

Paul and Timothy: Passing the Torch

Yes, You Will Be Persecuted

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Good morning men. Welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible study. Let's go ahead and give that shout out to our online friends, and if you would join me on the count of 3. 1, 2, 3. Hurrah.

The series, **Passing the Torch with Paul and Timothy**. Today, **Yes, You Will Be Persecuted**, that's the topic for the day. What I want to do is I kind of want to give you an overly brief history of persecution.

The first thing is to talk about how persecution is, it's part of the plan. It's part of the plan. You remember when Moses was told by God to go to Pharaoh and say, "Let my people go." And what did Pharaoh do? He went out and he said to the slave masters, because the Jews were slaves. He said to the slave masters, they still have the same quota of bricks, but don't give them any straw anymore. Make them find their own straw. That was a persecution. So it goes all the way back, all the way back. It's always been part of the plan.

In Acts chapter eight, right after Stephen is stoned. Do you remember perhaps how Jesus said? He said, "When the Holy Spirit comes upon, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth." Do you remember that? Do you remember what happened after he gave that command? All the Christians huddled in Jerusalem. They didn't do what he said, but then after Stephen was stoned, the Christians were persecuted, a great persecution broke out.

It says in Acts chapter eight, that there was a diaspora, that the Christians spread all throughout the known world. Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. So persecution is part of the plan.

Watch this. Persecution leads to proliferation when it comes to the Christian faith. It's always been that way. It's always been that way. Then just scroll forward to the European persecution that led to the founding of the United States.

I'm sure all of you here, and all of those listening would know this, but there are many people who don't really understand that the United States of America or the colonies. America was formed because of people wanting to escape religious persecution. William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, he was a Quaker, and his purpose in founding the Colony of Pennsylvania was to escape religious persecution.

What is persecution? It's really any mistreatment, any mistreatment based on Christian belief. However, here are some examples. Confiscation or destruction of property, incitement of hatred, arrests, imprisonment, beatings, torture, murder, and executions. Those are some examples.

Open Doors is a collector of information, data about religious persecution worldwide, Christian religious persecution worldwide. They say it takes many forms, but it's basically defined as any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Jesus Christ.

It may be a young woman in India who gives her life to Jesus and then is ostracized by her family, thrown out by her family. It could be someone who was kidnapped by Boko Haram, all of these different things count. Persecution today, over 300 million people, about 6,000 people, roughly per year are being recorded as martyred for their faith or killed for their faith worldwide, worldwide.

We have a unique situation in the United States because you might be canceled, but you're probably not going to be arrested. You may lose your job, but you're probably not going to lose your life. But worldwide, this is the number. One in seven, one in seven Christians worldwide, two billion Christians worldwide. One out of every seven Christians worldwide is under some kind of extreme persecution.

With that as a, like I said, an overly brief history. Here's the **Big Idea. Persecution is baked into the cake, but God is trustworthy and good.** Persecution's part of the deal, just part of the deal, but God is trustworthy and good, and then we'll dive into this. You'll see this come up a couple more times.

PAUL'S PERSECUTION AND OURS

First, I want us to look at Paul's persecution and ours, and the text today is Second Timothy chapter three, verses 10 through 13. First up, let's take a look at the text, the first half of the text. Paul is writing now to Timothy, his protege. You may remember we've said some of these things in the previous lessons.

On Paul's first missionary journey, he would've been to Lystra, and he would have met a young man named Timothy, a young man who then continued to grow and become a disciple. Then on Paul's second missionary journey, he goes back through Lystra, and he decides that he wants to take Timothy with him. So Timothy joins Paul for the rest of the second journey, and then eventually ends up becoming essentially like a pastor in Ephesus.

You've heard it said here in this series that Paul said, "I have no one else like him." So Paul really had a deep admiration for this young protege, spiritual son. Timothy, he says, "You Timothy, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings." Again, Paul loves lists. Persecutions, sufferings. "What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra? The persecutions I endured."

In this text, Paul is wanting to help Timothy have a proper set of expectations. This is what you can expect if you follow Jesus with regard to the persecutions. So what happened at Antioch? What happened at Antioch? I put down the texts here. I don't necessarily... Don't look them up. I'll just kind of summarize this relatively quickly, because it is after all only one Bible study.

