

Counting the Cost ***Mark 13:9-13***

***I wander in a foreign land,
Where worshipers of life on earth
Resent, and yet don't understand,
The sweetness of the second birth.***

***A life in shadows of the night
Has made them hate and flee
The noonday of the living Light.
And so it was one time with me.***

***But since I've known the God above
I do not fear their wrath, but heed
My King's command that I must love
All those who still sow Satan's seed.***

***For I am not alone down here.
I have a Counselor and Friend
Who's always faithful, always near:
The Presence of the Sovereign Wind.***

The Mount of Olives was wrapped in a green and golden twilight. After a long day at the temple, the disciples sat down on the hillside. And the Savior spoke.

Our omniscient Master presented a panoramic preview of things to come. He spoke about sieges and slaughter, destruction and death just forty years off.

Then, before He turned His attention to events that will mark the end of the age, our Lord paused to prepare His disciples for some very personal calamities they would have to face.

But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, Verse 9

Luke's account adds five words to that statement that define precisely when the disciples could expect to be persecuted.

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. Luke 21:12

Long before Titus' Roman legions besieged Jerusalem, slaughtered the Jews and destroyed the temple, men and women who trusted in Christ would face powerful enemies and excruciating persecution. They would suffer chains and whips for no other reason than because they made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.

The destruction of the temple didn't mark the end of the trials and tortures believers must face, either. Long after weeds grew over the scorched stones and rubble that was once Jerusalem, believers were still being hounded and hunted. And they still are today simply because they love and live for the Lord Jesus.

There is no joy so sweet or peace quite so satisfying as living as a committed child of

God. That is why the Bible urges us to commit our lives to Christ.

But our loving Lord would have us to do so with open eyes and complete understanding.

The Price

Count on it! Our Redeemer never recruits disciples by emphasizing the advantages yet saying little or nothing at all about the steep and stony paths His followers must walk.

That is why He repeatedly urged those who would follow Him to do what every wise builder does: to carefully consider the cost.

...which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Luke 14:28

For the disciples, one result of giving themselves, head, heart and hands, to Christ would come from their own countrymen. Councils of ruling Jews would have them arrested and savagely beaten as heretics. Later, Gentile rulers would haul believers before courts as troublemakers.

Jesus never said His followers deserve to be treated like criminals. And indeed they don't. After all, Peter and John were arrested and arraigned before the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem. And all they did was heal a man who was lame.

Later, Paul stood before that same ruling council for doing nothing more than proclaiming salvation through faith in God's sinless Son. Then he was dragged before Felix and Festus, Agrippa and Caesar himself.

America is one of the few spots on earth where Christians don't face such opposition from both religious rulers and governmental officials. But the Master's message still stands.

As believers, we too must not be cowered into a corner and shrink back in fear at the prospect of powerful enemies. Neither do we dare to compromise the Gospel or water down our message to please those who would persecute us. We must love our Lord more than our country, even more than our own safety.

But persecution by leaders of both religion and government is not the only result of a complete commitment to Christ. Our Lord also spoke of bitter enemies who sit at the supper table with us.

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. Verse 12

The disciples weren't surprised when the Savior said they could expect division and opposition from their own families. They had heard Him speak of it before.

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. Matthew 10:34-37

That is our Lord's lesson. We must love Him immeasurably more than we do our fathers and mothers, our sons and daughters. And that is not merely important.

It is essential. If do allow family loyalties to overshadow our Christian commitment, Jesus said we are not fit to follow Him.

We don't have to wonder why believers have always been persecuted, either. Jesus said it

grows from a savage, satanic root.

You will be hated by all because of My name, Verse 13

Two days later, after left He led His disciples out of upper room to walk across town to Gethsemane and betrayal, He explained why the world harbors such an intense hatred for those who trust in Him.

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. John 15:18-19

People of every country and culture hate Christians for but one reason. As slaves of death and darkness, they hate Christ. That is also why men persecute believers, just as they persecuted Jesus. And that is one reason why being persecuted is not a penalty.

It is a privilege. That is how Peter and John looked on suffering. With their backs still bloody from being beaten by the ruling Jews, they were not filled with sorrow but rejoicing.

...they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 5:41

Being persecuted as a Christian is also an honor because it is so easy to avoid. If we are silent and shy about our faith, the world will always pass us by.

Those who suffer for their faith aren't those who are scared into silence, but who stand up and speak out for the Lord who loves them.

That is the cost of a complete commitment to Christ.

The Power

Christ was completely confident that the men who followed Him would speak out for Him. In fact, He knew they would be so bold, His enemies would have no choice but to drag them into court.

So He gave them some specific instructions to follow when that time did come.

