the court and you have to give an answer to the judge, or you have to give an answer to the king, or the governor, or the Sanhedrin or, whoever it is; gotta go down before the Weld County Commissioners and give an answer for why you're proclaiming the gospel on the UNC campus. Whatever it is. Okay. Then, this is when you can count on God strengthening you, giving you, "a mouth and a wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute."

Why can you be confident that none of your opponents will resist and refute this? Because the words and wisdom are of God, and

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anything that comes from God cannot be resisted, cannot be refuted. If you speak God's word, it's over for them. Proverbs 21:30 says, "There is no wisdom, no understanding, and no counsel against the LORD." None. There's an 8th century monk called, The Venerable St. Bede, and he summarize this thought actually from this text with a little Latin Limerick. Let me see if I can pronounce this poorly for you. "*Vos ad certamen acceditis, sed ego praelior, Vos verba editis, sed ego sum qui loquor.*" You Latin speakers would know that it says this. "You go to the battle, but I am victorious. You publish the words, but I am the one who speaks." That's what this is teaching.

We saw this when we studied the 20th chapter of Luke, the scribes and the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, all these enemies and opponents of Christ, which were the religious leaders of the time. They all tried in vain to refute Jesus, calling to account for the authority he was using. They came out there to attack him, try to tie him up with his words, hand him over to the governor. They all fell silent.

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Every single one of their attacks failed. They thought they were ambushing him; it turns out they were the ones who fell into their own ambush. And same thing throughout the Book of Acts. The opponents of the early church, the apostles, the Christians, all of them fell silent. And what did they do when they had, when they ran out of arguments? They just resorted to more violence. When everybody, somebody is violent against you, they have lost.

Fox's Book of Martyrs, every home should own a copy of *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. It's fantastic to read the different stories of martyrdom. It describes, in those early, in the early chapter the martyrdom of Stephen, who was the first martyr of the Christian age. And then following Stephen, all the apostles, then Mark, then Luke, then Paul, then Barnabas.

Read the history of the official Roman imperial persecution, started with Nero in AD 67, all the way through Diocletian in AD 303. The imperial persecution ended with, with, Emperor Constantine, when he enacted the Edict of Milan in AD 313 and in the language of that edict, it said, "The Christians have the

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free power to follow the religion of their choice, in order," that is all that, "that all that is divine in the heavens may be favorable and propitious toward all who are placed under our authority." End Quote.

You can hear the politician in him. He wants to curry the favor of all gods, whatever God, whatever this Christian God, because it's favorable for our land, it's favorable for the people we, we, rule. Even with that Edict of Milan, we know that Christian persecution didn't end there. Did it? It continued through the centuries in different ways, in different forms, in different places, at different times; continues to the present day.

God has decreed that persecution should be to an opportunity for our testimony. So it's doesn't matter what a decree of man says. God has decreed this for our testimony. So having given his disciples the right perspective on persecution, having shown them where, the, how the power comes to them, where the, what the source of that power is, the effect of that power, Jesus needs to let them know, kind of the bad news, where the arrows

of persecution are going to penetrate to the very deepest parts of us.

So point number three is the pain in persecution. The pain in persecution, verses 16 to 17. The real pain in persecution is not the loss of reputation. It's not being marginalized. It's not being made fun of. It's not loss of jobs, loss of opportunity. It's not loss of property. It's not imprisonment. It's not pain in physical suffering, torture, and even death. The real pain in persecution is who brings it and by whose hand it comes.

Look at verse 16, "But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends. They'll put some of you to death and you'll be hated by all on account of My name."

Three main verbs in this section measure the pain in persecution. You go to the doctor. He says, hey, tell me the pain you're experiencing, level 0 to level 10, and you say 9. Here the pain of persecution is measured in its depth and its height and its breadth.

First, the depth of the pain in persecution is in relational betrayal. Relational betrayal, that cuts to the heart. Verse 12, They, "Jesus said, 'They will lay their hands on you. They will persecute you, handing you over to the authorities for My name's sake.'" Because you stand with Christ and for Christ.

Here in verse 16, Jesus tells us who the, they are, who will be responsible for starting the process of your arrest and your persecution, who will deliver us over to the authorities. It'll come through betrayal. It'll come through close relations. It'll come through treachery of family members and close friends.

Roman historian Tacitus, born in AD 56, he lived to around AD 120 and he wrote of events that were very close to this time. He tells about Nero burning Rome and then scapegoating the Christians and blaming them for it. They were all, the Christians, considered by Romans, considered by the pagans to be following a pernicious superstition. He considered them, and Romans considered the Christians, to be a disease, and Tacitus writes this: He says, "First confessed members of the sect were

arrested and next on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted."

On their disclosures: In other words, they arrested certain confessed members of the Christian sect, professing Christians, and then they turned on other Christians. They disclosed who their family and friends were, and then vast numbers were just, just, grab a few, put enough pressure upon them, turn the screws a bit, and they'll give up their friends and relatives. They were convicted, he says for hatred of the human race.

That's how the Romans viewed Christianity, as a hatred of the human race. It's not too far from what we're experiencing in our time, either. As Christians speaking the gospel and teaching the truth about sin and repentance, we're tell, we're told now, that we're doing psychological harm to those who cannot handle. They need a safe space away from us, because what we're saying is so psychologically disturbing and can even drive them to horrible things like suicide or drug use or alcohol use.

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It was during the COVID-19 response. It was common for some, even some professing Christians to tell everybody that wearing masks and getting vaccinated was loving one's neighbor, and not to do so then was unloving. That is hatred of the human race. It's happening today? It's not just non-Christians who treat us like this, those who are consciously opposed to Christ, who will persecute Christians; false Christians too. Those who think that they are Christians, but they're not. They will turn on true Christians. They'll betray them to authorities.

This happens during times of social persecution, upheaval against Christians. These false brethren are the ones that Isaiah writes about, in Isaiah 66:5, "Hear the word of Yahweh, you who tremble at His word:" So you true Christians, you true believers, listen to what Yahweh says. "Your brothers who hate you, who exclude you for My name's sake." They've excommunicated you. They've gotten rid of you. They, "Have said, 'Let Yahweh be glorified, that we may see your joy.'"

Just go along with the flow. Love your neighbor, vaccinate, wear a mask, don't talk about sin and repentance, don't force people

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to change what they can't change, go along with it, that we may see your joy. We just want to see you happy again. Ever since you've gotten into this Christian thing, your glum, and you're talking about sin and judgement and all these bad things.

Listen, lighten up. Yahweh promises, in Isaiah 66:5, "But they will be put to shame." That is, in the recompense of divine judgement.

False Christians, Non-Christians too, they really become irritated with holy living, don't they? They really become irritated with irrefutable wisdom from Scripture. And so, when they're unable to refute the wisdom of biblical arguments, they stop arguing and start persecuting. If they can't silence us by reason, they will shout us down. They'll censure us, silence us, which may mean death for some.

That leads into the second thing, the height of the pain. We see here, for some, the height of the pain is physical death. It's notable that of the four apostles that are named in Mark 13:3, these are the ones who came to Jesus, named as the ones coming

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to Jesus with questions; Peter, James, John, and Andrew. That's two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John.

Three of those four died as martyrs. The first to die is James, the great, John's older brother. He died in AD 44, just ten years after the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the church. He was beheaded. James was beheaded by Herod Agrippa, who hoped to ingratiate himself to the Jews with this action. John Fox tells the story of James's accuser, who witnessed how James faced his death. Fox says, quote, "His accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostles. Extraordinary courage and undauntedness. His accuser fell at his feet to request forgiveness, and he professed himself to be a Christian on the spot. It was resolved that James shouldn't die alone. And so the two were beheaded together."

Andrew, he's one of the ones who came to Jesus with these questions. He preached the gospel all around the Mediterranean, also in Greece and southern Greece. And in AD 60, in the city of Odessa, the wife of a Roman provincial governor was converted to Christianity through Andrews' preaching and testimony. The

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enraged governor, once he found out his wife had converted to this sect, he had Andrew arrested, scourged, and crucified.

And to mock him, and mock the religion, and the cross, that he proclaimed, the governor had the two ends of the cross fixed transversely into the ground to resemble an X. It's known as Saint Andrew's Cross. Even, today it's emblazoned on the flag of Scotland, since Andrew is the patron Saint of Scotland. And so now we see the Governor's attempt to disparage the Christian faith has today become a symbol to honor Andrews' martyrdom. Quite an ironic twist.

Peter's martyrdom, also well known. He died under Nero's persecution in Rome in AD 64; around there. According to Saint Jerome, Peter considered himself unworthy to be crucified in the exact manner as his Lord, and so he was granted his request to be crucified upside down, head down, feet up, and that still, Saint Peter's cross is still portrayed that way, upside down.

