

GLORY CROWN
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..... GLORY CROWN

GLORY TO GOD MINISTRIES
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“WITNESSING FOR CHRIST”

CHAPTER ONE

Two questions often asked of us are, “How can I share my faith in Jesus Christ better?” and “Is there something I need to do to be a more effective witness?” When I hear these questions I am immediately thankful in my heart because such a desire is a godly desire. God’s call for us is to go forth and spread His word, and tell people what great things He is doing.

“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so...” (Psalm 107:2) According to this passage, it is only fitting and proper for God’s people to tell others what He has done, and to do it in confidence and boldness – because it has already been accomplished. We are to tell the whole world what great things God has done for us through Jesus Christ and the love He has for His people.

We are God’s ambassadors to this world. As the Lord Jesus was ready to depart into the heavens, He told His disciples, *“All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”* (Matthew 28:18-10)

Here it is stated a little differently *‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.’ So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”* (Mark 16:15-20)

As we go forth in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking the word of God, and telling the people what we have seen and heard and know

to be true, God works with us and confirms His word with signs and wonders following.

God has also called every believer into a ministry of reconciliation, doing the work of Jesus. As He completed His work, He drew the people of the world to God. Through His love He made it possible for us to have life with Him forever, and now we are to show forth His love in this world, being ministers of reconciliation. We tell people that God loves them, that He draws them to Himself for life, and they can have that life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage makes it clear: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”* (2nd Corinthians 5:17-21) When we received the Lord Jesus, God made us new creatures, and the old things have passed away. God has made everything new, and His life is now within us.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation...” (verse 18) Each of us is to be a minister, showing the love of God in this world so people can turn to Him and receive His love.

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” (verse 19) Because of what Jesus Christ did for us, God did not count what separated us from Him against us.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” (verse 20) Be right with God. The only way to share the love of God with others is to be right with Him ourselves.

“For He hath made Him to be sin for us. Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” (verse 21)

God gave us that wonderful life that was in Jesus. He took our separation onto Himself so that we could have right standing with Him. This is His love: the fact that we were not worthy to receive His life, and yet He came while we were still enemies. Jesus gave His life for us, paid the

price for our separation, and gave us right standing with God. We who call upon the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, and we know that we have the life of God.

This is the dynamic experience in which we begin to share His love because if it were not for His love touching us, we wouldn't have life with Him. That knowledge produces an intense desire within us for others to have that love. Apart from Jesus there is no life or blessing of any kind according to God's word; but life, health, divine provision, protection and blessings of every kind are available in Jesus.

God has told us that we are to be ministers of this good news. We are to tell people what great things He has done for us. (Romans 10:14-15) Many times we get so self-centered in our Christian walk that we forget there is a whole world out there that needs to hear about God's love. It is easy to think on the blessings and forget to tell others that they can have it too.

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Romans 10:14-15) People will not come to believe upon the Lord until someone tells them about Him, and someone has to tell them. How can they preach or tell them unless they are sent? I believe the Spirit of God today is sending you forth under the anointing of the Holy Spirit to tell people about what great things He has done for you. That is where your witness begins.

Not everyone is an evangelist or a pastor, etc. However, all of us, as God's people, according to these Scriptures, are ministers called to tell others about what we have seen, heard, and know to be true. This is important. We are called to tell people.

Years ago, I thought witnessing was going out and preaching God's word. That really is not what a witness is to do. A witness simply reflects what he has seen and heard and knows to be true!! You don't have to be a great Bible scholar to be able to witness. All you have to do is to let your light shine about what you have seen and heard and know to be true.

The moon reflects the sun, and that is the same principle we operate under. We have no light in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ we have been given light. That reflection of Jesus' light flows through us and touches the people around us. The apostle John said to the people *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship with the Father, and with His son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”* (1st John 1:1-4) Note here that he is simply telling them what he has seen and heard and knows to be true.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This same Jesus is just as real today as He was to the apostle John. We have not seen Him physically, but through His word (and as we experience it), Jesus becomes real. As we see the word of God working in our lives, we have a testimony to bring forth to the people. This is what we are called to tell the people – what Jesus means to us, what He has done for us, and what we have seen, heard, and know to be true.

John wrote to the people to make their (and his) joy complete. (1st John 1:4) One of the greatest things that can happen to believers is to have the joy that comes from telling others about what Jesus Christ has done for them. Our joy becomes full when we tell what He is able to do for them. God is no respecter of persons. He has done things for us so He will do things for them. Their joy will be full also. We are to encourage people to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ and to believe His word.

Many times we find it difficult to witness about God's love in sending Jesus Christ because we think we have to first take some speech lessons or build up self-confidence before we can go out to tell people. This is wrong thinking on our part. We need to get ourselves out of the way, become filled with the Holy Spirit, and learn to rely upon Him to direct our witness.

I used to wonder why it was so difficult to get people to go out and tell someone else about the Lord. Several things came to me as I prayed.

- The first reason that many people don't witness is because they are not really convinced in themselves about their relationship with the Lord. You cannot tell someone else about something you don't have or are not sure of yourself.
- Secondly, many believers have not acted on the promises of God enough to know that He will do exactly what He says in behalf of them that believe. As a result, they do not have a testimony of God working personally in their lives.

You cannot have an encounter with Jesus and God's word and not have your life changed. You will want to tell someone else about what He has done for you. We all have a tendency to talk about the things we love the most. If Jesus is our first love, we will talk about Him.

There are many examples in Scripture about people who were touched by the Lord. Andrew, who was one of Jesus' disciples, told Peter that he had found the Messiah. Then he proceeded to bring Peter to Jesus. (John 1:35-51) Here is a breakdown of what Andrew did: One, he *searched for himself* so he could come to the point where he was convinced in his own heart that he had found the Messiah, and that he knew for a fact that Jesus was the Messiah. Two, he went and *told* Peter that he had found Jesus, the answer to his life. He had found a reason for rejoicing, a hope eternal; he had found the life of God. Third, he didn't leave it at that. Andrew then *brought* Peter to Jesus.

Our first step is to tell people about what great things God is doing in our lives and what we have seen and heard and know to be true. The second step is to lead them to Jesus. Andrew physically brought Peter to Jesus, and then Peter could find out for himself.

Another account in John 4:1-42 deals with a woman who talked with Jesus at a well. She told the entire village what had happened to her, the result being that the village received the Lord. She told the people what her encounter with Jesus had meant to her and what had happened in that encounter. As she did so, the village wanted to hear more about it. "*And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, 'He told me all that ever I did'.*" (John 4:39) That

was her testimony. She didn't preach the word of God to them. She simply told what Jesus had done for her. Operating under the Spirit of God, Jesus had given a word of knowledge to her. As a result she was touched. She knew this man was a man of God, so she went and told the people about Him.

“So when the Samaritans were come unto Him, they besought Him that He would tarry with them; and He abode there two days. And many more believed because of His own word; and said unto the woman, now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” (John 4:40-42)

It all began when a woman simply shared what happened in an encounter with the word of God, Jesus Christ, and how her life was changed. As she did so, people were touched and they came and sought for themselves. They received, and they too were set free.

Jesus told a man who had been delivered from demons to go back and tell the people of his country what great things God had done for him. Many others believed God to help them as a result of his testimony. This account is found in Mark 5:1-20. The man wanted to stay with Jesus, but He said, “No, I want you to tell the countryside and your family what great things God has done for you.” The result was that many people believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told to them.” (Luke 2:20 and Luke 2:17-18) Just prior to this, the shepherds told everyone about what they had seen and heard after Jesus' birth.

The devil doesn't want people talking about what God has done and will do for people. He doesn't want people going around saying that God can give you eternal life, He can give you health, He can heal your family situation, and He can provide for your needs. The devil doesn't want people knowing that God can deliver them from fears, worries, anxieties, and all depression. God, on the other hand, wants us to tell others what we have seen and heard and know to be true from experience on the basis of His word. The devil wants to shut everyone up and not let anything go out about what God wants to do and is able to. God wants us to publish throughout

the world what great things He has done, is doing, and will do for those who believe in Him and diligently seek Him out. (Hebrews 11:6, and Psalm 107:2)

- The third hindrance to people's witness is that they care more about what others think than what God thinks about them. Jesus said, *"If you are ashamed to confess me before men, I will be ashamed to confess you before the Father."* (Matthew 10:32) We are not to be afraid of what men can do. We are not to be afraid of what the devil can do because he cannot do anything to harm God's people. More importantly, we need to be most concerned about what God thinks about us.

Here is a scripture that many people think refers to the devil, but it actually refers to God: *"And fear not them, which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10:28) We are not to be afraid of the devil. The only one who has the right to destroy both body and soul in hell is God. The devil has no right to judge; only God does.

Jesus said not to be concerned about what people may think of you, but rather be concerned about what God thinks of you. He loves you, and He will help you. He will give you the words to say. *"Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 10:32)

This is vitally important. We must make a decision about whom we want to please. Scripture says that if we want to please God, we will receive His blessings. If we want to please men, we will *not* receive the blessing. Nevertheless, suffering will come from the hands of men as we seek to please God and witness about Jesus. (2nd Timothy 3:12)

- Fourthly, people are hindered from witnessing about the Lord because even though they are believers in Jesus, they have not yet received the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in Acts 8:4-19, Acts 19:1-7, and in other places. We will not go into detail here, but I would like to point out something. When a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, he

receives the ability of God to witness. Jesus tells us that once people receive the Holy Spirit, they will receive the power or ability to witness about the working of God under the direction of His Spirit. They will see His power go into effect.

“But ye shall receive power [ability], after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me... unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) In other words, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we receive the ability of God to witness with power, and the Holy Spirit will bring conviction on the hearts of the hearers as we speak. John 15:26-27 deals with this also.

An encouraging word is that if we rely on the Holy Spirit in us (after we are filled), then He will give us the words to say at the time they need to be spoken. (Matthew 10:18-20) They will be words coming directly from the heart of God as we speak. He works with us in our witness; we are not out there on our own.

After the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were on fire for God, witnessing about Jesus with all boldness and confidence. Before they had been fearful, and they even deserted Jesus. Throughout the Book of Acts, and especially in Acts 2 and Acts 4:1-31, we see the working of the Holy Spirit and how He empowered them to witness for Christ. They were not concerned with anything other than doing and saying what God would have done and said. They prayed for even more power to witness boldly. They prayed that God would extend His mighty hand to heal, so that even greater signs and wonders would follow the working of the name of Jesus, that even more people might be turned to God.

