

1. What Do We Do When Persecuted? We Tell it to the Church
 - a. The apostles went to “their own”
 - i. The mutuality in the Body of Christ gave the apostles needed support, encouragement, and comradery
 - ii. When threatened, they share this persecution with their fellow members of Christ
 1. There is something to be said about the interdependence of the Church, the mutual love and encouragement of friendship in the shared life in Christ
 2. The Church is necessary – there are no lone rangers in the Body of Christ
 - b. Report: the apostles tell them "as much as" the chief priests and elders said to them.
 - i. They report, not only their experience, but rather "what the elders said to them"
 - ii. Which was what? – Stop preaching and teaching in *this* name of Jesus!
 - c. This report clearly indicates a distinction between the social/civic/religious authorities and their opposition to Jesus, not merely the Church
 - i. The apostles understood that the opposition shown toward them was really an extension and continual fulfillment of the opposition to Jesus and a sharing in His sufferings
 - ii. 1 Pet 4:12-13; Phil 3:8-11
 - d. There is a sharing in the sufferings of Christ that is a shared suffering with all the Church, as participants, fellows of one another in the Body of Christ
2. What Was the Response of the Church to Persecution? PRAYER!
 - a. What were the possible responses to hearing the legislation which demanded their silence?
 - i. Anxious silence
 - ii. Aggressive fighting
 - iii. Apathetic carelessness
 - iv. All of these are self-autonomous, inward-motivated, attempts to protect oneself, love oneself, trust oneself
 1. They are all self-centered and self-trusting
 - a. Anxious silence is worried about itself, how to protect itself, what the best way to preserve oneself is for this situation – “I don’t want people to think badly of me.”
 - b. Aggressive fighting believes that it is up to myself to change the world, to *create* justice, rather than *reveal* it, and that I must coerce such change by my inner strength – “You must respect me! YOU are the problem with the world.”
 - c. Apathetic carelessness is not concerned about anything but oneself, ignorant of others because it cares too little about them, about God, or about Truth – “Who cares? Only what I think matters.”
 2. In this way, we see that liberal or conservative are simply terms for self-autonomy on differing branches but which share the same root
 - a. There are anxiously silent religious and irreligious, secularists and spiritual, conservative and liberal
 - b. There are aggressive fighters of both presuppositions
 - c. Apathy knows no bounds
 3. Just check your local bookstore: How many books are about you and how many are about God? Even your Christian bookstore?
 - a. Even in the church today we hear a lot more about us than we hear about God
 - b. “You are beautiful.” – “You just need to learn to love yourself” – “You can do anything if you believe in yourself”
 - c. Where is the emphasis, even in saying the same thing?

- i. “You are greatly loved.” Or “God loves you greatly.”
 - ii. Who is the subject of each sentence?
 1. I don’t want to be too picky, but these subtleties are telling when they become the dominant emotive expectation of strength and perseverance
- b. The Church, however, responded to this persecution by Asking for Help.
 - i. The Church did not begin with “we”, but immediately began with, “Master, You...”
 1. The Church did not anxiously remain silent, seeking their own comfort or ease in the face of opposition
 2. The Church did not aggressively fight, seeking to overthrow an unjust authority by force or violence
 3. The Church was not apathetic, as if they only cared about the Church and nobody else
 4. The Church began with God, looking to Him and at Him (You who created the heavens and the earth...)
 - a. How often, when trials and suffering and grief and fear settle upon us, do we begin with God? Do we look at His creative works? His sustenance of history?
 - b. My first thought is not usually to do theology, but the Church in this passage is doing exactly that!
 - ii. What did their asking look like?
 1. United - "one-minded"
 2. Humble - "lifted up their voice to God"
 - a. The Psalms call it lament
 - b. The difference between lament and complaining is that lament is Godward and complaining is me-ward
 3. Theological - context of redemption from the OT promises contextualized with present-day fulfillments
 - a. Strong statement of Jesus as the “Anointed One” (Messiah/Christ) of Psalm 2
 - i. The “kings of the earth” and “rulers gathered together” are interpreted to be Herod and Pontius Pilate, both Jew and Gentile rulers
 - ii. Yet, differently, the apostles connect “the peoples of Israel” with “the Gentiles” in opposition to the Christ and to the LORD
 - b. This means that the Church did not see a distinction between those who had previous revelation and those who did not, but rather the distinction was between those who received Jesus as the Anointed One of God and those who ‘took their stand against Him’ as authoritative King or Master
 - c. This distinction would be further extrapolated through struggle, dialogue, and the searching of the Scriptures, as recorded in the following chapters of Acts. The relationship between Jews and Gentiles would continue to be an issue in the early church, but here it seems clear that they view both as equally responsible for the execution of Jesus by both the peoples and by their rulers – Jews and Gentiles alike.
 4. Real - recognizes enemies of the gospel
 - a. “they took their stand against the LORD and His Anointed One”
 - b. It is not true to call all humanity “children of God” in the same way – there are enemies of God
 - i. So were we until God graciously intervened and gave us new hearts as a demonstrative act of sheer mercy
 - c. It is right to acknowledge this, *and to pray*

