

If we take a slandered church -8- and bring it by foes - hearing the reputation of the church to shreds, saying all manner of evil against them false leads to persecution.

Now this usually refers to words against God. It can have that meaning, but it can mean slander. The word referred too here - were the things that were said about them. By false Jews who were of the synagogue of Satan.

Did you know this is one of the tragedies of this universe. And of human history. The way religious people persecute each other. It is a disgrace. You give them an opportunity and practically every major religion that has ever existed will use an iron fist to grind dissenting minority to dust.

Sept 28, 1997

Christians have persecuted the Jews for centuries until His triumphant return. It is difficult even to win Jews today to Jesus. They have sought to persecute them. And they have looked for persecution. They have taken up persecution.

This month you will notice that the 28th is a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Early in Jesus' earthly ministry, opposition surfaced and, before very long, turned into intense and violent hatred. Experiencing this is foreign to us as Americans and, thus, we struggle to believe that such attitudes and actions still exist. The New Testament is clear, though, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12, NASB). This is not that we resign, but rather that we anticipate it. Persecution of the followers of Christ will continue and likely intensify until His triumphant return.

As we pray with insight and identifiable intercession for our believing sisters and brothers in places like Sudan, Albania, China, Indonesia and many more, let us also remember and rejoice that God uses the faithfulness of His children even in persecution to draw people to Himself. From one of the oppressive places of the world this word has come, "Now in a town where only recently there were no Christians, there are nearly 20. Friends who previously had no interest at all in Christ are asking for Bibles and how to become a Christian. . . . All this because you cared and prayed."

Back there in the beginning of the Christian era, around the world to care and pray for those who suffer for the sake of the gospel. around. The Roman Empire, where so many of the Roman authorities - they sought to blot out the infant Christian church. The first Roman Emperor to persecute Christians was Nero. And he listened to some of the wealthy Jewish population. They poisoned the minds.

Now this was brought about by the Jewish people. Martyrdom in all the world happened in this city of Smyrna. One of the greatest.

The pastor there at that time was Polycarp. He was the leader of the Christians in the city. Upon a Festival Day when the crowds were excited and cried out as a mob about Polycarp -- they brought him before the Roman Governor. He was given a choice of saying, Caesar is Lord or Jesus is Lord. He refused to say Caesar was Lord. He (the Governor) said say I swear that I will set thee at Liberty. Reproach Christ.

Polycarp answered this famous of all history -- "Eighty and six years have I served him and he never did me harm. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour. When the Governor pressed him -- the aged pastor answered, since thou art vainly urging that I should swear by the fortune of Caesar and pretend not to know who and what I am -- hear me, I am a Christian!"

A little later the Governor threatened him. I have wild beasts at hand. To these will I cast Thee except will thou change. And the Governor said, seeing that you do not fear the beasts, I will cast and cause thee to be consumed by fire. Polycarp answered, thou threatens me with fire, which burns for an hour. And after a little is put out. But thou art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgement. Of the eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. Why tarry thou, bring forth what thou wilt. Soon after the people led by the Jews, gathered the wood, and burned the faithful pastor, in the flames. Polycarp prayed this moving prayer. "I thank thee that that thou has graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour. That I may receive a portion in the number of thy martyrs in the cup of thy Christ."

So died the pastor, the angel messenger of the church of Smyrna. I know the pressure and agony unto death. I know thou utter destitution and want. I know thou blasphemy, which say they are Jews and are not. But are the Synagogue of Satan - I know and I understand.

It is said the King commanded a Christian to recount - if you don't give up Christ, I will banish you. The Christian smilingly said, you cannot banish me from Christ. He has said I will never leave Thee nor forsake Thee. The King was angry and said -- well, I will take your property. The Christian replied, my treasurers are layed up on high. You cannot get to them. The King was greatly angered and he said, well then, I will kill you. And the Christian answered, I have been dead with Christ in this world for 40 years, my life is hid with Christ in God, and you cannot touch it. To which the King said, what can you do with such a fanatic.

Studdert-Kennedy, a British chaplain in World War I, said that any person who was undisturbed by the pain and suffering of others was himself suffering from "hardening of the heart or softening of the brain." Suffering is a universal problem. It confronts us daily, brought sharply into focus by one tragedy after another. It is a part of life. Job reminds us that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

IV. OUR LORD'S ENCOURAGEMENT

"God doesn't care!"

V. 10 - We have come now to our Lord's words of encouragement. And praise and commendation. Found even in the way that he introduces himself.

If we look back to V. 8 - he says to the angel of the church at Smyrna write - these things saith the first and the last. Through all the trials that you will ever have. I am at the beginning of it and I shall be at the end of it. I shall be all the way through. I am the first and the last.

In early days and ancient days when a man made a map - he would write over an unknown country. Here be dragons. Over an unknown place - here be burning firey sands. Or over another place - here be the abyss.

Just so the Christian can take the map of his life, the map of the world, the map of all eternity. And when he comes to an unknown place -- he can write, here

is Christ. Here is my Lord. Here is my Saviour
 my Redeemer. I am the first and the last. The
 who suffered in Smyrna. Our Lord continues to
 When he adds, I am he which was dead and is now
 alive is translated in the present tense. That
 he refers to his resurrection and great event
 became dead, and am now alive. He was referring
 When he died and was buried and was raised from

Hong Kong airport. It is a telling story. A young woman
 was sitting near him, and after a while, she burst into tears
 which moved quickly into near hysteria. He tried to comfort
 her and discovered that she had lost her plane ticket back to
 the United States. She had been sitting there for three hours.
 She did not know what to do. All her money had been spent
 for the ticket. She cried and cried. He listened to her story
 patiently, and then he and an older couple, who had also be-
 friended her, decided that they would take her to get some-
 thing to eat, and then see if they could talk to the authorities
 and do something about her situation. The young woman
 reluctantly agreed and slowly got up, and as she did so, she
 suddenly screamed. "I thought somebody had shot her,"
 Fulghum wrote. "What is it?" he cried. "My ticket! My ticket!
 I have been sitting on it all the time! Here is my ticket!" As
 she left running to catch her plane, Fulghum wondered to
 himself how many of us have the solution to our problem
 and don't know it because all the time we are sitting on our
 "ticket." (7)

Is it not true that many of us are sitting on our tickets?
 Sitting on our opportunities for life and service. I can tell
 you that love convinces, but love also calls for a response and
 a commitment. Two men were convinced on that day as the

V. 9 - Our Lord said, I know thy works - tribulation, poverty, I know is not
 the "I know" of observation. As he has said. If he had said, if I observe or I
 see - I know having seen it in you. I know your works, tribulation, and poverty.
 This I know.

This comes from his own experience -- I know thy tribulation and thy poverty
 and thou slanderest me. They reviled him. Think how this suffering and this
 persecution brought death to him. He has expressed it all. He has experienced
 it all. He knew all of this. I know, I know.

V. 10 - Our Lord gives encouragement -- fear none of those things which thou
 shalt suffer. Satan shall cast you into prison. That you may be tried. And ye
 shall have tribulation ten days - the number 10 is an intensive number. It refers
 to fierce and intense persecution. The ten plagues in the land of Egypt. But the
 Lord said, fear none of these things. Now the Lord could have referred to ten
 different periods of persecution. Which some historians have laid out. But one
 might have expected the Lord to say, fear not. I will alleviate - I will relieve

He shall have Tribulation "10 DAY", NOT literally, but means the suffering. Fear not, the day will soon pass. Do not be afraid. I will destroy A definite period - imprisonment, martyrdom, those who persecute you.

Fear, None of these things that are going to happen. You are still Rich - Because you have the Saviour!! What do you have that will abide?

But the Lord said the contrary. You are to have more of the same. To which the Christian may have cried out -- oh Lord, we have so much now, we cannot bear it. Our property has been taken. Our homes removed from us. We live in rags and misery and agony. In hunger and in want. We are outcasts and we are despised.

Yet the Lord said, fear not. There will be more hardships. There will just be more. Is not anything promised the Christian besides suffering. Tribulation, poverty, misery and agony. Is there something else. The Lord never promised them any freedom from this in this world.

Remember when James and John asked if they might have a place at the right hand and one at the left. He asked them, can you be baptized with my baptism. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink. And they said they can. But how little did they understand.

James was beheaded by the sword of Herod.

John, as you know, was left on the Isle of Patmos to die of exposure.

Peter, in the last chapter in the Gospel of John, is called on to be crucified unto death.

You are going to have more trouble - amazing that Jesus said this to these people.

W. D. C.

The last thing that he says is to be faithful unto death. But our Lord has something else. When you see the wicked prosper. When you see God's people having a hard time. And some seem to be living in an abundance of things. Some are having all of this. But here you are - you do not have all of this. You have to struggle about your health. You have to struggle about how you are going to live from week to week. And as a Christian, you are suffering these deprivations. At times, you

are being persecuted and cast out. Clovis Chappell (I think this story about a boy, an Englishman, on horse back to collect a sum of money, tied gold sack to saddle, stopped road side each lunch, until day got set beside him, after lunch, fell asleep, then dog began to run in front of horse back & turn back, snap tails of horse, thought dog mad, shot faithful dog - horse looked at him - distance discovered loss - put horse in run, place

Can't you hear his voice. I say into you, my little child -- fear not. Do not be afraid. where crimson blood where dog had fallen - gone when reached bag of gold - there under his dog with a paw on either side of chin resting on treasure he was dead, he had remained loyal unto death.

Many times I have said those same words to members of our church and congregation. And to other people. Don't be afraid. When at the same time, their lurks even in my heart the shadow of fear. When I am afraid even to speak - but our Lord gives us complete assurance. I know. And because he knows, he says to these Christians at Smyrna he says, fear not. Fear not. I am the first and the last. I will be there all the way through. I will see you from the beginning to the end. I know all about it.

There is nothing to fear for the Christian. Do not be afraid. Do not hesitate - do not despair. Fear none of those things. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me. And thou strong arm support me.

Rupert Brook went to World War I, with a

Safe shall be my going
Secretly armed against all of death
Safe though all safety is lost
Safe where men fall
And if these poor limbs die
Safest of all.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air
I only know that I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

Paul wrote that I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels,
principalities, nor powers, things present nor things to come, nor height nor
depth, or any other creatures shall be able to separate us from the love of
God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Rom. 8:38-39.

Fear not, fear not. There are some of you who are going through trials
right now that only God knows about. There are some of you who are fighting
desperately for life. There are some of you who are struggling with your health.
And the Lord knows, and there are some of you who labor in persecution and God
knows. There are some of you who are depressed in Spirit, and in heart - and
God knows. Fear not. Fear not.

No more wonderful person ever lived than Catherine Booth. She was devoted to her husband, her children
Yet she found time to go into the slums of the city
of London and help the unfortunate, save the sick, the
lost. She encouraged her husband to leave the Meth-
odist Church rather than have his call to serve cir-
cumscribed by regulations. She was one of the front-
runners in the organization of the Salvation Army. No
one can estimate the good she has done. And yet when
she came to the day of her death, she said that she
could not recall one day when she had been free from
pain! Why?

Fanny Crosby had done nothing wrong. In fact, she
was a mere child of six when she lost her sight through
an accident. Why?

thought was brought on by sin, saying, "Though he
slay me, yet will I trust in him." Take the case of
Fanny Crosby again. God did not will her blindness.
It was an accident. It happened because certain natural
laws were broken. But the accident having occurred,
God could use Fanny Crosby to write,

Jesus, keep me near the cross;
There a precious fountain,
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calvary's mountain.

Dozens of other hymns by that same Christian woman
have literally lifted men's souls up to heaven. When
we suffer, no matter what the cause, and can have
such a faith, we are on the road to rugged good char-
acter and everlasting life.

David Brainerd born 1718 - my 1st husband - I am married in
sternly, I long to be there, my work is done, the world is nothing to me,
oh, to be in heaven to praise & glorify God with the Holy Angels! Life at it's Best!

These are our Lord - takes into consideration and speaks his marvelous promise.

Be thou faithful unto death. And I will give thee a crown of life. He that
overcometh, shall not be hurt, of the second death.

VII Rev. Clarkson, Nov. 1886 offered my woman give heart to Jesus, but I'll need
"Devils are in my Room. Ready to drag my soul down to Hell"
"It must be done." Husband, Jessie what must be done?
"Our hearts must be made right, it's too late!" WHAT ON EARTH IS GOD DOING IN THE WORLD?
The man of the world lives to die. (But

And Thou, O Lord! by whom are seen
Thy creatures as they be,
Forgive me if too close I lean
My human heart on Thee!

death for the lost lies death. But the Chr
morgue st. things - woman loved Pleasures
not be afraid. He has been through it all.
Dying, Friend - stay with me, I'm going to Hell &
awaits with a crown for the Christian who v
Tell the preacher to preach on Hell, I am a
ruined soul!
children. For you who live in a hard weary
God is with his people. And God is with yo

I read somewhere a fine statement about the great
Victorian general, Charles George Gordon. On the Sun-
day before he left for the Sudan, General Gordon went
all around London to a number of churches, taking
Communion as many times as he possibly could—in
order, he said, to start out "brim full of God." Brim full
of God! This is the secret of "bearing" suffering, of ac-
cepting it, of understanding it, and of using it. Apart
from God, there is no answer to the "why?" of sorrow
and pain and suffering.

V. II not see 2nd death! (Hell)
All with ears Hear!
conclusion then, it would be wise
crown of life. Death, that overcometh will no
No Second Death!
tell them not to fear death. Because etc:
rewarded for the race that won.
Not can take Broom with
Precious Good news =

William Stidger once told a story about how people
brim full of God handle suffering.

During World War II, a family received two tele-
grams in two weeks announcing that their sons had
both been killed in action. This family had always been
active Christians, involved in church affairs very deeply.
It was near Easter, and there was much speculation
about what they would do on Easter. The congregation
was not surprised. They appeared in their regular places
when the worship hour came, faces drawn in grief,
but with a look of victory in their eyes. However, it
remained for a small boy in that congregation to say
the ultimate word which summed up that beautiful and
dramatic experience. He was sitting in the pew im-
mediately behind that father and mother.

But unbelievers, there will be another
find not eternal life. But you will find e
You will be separated from the source of al
the world. You will go through this natu
that death that will separate you from God.
1883
Dr. Whit - why do you preach?
your disease is not fatal, but my soul troubles me!
It's not my Body But my soul troubles me!
Man stay with such man cried
Deliver my soul from this pain,
Push me out, I'm in the flames!
Repeated, Push me out, but me out,
I'm in the flames!

He saw them bow in prayer - 121
"Open Hymn Book Sing
sister Reading Bible
opening News 104 Bill Platy
Dad's Fare "They must Believe it" without W
actually believe in Easter?

WHEN CRISIS COMES

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribula-
tion, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or
peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more
than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am per-
suaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor princi-
palities, 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. (Rom. 8:35-37, 39)