- The fifth hindrance to people’s witness is that it is possible for people who have received the Holy Spirit to lose their First Love when they put the things of the world before God. (Revelation 2:1-7) They have allowed themselves to become distracted. As a result, they have lost the power of their testimony. (Mark 4:16-19) We have also found it to be true that people have forgotten the works which God has done in their behalf as they allow other thoughts to come into their minds. (Psalm 103:1-6)

If the devil or our flesh can get us sidetracked from our purpose of being ambassadors for Christ, then our witness is stopped. When our light is not going out to others, then people are not hearing what we know to be true. So, we have to stand against distractions.

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;...” (In the Greek it actually says, *“Be [being] filled with the Spirit on a daily basis, stirring up the Holy Spirit to overflowing.”*) *“...speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Ephesians 5:18-20)

If distractions are our problem, we need to ask God to forgive us for forgetting our First Love and allowing ourselves to be distracted. Then God will restore our witness with a renewed fire, and we will go forward under the anointing of the Spirit of God. His working will increase in our lives and in the lives of those who hear our testimony about what God has done for us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

WHAT DOES “SUFFERING FOR CHRIST” MEAN? A New Look at Job

CHAPTER TWO

I would like to deal with the following comment: “I have some friends who believe that they are giving glory to God by suffering for Christ through sickness. They don’t believe God will heal their diseases. Is this true?” Some people want to stay sick and carry the disease because they feel that they are suffering for Christ. They think if they smile and give glory to God in their disease, then people will come to the Lord as a result of their testimony.

God’s word will shed some light concerning this. People are under a misconception about suffering, trials, and tribulation.

God’s word clearly shows that suffering, sickness and disease are not His will for anyone (Acts 10:38), nor is it His will that anyone should perish and suffer eternal punishment in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. (2nd Peter 3:9)

The Lord Jesus has “*borne our griefs.*” (Isaiah 53:4-5) In Hebrew the word “grief” means sickness, disease and maladies (physical ailments). The Lord Jesus, at the cross, surely has borne our griefs. In English that would be, “He has borne our sickness, disease and maladies.”

“*He has carried our sorrows*” has to do with the emotional realm and the mind.

“*The chastisement of our peace was upon Him*” deals with the spiritual realm. “*And by His stripes we are healed.*” “To heal” means, “to heal as a physician.” The Lord Jesus fulfilled that word from Isaiah 53.

At the cross He actually bore our physical problems, our mental and emotional problems, and our spiritual problems, giving us life with the Father. We find this also in the New Testament. “*When the evening was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils; and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: That it*

might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” (Matthew 8:16-17) It is not God’s will that anyone be sick because Jesus didn’t say or do anything that was not the perfect will of His Heavenly Father. (John 8:28-30; 14:10-11) The Word says time and again that Jesus went about healing all who were oppressed of the devil for God was with Him. (Acts 10:38)

God’s will is that people not suffer affliction, sickness and disease because Jesus came to set them free from all of those things. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repentance.”* (2nd Peter 3:9) It is God’s will that no one be separated from His life in Jesus Christ. He has not predestined some to be with Him and others to go to the fire of *“Gehenna.”* People choose for themselves.

It is clear that God wants everyone to be saved. He has provided that salvation in the blood of Jesus, which was given for us at the cross. Why, then, isn’t everyone saved? Not everyone turns to the Lord Jesus for life and is faithful to the end. God’s clear desire is that everyone be saved. In the same way, it is His will that everyone be healed. The blood has already provided for it. Likewise, not everyone is healed because not everyone believes God for healing.

Not everyone was healed in Jesus’ day because not everyone came to Him to be healed. Jesus acted in the perfect will of His Father, and He healed all who were oppressed of the devil. (Sickness and disease are from the devil.) Jesus healed people because God was with Him.

Everyone that sought healing from Jesus received healing. Remember, sickness and disease are *not* from God; health and salvation are from Him.

People will not be free to receive their healing until they understand that it is not God’s will for them to be sick. Take the time to study His word and find out what He actually says, and you will find the truth which will set you free. It is our purpose in this book to set forth what His word says, not our opinions. Let our opinions rest upon what God has said. We will get at the truth, and the truth is going to make us free.

The Lord Jesus told us that if we continue in His word, then we are His disciples, and we will know the truth and the truth will make us free. (John 8:31-32)

God's word says that "*suffering for Christ*" means being persecuted for being a Christian. NOWHERE throughout the bible is there a reference to any person suffering sickness and disease for Christ's sake!

Jesus suffered for us by being afflicted, beaten, mocked and crucified. He gave His own blood and life as our substitute—paying the price for our separation from God so that we might be saved when we receive Him as our Lord and Savior. Because Jesus was on the cross, and his blood was given, we become spiritually right, and we have peace with God.

The blood of Jesus took away all of our mental anguish, torment, fears, worries, depression, doubt, despair, and confusion of the mind. Then as we pointed out earlier, He took our sickness, disease, and maladies (the physical). The blood of Jesus took away the power of sickness, disease and maladies. In other words, healing for spirit, mind, and body is available to those who believe and are seeking God for healing in Jesus' name.

To think I am suffering for Christ by being sick and diseased is a lie of the devil. Again, there is no reference in the Bible for anyone suffering sickness and disease for Christ. Examine God's word so that you can find the truth.

What is suffering for Christ? It is being persecuted because of what you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to look to the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord as examples of suffering, affliction, and patience. (James 5:10-11) The prophets constantly went through persecution because of what they said under the divine direction of God Himself.

"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." (James 5:11) Job was healed and prospered by God. If anyone would ever take the time to read Job 42, they would plainly see what happened when he repented of his ignorance of God's

operation. He said (paraphrased), “I spoke of things I didn’t know about, things too wonderful for me (Job 42:1-6), and I want to correct it all.”

It is time we all stand before God with a repentant heart. We need to repent of attitudes and values that have been taught to us down through the ages (or we have picked up on our own) if they are not true and consistent with God’s word.

In the end Job was healed as he prayed for his friends. Perhaps you have heard people say God put that sickness and disease on him. The Bible clearly shows that He didn’t do it; Satan did. The first chapter of Job shows that Job was in fear for his children, which is what opened the door to the enemy. Job offered sacrifices for his children “*perchance*” they had committed some sin against God. He did this on a continual basis. (Job 1:5) The term “perchance” means that it did not necessarily happen, but Job feared that it would. He was trying to cover for his children. Fear is sin. The door was open, and Job admitted it himself: “*That which I feared the most is that which came upon me.*” (Job 3:25)

When the Lord spoke with Satan in Job 1:10, Satan said, “*I cannot touch this man [Job] because You have a hedge around him.*” The hedge was the divine protection and prospering of God. (When we are in God’s protection, the evil one cannot touch us.) People have said, “God took down the hedge.” No, Job took down the hedge with his fear. God was not the author of Job’s sickness and disease. Satan brought the problems.

When Job repented, he said, “*I have heard of Thee with the hearing of the ear:*” (Job did not really know who God was, and yet he was a man standing in faith, believing in this God.) Many people today have not had a real encounter with the Lord, but they know about Him, and they praise Him. They believe in Him, but they are not moving in the way He moves and operates. We need to search His word so that we find out how He does operate.

When Job found out how God operated (and when God appeared to him just prior to chapter 42), he repented for his ignorance and spiritual pride in dictating what God would and would not do for him. Then God healed him as he prayed for his friends, and He prospered him and gave him back double the wealth he had before (Job had been one of the wealthiest

men that ever lived.). In addition, God gave him 140 more years of life. It doesn't say he was ever sick again. (It would be helpful to read chapters 33-42.)

Glory always went to God when people were healed, not because of their sickness and disease. Here is an incident about giving God glory: *“And Jesus said unto him, receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.”* (Luke 18:43) Did they give praise to God because this man was blind? No! They gave praise to God because Jesus healed him.

We have to do away with the thinking that glory goes to God in sickness and disease. The Scriptures will not substantiate it. *“And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, ‘We have seen strange things today.’”* (Luke 5:25, 26) The person gave glory to God, and all the people around gave glory to Him because of the healing (the power of God moved), not because the man was sick.

“...In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” (2nd Corinthians 13:1)

These are but a few scriptures on this subject; there are many others if you care to search them out for yourself.

“So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.” (Acts 4:21) In other words, all the people were giving God glory, *“for the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.”* (verse 22) It was the miracle that caused the people to give God glory, not the man lying there sick.

You can give glory to God all you want while you are sick. However, sickness and disease is not from God but from the devil. We would be giving glory to the devil.

“And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and anklebones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.” (Acts 3:7-8) *“And all the people saw him walking and praising God.”* (Acts 3:9) This man was praising God when he was healed, and it was the healing that actually gave the glory to God.

The term “tribulation” appears 26 times in the bible. The Greek definition means “persecution, trouble, or tribulation.” None of the New Testament listings describe tribulation as sickness and disease. Tribulation is the result of pressure from the devil towards Christians, which usually comes in the form of persecution. This can be tested out in Scripture. Here are just a few:

In the parable of the sower and the seed: *“Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for awhile; for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, by and by he is offended.”* (Matthew 13:21)

NOTE THAT ALL THE “SUFFERING FOR CHRIST” AND TRIBULATION IS NOT DEALING WITH SICKNESS AND DISEASE. IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE WORD OF GOD. WHAT PEOPLE BELIEVE RESULTS IN SUFFERING, PERSECUTION AND TRIBULATION.

According to the parable, people who are new in the Lord don’t have firm roots down, so when others come with the pressure of persecution, they give up Jesus. They don’t have enough Word in them. After a period of time it says they are offended. This happens quite often today. If people would realize what is happening – that it is the devil working in and through others to steal their faith – they would be a lot firmer in their stand to hold fast to what they know to be true. They wouldn’t give up their faith in Jesus and God’s word.

Another scripture dealing with tribulation (pressure from the devil to give up your faith) is: *“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”* (Matthew 24:21-22) This refers to the last days – there is a great tribulation coming. Again, this will not be in the form of sickness or disease but a great persecution against the people of God. People will be pressured in this way: “either give up your faith or die.” People will be confronted with a great choice at that point.

Other scriptures for your own reference along these lines are:

Mark 13:24
John 16:33
Acts 14:22
Romans 2:9
Romans 5:3
Romans 8:35
Romans 12:12
Corinthians 1:4-7
1st Thessalonians 3:2-4
2nd Thessalonians 1:4-6
Revelation 1:9
Revelation 2:9-10
Revelation 7:14
Romans 5:3
Ephesians 3:13

“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.” (2nd Thessalonians 1:4-7)

Those people were being persecuted and going through tribulation and trials for the sake of the Word. They were *“counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer,”* meaning they were suffering for the kingdom of God’s sake, not suffering with sickness and disease.

