

Wil Owens
Preparing for Persecution; Matt 10:16-25
GPBC
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Introduction – When Summer and I attended the SBC in June, one of the discussion panels was on the topic of persecution. The speakers included Pastor Brunson, who had been imprisoned in Turkey, and his wife, the cake-maker from Colorado who was sued for declining to participate in a gay wedding because it went against his conscience, and Nik Ripkin and his wife who served 10s of 1000s of refugees during the Mogadishu crisis. The main point that each speaker continued to stress was that we, as American Christians, need to prepare for persecution, because it is coming. And when it does, we only have 3 options; we can shrink into silence and by so doing deny the faith, we can compromise the faith and by so doing deny the faith, or we can stand firm in the strength and grace of God and show the world that Jesus and the gospel are worth it.

Just this past week I received this persecution update on the West African nation of Burkina Faso. In April of this year, 48 year old, Pastor Zore was murdered for his faith, leaving behind a wife and 6 children. 5 days later, 80 year old Pastor Oedraogo and 5 other Christians were killed when they refused to deny Jesus.

Persecution is a reality for those who know and treasure Christ above everything, including this life. Darkness does not welcome light. Deception cannot tolerate truth. Evil despises the sacred. Nothing declares the worth and beauty and glory of Christ any clearer than when His people are willing to suffer for His name. If we are willing to lose friends, lose money, suffer hardship, and even give our lives for the gospel, then Christ must indeed be the greatest treasure in then world!

But we must be prepared for it so that when it arrives we will be found loving Jesus more than our comfort and pleasures and luxuries. Those who are willing to lose the faith never truly had it. That's exactly the point of today's text. He's preparing His disciples for the persecution that they will eventually face for being His followers.

- I. Preparing for Persecution Calls for Wisdom and Innocence (v16)
 - a. Being wise as a serpent – we don't act foolishly and bring about needless suffering. We don't agitate and stir up hatred and

opposition. A serpent will avoid danger. He will hide. A rattle snake will rattle and warn off potential harm. We don't go looking for a fight. We act wisely. We share the truth in love. We stand on our convictions, but we do so in a winsome, compelling way. Our motivation is the souls of those who have yet to meet Christ.

- b. Being innocent as doves – we don't instigate trouble, but we don't run from it either. We freely live out our faith. We lovingly share our faith. We affirm truth in caring, welcoming ways.
 - c. We live the faith in a wise, innocent way.
- II. Be Prepared for State-Sponsored Persecution (vv17-20)
- a. If you think this could never happen in America, just ask the Colorado baker who had to take his case all the way to the Supreme Court. The Court ruled in his favor because the state had been so religiously hostile. Our religious liberty is under extreme pressure in our day.
 - b. It is becoming increasingly difficult for athletes and other professionals to speak out and stand up for what they believe without facing outrage and backlash.
 - c. There is a new so-called progressive morality that has captured many of our institutions, companies, politicians, and university campuses. This new morality is cloaked in the language of "rights" and is being promoted throughout the world of education and entertainment. It is a worldview that preaches toleration for everyone and yet is vehemently intolerant of the Christian voice. The moral signaling on all fronts is clear. The message is clear. If you don't fall in line with this new morality, you will face the consequences.
 - d. Faith-based agencies and institutions are facing backlash, Christian Organizations and companies are constantly pressured to conform, university campuses are increasingly silencing any Christian voice. In days ahead it will be extremely difficult for Christians to practice medicine and all other professional vocations because the Christian morality is more and more viewed as immorality.
 - e. Notice there's also religious persecution in this text. And it is true in our day as the doctrine of progressivism pushes against evangelicalism.
 - f. So why don't we just fold and get in line? If everybody else believes they are right and we are wrong, we don't we just accept this new

morality? Because the new morality unabashedly and without the slightest pause calls for the death of innocent children. The new morality demands that abortion be acceptable right until the moment of birth. The new morality calls for a reinstatement of partial birth abortion. We believe that God is Creator. That life is precious and sacred and begins at conception. That every human being created by God bears His image.

- g. The new morality demands the acceptance of gender fluidity and total sexual and sexuality freedom under the claim that one can only be free if they are free to live out their desires. We know that as sinners, our desires can be misleading and destructive. We are capable, in our sinful flesh and deceptive hearts to want and desire almost anything. Eve looked upon the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and saw that it was desirable and pleasing to the eyes. And the serpent's lie was that God was actually keeping something from her. That deception is still alive today in this area of gender and sexuality and everywhere else. It looks desirable. It promises to fulfill and make happy. We know that only in Christ will we find our identity and satisfaction and life!
- III. Be Prepared for Familial Persecution (v21)
- a. This may be the most unexpected and unanticipated form of persecution believers experience – rejection, hatred, separation, and even harm from members of your own family.
 - b. The saying “blood is thicker than water” means that family members will remain united against any outsider. But as it turns out, ideology and agenda is thicker than blood. I've met young bible school students in India who were disowned and abandoned by their families the moment they received baptism. New believers from Muslim contexts are routinely beaten and rejected by their families when they come to faith in Christ.
 - c. We are living in a time that to disagree with someone's belief or practice is immediately interpreted to be hatred and rejection of the individual. We've lost the capacity to have charitable disagreement. To disagree is now to be a hater.
 - d. If you stand for truth in this day, you will face backlash from members of your own family.

- IV. Be Prepared for General Persecution (vv22-23)
 - a. You will be hated by all for My name's sake – presenting Christian morality or sharing that Christ is the only way to the Father or defending the truths of Scripture on social media or in the workplace or marketplace receives vicious backlash and outrage.

- V. Expectation is Preparation (vv24-25)
 - a. If Jesus was called Satan, if Jesus was likened to the worse evil, then we can expect our good works and our proclamation of the truth and of the gospel will also at times receive harsh, vindictive words, accusations, and even hurtful, violent actions.
 - b. We should learn to expect it, and then we will not be shaken or surprised or caught off guard or not prepared when it arrives.

Conclusion – Persecution has a purifying purpose, v22b – nothing reveals the true church from the false church like persecution. Persecution draws a clear line between American Christianity and biblical Christianity. Those whose religion is nothing more than going through the motions to maintain an appearance of good works, will not endure persecution. But those who have found the pearl of great price, those who have truly embraced the glorious, all-satisfying Savior, will not let go of Christ even if it cost them their very lives. Persecution purifies the church. Persecution revives the church. Persecution grows the church. Persecution reveals the church.

Persecution has a gospel purpose, vv18-20 – Men intend for persecution to be a means of silencing the gospel. God intends for persecution to be a means of giving voice to the gospel. It's precisely because of persecution that the gospel has sounded forth in prisons, in courts, on TV and radio, in death camps, before dictators and tyrants, and in the ears of the most hardened of souls. It's precisely because of persecution that the gospel has gone in to places it would have never gone without it! You see God's at work, even in brutal, harsh, heart-breaking persecution. So don't be anxious. It's God's work. It's God's plan. He'll give us what to say.

The only thing we need to do is prepare for persecution so that when it comes, we'll be found faithful to the end!