

Persecution Then and Now

The Question

- So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (Acts 9:6 NKJV)
- This question coming from the man who had been THE persecutor of the church.

Defining the Term

- Persecute: to harass or punish in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict ; *specifically* : to cause to suffer because of belief
- To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21)



Biblical Examples

John the Baptist beheaded -- Matthew 14:1 – 12

The Stoning of Stephen

- At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death (Acts 7:57-8:1).

The Apostles Flogged

They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:40-41).

Paul's Life as an Apostle

Before the Sanhedrin:

"My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead. (Acts 23:6)"

Escape from the Jews in Damascus:

After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. (Acts 9:23-25)

Stoned at Lystra:

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe. (Acts 14:19-20)

Christians in Rome

- Pinch of incense on the altar and declare Caesar as lord
- Human torches lit up the night sky
- Battling gladiators, wild animals, wearing animal skins, crucifixion, etc.
- Emperor Nero and the burning of Rome
- Why/how could anyone stand up under such persecution?

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12-13).

John wrote the book of Revelation during his banishment on the island of Patmos.

- The story of the little girl in Fayetteville during the Civil War

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions (Hebrews 10:32-34).

Well, at least we don't face persecution today?????

- Our lifestyles—abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage, alcohol, drug use, etc.
- Our opinions---Miss California
- United Kingdom: Christians risk rejection and discrimination for their faith, a study claims (June 2, 2009)
- Bangladesh: Muslim Villagers Beat Evangelists In Southeast (June 1, 2009)
- United States: "In God We Trust"

Positives of Persecution

- *God makes negatives into positives!*
- *Because of persecution against the church, it actually GREW! :*

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said (Acts 8:4-6)

- Also Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch
- Missionary journeys of Paul
- *Strengthening of faith*: Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3-4).
- *New converts are won—sometimes even old persecutors just like Paul.*

Our Assurance and Encouragement

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance (James 1:2-3)

*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, (2Timothy 3:12)

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:17-19).