The words “temptation” and “tempted” appear 20 times in the New Testament. In the Greek they mean, “a putting to proof by experience of good, experience of evil, solicitation, provocation, discipline, adversity, or trial.” Again, this is not dealing with sickness or disease, but temptation that comes against us in order to prove our faith. In the devil’s way of thinking, he is trying to move us away from our faith by the temptation. We must take a stand against it. *“Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation:*

the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41) We are to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation, meaning that many times we can keep ourselves out of temptation by watching and praying.

We are to count it joy when various trials or temptations come upon us, for through those trials God will develop patience. (James 1:2-6, 12) The trial and the temptation do not work the patience, for those things are actually intended to destroy us. As we stand fast, believing in the word of God and rejoicing in the Lord in the midst of the trial and temptation, then the temptation has no effect on us. The Word is our solid rock. As we stand on the solid rock, God sees us through, and the result in our hearts and our lives is patience.

We have seen this time and again. As a person follows the word of God and holds fast to it in the time of trial, God sees him through to victory. *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."* (James 1:13) God has nothing to do with the evil temptations, but in the temptation God will provide a way of escape and will not allow us to bear any more than we are able to bear. (1st Corinthians 10:13)

It is important for us to understand that temptations and temptings will not affect us as we stand fast in the word of God. God allows the evil because we permit it. He does not send evil. Note that God cannot be tempted with evil.

Scriptures for your reference are:

Matthew 6:13
Matthew 26:41
Mark 14:38
Luke 4:13
Luke 11:4
Luke 22:40
1st Corinthians 10:13
Galatians 4:14
Timothy 6:9
Hebrews 3:8

James 1:12
Revelation 3:10
James 1:2-6
1st Peter 1:6
2nd Peter 2:9

I encourage you to do this study on your own.

WHAT DOES “SUFFERING FOR CHRIST” MEAN? A New Look at Paul’s Thorn

CHAPTER THREE

Paul had been blinded by the appearance of the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. Then God sent Ananias to lay hands on him so that he might receive his sight. The word the Lord gave Ananias about Paul was "*Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake.*" (Acts 9:15-16)

In other words, Paul was going to be suffering for the sake of Christ – because of the name of Jesus. Our question is, was Jesus talking about Paul suffering with sickness and disease, or was He talking about suffering something else for the sake of the Lord Jesus?

Look at the list of the things Paul suffered for Christ. (2nd Corinthians 11:23-33) In the following verse he was defending his ministry against false teachers: "*Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.*" Paul had just been told by the people of Corinth that he was a lesser apostle. Then he listed the sufferings he had gone through as an apostle in order to vindicate himself. He knew he was speaking as a fool, that is, speaking in the flesh because he didn't have to vindicate, defend, or justify his ministry. He didn't have to compare himself with any man. He knew his call was from God. To God alone he was responsible at that point. (1st Corinthians 4:1-5)

He suffered beatings, he was stoned, and he was raised from the dead by the power of God. "*Of the Jews five times I received forty stripes save one.*" (verse 24) Five times he was beaten with 39 stripes because of what he preached concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. "*Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils*

among false brethren [people who called themselves brothers in the Lord, but were not]; In weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not? If I need to glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands." (2nd Corinthians 11:25-33) Thus far, we have seen nothing about Paul suffering with sickness and disease for Christ's sake. All we see is the persecution that he went through because of what he preached about the Lord Jesus Christ and because of what he believed and would not compromise. The persecution came because of the word of God. This is consistent with what the Lord Jesus told Ananias that He was going to show Paul *"how great things he must suffer for My name's sake."*

Continue into 2nd Corinthians 12:1 because the end of the chapter does not end the thought. Paul was still relating to the people at Corinth.

"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." (2nd Corinthians 12:1) Paul then described the various revelations and visions that he had from God which balanced out the persecutions he had gone through as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. *"... He was caught up into paradise and he heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter... yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I shall say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me." (2nd Corinthians 12:2-6)*

Here he said he would not go into any more concerning the experiences that he had with the Lord because he didn't want people to get puffed up in him. He wanted to give all of the glory to God. This is very important for any minister of God to reckon with. No matter how many great and wonderful experiences we have with the Lord, we are to keep ourselves in a place where all the glory goes to God. We don't want people to think more highly of us than they ought to. (1st Corinthians 3:1-9, 18-23, 4:6-7)

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness..." (2nd Corinthians 12:7-9)

This describes specifically what his thorn was. It is very clear in the text: the thorn is *"the messenger of Satan to buffet me."* The Greek term for messenger is "angelos," meaning an angel of Satan. We could also say it was a demon sent to buffet him.

Paul reasoned, *"Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, lest I should be exalted above measure."* Paul's reasoning was that God sent this devil to buffet him and to keep him humble. However, this is not consistent with the scriptures. We need to look closely so that we don't get confused as to what Paul was actually suffering.

Was he suffering from sickness and disease as people have often thought concerning his thorn, or was there something else he was suffering? The Bible says, *"God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."* (James 4:6) *"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up."* In other words, we can humble ourselves before God; we don't need any demon to come along and humble us. In fact, as we noted earlier, *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man:"* (James 1:13)

According to the list Paul gave, there is no mention of sickness or disease. He simply lists the things he went through in suffering for Christ (persecution because of the word of God that he spoke forth and because of the Lord Jesus whom he held onto for his very life). He counted Jesus as the only one who was important in this life, and he put aside everything else to follow Him. (Philippians 3)

It specifically says, *"the messenger of Satan"* (a demon) was the thorn. (2nd Corinthians 12:7) Paul said he besought God three times to remove the thorn. (verse 8) Jesus said, *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for My*

strength is made perfect in weakness." Jesus is not saying, "In your weakness." He is saying, "*My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" This is very important to understand.

God had already given authority to His people. The Lord Jesus said, "*Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*" (Luke 10:19) God had seen Paul through all of his persecutions and sufferings, and God's ability was sufficient for him. Paul just needed to take authority and act upon what he knew to be true. God's ability was there all along.

Some have said that Paul had eye difficulty (an eye disease or something similar). Where did that come from? Paul said to the Galatians, "*... you would have given your own eyes for me.*" This refers to the fact that he looked so horrible they couldn't stand to look at him. What was involved in this?

On Paul's first missionary journey, he came to the cities known as Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium (the region of Galatia). He was stoned at Lystra. They took him outside the city and threw rocks at him, stoning him to death. (Acts 14:19) As the disciples gathered around him, God raised him up from the dead. He went immediately to the next city. The people of these cities in Galatia are the same ones to whom Paul addressed the letter of Galatians, which states that the people saw Paul. He must have been one mess as far as his head was concerned.

If you have ever been hit by a rock, you know that it can demolish. In fact, I saw a guy get hit by a rock, and it took his nose right off to the side of his face. Paul was hit by many rocks that caused his death at that point, but the Lord Jesus raised him up.

When Paul went into the area of Galatia, he related how wonderfully they had received him (even as an angel of God), even though he looked a horrible, bloody mess. He was referring to the fact that his wounds were not yet healed. His bones were probably smashed and his face disfigured; yet the people received the word that he spoke. He said that they would have even given their own eyes for him. (Galatians 4:13-16) Yes, it is true that his infirmity, at this point, was of the flesh, but note it was only "*at the first*" (verse 13). We know that God had seen him through it all. God had raised

him up in spite of what that form of persecution (the stoning) did. This was Paul's first missionary journey and he went on two other journeys which were even more extensive than the first. Paul lived a long time, giving glory to God and doing the work of God.

I would that I could do half of what Paul was able to accomplish, but I believe that by the Spirit of God, we will all accomplish that which the Lord would have each of us to perform. In the meantime, we want to look at what Paul's thorn was. The Bible does not say anything about him having a sickness or disease for which he was suffering for Christ. Sure, he was a mess physically and his head was probably battered beyond recognition, but it was not a sickness or disease. Rather, his physical condition was a result of the persecution that came because of the word of God. God did wonderful things cosmetically and physically with the man to raise him up so that he was able to go on several other missionary journeys more extensive than the first one. There is no mention of his condition again.

Note how powerfully the devil came to buffet Paul so that he would not go on any more missionary endeavors. The devil tried to kill him so that Paul's work would end before it really began. Praise God's holy name, He raised up Paul. Satan will try to stop anyone who is stepping out in the Lord, but God will deliver us also. (Psalm 34:2 and 2nd Timothy 3:10-14)

Jesus said, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."* I don't believe he is talking about Paul's weakness here. The Lord tells us in Joel 3:10, *"Let the weak say, I am strong."* What is He talking about? Put 2nd Corinthians 13:3-4 together with Joel 3:10, and you will have the key to understanding.

"Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which towards you is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though He was crucified through weakness, yet He liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." (2nd Corinthians 13:3-4)

Jesus was crucified through weakness, yet He lived by the power of God. God considers the foolish things of this world as being wisdom to Him. (1st Corinthians 1:18-31, 3:18-20) In other words, what people consider foolishness (they considered the cross foolishness or weakness) is

actually God's wisdom. Jesus lived by the power of God. In the same way, many of the things Paul was going through were because of weakness, yet in that weakness the power of God was manifested. God's ability and strength was sufficient. *"We also are weak in Him [Jesus], but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you."* (2nd Corinthians 13:4)

Anyone who is about the business of the Lord Jesus Christ is in a weak (vulnerable) position, yet in a position where the power of God is able to flow. When one is totally surrendered to the Lord, he is considered weak as far as the world is concerned. It is considered weakness to rely upon God rather than your own strength. To God it is foolishness to think that way because His strength comes to those who are weak; that is, if they are yielded to Him. They have given up any strength within themselves, and they totally rely upon the presence and ability of God. At that point, His power goes into their lives to make them strong, and they are able to deal with any situation they come up against.

Paul suffered many things for Christ in the early stages of his ministry. He became stronger and stronger as time went on, as he relied more and more upon the Lord Jesus Christ rather than his own ability.

Jesus *"was crucified through weakness."* (2nd Corinthians 13:4) The cross was considered weakness, yet we know that it was actually the power of God to salvation to those who believe upon Him. (Romans 1:16) At the point of weakness, the greatest power of God rose up. The cross was no longer considered weakness as far as God was concerned, but was the point on which our salvation rests. It was the point of victory in our God. Then the Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. Because he lives, we will live with Him also.

