

LIFE: Tea Bag Christianity

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 3:8-14

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In just a moment we are going to turn to 2 Timothy chapter three beginning in verse eight. I have entitled today's message "Tea Bag Christianity." It is on your worship guide and for those of you that have access to the internet. And so this morning I want to give you one of my favorite examples to demonstrate what I am talking about.

I have up before me—and those of you who are listening online or on the radio on Friday nights—I have got two, for lack of better terms, two clear pitchers. One of these pitchers I am going to fill about half way up with just normal, everyday, somewhat cool, room temperature water. The other pitcher I have, thanks to the gift of electricity and percolators, I have some very toasty water here. For lack of better terms, we would classify this as hot.

Now in the spirit of tea, I thought it would be only fair to go get some British tea. So for those of you who have that kind of background you can just say "thank you." I knew there were some of you out there, that is why I said it.

Now, two pitchers of water and a whole bowl of tea packets. So for the sake of illustration, I am going to grab about three of these. I am going to drop them in the cool water. Now those of you who are in person can see there is nothing happening, not a lick. In fact, I can take these and I can swim them around. I can dunk them. I can make them Baptist, just in case they are not already. Guys, I am telling you. And for those of you who don't see well from the back row, there is nothing happening here. I mean, the tea bags are just sitting there. There is nothing transpiring. In fact, it is just packets of tea on top of cold, normal water.

But what happens when I take the same item, the same tea bags, three different tea bags, obviously and drop them in the hot water? What you will see is that in a very brief amount of time. See, make them Baptist, you dunk them and the water changes colors. That is how that works. And you can see that over the process of time there is discoloration that is beginning to take place. Why? Because the product that is in the tea bag begins to permeate the water when it is hot. When it is cold, it does not permeate.

One of my favorite illustrations or one of my favorite anecdotes about Christianity is this. That Christians are a lot a lot like tea bags. You really don't know how strong they are until you put them in hot water. That being said, life is not always a bucket of cool water. There are times in life when we experience struggles and adversity. We are going to deal with a word today that none of us likes to use and none of us likes to talk about, but it is a word that we are going to need to become ever increasingly familiar with. It is the word persecution.

I know a football coach that used to say, “Blood makes the grass grow.” That was his excuse to work us out too hard. But throughout the course of Christianity, over the last 2000 years—and we discover this today is that if you want to see when and where and how the message of Jesus Christ permeates a culture faster than any other time, just allow persecution to take place and those who are strong in the faith, it is their message of Jesus Christ that will permeate that entire culture.

So I want to invite you to turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter three as we continue in this blueprint of how to engage a culture. Last week we talked about needing to be on defense, about drawing a line in the sand and saying in our personal lives and in our family’s life and in our community’s life, in our culture’s life that whatever sin or whatever transgressions, whatever struggles are happening, then we say enough is enough and we go no further.

Beginning in verse eight of 2 Timothy chapter three. He begins to discuss this whole idea of persecutions and adversity. It says:

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was.

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.¹

Today I want to speak about a subject matter that none of us wants to address, but based on the Word of God we must address. And it is this issue of persecution, this issue of adversity toward the message of Jesus Christ which is possessed by those believers known as the Church or as Christians. I think the best way to understand this in light of the text is just to do a simple chronology. Let’s just deal with the past. Let’s deal with the present. And then heed a very important word about the future.

So what about the past aspect or the past concept of persecution? You have here in verse eight two names mentioned. These names are an allusion to an event in Exodus chapter seven when Moses was encountering Pharaoh and the famous “let my people go,” 400 years of slavery coming to an end to the Egyptians. I want to kind of use that verse as a jumping off point that all throughout Scripture, primarily in the Old Testament and the gospels, we see that there are three main avenues that believers in Jesus Christ come under what we would call persecution. The first avenue is what I would call this. Those

¹ 2 Timothy 3:8-14.

who are the rulers, those who are the secular, those who are the governments, those who are the elite, those out there who possess in earthly favor a certain power and ability to control and or dictate or make secular decisions.