When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Verse 11

When Paul stood before Nero, that decadent Roman ruler had the finest legal minds in the empire on his side. So there was no way a Jewish tentmaker could out argue them.

But the old missionary didn't have to worry and fret about what he should say to defend himself. The Savior promised His Spirit would give His disciples the words to say when they stood before both Jewish and Gentile courts. And there is no limit to the knowledge and wisdom of God's Spirit. And that is not all the Holy Spirit does for Christians who are forced to defend themselves before powerful enemies.

He also gives persecuted believers the strength, the stamina and the courage to stand boldly for the Savior they love. And that promise is more than merely important. It is vital. We cannot hope to stand for our Lord for a single moment on our own. We must have His strength to straighten our backs and stiffen our knees when powerful men attack us.

We must have the Spirit's wisdom to know what to say, too. That is why, when we are faced with those who hate our Lord, we must know our own heart as well as Moses knew his.

Moses said to the Lord, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and

slow of tongue.” The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” Exodus 4:10-12

That is the key to standing and speaking out for Christ in times of trial and trouble, of pressure and persecution. We must admit we are too frail to stand for our Savior alone and too foolish to know what to say.

Jesus said we are not only refuse to plan and prepare what to say. He also commanded that we are not to worry and fret when we face enemies who hate and harass us.

Instead, we are to trust in God. For inner peace in desperate hours flows from a fountain of faith.

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, Isaiah 26:3 (ESV)

It is also important to remember that Jesus did not say, *if they arrest you*. For faithful followers of Jesus Christ, persecution is not a matter of *if* but *when*.

If our commitment to Christ is complete and our stand for the Savior is uncompromising, sooner or later we will be faced with persecution. And that stabs many believers with icicles of fear.

All too often we harbor a secret dread and a desperate fear of persecution. But that is merely more unbelief and lack of faith.

Our high and holy heavenly Father cannot lie. And He has promised us, when our hour of trial does come, His Spirit will be both in us and with us to give us a strength that will startle our enemies and words that will confound them.

And as surely as God is true and every man a liar, we can rest in His promise.

The Purpose

However, one question still remains. If our God is the sovereign Ruler of all creation, why does He allow those who love and serve Him to be persecuted?

The answer to that question is wrapped up in both God’s love and His righteousness. Jesus not only told His disciples they would be hauled before councils and courts. He also explained why.

...they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. Verses 9-10

Nero was one of history’s most despicable tyrants. He murdered his own mother to solidify his power. And his persecution of Christians became so vicious and violent, even battle hardened soldiers in the Praetorian Guard were disgusted by it.

Nevertheless, the great God of Heaven loved Nero and sent His Son to suffer and die for him. The Lord loved the pudgy young ruler so much, He allowed His premier apostle, Paul, to be led in chains before Caesar’s throne in Rome.

Then when Paul stood there, God’s Spirit gave the old missionary the words to say to Nero. And there is little doubt what Paul said then was much different than what He said earlier when he stood in chains before Agrippa.

I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light

both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. Acts 26:22-23

God allows His servants to be charged by wicked men that He might share the good news of Christ's love with them. But that is not the only testimony suffering saints share. Their fearlessness also bears witness of the power of God.

In addition to providing wicked men with an opportunity to respond to Jesus' love, the witness of persecuted believers is also a powerful testimony against their captors.

When God judges all men, those rulers will be without excuse. They didn't merely hear a man tell them about salvation through Jesus Christ. They heard the words of God Himself.

There is yet another reason why God allows Christians to suffer. And that reason is tucked away in our Lord's final promise.

You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. Verse 13

Genuine believers do not have to worry that they will fail out of fear and deny the Lord they love when they are faced with suffering. God has promised to keep those who are His, just as Jesus kept those who trusted in Him.

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that Name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. John 17:12 (NIV)

No human being has the inner strength to keep his commitment to Christ by his own force of will. God must keep us, or we will surely fail. That is why Paul depended upon his Lord to keep the commitment he made to Christ.

I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. 2 Timothy 1:12

When John wrote his first letter, Christians were being savagely persecuted. And some who claimed Christ's name left the faith.

Some of those apostates even became false teachers, spreading lies to mislead sincere saints. Nevertheless, John wrote that none of them actually left their faith behind. They never really had it.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. 1 John 2:19-20

John was absolutely convinced that those who are really saved will endure to the end of their days on this earth. So those who do depart from faith never really had a genuine, life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ to begin with. Real faith endures.

And suffering is like a garden hoe. It weeds out those whose faith is pretense and whose commitment is not genuine.

There is a wonderful promise in that. If we genuinely trust in Christ's blood and have sincerely offered Him our lives, even the darkest and deepest persecution cannot extinguish it.

By the power of our Savior's Spirit within us, we can and will endure to the end.