

II Tim. 3:10-13; John 16:31-33; Realistic Expectations I. When will Persecution Come II. Why will We be Persecuted III. Who will be Persecuted

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, once again I was struck this past week by the pressing issue of persecution. Persecution is not just something reserved for those living in China, North Korea or Nigeria. Rather, all of God's people will face persecution in various forms and at various times. It has often been said that there will be more Christian persecution in the 21st Century than any time before- and part of the reason for this is that there are so many Christians living in almost every country. The focus of this sermon is not scare you but rather to prepare you. To strengthen your will and embolden your courage. We live in a time when the contrast between truth and the lie is becoming sharper. For example, the so called "Respect for Marriage" act recently passed by Synod has redefined marriage. The LGBT movement along with the gender dysphoria has sought to redefine male and female. Those in positions of power who are supposed to defend the innocent are setting the guilty free as they side with the law breakers. We live in a time when wickedness and rebellion are called good while the righteous and the upright are called wicked, extreme and hateful! Such is the world in which we live- and we need to be ready to stand firm. With the possible loss of charitable status, the possible vandalism of our church like what took place at the Focus on the Family campus last week, and even the possibility of being hauled into court for speaking the truth- we as God's people need to be prepared- ready! We need to have realistic expectations for the kind of reception we will receive in this world. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ prepared the church for persecution by reminder her of His victory!

I. When will Persecution Come

In our first point we will consider when this persecution will come. When should we expect to receive these trials and tribulations? And the answer is- now! We should expect to be persecuted now- today- in this life. Jesus put it this way in John 16:33, in this life you will have trouble- in this world you will face persecution. Now this might be surprising to some as we have come to expect our best life now. We have grown accustomed to a life of ease and comfort. But Jesus states in no uncertain terms, all those who

seek to follow after Jesus will face trials and will be persecuted in this life- just as Jesus was. Or to say it as Peter does in I Peter 4- do not be surprised at the fiery trials when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. So it is not trials that are strange- rather it is times of peace that are abnormal. For the church, we should expect to be face these thorns and thistles of tribulation. Since our country has in the main enjoyed a history of civic order- our laws being built broadly on the standards of God's law- we have enjoyed many years of relative peace. But that is not to say that the church in North America has not faced trials- it surely has. But unless the Lord directly and mightily changes the direction of our nation- it seems clear that the churches in North America are coming up to a time of increased persecution. It will be more and more difficult to live for Jesus- to live a quiet, decent and productive lives without raising the ire of fellow man and our government. Speaking the truth will earn us the title of hate speech. Instructing our children in the Word will be seen as indoctrination in extremism. This persecution has and will come in many forms. It may be in the loss of job or being passed over for a promotion. Being slandered or avoided by others- being unfairly criticized or sued. But these trials are also felt when we see the sins put on display around us! It hurts us- it grieves our souls when we see the sins of this world flaunted and praised! It bothers us to see the LGBT and Gay Rights receive the praise of our leaders. When marriage is undermined and gender confused. These things pain us because we know that they cause pain to the LORD! To see His creatures created good now delving into ever increasing wickedness! It hurts us as well to see the Lord's Day despised- to see stadiums full of worshipers while the churches sit empty. Our conscience is pricked when God's name is slandered and His name dragged through the mud. This too is part of the trial that we endure in this life.

II. Why will We be Persecuted

Now that we have seen that persecutions and trials are to be expected and endured in this life- today; in our next point we consider why it is that we will be persecuted. Why should we expect to receive these hardships in this world? Why do we grieve when we see the sins of this world and the sins in our own

hearts? The reason is found in our identity. We are in the world but not of it as John 15:19 says. If you were off the world, the world would love you as its own. But since you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you. Although we continue to live in a fallen world, our identity or our citizenship is of the world to come. You see, when people of the world share their idols with others they are comforted. But when their neighbors belong to a church and do not worship the same idols they do, they feel threatened. When Christians stand for the truth and align their lives with the Law of God, their own sinful deeds are exposed. The world hates the light! The light of the Word and the piety of our lives exposes their own actions and they are filled with hatred and rage! But this should not surprise us- for as John 15 continues- a servant is not above his master. If they persecuted Jesus, they will persecute His followers. So the church will be persecuted because of what the church represents! Whom the church represents! The fact is, as Paul puts it, the cross is offensive! To be clear- the gospel of Jesus Christ is the offense- not us! Your life should not be abrasive or harsh towards others- but our embrace of the truth is where the conflict is! The truth about sin is repulsive to those who suppress the truth! We have to remember that we are part of a battle- the church is engaged in a cosmic war! The army of darkness is waging war against the church- the devil is seeking to destroy Christ's witness and kingdom on earth. So although our battle is not against flesh and blood, the devil does use flesh and blood to carry out his dirty work! Since the devil has been cast down and now prowls around like a lion- should we be surprised when we are persecuted in this life?

III. Who will be Persecuted

Now that we understand why we will be persecuted, we come to our last point that deals with the "who" of persecution. Who should expect persecution to fall upon them? Our reading from II Tim. 3:12 states: Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Notice that Paul starts by saying – indeed. This fact is certain. And he follows by saying- all who desire- anyone who wants to live a godly life- all of these will be persecuted! To say this another way, all those who are united to Christ by faith- all those who seek to obey God's word and follow His will- all of these will be persecuted. It is not a

possibility or probability- but a certainty! The church will be harassed as they live their lives here below. Those who love and speak the truth will be hated and slandered. So in some ways, enduring hardship is one of the signs of belonging to God's people. There almost should be a warning above the doors of the church- all those who enter here will be persecuted! If you want to avoid hardship- if you want the easy life- then don't join! In fact, v. 13 continues by saying that evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. One of the ways in which God tests His people is by persecutions! These separate the committed from those just sitting on the fence! The fires of tribulation test the hearts of men. If people pack up their bags and go home at the first sign of trouble- as soon as Christianity falls out of favor they no longer are interested- this is one way in which God weights the hearts of men! The plant that withers at the first sign of drought is not one of God's fruitful trees planted by living waters! So the church is tested and tried- and Jesus sees what is in the heart of every man. Think of the righteous men of the past- like Noah and Lot- men who were tormented by the wickedness they saw around them. So it will be in our world! Remember that enmity with the world is a hard-fought victory for us! Because friendship with the world is hostility towards God! Let the church remember the call of Christ- to take up your cross and follow Him!

But all is not doom and gloom here- there is good news that must be heard before we close. Back in John 16 Jesus follows the word of warning about impending persecution with these words- take heart! I have overcome the world! The church can still have great comfort and peace even in the mist of trying times because Christ has overcome! We can be of good cheer- we can act boldly and stand our ground because we know that the gates of hell will not prevail! So let us all be ready for the battle- not surprised when trials come- but rather ready and prepared! So that we stand firm in the day of trouble- never denying but always confessing the truth! Jesus Christ prepared the church for persecution by reminder her of His victory! As Jesus said, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.