On this first missionary journey, Paul goes to these three cities in Southern Turkey, South Central Turkey. The first is Antioch, sometimes Pisidian Antioch, same city. Antioch. In Acts chapter 13, verse 50 and following, it says, "But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city." So this is a persecution that's taking place. Paul is saying, these are the persecutions that I underwent in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

It says, "They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from the region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium." We can see that when you have immense opposition, when you are basically expelled from a region, that's an example of persecution. So what's persecution? Being expelled, having this intense opposition from religious leaders and people high standing in your community.

By the way, Paul came back to Antioch later when Peter was there. Peter stopped eating with Gentiles because he was afraid of the Jewish leaders, and Paul called him to account when Paul got there. The scriptures tell us in this other passage, Galatians chapter two, 11 to 14, that there was a dispute and there was a mass opposition to Paul. It was another kind of persecution. He was opposed by everyone, even Barnabas turned against Paul. Even Barnabas turned against Paul in this other episode that took place at Antioch.

Then onto Iconium. So what happened to Paul in Iconium? From Acts chapter 14, verses four to six. "The people of that city were divided, some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot, a

plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews together with their leaders to mistreat them and stone them, but they found out about it and fled."

There was a plot to stone them, to do them bodily harm, that's persecution. Then what happened in Lystra, Acts chapter 14, verses eight to 11. It's so fascinating because when they got there, they were so enthralled with the teachings. They called Paul, Hermes, and the other guy, was it Barnabas who was with him? Whoever was with him. They called him Zeus, and they started worshiping Paul. That's what happened in verses eight to 11.

But then just a few verses later, then some of the Jews in Acts chapter 14, verse 19. "Then some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium, the places he had just been. They came and they won the crowd over, and they did, they finally did it. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city thinking he was dead." That's persecution.

Watch this. "But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city." Oh my gosh. Then next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

The suffering that Paul here had undergone, this gives you an example of what persecution, biblical style persecution's really all about. Having somebody hurt your feelings on Facebook is not persecution. The Big Idea here, persecution, you can see it's baked into the cake. It's just part of the deal. It's just part of the deal.

We saw it in Moses. We saw it in the stoning to Stephen. We see it in the life of Paul. It's just part of the deal. So what about our persecutions? What would be an example of our persecutions?

We had a table leader here once named Eddie Jermakowicz. He was working for a company, I think it was like a forms sales company or something like that. His boss told him to alter an invoice, and basically create a fraudulent invoice to one of their customers, and he refused to do it. He did that, he said, I can't do that because of my faith.

Upshot is, he got fired. He got fired because he would not, he got fired because of saying, that's the kind of persecution that you might experience in this life. Eddie J. is flourishing and doing extremely well today. God has blessed him because of his integrity, because of his faith.

Another friend here in town, I won't say his name, but a banker who is a very out loud Christian, very outspoken, and it completely stalled his career. He never got a promotion, ever because of his desire to be open about his faith. That's a kind of persecution. So those are persecutions, those are like American persecutions.

PAUL'S COMFORT AND OURS

Then the next thing to talk about here is just Paul's comfort. Paul's comfort and ours. Paul went on to say, "Yet, the Lord rescued me from all of them." Now, this should not be taken as normative because you also have Hebrews 11 where you have the hall of heroes and some of them got all these great rewards, but a lot of them got sawed in half and stoned and didn't receive their reward in this life. But they did of course receive their reward in the next life.

So don't think of this as normative, but Paul wants Timothy to know yet the Lord has rescued me from them all. It's kind like this story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So Nebuchadnezzar builds this giant gold statue, and everybody's supposed to bow down and worship this statue. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Daniel's three associates. They say, no, we're not going to do that so they don't.

All of the other rulers bring this to Nebuchadnezzar's attention. He calls Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego before him, and he says, "What is this I hear about you? You have to bow down before this idol, if you will, or whatever he called it, God. If you don't, you're going to be burned in the fire. I'm going to throw you in this burning fire."

Here's what they said, those men said in Daniel chapter three, 16 and following. "O King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up."

So our God will save us, but even if he doesn't, we want you to know that we're not going to worship your God, and they were thrown into the blazing furnace. In fact, the blazing furnace got heated up to seven times what it ordinarily would be, and the soldiers that carried Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to throw them in the fire, they died just approaching the furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar saw three men, no, not three but four men walking around in the fire, the angel of the Lord, and they were delivered from that fire. So they were rescued, but then there are others who, for whatever reason, are martyred and give their whole life for it.

But Paul's telling Timothy with regard to the kinds of things that I've been going through, and I'm asking you to do, I want you to know that the Lord rescued me from all of them. He goes on to say, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted in Christ Jesus. Everyone who lives a godly life or wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, they will be persecuted."