In fact, if you look at that passage in Exodus chapter seven, 400 years of the persecution of the people of God. And I don't care what the secular media say today, those who claim a heritage of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the 12 tribes whom we know as the Israelites, they are the chosen people of God no matter what your newspaper says. I just want to go on record by saying that. That being said, you see for 400 years a secular institution, a secular state persecuting and putting them in slavery for 400 years.

Moses comes and when Moses comes to the rescue he has been out in the wilderness, the burning bush incident. He comes back and he says, "Let my people go." And they say, "Hah, not going to happen."

What you see in chapter seven is that Moses takes his rod. It goes to the ground. It becomes a serpent. These two guys that are listed in 2 Timothy do the exact same thing. What happens, though, is that Moses' eats theirs.

We have what we call the first miracle or the first plague, the water that turns to blood. And yet even Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers imitate and emulate the same thing. But pretty soon they run out of tricks in their bags. And it is one of countless stories in the Bible of governments, whether it be Assyria, whether it be Babylon, whether it be Greece, whether it be Rome, all throughout the Old Testament and even into the gospels you see that those who claim faith in God, those who claim a belief in Jesus Christ are not going to be the best friends of the world at large. Jesus made the statement. "Do not be shocked when the world hates you. It hated me first."

Persecution does and will occur through secular institutions, through governments and through rulers who do not believe in Jesus Christ. That is why in 1 Timothy two it says to pray for these guys and pray for these girls who are in leadership that we might live a peaceable life.

Why would we be shocked if persecution occurs? It occurred in Exodus. It occurred through the psalms. It occurred all throughout the Bible. Who are we to say, "Well, maybe it just won't happen with us"?

Persecution comes through the secular institution. But there is a second group that often times persecutes those who believe in Jesus Christ. It is what I call the religious group, the religious zealots. In fact, we see in the news media and we get upset about all the secular persecution of Christians, but, believe it or not, most persecution actually comes from other religions. The last time I checked, there are faiths around the world, not just Islam, there are radical Hindus. There are all kinds of faiths out there who so dramatically oppose the message of Jesus Christ that they actually believe they are doing God a favor by killing you. It happens all over the world.

Now thankfully we don't see it as frequently here, but as we talk about in a moment, we are just talking about the past. There is a future coming.

You remember the book of 1 Kings eighteen. There was a prophet of God by the name of Elijah. In fact, he was only one who stood up for God. There were 450 prophets of another faith, a Baal faith, a false faith who persecuted him, slandered him and were trying to kill him. Had it not been for 1 Kings eighteen where they have the contest where the 450 guys are cutting themselves and getting all upset, what happens is the one true God shows up with fire and they discover that that is the one true God. All throughout religious persecution, all throughout the Old Testament, the Baal worshippers and the Ashtoreth worshippers and the false gods and the temple of Dagon. And, by the way, if you are watching the news and all that is going on in the Middle East today, there are bombs going off and one of the cities is Ashdod. That is a contemporary city. Ashdod was the home or the center of Philistine pagan worship. That is where they took Samson and tied him to the pillars.

In the past governments have persecuted those that believe in God. In the past, religions have persecuted them; but there has been another group, probably the most subtle. It is what I call the regiment.

Now the regiment is technically a military term that even though there are variations of how to define a regiment, in essence, you have got a group of people who should be headed the same direction with the same purpose and the same goal. As we particularly get into the New Testament you have a man by the name of John the Baptist, a man who the Bible says comes in the spirit of Elijah.

Do you know what his one job was? We think his job was baptizing people. Yes, he did, but he took his finger and he pointed to Jesus and he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Now do you know the group of people who were looking for the Messiah? The Jewish people. They found themselves divided among the Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes and other various groups. Do you know that John the Baptist was ridiculed? He was verbally admonished. He was ridiculed by those who were supposedly looking for the same one he was. Jesus Christ himself did not have trouble with pagans, did not have trouble with heathens. He didn't have a whole lot of trouble with all kinds of groups. I mean, in fact, Zacchaeus who was a tax collector, a Gentile woman on a bench, all of these different scenarios. But who opposed him more than anybody else? Those who should have been supporting him, those who should have been saying, "You are the Messiah, the one we have been looking for, for literally a thousand years."

See, persecution often comes from without by the governments. It often comes from without by other faiths. But we also need to be aware that sometimes it even comes within the regiment that we thought or supposed was on our own side.

You know, a famed evangelist said in days gone by, made a statement that I will never forget. He said “The Lord’s army, the Christians, it is the only army in the world who often times shoots their own and sometimes in the back.”

That being said, that is the past. That kind of gives us a palette to work with. That gives us kind of a platform. Let’s talk about the present, because in verses 10 through 12 the apostle Paul makes this statement. “You have fully known my doctrine, my manner of life, my purpose, my faith, my longsuffering, my charity, my patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, Iconium, at Lystra, that persecutions I endured, but out of them the Lord delivered me. Yea, all those that live a godly life shall suffer persecution.”

You look at those verses and say, “Man, I know the first century was rough and it was tough and those Romans, boy, they hated Christians.” And the Jewish community that rejected Jesus, hated Christians, and the pagans hated Christians and they were doing all kinds of horrible things to them.

Let me back you up a week. If you were not with us last week, I want you to look back at verse one where it talks about being in the last days. And we talked about in light of Hebrews chapter one verses one and two that this phraseology or this concept of the last days is from the ascension of Christ until the eventual return of Christ. But if you look in verse two it says that though we being the last days, perilous times shall come.

Listen. Do you know what the apostle Paul was saying? That times were bad and times were rough, but they would continue to be and possibly even increase and look worse than what he actually endured. So when we talk about persecutions of the present, we cannot separate ourselves and say, “We are advanced from the first century.” We cannot say, “Well, those were Bible times. These are today times.” The present in light of chapter three verse one and two is today. Paul’s day and our day is the present.

There are three aspects that I want you to grasp about the present aspect of persecutions, not only in the world at large, but in your life. And the first one is this. There is this issue of purpose.

Can I be honest with you? One of the most frustrating things that I come across in my life is this idea that has been propagated by the media. It has been propagated in books and it comes from the Church, this idea that our purpose as a believer in Jesus Christ is to possess either or both of the following things: prosperity and power. Every time you turn around there is a new best seller on how we can get more, have more or do more. Do you notice that in these verses the apostle Paul never bragged about how big his church ever got? He never bragged about how much influence, he never bragged about this, he never bragged about that. In fact, he never used the word power. He never used the word prosperity. Three times in two verses he says, “I endured persecutions.” He talked about that he endured afflictions. He said he endured patience. And before you think patience is good, be careful before you pray for it, because in James it says the only way to get it is through tribulations. He is saying, “I had tribulation. I had afflictions. Three times I had

persecutions.” And what we grasp and what we understand is in his understanding of living a godly life in the midst of all this stuff, it wasn’t about possessing more, getting more or attaining more. But realize that if we are living a godly life, we shall actually be not pampered, but persecuted, which leads to this. What I want to talk about is a paradox. There is a paradox in these verses when we deal with persecution in the present. And the paradox is that we live in a world today that says if things are getting better and things are getting bigger and the world is happier with us, then we must be living godlier lives.

I want you to look at verse 12. All of those that will live a godly life in Christ Jesus might suffer persecution, quite possibly suffer persecution. It says they shall suffer persecution. Nowhere in the New Testament do you ever see the apostle Paul say, “Well, church A was growing faster than church B.” Nowhere in the Apostle Paul’s writings do you ever see, “Well, you need to listen to this guy, because his books sell more than this guy’s does.” No, in fact, if you will read through the letters to the churches he is always encouraging them in the midst of adversity. He is always encouraging them in the midst of the struggles of life and the paradox is that we live in a world today that celebrates a Christianity that gets and attains more and Paul celebrated Christianity that actually attained less, not less because they weren’t gifted, not less because they weren’t talented, not less because they weren’t intelligent, but less because by standing on a godly life they could no longer be supported by, endorsed and promoted by the world at large.

You do realize that the greater stand, the greater godly life you live, you will become more antagonistic to the world. You will become more antagonistic to other faiths. And, as we are going to discuss in a minute, you will become more antagonistic to those in the regiment who are not completely on board.