We know that Jesus never suffered sickness or disease as long as He lived. There is no record of it, and we know He went about healing everyone. In the same way, we too do not need to "suffer for Christ" with sickness or disease. These are actually the curses of the law that our Lord Jesus came to take away. (See Deuteronomy 28)

Because Paul's thorn was a demon sent to buffet him, everywhere he went people were stirred up and came against him to cause the persecution and suffering he went through because of the word of God and his faith in

Jesus. The demon was sent to buffet Paul, and the demon would jump on the people who were not open to the Word through Paul. They stirred up trouble, so those people became the agents to cause the persecution.

The thorn, then, was a personal agent, not a sickness or disease. This personal agent was sent to keep Paul from doing the work of God. By the ability of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was sufficient for Paul, it made God's strength perfect in the weakness. God's ability flowed to Paul as he went about God's business in this world, not in his own strength, but in the strength of God. The strength of God in the message of the cross is considered weakness to this world, but it is power to those who believe.

"...Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: [Look closely at this list. Do you see sickness or disease for Christ's sake in there?] "For when I am weak, then I am strong. I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." (2nd Corinthians 12:9-11)

We must distinguish between what God really says and what we have been taught, or have heard, or what we ourselves have thought. "Suffering for Christ" is something we need to understand.

Look at the term "suffering" as it is used throughout the New Testament. *"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation." (2nd Corinthians 1:5-6)* He is not talking about suffering sickness and disease for someone else's benefit. He is saying that because he continued in the word of God and continued to share it in spite of the persecution and suffering, it is for these people's consolation, encouragement, and salvation. He did not stop preaching just because he was persecuted.

"Which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer, or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation... And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing, that as ye are

partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation." (2nd Corinthians 1:6, 7)

Was he saying that he was in the area spreading germs and they caught the sickness and disease? Certainly not. "They are partakers of the sufferings of Christ." It is saying that when you stand for the word of God, and you stand up for what you believe in Jesus, you will suffer persecution.

"DO I HAVE TO SUFFER PERSECUTION FOR CHRIST?"

CHAPTER FOUR

God says to those who are being persecuted because of the word of God, *"Rejoice and count it a blessing. Great is your reward in heaven!"*

Paul told them, *"And I, brethren, if I preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased?"* (Galatians 5:11) If Paul had been preaching the news concerning the law of the Jews (circumcision), he would not have been in any trouble from the people. But now in Christ, circumcision no longer needed to be done as a fulfilling of the law. People who believed in it were coming against Paul and persecuting him. What happens when a person receives the good news of the Lord Jesus, starts to grow in God's word, and believes in all that He has? There will be persecution. It may often come from other believers who are not believing the same way.

"As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ." (Galatians 6:12) People have a tendency to throw rocks when someone does not agree with them. Deal with the fact that in love we need to look at God's word and find out what He actually says. It may be that things are not quite as we have always believed or been taught. We need to humble ourselves. We must be willing to look at scripture and throw out that which we find is not true and take on that which is true according to God's word and promise. That is the way we grow up. It is so important that we always speak the truth in love to one another, so that we might grow thereby. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

"And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions:" (1st Thessalonians 3:2-8) This refers to the suffering that comes for the sake of believing on the Lord Jesus and speaking God's word. Many people out there will not want to hear what you have to say. They may threaten, "You're going to lose your job if you keep talking about those things." There may be people, your friends and family included, who might say "I

don't want to have anything more to do with you because you've become a fanatic. You've changed. I don't like what I see in you now."

If that is what is happening to you because of the word of God, the Bible says, "*Rejoice!*" We need to establish, comfort, and encourage one another in the faith. "*That no man should be moved by these afflictions:*" (1st Thessalonians. 3:3) In other words, we are not to be moved from our faith and what we know to be true because of the enemy's tactics of working through other people to get us to compromise.

"...For yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto." (1st Thessalonians 3:3) That is, we will have these things. Jesus said that the servant is not greater than the master. "*If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*" (John 15-20) Learn to expect them and rejoice in and through them. We will be sharing with you what to do when persecution comes for the word of God. It will come when you are testifying and letting light out to God's glory.

"For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain. But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if we stand fast in the Lord." (1st Thessalonians 3:4-8)

When we are going through persecution, and we hold on to the word of God and the truth that is being taught, it encourages those who are suffering for the sake of that good word they have preached. There are people in other countries right now who are suffering for the sake of the word they have preached. There are people in other countries who are physically suffering for Christ and are shedding blood. They are not giving up their faith but continuing to believe in the Lord Jesus.

It is time that we, as God's people, stand up and take note that when we really believe in God, the world will hate us. The devil will hate us.

People will try to make us compromise our faith. However, the Lord Jesus is greater, God is greater, and He stands with us in these times of trial.

Paul saw that the people were holding onto their faith and what they knew to be true. They were not being moved from it. Such behavior also encouraged him when he was in prison because of the Lord Jesus Christ. We encourage one another by holding on to the faith in what we know is true.

"For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe." (1st Timothy 4:10) Again, we find no evidence of people suffering sickness and disease for Christ. We see people suffering persecution for the word of God which may involve physical torture and punishment, but we do not see them suffering a cancer or heart attack.

"For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (1st Timothy 1:12, 13)

Paul spoke again about the suffering he had gone through because of the Word that he preached and taught. He was suffering because of the gospel, but, nevertheless, he was not ashamed of what he said. He knew whom he had believed and was fully persuaded and convinced that God was able to keep him. In times of persecution, the power of God will rise up strong in our behalf if we learn to trust God.

"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us: If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." (2nd Timothy 2:11-13) If we should suffer for Christ, we will reign with Him. This is the power and promise of God which goes to people who do not compromise His word. The power of God will go to work in their behalf.

After listing the persecutions Paul had gone through in other places, he said, *"...Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at*

Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me." (2nd Timothy 3:11) It doesn't sound like a statement from someone who is weighed down by sickness, disease, or poverty. It sounds like a statement that comes from a man who knows whom he believes in, and the power of God moves in his behalf because of his faith. *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (2nd Timothy 3:12)

If people think it is an easy life being a Christian, they are not letting any light shine out. If you let your light shine, this world will rise up and hate you. If you let any light shine, the devil will try to crush you. I don't say this to put fear in you because the Lord is true, and *"...out of them [persecutions] all, the Lord delivered me."* The power of God is greater.

"In the world you will have tribulation, but fear not, I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33)

"...This is the victory that overcomes this world, even our faith." (1st John 5:4) Our faith in Jesus brings us his victory over the world.

God is greater than anything that comes against us. We need to learn to stand on His word and know where the suffering is coming from. We need to rise up in the Lord Jesus Christ and hold on to what we know to be true so that we can see the victory of our God.

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season..." (Hebrews 11:25-26) This referred to Moses, who chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. Moses could have been at the top of the world's system, being the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but he chose rather to go with God's people. He was *"...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."* Moses wanted to receive the reward from God rather than anything this world had to offer. Anytime we let Jesus shine through us, the world will hate us, and all those with the values of the world will hate us. We need to rest confidently in God, stand for what we know to be true and continue to move ahead.

Again, we do not find any evidence of suffering for Christ with sickness and disease. The bible constantly refers to suffering for what people believe and know to be true in the Lord.

"For what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (1st Peter 2:20-24)

The word "heal" means "to heal or to make whole as a physician" – spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. The blood of Jesus has set us free. So when suffering comes because of what we believe in the Lord Jesus, we are to bear it patiently and commit our cause to the heavenly Father who judges justly. He will look out for us the same way He looked out for Jesus. We praise God today that His power will move in behalf of those who are trusting in Him.

If people suffer for the faults they have committed, they are not "suffering for Christ." Often they have done or said something to someone who has tried to get back at them. I have heard people say, "They're unbelievers, and I'm suffering for Christ." In reality they were suffering because of their own mismanagement, their temper, or because they were talking about people behind their backs, etc. Suffering occurs because of acts of the flesh that have been committed, acts not pleasing to God. People are simply reaping what they sowed.

However, when you love God, and mind your own business, telling people about the Lord and loving them, then you are persecuted because of what you believe. That is suffering for Christ. If you have cheated someone, and they in turn come down on you, you are suffering because of your own sin. At that point, you need to ask God to forgive you and make restitution to your brother or sister.

"For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." (1st Peter 3:17-18)

It may be the will of God that we go through some suffering (not sickness and disease). I want you to take a close look at that fact. The verse says that you suffer for well doing (doing the will of God) rather than evil doing. Since the world and Satan do not want us doing God's will, they will persecute us. In the same way, Jesus did not have any sickness or disease when He was suffering for our sins. He was suffering in the will of God for us so that we could have life. Praise His holy name!

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;" (1st Peter 4:1) <Note: Like Jesus, Paul described his "suffering in the flesh" (Galatians 4:13) (Read also 1st Peter 4:2-5).> When a person walks in the will of God, and does His word, he is different from the world. He is in the world but not of it anymore. The people of the world will hate him and come against him for what he now represents.

"Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them..." (1st Peter 4:4) Because we are different now, we point out their sin. That is what happened to Jesus. He didn't do or say anything wrong to people, but who He was brought conviction on their hearts. (John 15:24-25) He was of God, and they were of the world. The same thing will happen to us, so we need to arm ourselves and be ready for it. Do not think it strange when these fiery trials come upon us. (1st Peter 4:12) Many times Christians fall to the devil's temptation of persecution for the word of God, and they give up.

They think, I'm a Christian now, and everything is going wrong. All these people are turning on me. I don't have any friends anymore, and my family is upset. They should be rejoicing with me.

"But rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings..." (1st Peter 4:13) It cannot be any clearer as to what persecution for the word of God means. "That, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye." (1st Peter 4:13, 14) We should rejoice when they speak evil of us

concerning our faith in Jesus. When they say and do things against us, we should be happy, not sorrowful and down in the dumps. *"For the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."* (1st Peter 4:14-16)

When the apostles were persecuted in one town, they shook the dust off their feet, rejoiced, and gave glory to God. They didn't wonder, *What is happening?* They rejoiced in God and in what was going on in their lives.

"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part He is evil spoken of [they are speaking evil about God and about us], but on your part He is glorified." Suffering for Christ holds a great crown when we stand before the Lord God of Hosts. He is being glorified as we suffer because we believe in Him and some day soon He will glorify us.

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (1st Peter 5:10) As we go through persecution because of the word of God and what we believe in Jesus, there is a purifying that happens with our faith. All the things that are not profitable are burned off, and we are purified through the fire. We can rejoice in that fact today.

"Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1st Peter 1:5-7) This is important. Our faith is proven through persecution and suffering for Christ, and glory goes to Jesus as we remain faithful to Him and His word.

These things will happen, and we need to hold our ground. We need to hold on to what we know to be true. Satan is the persecutor. God is the deliverer of the faithful.