And John was the only apostle who did not, and only, only, one of these four, the only apostle of these four who didn't die a

violent death. AD 95, he was banished by the Emperor Domitian to the Isle of Patmos, where he received the revelation from Jesus and wrote that down. So the two sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, James and John, John is the one who outlived them all. In fact, John is the one who survived all twelve of the apostles. He lived into his late 80s or early 90s, died of natural causes in Ephesus during the reign of Emperor Trajan shortly after the year AD 98.

The martyrdom of most of the apostles is one of the reasons that we have to see that these apostles listening to this, on this particular occasion, they represent believers in the church age. It's not just them, to whom Jesus speaks, because look at the limitation that Jesus gives in verse 16, "They will put some of you to death." Not all of you, not most of you, not even many of you, just some of you. So if Jesus is speaking to the twelve only, about this persecution, he's talking about only them and their lives. He would have said they will put all but one of you to death.

It wasn't just some of the apostles martyred, it was most of them. It's also true, so obviously, it's, he's speaking to them, but, he's, they're representing others. It's also true we can't see the apostles as representing only the Jews who died during the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in AD70, because at that time more than 1.1 million Jews died during that Roman siege. That's not just some Jews, that's the entire non-Christian Jewish population of Jerusalem; 1 to 200,000 in the population of Jerusalem, plus the hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims, who visited for the feast, and they were caught there when the Romans surrounded the city and besieged it.

So again, these apostles and disciples to whom Jesus speaks, they're representatives of believers. At some points throughout this section of the Olivet Discourse, they represent Jewish believers who are living in the tribulation, as we see in the previous section. But in this case, they represent church age saints; Christians like you, like me, living now.

So for Christians living in the church age, the depth of the pain in persecution, what really cuts us to the heart is due to

relational betrayal. Just as Jesus was kissed, betrayed, by Judas, his close friend, the one he shared bread with, the one he travelled with, the one who was trusted by all the apostles, so much so that he kept the money bag and yet he betrayed them all. That's the depth of the pain in persecution is by whose hand it comes.

The height of pain for some is going to be physical death. Mindful of what Jesus told him in Luke 21:16, "That only some will be put to death," Peter says this, in 1 Peter 3:14, he said, "Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness," even if you should like, in that remote possibility you might suffer. And he's writing to a, to a people under persecution, going through fiery trials, he says, "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness." The verb is in the optative mood, which is very rare in the New Testament. It's a mood of kind of remote possibility. Could happen. Probably won't. Could.

He's writing to believers who are living under Nero's persecution. He's telling them not to be surprised at the fiery

ordeal among them. 1 Peter 4:12, "As though some strange thing are happening to you." This is planned. So consider Peter's words as you listen to Tacitus describe; remember the Roman historian Tacitus? He describes Christians who suffered under Nero, derision accompanied the end of these Christians. They were covered with wild beasts' skins, and torn to death by dogs. They were fastened on crosses, and when daylight failed, they were burned to serve as lamps by night.

Nero had offered his gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his circus, mixing with the crowd in the garb of a charioteer, were mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a Guild, which he had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose among the Pagan Romans a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state, but to the ferocity of a single man, that is Nero.

That is to say, Tacitus could recognize that Nero's persecution of the Christians, him scapegoating them for the burning of Rome, and how viciously he treated them, and the guilt of his conscience, just loading on more and more; more suffering, and

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persecution, and death, and cruelty upon the Christians. His plan failed, because the rest of Rome started to see he's not persecuting them because they're guilty. He's persecuting them because he's guilty. And still, Peter says suffering for the sake of righteousness, even severe persecution unto death, that is a remote potential for most Christians.

Most of us, we will live relatively normal lives. We'll live in relative peace and security, as we are now. Which one of you is suffering like that? Being chased by hounds, pursued at the point of a gun, or the edge of a sword? We're not. No bullets are flying; no new holes that we didn't wake up with. Even though some of us may be persecuted to the highest degree, even to death.

So the depth of pain, the height of pain, that brings us finally to the breadth of pain in persecution. The breadth of pain. The breadth is in universal hatred. Universal hatred, I think, that this is probably the hardest for many of us Christians to accept, because when we're not living in a time of acute suffering, that is being hunted down the streets, losing

jobs, being thrown into prison, slaughtered in gladiatorial games, we can easily interpret the intolerance of the world as friendliness. It's not.

Jesus tells us to make no mistake. In verse 17, he said, "You will be hated by all because of My name." You will be hated by all, even those who smile at you at the grocery store. "You will be hated by all because of My name." Same level of warning comes the very next night, John 15, verse 18, and following, "If the world hates you, know it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this, the world hates you. Remember that I said to you, 'a slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you," also. Make no mistake. oh, but if they kept my word, they'll keep yours also.

Most of the time, as you and I, as Christians, as we move through the world, we go to work, we make a profit for our employer; as good citizens we enter the marketplace, buy and sell. We do what others do around us to provide for our

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families, just like they do with theirs. We're kind to others. The fruit of the Spirit shines forth in our lives, and people really like that. They like our friendliness.

In fact, sometimes they enter into the Church, people with bad motives enter into the Church and take advantage of Christian friendliness; happens all the time. With people who are not as, who are not close to us, we appear to be nice people, friendly, mild mannered, well behaved, productive citizens. Gospel teaches us to live in exactly that way, to live virtuous lives. The more the gospel transforms our lives, the more exemplary our lives become, the more attractive we are to other people.

But the closer people get to us, when they find out what explains the transformation of our lives, the attractiveness of our speech, of behavior, why we're like that. What explains the change? What explains the difference? They're either drawn even closer to find out about true salvation, or they're repelled from us in total offence. There's really no middle ground. The closer that they get, the line that's already there in the sand starts to appear more clearly.

It's through our lives and behavior, though, that God spreads the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "We're the fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and also among those who are perishing; to the one," we're the aroma, "We're an aroma from death to death, and to the other an aroma from life to life."

So the closer people come, the more they know of the gospel that has saved us and transformed us. That is when they react. Some react with gratitude for the knowledge of Christ and salvation. If they kept my words, they'll keep yours too. Others react, though, with anger and hostility, which is what explains what Jesus predicted in verse 16, that parents, brothers, relatives, friends, husbands, wives, cousins, family members, they will turn against us. They'll betray us. It's not because of us, *per se*. It's because of what we represent. It's because of who we represent.

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Oh, they'll blame us for sure. They'll never blame him. They'll call us judgmental, though. pharisaical. They'll speak all kinds of slanderous lies about us. Sinner's hate having their sins exposed. They hate being confronted. They hate being called to repentance. They always want to find some way to let themselves off the hook. Roman citizens, they used to slander the early Christians by calling them cannibals, because of the Lord's Supper. They partake of the body and the blood of the Lord.

It's they, they, they slandered them as sexually immoral, because the Christian said, we're going to the love feast. They used lies like that and really, intentionally misconstruing the truth, because they knew. But they use that intentional misconstruing of the truth to justify their hatred of Christians and their persecution of Christians, which was entirely unjustifiable. But that is what proud sinners always do. Rather than humble themselves and repent of their sins, they shift the blame. They shift the focus off themselves, speak of themselves as the victim and everybody else, all the Christians as their persecutors. They disparage others, slander them, misconstrue their words and accuse them of wrongdoing.

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And Jesus wants us to know, in no uncertain terms, "you will be hated by all because of My name." Do not misunderstand him on this point, beloved. Do not walk through life with a Pollyannaish view that if you're just nice to them, they'll be won to Christ. They need a, they need a deep confrontation with their sinfulness against God, with coming judgment, with the, with the prospect of eternal hell lying before them.

They need to understand they've sinned against the Holy God, they're condemned underneath his wrath, and it's only Jesus Christ in whom they'll be saved. The construction of the verb, "you'll be hated by all because of my name," shows a progressive ongoing nature of the hatred of Christians. So Christian again, do not be fooled. Now, even in spite of this, the pain in persecution, we're not to walk around in fear and anxiety. We're not to walk around frightened by everyone we meet as a potential tormentor. Looking at the grocery store checkout person and saying, man, that she's going to be turning the screws on my thumbs. We're to walk around humbly, but boldly, because of what we're promised.

Final point. Very short one. Final point, just briefly: The promise in persecution, verses 18 and 19. The promise in persecution. Jesus promises us, "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your perseverance" or your endurance, *hypomonē*, "you'll gain your lives." We notice that in, in verse 16, Jesus said, "They will put some of you to death." In verse 18, "Not a hair on your head will perish." That, that's not a promise, you're going to die with perfect hair.