- i. Look how the Psalmist continues speaking to those who “take their stand against the LORD and His Christ”
 - 1. “...Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Ps. 2:10-12 ESV)
 - ii. There is both a severe warning that doing so will put you in the path of the wrath of the Son, but also that there is hope of salvation in the same Son
 - 1. He is the wrath-bringer AND He is the refuge.
 - 2. Kiss the Son
- 5. Dependent - recognizes sovereignty of God
 - a. "whom you anointed to do whatever your hand and your plan had determined beforehand to take place"
 - b. The Church here clearly states that whatever happened to Jesus, carried out willingly by Herod, Pilate, and the peoples (both Gentile and Israel), was God’s hand (activity/power) and God’s plan (intention/will)
 - i. God’s plan was decided and carried out before the actual events occurred within history
 - c. This element of God’s sovereignty is meticulous, purposed, and accomplished
 - i. This shows the following things:
 - 1. God ordains suffering to accomplish something far more glorious than immediate comfort or immediate glory
 - 2. Nothing that happens occurs because God couldn’t stop it, but rather because He has something far greater to be accomplished through it than that which would be accomplished without it
 - 3. Everything, then, which befalls the believer in Jesus Christ is working for the greatest glory – God’s (Father, Son, HS) and God’s people’s
 - a. 2 Cor 4:13-5:6a

3. How Did the Church Interpret Suffering? – God’s Plan and Participation with Jesus

- a. They viewed it as part of God’s plan
 - i. Consistently, in every chapter of Acts so far, Peter has expressed the confidence that God is actively using rebellious human beings who don’t receive His revealed will to carry out His purpose
 - 1. “they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should come to pass”
 - ii. This is expressed in the manner in which the gathered Church addressed the Father, “O Sovereign Lord”
 - 1. “Sovereign Lord” here is the one word *despotes*, which is one with supreme authority and sovereignty – particularly connected to God’s rights and authority as Creator of all that has been made
 - 2. They approach God in prayer as servants coming to a Master *because they know that He has authority over everything*, even the enemies of the gospel
 - a. Of the 6 ½ verses here, 4 ½ are concerning God’s sovereign majesty and 2 are asking for His saving mercies
 - b. Do we pray with these kind of proportions in our prayers?

3. The most important aspect of prayer is to remember to whom we are praying: Infinite, Eternal, Sovereign, Independent, Creator
 - b. They viewed suffering as an expected aspect of sharing in the life and ministry of Christ Jesus
 - i. Luke 9:22-24, 57-62
 - ii. They expected suffering
 - iii. Their prayer consists of asking for boldness to continue proclaiming the gospel in the face of such opposition.
 1. “In a time of threat, prayer can be a rediscovery of the sovereign God who wins by letting our opponents win and then transforming the expected result. This rediscovery can keep God’s witnesses faithful in spite of threats.” (R.C. Tannehill, *Shape*, p73)
 - c. Suffering and afflictions for the sake of the gospel is a participation in the sufferings of Christ and the redemption and maturation of the Church
 - i. Colossians 1:24-26
4. What Did the Church Want? – Justice and Boldness to Continue Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus
- a. Consider their threats
 - i. Literally, “fix your gaze upon their threats”
 1. They wanted God to see it, to look into these threats and act accordingly
 2. They wanted justice – righteousness concerning the authorities, so they ask for it
 - ii. They also are praying consistently with the Psalms, which reveal that the judgement and wrath of the LORD and His Anointed one must inevitably fall upon those who take their stand against Him.
 1. We don’t like to pray like this, but it is biblical, true, and honoring to the Lord
 2. Yet, notice what the apostles also ask the Lord to grant them next
 - iii. We deal with injustice first and foremost by asking the Lord to see it and act according to His righteousness
 - b. Enable your servants to speak God's Word
 - i. They not only pray for justice, they also pray that God would enable them to speak His Word, which is the message of hope *proclaimed to the enemies of God*
 1. Colossians 1:5
 2. Ephesians 2:12
 - ii. To speak it "with all boldness"
 1. Boldness to speak God’s Word is a divine gift, not a moral virtue that is acquired through various exercises or repetition or systematic training
 - c. The emphasis of their prayer was on the sovereignty of God and the provision of continual strength to boldly proclaim the Word of God
 - i. When persecution comes upon us because people are “violently agitated” at the proclamation of the *necessity* and *exclusive authority* of “this Jesus”, the Church ought to pray
 - ii. God, the sovereign Creator, is the only one capable of bringing justice and providing the strength to continue to proclaim the gospel of peace, reconciliation, and the hope of enemies who can become saints

We must know the God who reigns over all in order to endure the persecution growing in this world towards the true and glorious gospel of the sovereign King Jesus. He is worth it. He is far above all powers and authorities and rulers of this world and of the unseen world. He will resurrect us to glory. Let us not fear, for our Master is the uncreated Sovereign over all. May the Spirit empower us to boldly proclaim the hope of the nations, to love our enemies to seek their flourishing, and to entrust justice to God and God alone.

“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and [remember] those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.” (Hebrews 13:3).