“Blessed is the man who perseveres and holds fast to God's word under trial. Because when he has stood that test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those that love Him.” (James 1:12)

JESUS SPEAKS OUT ABOUT HOW PERSECUTION OPERATES

CHAPTER FIVE

Satan, not God, is the tempter of adversity, sickness, and evil. We find this in Matthew 4:3, Mark 1:13, and 1st Thessalonians 3:5. God is the deliverer of the faithful according to 1st Corinthians 10:13. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* Praise God! *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."* (James 1:12, 13) (Read all of James 1:12-17)

All temptations of the devil are intended to make our faith in God fail and to destroy us spiritually, mentally, and physically. We need to understand that God does not teach us by sending evil (such as sickness and disease) upon our bodies. God disciplines and teaches us by His word. (John 15:3)

As we stand on the word of God and hold fast to it, we will experience suffering for Christ. *"And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended."* (Mark 4:16-17) Being offended means that they gave up their faith.

Family members and friends often seem to think a person who comes to Jesus is a fanatic, or "off the wall" and strange. When the Word is received in a Christian, Satan comes to try to steal it. He does it through persecution or "suffering for Christ." The intention is to mentally and/or physically persecute a person in such a way that he would then compromise God's word (what he knows to be true) and give it up. We deal with this often when people receive the Lord Jesus, and they are excited and joyful.

When they begin to grow in the Word, persecution comes, and they think, *Why did I ever get into this?* A lie of the devil is trying to move them to give up the Lord Jesus. They cannot afford to give up because abundant life is only in Jesus.

They who are godly will undergo persecution. (2nd Timothy 3:12) This is a clear principle in scripture. The Lord will deliver us in the persecution. *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."* (Psalm 34:19) The devil, working through the world and people will try to steal what God has given us. If we hold fast to what we know to be true, clinging to the Lord of Hosts, His power and ability will see us through it all. Praise God, we will see the rest of our families and the people in the world coming to the Lord Jesus as a result of our testimony.

When Stephen shared the word of God, the people rejected him, picked up rocks, and stoned him. The account of Stephen's testimony and death is in Acts, chapter seven. Saul was standing by holding the coats of the others. Later on, he became the instrument of the Holy Spirit when God touched and changed his life. At that point, however, he was a persecutor of the church, and he grew to be an even greater persecutor. Later he became God's agent by the power of God, so that people could come to life in Jesus Christ.

Someone could persecute you because of the Word (because you stand for Jesus), and hate everything you stand for because you stand for. (Actually, it isn't you who is being persecuted, but Jesus in you is being persecuted. Understand that fact.) In the next moment, that same person could turn to the Lord as a result of how you responded in the persecution.

Hold on to the Word when responding to persecution: The following pages will include scripture references on how persecution operates.

It is important to understand that persecution *will* come. Jesus told us and the apostles spoke about it. What are we to do in it? (Look at Mark 10:29-30.) When we are called to the Lord Jesus, we are called to put Him first. He is to be above our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, or children. Jesus is to be before anything in this world. As such, the devil then cannot use any of those things or people against us to compromise

our First Love and our faith in the Lord. However, the devil will try. If we have someone or something that is more important to us than the Lord, when persecution comes, we will give up the Lord Jesus rather than go through the persecution.

I am sorry to say, there will be a day when many people will give up their faith in Jesus to please others. They will give up their faith rather than lose a loved one or lose the things of this world. That is a sorry state, but it will happen and is already happening now.

The disciples asked, *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus looked at them and said, *"With men it is impossible [that these people enter into life], but not with God: for with God all things are possible."* (Mark 10:27) I want you to claim that right now in behalf of loved ones, friends, and the people of this world. Let us claim them for God.

"Jesus said unto him, 'If thou can believe, all things are possible to him that believeth'." (Mark 9:23)

"Jesus said unto them, 'and nothing shall be impossible unto you'." (Matthew 17:20)

Let us hold on to those people and not give up on them. Even the same people who are persecuting us today may be in the kingdom of God tomorrow. We do not know because that is their choice. Our part is to believe God that they be able to receive the life He has for them in Jesus Christ.

"Then Peter began to say unto Him, 'Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the gospel's. But he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions: and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last: and the last first.'" (Mark 10:28-31)

God promises that when we give up everything for Him (that doesn't mean separating from people, but putting our love for God before anyone or anything else), He will give us a hundredfold of everything we gave up in this life. Note in verse 30 "with persecutions." Persecution will come from the world when the world sees that you and I are different and do not have the same values and attitudes.

The persecution comes, as we just noted, from Satan. He wants to take the word of God away from us. He wants us to compromise it. We are in this world but not of it. The persecution will come because we, who are walking in godliness and obedience to the Word, become a threat to the world. They cannot figure us out. They call us fanatics; they call us everything else they can. We have something more than they do, so it is by our loving them that we will draw them into the love of Jesus Christ.

Those of the world come under conviction for their sins and their separation from God every time a believer walks into the room. This is why they feel uncomfortable. Don't try to make them comfortable; let them turn to the Lord and be comfortable with Him. You see, it has nothing to do with them liking you or not liking you. It has to do with what is in you (Jesus) versus what is in them (the devil). Jesus said that you are in one of two families. You are in the family of the devil with Satan as your father, or you are in the family of God with God as your Father. (John 8:42-45) You are either under Satan's control or under God's control, depending on what you have done with Jesus.

Jesus said, *"If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My sayings, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do to you for My name's sake because they know not Him that sent Me.* (John 15:18-21) They did not know the Father God.

"If I had not come and spoken to them:" (John 15:22) The persecution comes because of the word of God that we speak

"They had not had sin:" Every time you speak about the Lord Jesus you are calling people to a decision.

"But now they have no cloak for their sin." There is no more covering for their sin: everything is exposed

"He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to

their law, they had done nothing
"But when the Comforter [Holy Spirit] is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27) (Remove the chapter 16 heading and flow along with the thought of the message).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended." (John 16:1)

As mentioned before, Satan comes with persecution. (Mark 4) It comes through people, usually those closest to us, the ones we love and care about. They are the first ones to say, "You've gone crazy. You're a fanatic. You're no longer the person I once knew, and I really don't want to be around you anymore."

The intention of persecution is to get us to compromise God's word so that we give it up. It says that they were offended, which means they gave up the faith. This is what Jesus basically said. "I am speaking to you about these things and telling you what will happen so you won't be offended and won't give up when persecution comes from your husband, wife, children, or friends."

"They shall put you out of the synagogues [or the churches]: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (John 16:2)

This is happening today. People are moving forward in the Word, being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in new tongues, laying hands on the sick (and the sick recover), and removing demons in the name of Jesus by the power of God. (Mark 16)

Religious leaders and other "well-meaning" people are often ignorant of God's word. These "Christians" have actually kicked people out of churches for this. It isn't anything new; it was happening in Jesus' time. Jesus received persecution mainly from the religious folks.

"The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God a service [a favor]." (John 16:2) The time will come. It will happen, and it is happening. Jesus said so. "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me." (John 16:3)

"But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you." (John 16:4)

Jesus clearly lays out the principle that people will be persecuted because of the Word they speak, because of their faith in Jesus, and because of the works they do. Here are the works of God: telling people about His love, telling them they need Jesus for life, laying hands on the sick so they recover, casting out demons in the name of Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in new tongues, and giving glory to God. (Mark 16:15-18, John 14:12) People will be offended. They will come against you. They will think you are in some kind of cult. Well, praise God, it is the same cult that Jesus was in because these are the works that He sent His disciples out to do in His mighty name.

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you, Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27) Do not be afraid when these things happen. The peace of God is there to help you, encourage you, strengthen you, and enable you to stand and have the victory of God.

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Note that it says, “...shall have tribulation.” You will have it if you are letting any light shine for Jesus. If you are letting any witness go forth, the devil wants to stamp it out. The world wants to stamp it out because it brings conviction on people’s hearts. Jesus said that if you hold onto Him, He will keep peace in your life (not in your circumstances, but in your life). Faith overcomes the world. (1st John 5:4-5) It is faith that Jesus is the Son of God and faith in the power and ability of God.

In

Matthew 5 Jesus told us something else to do when persecution comes because of the Word, so that we are not blown away when people call us fanatics and come against what we believe and know to be true. We don’t want to fall apart, compromise His Word, and give up our faith. We need to know what Jesus said in this area.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake [because of the word of God, because of obedience to it]: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake.” (Matthew 5:10-16) It is not because of anything we have done against someone, but it is simply because we are sharing His word, His love, and His standards and principles. We are to call ourselves blessed.

43

Each verse begins with “*Blessed are ye,*” or “*Blessed are they.*” Rejoice! Don’t be down in the dumps; don’t think they hate you. They don’t hate you; they hate what you stand for. They may hate you because of what you believe, not because of any weakness in you.

Remember, you died to yourself and Christ lives in you. (Galatians 2:20) Persecution comes because of what you are and what you stand for. You are now a son or daughter of the Lord God of Hosts, a new creation. Old things are passed away and everything is new (2nd Corinthians 5:17), and they don’t like it. You don’t move in the same circles as they do anymore. You don’t want to.

“Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. For great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”
(Matthew 5:12) Rejoice in what God is doing in your behalf when persecution comes, count it a joy, and God will strengthen you. He will stand with you, and you will see the victory of your God.

1st

and 2nd Peter were written to believers who were undergoing persecution for the word of God. Time and again they were suffering for Christ, being killed for their faith or being imprisoned. They had to go underground because their lives were at stake. They did not compromise, but, in fact, their faith became stronger.

Many times people think, *I don’t want to be martyred for the Lord.* Who says you have to be? It may happen, but it doesn’t necessarily need to be the case.

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.”
(Isaiah 54:11-14)

Claim this promise of God for yourself. If you are being persecuted for your stand in Jesus by your husband, wife, or children, hold onto the promise.

“In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear; and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by Me. God is saying, “I am not gathering these people against you; they are coming against you because the enemy is coming against you.” Whosoever shall gather together against you shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.” (Isaiah 15:14-16)

The next verse is a strong promise. *“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord.” (Isaiah 54: 17)*

Take note of Psalm 91 and Psalm 46. In these psalms we find that we are under the shadow of the Almighty. Even though everything in the world may be crashing down around us, we can be still and know that God is God. We can know, *“There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Psalm 91:10)* The verse just before that says, *“Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation.”* If our hearts are upon the Lord, not wanting to compromise Him or His Word to the point of being willing to die for what we believe, the ability and power of God goes into effect for us. Examples of this principle are in Daniel 3:17, 18; Daniel 6, Acts 12:1-19, Acts 14:19-22, and Acts 16:23-33.