How is this for positive preaching? How is this for purpose driven preaching? No. You realize that we are coming to a day and time in our life where if we draw a line in the sand and if we stand and say, “I will stand. I will do no other,” they will do you like they did to Luther. They will get a gang of folks to kill you. That is life. And the apostle Paul says, “Why would you expect any difference?”

But let me give you a promise. The promise is found at the end of verse 11 “...the Lord delivered me.”²

The apostle Paul found himself in Acts chapter 16 in the middle of a jail cell with Silas. They were chained with their feet, chained with their hands. The only thing they could do was sing. What happened? The angel of the Lord came and burst open the door and they were delivered and they were set free.

You see situations all throughout the New Testament where any time persecution occurred, any time adversity occurred that deliverance did take place.

² 2 Timothy 3:11.

Now ultimately the final deliverance is a home in heaven and we have got that. We understand that. But what we need to get is that as the water gets heated up, as the society, as other faiths begin to become more adversarial to the message of Jesus Christ, please hear me clearly. Other entities, other institutions, other governments, they are not your deliverer. Jesus Christ delivered Paul, not the Roman government. Jesus Christ delivered Paul, not the Jewish synagogues. Jesus Christ delivered him.

Listen, not even the Church. I mean not even the faithful members at First Baptist Thessalonica. And I know you are thinking, “what?” I didn’t know it was First Baptist. I am going to make it First Baptist Thessalonica. Not even the members at First Baptist Thessalonica could come down and say, “Hey, we are big. WE are powerful. We are influential. Let that guy out.”

Who was his deliverer? Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

Now what about the future? Because ultimately when we leave this place, ultimately tomorrow morning is technically from this perspective the future. We have established that there is a past track record of persecution. We understand that there is a present reality of persecution worldwide and is ever increasing in our life, society, and civilization. So what about the future?

I want you to turn to Matthew chapter twenty four, one of the great chapters in the Bible regarding the end times, regarding the Second Coming. Jesus is on the Mount of Olives and he is sharing with his select few what is going to occur. They have asked him a couple of questions about this coming, about the end of the world. And I want to be honest with you before we come to this passage of Scripture. This is one of the most difficult chapters in all of the Bible. And people will debate and they will write books and they will have discussions about when should we put this chronologically? You know, this side of the tribulation, during the tribulation, the end of the tribulation. Please just hear me out that as we look at these verses beginning in verse nine of Matthew chapter twenty four Jesus is making a statement to his followers about times in the future that will not be as rosy as they have been in the past. There are times coming that will be more adversarial than they have been in the past.

I want you to notice beginning in verse nine of Matthew twenty four what Jesus says. “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”³

You do know what the word all means, right? All. Verse ten.

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.⁴

³ Matthew 24:9.

⁴ Matthew 24:10-12.

Hear me clearly. I am not a prophet. I am not the son of a prophet. But I can read the Word of God and I can understand it. Let me share with you as a believer in Jesus Christ, one who understands that salvation is not based by checking a box. Salvation is not based on the title above a church door. Salvation is not based on who you were or were not born into the family of. Salvation is based on the fact that we are sinful creatures in need of a loving Savior and that person is Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose again and is one day coming back.

As a believer in Jesus Christ allow me to share with you what the future holds for you. First and foremost, you can expect a consensus. A consensus is getting everybody together, right? Look at verse nine. All the nations of the world. All means all. Not all but this one. Not all but that one. There is going to be a consensus and you are going to find in the days ahead that the governmental entities, the powers that be in the world at large are going to become ever more increasingly antagonistic and adversarial and opposed to what you believe in Jesus Christ. And the stories that we hear about people being threatened in the Middle East, about people being threatened in Africa, about people being threatened in South America. Do not be shocked because it says all nations, that that one day comes to your nation. It does not say every nation but one and just make sure you live there. He says nation will fight against nation and all nations. What does it say? Will hate you.

You do realize that this world is every increasingly accommodating to every faith but Bible believing Christianity. Every faith has a seat at the table but Bible believing Christianity. Jesus said it would happen. Paul said it would happen. Why would we be shocked when it happens?