It's a common metaphor: Not a hair of your head will perish. It's a common metaphor for safety. Often, it's a physical safety. You can see that in the Old Testament. 1 Kings 1:52, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, has that. Acts 27:34, Paul promises all the, the, sailors on the ship, when the ship is going to break apart, he says, if you'll trust God and just do what I say not a hair of your head will be. It'll be wet, but it won't perish. Right?

Here in this context though, Jesus is talking, he's using the same metaphor, but he's talking about spiritual safety. The word, lives, is the word, *psyche*. *Psychos* in the plural. The basic translation of, *psychē*, is soul, so that's what he's

talking about. Here, the point is to portray the soul as the whole of human life. So he's saying, even if your body should die, your life consists of more than your body and you will not lose your life.

"Don't fear those who can kill the body and after that there's nothing they can do," Luke 12. Tell you who to fear. "Fear the one who, after killing the body, can cast your, both body and soul into hell." That's who your to fear. He's emphatic on this point. He uses a verbal mood here in, in, conjunction with an emphatic denial, which, taken together, denies even the, the, potentiality of Christians who forfeit their souls; can't happen, at all. It's an emphatic and very vigorous statement of the eternal security of the believer par excellence.

There's no stronger way, in the language, to say your soul is safe. You will live forever. Same idea, Luke 9:24, "Whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it." God is sovereign over our lives. Our lives are precious to him. He's ordained the day of our, our birth, day of our death, every day in between. Indeed, Jesus says in Luke 12:7, "The very hairs of

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your head are all numbered. So don't fear," not a hair will be lost. God's purpose in persecution is so that we speak about our testimony of his saving grace in Christ Jesus, the one who died for the sins of sinners, that they would repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus Christ and live new lives that bring glory to God, that do true good to people.

God's power in persecution, it's to give us words and wisdom that are sufficient to the task and to the moment, so that the power is not explainable, because of us, or through us, or because of us. It's clearly because of him. All of it, to bring glory and honor to him. Even in the pain of persecution, think about each of those points. God has a purpose in the pain, as well. Peter says, that "the fiery ordeal comes upon you." He says, "for your testing to prove the quality of your faith," not to destroy you, but to prove you, to strengthen you, to bring you through that fire.

And, and the, the, the faith that is more precious than gold, even though it's tried by fire. When it's tried by fire, true gold is purified, it's not destroyed. Tested with the prospect

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of physical death, true faith does not shrink back. It endures under the trial, because God has made us invincible, truly invincible. Tested with the pain of intimate betrayal, we find that true faith doesn't prefer anyone else, even close family members, to Christ. We would rather stand with Christ, and fall with Christ, and die unto Christ, than betray him who saved us from our sins. He is that precious to us.

He's a friend that's closer than a brother. Tested with the pain of universal hatred, the world hating God and hating Christ and because we represent God and Christ, they hate us too. And yet tested with that pain of universal hatred, true faith clings so closely to the Lord Jesus Christ, that though Mother and Father abandoned me, yet I will hold fast to him. He's the one who has loved us and gave himself for us. If I should be counted worthy to die for his name's sake, the worst thing that could happen to me, immediate glory. Death takes me to, immediately transports me, to the presence of Christ, the one I love.

God's promise in persecution is really our soul's salvation. And so Peter goes on to say that to the degree that you share in the

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sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing. Beloved, rejoice if you endure suffering for his name's sake, or persecution. Keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of his glory you may rejoice with exaltation. If you're reviled for the name of Christ, you're blessed, because the spirit of glory that is glorifying God, revealing him, revealing who he is, and the Spirit of God rests upon you. That's why you suffer. That's why they're persecuting you. It's because you look more and more like him. Amen.

Is that good news? Let's pray. Our Father, thank you so much for this, the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. We thank you for raising him up and sending him to be the savior of our sins. Sending him to us. We're so grateful for his teaching, the illumination of the truth by your Spirit. We thank you for this precious word that we have that, shines forth the path to glory, and it does come through suffering and persecution.

We pray that, if this does come to us, in our time, in our church, it should help us to stand firm and to endure to the end. Because we know your plan for this. It's for our testimony.

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It's for our good. It's for our strength, for our growing. It's so that you may be glorified in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, the one we love. It's in whose name we pray. Amen.