Persecution will come, but it is not coming from God. In addition, we know that in the persecution, God is with us and will strengthen and keep us. He will deliver us. (2nd Timothy 3:12; Psalm 34:19; 2nd Peter 2:9). I praise Him for the fact that His Word is true.

HOW DID THE EARLY CHURCH RESPOND TO PERSECUTION?

CHAPTER SIX

Jesus sent out the disciples, as recorded in Matthew 10:1-40.

“And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples He gave them power against uncleanness, and against all sickness and all diseases, and commanded them to go into every city and into every town and into every village, and preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:6-10)

The call to us today is to go to all nations and to all people.

“And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy [that is, believers]; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into a house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you. It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.” (Matthew 10:11-15)

Jesus said, *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues.”* (Matthew 10:16-17) They would kick them out of the synagogues and kill God’s people, thinking they were doing God a service. (John 16:2)

“And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” (Matthew 10:18-20)

When we are undergoing persecution because of what we believe in the Word rather than because of something we have done (like not being obedient to God's word), God will minister to us by His Holy Spirit. He will bear testimony and witness through us and will give us the words to say to the people who are persecuting us. We don't need to take a thought of what we will say at that time. God will give us the words.

“And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.” (Matthew 10:21-23)

Many people think they can get out of persecution. The bible says otherwise. Jesus says to the contrary: *“It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? (Matthew 10:25)*

In

Matthew 12 the people said that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan. This is considered (by the Lord Jesus) as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit because they were saying a work done by the Holy Spirit of God was being done by a devil. It is the unforgivable sin. (Matthew 12:22-37)

Jesus said that if they call Him “of the devil,” how much more will they call those of His household (His followers).

“Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:26-28)

Don't be afraid of those who are persecuting you for the sake of the Word.

If it is a spouse who is threatening to leave, don't be afraid. Neither be afraid if a child threatens to leave. If a government, church, or anyone threatens you for the Word's sake, stand your ground and you will see His delivering hand. If you are afraid, God is not able to do anything in your behalf. The Lord Jesus tells us not to be afraid of or concerned about what people say or do. He tells us not to be concerned about the devil, but rather be concerned about what God in heaven is thinking and doing, for God alone is the One who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. God alone has that right.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31)

The Lord told us that in those times, the heavenly Father knows all that is going on in our lives. He loves us. As we hold on to Him and His word, He stands faithful to perform it. God is looking out for us and will fight in behalf of His people.

“Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32-33)

It is important that we stand up for what we believe. This is where the real difference between the world's people and God's people will be shown. Even within the churches, you will see that when people stand up for what God really says, and they are believing the whole Word, not just parts that they feel comfortable with, persecution will arise. If we compromise (do not stand for what we know to be true on the basis of His word), then Jesus will not confess us before the Father. However, if we do stand for what we know to be true, and stand in love, at that point Jesus will confess us before the Father and the power of God will fight in our behalf.

“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34) When we come to Jesus we

often think peaceful.

Jesus said, *“For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”* (Matthew 10:35-36) This is exactly what will happen. We must understand this. Persecution will rise from those who do not know the Lord Jesus and are not moving in the fullness of His Spirit. It may come

“He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matthew 10:37-38) st to what the

The cross mentioned above is persecution for the word of God, which will come as we stand upon what we know to be true. It comes as people take offense because of the Word we believe and speak.

“He that findeth his life shall lose it.” In other words, he that compromises to make peace and save his life will lose it. There is no peace apart from God. There is no peace when you try to compromise His word. *And he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me.”* (Matthew 10:39, 40)

This really blessed my heart when I ran across it because I saw that it is not we who are being persecuted. It is Jesus in us who is being persecuted. When people receive the word that we have to share, they are receiving Jesus. When people reject the word we have to share, they are not receiving Him. When they reject what we have to share, they are not rejecting us, so we don’t need to get our feelings hurt. They are rejecting Jesus who is the Lord of our lives, and they are rejecting the truth that we stand for. It is important that we grasp these truths because persecution will arise for anyone who is believing and acting obediently upon God’s word and principles.

What did the apostles do when they were persecuted? (I want to encourage you to allow the Word to move in behalf of the people who are persecuting you. God is fighting in your behalf).

The following paragraphs are highlights from Acts 3 and 4. If you would like to look up the whole section for your own reference, see Acts 3-4:31.

Peter and John were going into the temple. There was a man sitting there who had been lame from birth. Peter looked at him and said, *“Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”* Peter took him up by the right hand and lifted him up. Immediately the man’s feet and anklebones received strength. The man leaped up and walked into the temple with Peter and John. He was walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him doing that. They knew it was the same man who had been sitting out at the Gate Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. As a result, God was given the glory through the healing (not the sickness). Then Peter proclaimed the good news to all the people around there. Many came to the Lord Jesus and accepted Him as their Lord and Savior. They recognized that the power of God had changed this man’s life (and touched theirs as well) as they witnessed his joy.

The result of this event was persecution from the religious leaders. They called in Peter and John and forbade them to speak anymore about Jesus or lay hands on the sick in His name. Jesus was actually standing up in Peter and John at that point, and by the Holy Spirit of God, they told the leaders, *“You determine here and judge for yourselves which it is right to do, whether we should listen to you or to God. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”* There was no disrespect in what they said. They were actually appealing to the authorities, “You determine what we should do – whether we should do what God has shown us to do or do what you told us to do.” There is a difference between acting on God’s word (and what God has revealed) or doing what people say. Jesus said if we are seeking glory from people, we will not win any glory from God. (John 5:44) Such behavior is a compromise.

It is time that we, as God’s people, rise up and stand for what God has said rather than for what people are telling us. Note here that Peter and John

were threatened because of the word that they spoke and were told not to do it anymore. The leaders “slapped their hands,” and let them go.

Peter and John went back to their own company and reported what the chief priests and elders said to them. (Acts 4:23) The believers lifted their voices to God with one accord (now picture this), and they said, *“Lord, You are God which has made the heavens and the sea and all that is in them.”* (Acts 4:24) There was a big revival and prayer time.

“Who by mouth of your servant David has said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.” (Acts 4:25, 26)

“For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy Word, by stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus.” (Acts 4:28-31)

This is really important. In God’s church throughout the world, in many cases, people do not even believe that God will heal. The early Christians encouraged one another and prayed to God for Him to extend His hand to heal and to do even greater signs and wonders to confirm His word. They rejoiced in the Lord God of Hosts.

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31)

This
is
what

happens when God’s people believe and act upon His word. The strength within them wells up and the power of God rises up to meet every need.

The disciples went out again and the same thing happened. *“There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.”* (Acts 5:16) All were healed in the mighty name of Jesus.

The disciples were called in once more. *“Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”* (Acts 5:28)

This is happening today as well. People call each other “fanatics.” Until they are touched by the love of God in Jesus through your testimony and witness (as you stand in love during that time), they won’t like you – until they give their lives to Jesus. And, praise God, it will happen, and it will happen soon. We don’t have much time left here on this earth before Jesus returns.

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” (Acts 5:29-32)

Then Gamaliel, one of the doctors of the law, stood up and said that if this was not of God, it would die out. If it *was* of God, they had better beware and take heed lest they found themselves fighting against Him. *“But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”* (Acts 5:39) It was that kind of Holy Spirit boldness in the apostles that enabled the word of God to increase. God stood in behalf of His people and the Word increased.

Stephen became the first martyr. He gave his life for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ and the word of God that he preached. *“And they stoned Stephen, [he] calling upon God, and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my*

spirit.’” Notice Stephen’s attitude: “And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep [died].” (Acts 7:59-60)

The power of God moved in compassion and mercy as this man of God stood for what he believed. Note that just prior to this, Stephen was shown a vision in which Jesus honored him by standing (not sitting) at the right hand of God, ready to receive him. Stephen had not compromised God’s word but had given it even to his death. *“They loved not their lives even to the death,”* and they were willing to give up their lives rather than lose Jesus. In addition, God honored Stephen’s prayer.

There was a man standing nearby helping the people who were stoning Stephen. He held their garments. This man’s name was later changed to Paul!

The book of Acts is filled with accounts of what happened as God’s people stood for what they believed and shared the good news. The devil wants to put out God’s word. He wants to stop the signs and wonders that follow the Word. He wants people to be weak and helpless, with a wavering kind of faith that doesn’t know anything about God and doesn’t act in His power. Jesus said, *“Would that you were hot or cold, but since you are lukewarm I will spit you out of My mouth.”* (Revelation 3:15-16)

Today we cannot be lukewarm Christians, seeking the favor of people, and seeking to please people. We need to be hot, on fire, for what we know to be true from the Word and acting upon it, and always open to the fullness of what God has for us.

As Paul and Barnabas preached, many people came to the Lord Jesus. *“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.”* (Acts 13:48-50) What did Paul and Barnabas do then? They did just what Jesus told His disciples to do in Matthew 10. *“But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.”* (Acts 13:51-52)

When we are being persecuted for the word of God and for Jesus (not because of something we have done wrong), we are to be filled with joy that we are worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. (Matthew 5:10-16) We are not to be downcast. *“And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.”* (Acts 13:52) They shook the dust off their feet and went on to the next place. It is important to understand here that shaking the dust off their feet was not an action like “We’re giving up on you,” but it was an action which said, “You haven’t received what we shared, but it will come to you according to what you believe.”

Be sure to note that their attitude was not an attitude of hatred toward those people, nor were they depressed. They were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, going on to the next place to proclaim the good news. They continued to seek out those who were willing and open to grow in the Lord and receive the life that God had for everyone who turned to Him in Jesus’ name.

The following verses tie in with what Jesus said in Matthew 10: *“For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”* (2nd Timothy 1:7-8)

Many people back off when persecution comes. They think, *I’ll just compromise and make peace; then I’ll have peace.* That is not the way it works. If you compromise with the devil and back off from what God says, you will have nothing but what the devil gives you.

Jesus said, *“The thief [Satan] has come only to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come that you may have life and that you may have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10) We need to have the same attitude that Jesus, the apostles, and other believers had. They were partaking of the affliction of the gospel according to the power of God. When they were weak through the affliction they experienced (the persecution), the power of God stood strong in their behalf. And they rejoiced and counted it all joy.

“For this reason I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. Hold fast to the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2nd Timothy 1:12-13) It is important that we learn not to give up that which God has established in our behalf.

Persecution will come, *“but out of them all the Lord delivered me,”* (2nd Timothy 3:11) Paul said, *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* (2nd Timothy 3:12) We will not be cast down by it, nor will we be defeated by it, but persecution will come to those who obey and do not compromise God’s word!