Do you know what the great thing about this is? The hotter the water, the faster Christianity spreads. We want the cold stuff. We want the cool stuff. We want life to be comfortable and nice. But understand it is the hot water. It is the martyrdom of the saints. It is the persecution of the saints that makes the lost world look back and say, "Wow, maybe there is something to gather here. Maybe there is something to pay attention to."

There is going to be a consensus that arises. The world at large is not... listen. The world is not going to become more of our friend tomorrow than it was yesterday. Please understand that. That is what Jesus said. The second thing is this. It is what I like to call a counterfeit. It says in verse ten: "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another."⁵

The idea that you get there is that even those within the faith, even those who would claim the name of Jesus, those who would say are in church with us, right, another church, it says because of the consensus of the world, they start betraying others.

You may or may not be aware of this. But there are major entities of religious influence in the United States of America who claim the name of Christ, who have actually sent

⁵ Matthew 24:10.

letters and petitions to our own government denouncing Israel's right to the land in the Middle East, betraying one another. And it will happen not just over there. It will happen here.

You get to 2 Thessalonians chapter two and it says that before the antichrist shows up there shall be a falling away. It means that there is going to be a time where the church of Jesus Christ will actually begin to start shrinking in number. But, according to our illustration, growing in impact and influence.

You understand based on the past why should we expect anything different from the future? Why? Because those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. As we go forth from today there is going to be a consensus. The world at large is going to become more and more antagonistic and less and less interested in what you are teaching, preaching and living.

The second thing is you can expect the name, "the Church of Jesus Christ" to even turn on itself, to divide itself, to start shooting arrows at itself and just like Gideon's army, we may go from 10,000 to 300 overnight.

Last time I checked, though, Gideon did pretty well with 300, didn't he? Which leads to the last point, verse eleven. It says that there shall be false prophets arise. There is going to be a consensus in the world. There are going to be counterfeits even among the name or the title. But let me share with you some thing that is very near and dear to my heart and I think we see such an increase of it. You are going to see an absolute compromise of the message of Jesus Christ from the very ones who were called to preach it and to teach it, false prophets. People getting up in "churches," and behind pulpits and with Bibles in their hands. And rather than standing on the truth of God's Word, they will give in to the power shifts of the world so that they do not end up in hot water.

Let me share something with you, church. My wife and I have talked about it. My children and I have talked about it. Our Tuesday morning men's Bible study has talked about it. I want you to hear me clearly. I hope that you are studying the Word of God every day, not just on Sunday. I hope that it is important to you, because do not be shocked when a Baptist pastor such as I, who believes what he says and says what he believes, do not be shocked one day when you find out that I have to preach behind bars. Do not be shocked one day when you find out that they have taken me to the back 40 and they have shot me. Do not be shocked when you find my body hung from a tree because I will not recant, I will not renounce and I will not give in. It will happen.

I don't like it, but I will refuse to compromise. And there are too many "men and women of God" who want to get so entangled with the world and everything else that they are compromising the message of Jesus Christ. He is the only means of salvation. He is the only means of forgiveness. He is the only means of eternity. And I don't care how big the other army is. I don't care how big the guns are, eternity is too long to be wrong, folks. And you understand I used it from my perspective. I am the "head of the snake." I understand that. But do you know what happens after you get the head? They go after

the tail. And what that means is you in your work place, in your school, in your community, you have got to be prepared that the water is going to get turned up. The water is going to get warmer.

But here is the great thing. Which one do you want to be? The one that is actually making impact or the one that is just kind of sitting there and it looks kind of nasty.

Hey, we are in the South. We are into tea. Now there is no sugar in either one of these, so work with me here, but if there were, which one would you want? You would want the one that was saturated. You would want the one that makes a difference. You would want the one that makes the impact. You realize that this entire container of water was changed by three little packets. See, we bought this. We got this idea that we need thousands and tens of thousands. Gideon only needed a few hundred. David only needed a few mighty men. Jesus only needed twelve. The last time I checked, that is a pretty good track record.

The question is: Are we willing to be a “tea bag Christian?” Are we willing to be strong in the midst of adversity? Are we willing to say: “Do you know what? I am not going to compromise. I am not going to give in on what I believe. I don’t care who they are or what they say.”