The rest of the verse, while evil doers and apostates will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. So will you be persecuted? That's the title of the message. Yes, you will be persecuted because everyone who wants to lead a godly life is going to be persecuted. It's just part of the deal. It's just part of the deal.

This is a comfort to you, and it's a comfort to me, and the comfort is really found here in the second part of our Big Idea. **Persecution is baked into the cake, but God is trustworthy and he's good.** God is sovereign, you've heard me say, perhaps if you've been here a while, that my greatest comfort is the sovereignty of God. I find my greatest comfort in the sovereignty of God.

My understanding that God is sovereignly orchestrating all human events, even the persecutions to bring us all into right relationship with him and right relationship with one another. That's what God is doing.

Ephesians chapter one, verse 11. "God is working out everything in conformity with a purpose of his will." He is trustworthy. You can believe his word, you can believe his character and his nature, his very nature is good. He is great. He's almighty. He's omniscient. He's omnipresent. He's omnipotent. He's all these things, but he is also good. He's loving, he's gracious, he's merciful. We can trust in his good plan for each of our lives, even if it's hard right now, even if it's hard right now.

PAUL'S RESPONSE AND OURS

The final piece here is Paul's response and ours. Paul, I already read the verse where after he had been stoned and left for dead, he got up. He said, "Wow, what just happened?" He went right back into the city, and then the next day he and Barnabas went to Derbe. It says there, "They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples."

They returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. He said this, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." Again, that's another form of everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.

"Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust." So what was Paul's response? So Paul was persecuted. Paul was comforted and he found his comfort in this idea that God had rescued him from all

of these persecutions. He reminds us too that we're going to be persecuted. Everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted.

The way he responds is, what did he do? He got up, he dusted himself off, and instead of having a pity party, what did he do? He went to the next place. He preached the word there, won a large number of disciples. You see, persecution leads to proliferation. You see this. Then they returned to the same three cities.

I don't know about you, but the natural tendency for me would be, if I'd been rejected in three different places. By the way, I have been rejected, come to think of it, in more than three different places. I'm the kind of guy who gets invited a lot of times. I get invited to speak somewhere once.

Then they returned to these three cities, and look what he did. There were believers there, and he strengthened those believers, those disciples. He encouraged them to remain true to the faith. Even though there was opposition in the city, opposition, he was committed to the mission of raising up believers into maturity.

It says that they appointed elders in each of these churches, so he was establishing churches in each of these three cities. This is the way that he responded to that.

Hey, how do we respond to that? Well, Ecclesiastes 10:4 says, "If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post, for calmness can lay great errors to rest." Stay the course, keep the faith. The whole world, it says, is under the control of the evil one. That's what it says somewhere in First John. But also it says, do not be surprised about such things.

Then I want to read you a passage out of First Peter chapter four, verse 12 and following. So Peter and Paul, Paul opposed Peter, but they were definitely reconciled. In fact, it's thought that Peter and Paul are the two men who established the church in Rome. Actually, Peter obviously had a very high opinion of Paul because somewhere in Second Peter, he actually says that Paul, some of his sayings are difficult to understand as are other scriptures. Peter actually attributes the status of scripture to the writings of Paul.

Here's what Peter said, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you as though something strange were happening to you." Persecution's baked into the cake, brothers. "But rejoice, in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

There are three reasons that we suffer. We suffer for doing wrong. We all know that. We suffer for no apparent reason. We can't figure it out. Then we do suffer for doing right. We are persecuted for being Christians from time to time. Everybody's experienced some kind of, almost everybody, has experienced some kind of persecution.

"So then, those who suffer according to God's will, should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good."

Brothers, the Big Idea today, Persecution, it's baked into the cake. But God, you can trust God. He's good. You can trust God. He's good.

Let's pray. Our dearest Father, we come to you this morning, knowing that persecution lies ahead for everyone who wants to live a godly life. Lord, we pray that what was true for Paul, and what Paul was telling Timothy, would be true for us, that you will rescue us from them all.

We pray Lord that when we are in, and maybe we're in it now, or maybe we've been through it, or maybe you were watching somebody else, but that we would see that you are sovereignly orchestrating everything, and we can trust you and you are good.

We ask this, Jesus, to tutor this to our hearts by your Holy Spirit and remind us of it whenever we need to be reminded. In your name, we pray. Amen.