OVERCOMING PERSECUTION GOD'S WAY

CHAPTER SEVEN

What should our attitude be when we are being persecuted for the sake of God's word?

Luke 9:52-53 tells us that Jesus was rejected in a village of the Samaritans. The disciples, James and John (first known as the Sons of Thunder, but later known as the Followers of Love), questioned Jesus when they were leaving the area. They asked, "*Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?*" (verse 54) In other words, the people had not received what they had shared. What they shared was true, but the people rejected it. "Lord, shall we call down the fire and have them destroyed for not believing upon You, in fact rejecting You and sending You out of the city?"

"But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' And they went to another village." (Luke 9:55-56)

We need to maintain an important attitude as we undergo persecution for speaking the word and the truth of God. Note that Jesus did not say they couldn't call down fire like Elijah did. Jesus said there was a better and higher way to turn people's hearts to Him.

Here was an act of love on God's part moving through Jesus. On the cross Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" as He gave His life. (Luke 23:34) It would appear that these people knew what they were doing. It was pre-meditated, calculated murder.

People appear to know what they are doing; they think they know what they are doing. But when someone is deceived by the devil, they don't know what they are doing. Jesus pointed this out. "*Father, forgive them. [Give them an opportunity for life. Grant them life. Do not hold this sin against their charge.]*"

Stephen told the people the truth about God, about the Lord Jesus Christ, and the truth about themselves. The people didn't want to hear it. They stopped up their ears and picked up rocks to throw at him. As they were stoning him, he looked up to heaven and said, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."* In other words, *"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."*

It is very important that we have this attitude, especially if we are in situations where people don't seem to understand what we believe, like in a husband and wife situation. This often happens because light and darkness do not mix. *"What does light have in common with darkness? What do children of God have in common with the children of the devil?"* Absolutely nothing.

By the Spirit of God you can win a person over to the Lord Jesus Christ by your attitudes and actions. Then the Spirit of God moves upon that individual.

God is drawing the people of this world to Himself through us who love Him, for we are shining lights for the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the ones the world wants to stop and whose lights the devil wants to put out. We cannot afford to begin to compromise that which we know to be true, even if it means losing everyone around us.

I would like to show you something that will enable God to touch those people's lives and move to change their hearts. Then they too may receive the life that we know and enjoy.

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive [quarrel]; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2nd Timothy 2:24-26)

When we deal with people who don't understand or know what we believe, we should be aware that they may want to argue with us. They may want to prove us wrong. A servant of the Lord must never quarrel or try to prove others wrong. The servant of the Lord must never strive with people.

The Bible says that we are to be gentle with everyone and ready to teach when the occasion arises. When people start asking questions, then we can share. (1st Peter 3:15)

Being patient does not happen overnight. Many people give up just when situations are starting to break through. We need to develop patience, which comes through tribulation and from standing for what we know to be true. It comes from holding on to the word of God in spite of the circumstances around us. As we hold on to the Word, patience is developed within us, and we will see the victory of our God.

“In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves...” The only difference between a believer and a non-believer is that a believer has come to the light and asked forgiveness, inviting Jesus into his heart as Lord and Savior. It is just that simple! It is not that we are or have done anything better than they. It is just that we have realized that Jesus is Lord, and we need the Lord, not only to be there but also to control every part of our lives. We need to constantly remember that we were once like those people. (Titus 3:1-8) It is easy, once we have come to the Lord Jesus, are growing in the Word and the faith message, and believing His promises, to start to look down our noses at others who do not know the Lord or understand the truths yet. In reality, according to God’s time framework, it was only yesterday that we received.

You may be thinking, *They’re just unbelievers; they can’t be expected to understand this,*” or, after you pray for someone and believe God for his salvation, you constantly treat him like an unbeliever. Thus, you are working against the prayer of faith. You would be working against everything you believe and claim. If you claim people for life in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you ought to treat them like they are already saved, even though at this point they are not necessarily able to receive the Word.

Treat them like Christians and love them. Does not God’s word say we are to love everyone? It includes unbelievers, not just those who see things the way we see them. This is the love of God: that while we were yet enemies, God (in His love) sent Jesus to die for us on the cross, that we might have the life of God.

“If the gospel which I preach is hid, it is hid to those who are lost. In whom the god of this world [Satan] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (2nd Corinthians 4:3-4)

When the good news about Jesus is hid from those who are lost, they have been blinded. Otherwise they would receive the truth and be set free. Therefore, we don't approach people argumentatively but in a spirit of gentleness, ready to answer their questions, being patient with them, not condemning or pounding God's word into them. Such behavior will just antagonize them and make things worse for us.

“In meekness instructing those who oppose themselves...” (2nd Timothy 2:25) Meekness is the kind of quality that says, “I've been there and I know what's going on in your heart and in your head. As God has set me free, He will do the same thing for you!” *“God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.”* (2nd Timothy 2:25) In other words, they will see the light. Whether unbelievers will receive the light or what we have to tell them is based in many respects on how we as believers respond to them.

Do we approach them arrogantly, like we know everything and they know nothing? What is to be our attitude when we approach those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus Christ?

The Lord Jesus said something important for those who are undergoing persecution. (Matthew 5-10:12) He wants us to understand what is actually happening and to respond with a godly attitude. Those around will see that the persecution is intended by the devil for our harm (Mark 4) but will be turned around by God to our good as we respond with the attitude God would have us display. (Genesis 50:20) Those who are watching will not be able to figure it out. They will fall on their faces when they realize that this God we believe in is real, and that He loves and cares for His people.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteous' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my

sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matthew 5:10-12)

The Bible says when we are persecuted for the sake of the word of God at home or in church, we are counted blessed in God’s sight. We are to rejoice and be exceeding glad, for our reward is great in heaven. When being persecuted for the Word’s sake, rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord that you are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name’s sake, just as He did.

The servant is not greater than the Master. We will be persecuted when we step out in boldness. Still, we are not going to call down fire to destroy the people. We will love them into God’s kingdom. (1st Peter 3:15-18) We will rejoice in our God because we have the victory in spite of what is happening around us or to us.

Often there is a tendency to lose joy when being persecuted. The pressure comes to try to take away our joy. *“The joy of the Lord is our strength.”* (Nehemiah 8:10) What do we need in times of trial and persecution? We need strength. As we rejoice in the Lord, and rejoice in the fact that it is not we who are being persecuted but Jesus in us, then the power of God will be able to move in our situation and set the people free.

In marriages where one spouse believes in the Lord and the other does not, situations can get really tense. The tendency in persecution is “I want out. I can’t take this anymore!” Bear up under the persecution, stand strong in what you know and believe to be true, and you will see the power of God move in your behalf. The Lord tells us, *“And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.”* (1st Corinthians 7:10-16)

Just because people don’t believe in the Lord Jesus doesn’t mean that you kick them out, nor should you antagonize them into leaving.

“And the woman which has a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving

husband [note this] is sanctified [made holy] by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean: but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace” (1st Corinthians 7:13-15)

The scripture doesn't say to marry again. *“For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? In other words, there may be a time in which a spouse takes off. It may be during that time that the unbelieving partner comes to the Lord. If you marry again, it complicates the issue.*

God's perfect will (note, perfect will) is that husbands and wives are one in the Lord. How do you know, wives or husbands, that your spouse will not come to know Jesus Christ as Lord? If you hold fast to the Word, you will be able to believe them into the kingdom.

“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it [You are being obedient to the Word and you are standing for Christ], ye take it patiently, and this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered. He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” (1st Peter 2:19-23)

In review:

First, we are to rejoice in the Lord when undergoing persecution. Secondly, we are to commit our cause to the Father who judges justly. This is what Jesus did. He knew He was in right standing with God. He knew that what happened wasn't because of what He did, but because the people hated what He shared, they hated the One He believed in, and they hated what He stood for. He didn't attack them. He loved them. He committed His cause rather than attacking or speaking against them. He committed His cause to the Father God who judges justly.

“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” (1st Peter 2:24)

This is what Jesus did for us in His love. We all persecuted Him, and He loved us to the point of giving His life so that we might be set free to have life. *“Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)*

“For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” (1st Peter 2:25) We were apart from God, but now, through Jesus, we are returned to God. In the same way, I believe, husbands and wives and even church bodies who are opposing the Word, will be turned back to the truth. They will see the light of the good news of Jesus and the fullness of the power of the Spirit of God in these days, as we stand in love upon what we know to be true.

“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [way of life] of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation [way of live] coupled with fear [reverence].” (1st Peter 3:1-2)

A wife can win her husband to the Lord by living the Christian life and not saying anything to him, simply by her godly way of life, not preaching to him. By living what she believes, her husband will behold this behavior. He will watch and observe. Then he may say, “There is something here that I need. There’s something more.” When he sees his wife loving, honoring, and respecting him as to the Lord, God is free to set that husband free. As the wife acknowledges the Lord by calling her husband “lord” and acting accordingly (1st Peter 3:6), then God will draw the man under His authority. (See 1st Corinthians 11:1-4, 7-12).

“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.” (1st Peter 3:7)

We are to love people and be forgiving, we are to rejoice in the Lord, committing our cause to the Father God, and live the Christian life, not

compromising the word of God but living it. Then God is free to move on people's hearts.

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing;” (1st Peter 3:8) When things get rough, we are to pray blessings on those who are persecuting us, not fight with them.

“Knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile [deceit]: Let him eschew [hate] evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensure [pursue] it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1st Peter 3:9-13)

When people are being persecuted for the Word, they think they will be harmed because of the threats coming from the enemy – “I’m going to harm you. I’ll leave you. I’ll take everything we have.”

“And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But, and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror [Do not be afraid! There is no need to fear!], neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: Honor God in your heart.” (1st Peter 3:13-15)

Praising the Lord during times of persecution, in your understanding and in the Spirit (in tongues) is one of the finest things you can do. *“And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation [way of life] in Christ.”* (1st Peter 3:13-16)

Many times those who come against believers have falsely accused them. Later, after the persecutors came to the light and turned to Jesus for life, they returned and said, “Would you forgive me? I was out of line, and you were right about what you said..”

“For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:” (1st Peter 3:17-18)

Are you willing to lay down your life for your brothers and sisters that they may come to know Jesus as Lord? This is the question I want to challenge you with. Are you willing to be that different for Christ? That is what He is all about. You are not of this world. You are in it, but not of it. You are different! You are God’s child; not a child of the devil anymore. Are you willing to take the persecution that will come as you stand for Christ? We are not talking about persecution which comes because of your orneriness or obnoxious ways, but persecution that comes from simply telling people the truth in love and loving them, reaching out and caring about them in Jesus.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (1st Peter 4:12-16) There is no room for compromise; there is no need for fear of people. We are to look for an opportunity to help them.

We are not to seek vengeance upon anyone persecuting us, but *“if thine enemy hunger, feed him.”* (Romans 12:20) We should expect God to open up opportunities so that we can share with the people, the same ones who persecute us and come against us. God will give us opportunities to love them. Are we willing at that point to reach out and love them? That is where the love of God will touch them and change their lives.

“...And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith [faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God].” (1st John 5:4 – 5)

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35-39)

LOVE, WISDOM, WITNESS, AND THE GLORY CROWN

CHAPTER EIGHT

Witnessing is serious business. It means that a person is willing to lay down his life for what he is testifying. Another word for “witness” is “martyr.” Witnessing is more than idle talk. A person’s life and reputation, and the reputation of the One the person is testifying of, are at stake.

Conviction cannot be based on hearsay. We must personally perceive the reality of what we have heard, seen, and know to be true. It is this kind of unwavering conviction in God and His word that demands a response from the world. The people of the world will either fall on their faces and receive Jesus as Lord (and believe that God’s word is true), or they will seek to destroy you and remove your witness to the truth. If the world cannot tell any difference between them and you, a Christian, then you don’t have a testimony or witness for Christ. There is no light shining in the darkness. The Lord would have you repent if you are lukewarm. (Revelations 3:14-19).

There is “*a great cloud of witnesses*” (Hebrews 12:1) who held unwaveringly firm to their faith in God, which resulted in a testimony to God’s glory and a source of encouragement to us. We see that God will never fail us. The people in Hebrews, chapter eleven, saw the glory and power of God and refused to compromise their faith in Him by enjoying the pleasures of sin or bowing down to other gods to please the world.

Daniel saw glorious supernatural deliverance from the lions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw the Lord come into the fiery furnace with them and supernaturally save them. They believed God for the victory. In both cases, they faced death for their faith in God, knowing that He would deliver them out of the hand of those who persecuted them, or He would give them eternal life. (Daniel 3 and 6) (Read closely Daniel 3:17-18) Whether in life or death, they would not compromise their faith in God and His word for anyone or anything.

“And they overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb [Jesus], and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives to the death.” (Revelation 12:11)

This unwavering conviction of faith and witness caused God’s people “to subdue kingdoms, work God’s purposes, obtain promises, stop lions’ mouths, quench the violence of fire, escape the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turning to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bones and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.” (Hebrews 11:33-39)

Together with them we look for the resurrection of the dead to live forever with the Lord Jesus in glory. They did not faint or give up their faith because they knew God had a new heaven and earth awaiting them in which they would reign in glory with Him. Without allowing discouragement, they patiently awaited His promise to be fulfilled in their lives or deaths. They looked to an eternal kingdom which would never pass away. Even so, realizing this world is not our home we eagerly await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Read Hebrews 10:32-39; 13:12-16)

Some people who witness are persecuted not so much for their witness as for their attitude. The fire of persecution will purify the motivation of the witness’ heart.

Paul knew how to overcome persecution. As he sat in prison for Jesus’ sake, he was criticized by other Christians. Paul responded by encouraging the people to love and approve that which is true, seeing his imprisonment not as an evil thing but rather as a means for the gospel to reach into places which normally would not be reached. He encouraged them to have boldness to speak the word without fear because they had seen his example. He was not concerned about those who spoke against his ministry. He was only concerned that the good news of Jesus was being

preached. He rejoiced in prison, knowing that God's word and purpose would always prevail because nothing can stop God. (Read Philippians 1:5-30)

Paul was not concerned about himself because his life and ministry rested in God's hands. He didn't say, "Oh, poor me. I'm being persecuted for what I believe. Lord, take me out of this world, away from these unbelievers. Even the Christians don't appreciate me!" No. To the contrary, Paul was concerned that Jesus be lifted up and the good news be spread. His motivation for witnessing was rooted in love for God and His people. He was not in the ministry for himself but for God.

We have found that the true motivation of the heart is exposed during persecution. Do we really love the Lord Jesus and the people to whom we are witnessing? If we get offended after not being received, our motivation could not have been love. We were not willing to lay down our lives for the other person to be saved. If we take offense, we are selfish and self-centered.

Love is what wins people's hearts. I, personally, feel that many Christians are not persecuted for Jesus' sake but because of a self-righteous, overbearing, obnoxious form of witness which looks down on and judges others as heathens. Such witnesses attempt to "Bible-beat" others into submission to God or to their way of thinking (the hypocrite's approach). When the other person responds in a natural, negative way, the Christian says, "The dirty heathen will never change. Why did I cast my pearls before swine, wasting my time, and putting myself through all of this abuse?"

Love never gives up and never fails. (1st Corinthians 13:7-8) True witnessing will reveal a person whose motivation is unselfish love for the people. Paul described Timothy as such a person, "*For I have no man like minded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*" (Philippians 2:20-21)

Love never takes offense nor deliberately gives offense. If you know someone doesn't want to hear what you have to say about Jesus, why force it upon him? Pray in the Spirit (tongues) for the people and love them in every way you can. Trust God that He will open up an opportunity to witness about Jesus. When talking to non-believers, concentrate on the love of God

in Jesus Christ, not healing, Holy Spirit, or tongues, etc. Evident love always gives God opportunity to open up witnessing opportunities. Command the devil that is blinding their minds to let go of them in Jesus' name. (2nd Corinthians 4:3-4; Matthew 18:18) Pray that they are able to receive salvation and all that God has for them in Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:17-23)

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; praying also for us, that God would open to us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without [unbelievers], redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man.” (Colossians 4:2-6)

There is a time to speak and a time to keep our mouths shut. God will show us the difference if we ask. Love for God and love for mankind compels us to witness the love of God in Jesus Christ. (2nd Corinthians 5:13-15) Conviction of faith produces conviction, which produces changed lives. Witnessing involves responsibility for our witness and acceptance of the consequences. I am certain we are all willing to be loved by those who come to the Lord through our testimony of Jesus. Are we equally willing to be rejected, evil-spoken of, mocked, and possibly killed for Jesus' sake? These are definite consequences of our witness for Him.

A loving witness considers nothing but Jesus being glorified so that in life or in death, we are victorious. *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he [Jesus] laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”* (1st John 3:16)

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you.” (John 15:13-14)

God loved us while we were enemies and His love in Jesus made us friends and sons of God. Everlasting life, joy, peace, and love belong to those who are witnessing, living and dying for Jesus and others. God's blessing and hand is upon them. In the new heaven and earth they will shine forever as the stars in the sky. (Daniel 12:2-3)

Martyrdom is not defeat. Jesus was not defeated! He laid down his life when he was ready. Eleven disciples were martyred, none of which, I believe, went before their work was completed. They yielded themselves to be martyred, looking towards an eternal reward with God. John could not be killed with boiling oil, so they exiled him to Patmos where the Lord Jesus gave him the book of Revelation. Apparently, God's purpose through John had not yet been fulfilled. He died a natural death after being released.

It is interesting that the early church thought Jesus had told Peter that John would not die. *"Yet Jesus did not say to him, 'he shall not die'; but 'if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to you?'"* (John 21:21-23) John knew differently, and he died a natural death at an old age.

We are not to rush into the lion's mouth, but we are to be led of the Spirit of God in wisdom to know the will of God. When Paul first started preaching about the Lord Jesus, Satan attempted to steal his life. Paul escaped by being lowered in a basket over the wall of the city. Later, he was stoned to death, but the prayer of faith raised him from the dead so he could continue to preach and minister. Many afflictions occurred throughout his travels, yet the Lord delivered him out of all of them. (2nd Timothy 3:11; Psalm 34:19)

"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (2nd Timothy 4:17-18)

God's plan for Paul was that he eventually go to Rome to preach to the leaders of the Gentile world. Many people think that Paul missed God's purpose by going to Jerusalem when the prophet Agabas told him what was going to happen there. (Acts 21:10-14) The people tried to dissuade Paul in order to save his life. However, Paul responded, *"What mean you to weep and to break my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And when he would not be dissuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done'.*" (Acts 21:13-14) Paul's heart was set to go to Rome for Jesus.

Why was Paul not persuaded to escape this time? Did Paul miss God's will and leading? The answer is found after Paul had testified at Jerusalem. As he was in protective custody, *"The Lord Jesus stood by him, and said, 'Be of good cheer Paul: for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.'"* (Acts 23:11) Later Paul went to Rome, proclaimed the good news of Jesus to emperors and rulers, and was martyred at an old age after his work was completed.

Paul listened to the Holy Spirit's of God's direction. Agabas, the prophet, confirmed it. The Lord Jesus himself verified the fact that Paul's desire to go to Rome was not his own desire or whim, but it was the will of God for his life. (Acts 23:11)

I believe that God has a plan and a purpose for each of our lives. I believe that when an individual is seeking and being led by the Spirit of God in wisdom and knowledge, believing and obeying God's word, there is nothing that can hinder His purpose from being accomplished. If we would ask God, He would reveal His purpose to us. (James 1:5) One purpose we know for certain from God's word is that we are to *"be to the praise of His glory"* (Ephesians 1:12) and *"... shining lights in a perverse and crooked generation, holding forth the word of life."* (Philippians 2:15-16)

God is calling His people in these last days to faithfulness and holiness.

- Judgment begins first in the household of God. (Read 1st Peter 4:12-19)
- The Lord has a crown of life and glory awaiting those who are faithful to the end. (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10-11)
- As we continue to look to the Lord Jesus, we will press on to victory. We will not faint in our minds and give up. (Hebrews. 12:1-4)
- The Lord Jesus Himself will see us through to the glory crown. (Hebrews 2:9-18)

Anticipating the glory of a crown to be presented by the Lord Jesus at His coming, the apostle Paul did not consider the sufferings he endured to be compared with the glory which was to come. (Romans 8:17-18) Recognizing that he had no ability of his own to overcome in this life, he relied upon the presence and power of the Lord Jesus to win him the victory. This awareness of Jesus' presence (Hebrews 13:5-6) caused him not to faint or give up. (Read also Joshua 1:6-9) God made Paul a winner, and He has made us winners who are about to be presented the glory crown when we remain faithful to the Lord Jesus. Nothing can break us down or defeat us as we continue to think and act on God's word and look to the hope of our calling: Jesus is returning for us, crowned in glory. (Especially read 2nd Corinthians 4:7-5:1)

“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”
(Read 1st Peter 4:12-19)

LET US NOT FORGET TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE TRULY SUFFERING FOR CHRIST'S SAKE THAT THEIR FAITH NOT FAIL.

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.” (Hebrews 13:3)