

The New Testament Church
Preparing for Persecution #1: The Pressure of Persecution
 Pastor Paul Jehle – July 24, 2022
 Matthew 5:10-13; John 15:18-21

I What is Persecution?

A. Persecution defined

1. Greek – *to put to flight, drive away.... To pursue* – thus it is pressure being given...
2. Webster's 1828 - *The act or practice of persecuting; the infliction of pain, punishment or death upon others unjustly, particularly for adhering to a religious creed or mode of worship, either by way of penalty or for compelling them to renounce their principles.*
3. Persecution is on the rise – statistics by Open Doors – in 2021 alone...
 - a. 360 million, or 1 in 7 believers world-wide, suffered significant persecution
 - b. Every day in 2021 an average of 16 believers were killed – 6,000 – 24% increase!
 - c. But persecution is wider, more purposeful that we give credit to God for allowing it

B. Breadth of persecution – example of Perpetua's story – martyred March 7, 203 AD

1. Of the spirit – pressure from the demonic – rehearse who you are in Christ
 - a. The enemy is limited, can't possess your spirit, but put pressure
 - b. If we do not continually rehearse who we are in Christ, we run away
2. Of the soul – pressure from the flesh – renew your mind
 - a. The flesh always persecutes the spirit – Galatians 5
 - b. Thus, we need to renew our minds in the Lord – learn Scripture choruses!
3. Of the body – pressure from the culture – rehearse the purpose of the pressure
 - a. To be demeaned, hated, attacked, martyred, false accusations, etc.
 - b. To handle it we must continually prepare by dealing with smaller issues...

II The Purpose of the Pressure of Persecution

A. Exposure of the condition of the Church – Matthew 5:10-13

1. Persecution due to living righteously – v. 10-12
 - a. Life in Christ is the opposite of the “spirit of the age” – nothing we can do
 - b. Say all manner of things against us falsely – that is the key
 - c. Great is our reward in heaven – spirit, soul and body enduring for His glory
2. Persecution because of passivity – v. 13
 - a. Persecution can be minimized by being “salt” – relationships, harmony, unity
 - b. The world then sees us as legitimate servants, not to be “trodden” under foot
 - c. We can actually bring persecution on unnecessarily – individually and corporately

B. Persecution is to be expected – John 15:18-21; (see also 2nd Timothy 3:12)

1. Jesus is our forerunner and thus *all that will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*
2. Persecution in the 1st century early Church
 - a. All the original disciples were martyred except for John
 - b. What life was like in the early church – quotes and ideas (see backside)
 - c. The world means the system – demonically inspired – not every unbeliever
 - d. Must avoid an “us and them” mentality – Ephesians 6 – not flesh and blood

C. Birth-pangs of the Kingdom – Romans 8:18-22

1. Suffering of the present time doesn't compare to the Glory eternally
2. All of creation yearns for the manifestation of the Kingdom through believers
3. All of creation “groans with birth pangs” to manifest the Kingdom
4. We must keep this goal in mind – *God uses the pressure of the culture to help us focus on the manifestation of His Kingdom for this generation and future ones!*

Living by a Higher Authority – by Stephen Presley, 2022

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To be openly Christian in the ancient world was to be mistrusted and mistreated by one's fellow citizens. Christians had to walk the streets and share all the forms and features of living within a pagan culture, but they were universally hated and their doctrine was largely misunderstood. In addition, to sporadic (and eventually empirewide) persecution, a general posture of incredulity and suspicion existed toward the new faith.

Celsus, a critic of early Christianity, 175 AD

(Christians) invite into membership those who by their own account are sinners; the dishonest, thieves, burglars, poisoners, blasphemers of all descriptions, grave robbers... I mean – what other cult actually invites robbers to become members!

Tertullian's Apology – Carthage, 197 AD

They think the Christians the cause of every public disaster, of every affliction with which the people are visited. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is a famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is "Away with the Christians to the lion!"

Epistle to Diognetus – 103 to 200 AD

(Christians) marry like everyone else, and have children, but they do not expose their offspring (to death). They share their food but not their wives. They are in the flesh, but they do not live according to the flesh. They live on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws; indeed in their private lives they transcend the laws. They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted.