

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 185

PERSECUTION

*The servant is not greater than his
lord. If they have persecuted
me, they will also
persecute you.*

John 15:20

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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185

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DISCIPLES OF CHRIST MUST EXPECT PERSECUTION

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646)

*“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”—Matthew 5:10.*

[In the Sermon on the Mount] Christ begins with the poor and ends with the persecuted, when he would shew who are the most blessed men in the world. My brethren, see whether the wisdom of Christ be like the wisdom of the world, yea or no. When you would describe a blessed man, would you begin with the *poor* and end with the *persecuted*? Oh the wisdom of Christ! It is not according to the wisdom of the world. The thoughts of Christ concerning blessedness are not according to the thoughts of the world.

And then, secondly, this is to be wondered at, that Christ should have need to speak of the blessedness of those that are persecuted, after he had mentioned the blessedness of the former. What! Blessed are the *peacemakers*, and blessed are the *persecuted*? What agreement is there between these two or what connection can there be? For if a man be of a peaceable disposition, who will harm him? Why, surely they will escape persecution of all men! It may be there are some, though godly, yet are of a turbulent disposition and are furious and hot. *They* perhaps may be *persecuted*, but will the peacemakers be persecuted? Will those that in the places where they live are no occasion of evil to any that they live among, but labor to do all the good that possibly they can, and yet shall these be persecuted? Yes, truly. Even these if they be godly, these if they be righteous, these must not think to escape. None that are truly godly and righteous, though they be of the most quiet and peaceable dispositions in the world, they must not think to escape; and therefore these two are joined together.

Yea, this blessedness that follows upon persecution is added to all the former, to note that a man may be *all* the former and yet a persecuted man. As thus: a man may be of a very poor and humble spirit and yet persecuted. A man may be of a mournful spirit, mourn for his own sins and for the sins of others and yet persecuted. A man may be of a meek spirit and yet persecuted. A man may be hungering and thirsting after righteousness. A man may be a merciful man and yet

persecuted. A man pure in heart, not having any base ends¹ of his own, and yet persecuted. Yea, a man may be a peacemaker and yet persecuted. Such is the wickedness of the world, the vileness of the nature of man, that there is nothing in the world can keep him from persecuting of the saints, though they be of never such poor and mourning and meek and pure and merciful and peaceable hearts. This for the connection:

Blessed are they that are persecuted. The word translated *persecuted* signifies the following of a thing hard, i.e., a hard following of a thing. It is taken sometimes of a good sense. The same word that is here and in divers other Scriptures taken in an ill sense is often taken in a good. 1 Thessalonians 5:15, “Follow that that is good,” saith the text there, persecute that which is good.

And in Hebrews 12:14, “Follow peace,” there is the same word. 1 Corinthians 14:1, “Follow after charity,” there is the same word there too. It signifies, therefore, so to follow a thing as not to leave it till we have gotten what we would have. So the apostle uses it in Philippians 3:14, “I press towards the mark,” I *persecute* the mark as it were. That is, look with what eagerness I did ever follow the saints in the persecution of them; I do now with the same eagerness press towards the mark. A man that hath an eager spirit doth press towards a thing. Now, as it is applied in an *ill* sense, taking the meaning of it, to follow the thing thoroughly. Now if you would know what persecution is, it is nothing but this: a pertinacious² following of one to do him hurt, tending to his destruction.

When men do follow eagerly a business that is evil and follow a man or woman in a thing to do hurt to them and follow them eagerly and resolve never to leave till they have got their wills of them, they may be said to *persecute* these men. For persecution is not merely to do a man hurt. There is a difference between *wronging* a man and *persecuting* a man. They may do them wrong in some one act; they may do them wrong accidentally. But now persecution is when, intending to follow a man or woman in a constant way, and resolve never to leave them until they have had their wills of them. Oh, blessed are they that are persecuted, that are followed by the world—those that the persecutors of the world are set upon and are eager to do hurt unto. This is for righteousness. It is not the *punishment*, but the *cause* that makes the martyr. Those are not blessed that are followed hard for their sin, for their wickedness—that suffer for wickedness, that suffer for evil doers, for God would not have them suffer so. No. That is a part of the curse

¹ **base ends** – vile aims; worthless goals.

² **pertinacious** – stubbornly or perversely obstinate.

of God upon them that as they *do* evil, so they should *suffer* evil. Now the saints that are blessed, they labor to be so far from suffering for evil-doing that they would rather suffer all the evil in the world than do the least. There is a great deal of difference between these two.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1647): one of the most popular preachers in London during his time there. One of the Independent members of the Westminster Assembly of Divines and a Congregationalist. Burroughs was so highly regarded by his peers that they published 13 volumes of his sermons after his death.



THE CHRISTIAN AND PERSECUTION

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

*“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”—Matthew 5:10.*

WE come in verse 10 to the last of the Beatitudes, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” It is generally agreed that verses 11 and 12 are a kind of elaboration of this Beatitude, and perhaps an application of its truth and message to the disciples in particular. In other words, our Lord has finished the general portrayal of the characteristics of the Christian man by the end of verse 10, and He then applies this last statement in particular to the disciples.

At first, this Beatitude seems to be rather different from all the others in that it is not so much a positive description of the Christian as an account of what is likely to result because of what has gone before and because the Christian is what we have seen him to be. Yet ultimately it is not different because it is still an account and description of the Christian. He is persecuted because he is a certain type of person and because he behaves in a certain manner. The best way of putting it, therefore, would be to say that, whereas all the others have been a direct description, this one is indirect. “This is what is going to happen to you because you are a Christian,” says Christ.

Now it is interesting to observe that this particular Beatitude follows immediately the reference to the peacemakers. In a sense it is because the Christian is a peacemaker that he is persecuted. What a wealth of insight and understanding that gives us into the nature and character of the Christian life! I do not think you will ever find the biblical doctrines of sin and the world put more perfectly or precisely anywhere in Scripture than in just these two Beatitudes—“Blessed are the peacemakers,” and “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” If a Christian man is a peacemaker this is what happens to him.

Another preliminary point of interest is that the promise attached to this Beatitude is the same as the promise attached to the first, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That is, if you like, a further and additional proof of the fact that this is the last Beatitude. You start with the kingdom of heaven and you end with it. It is not, of course, that the various blessings which have been attached to the other Beati-

tudes do not belong to those who are in the kingdom of heaven, or that they do not get blessings. They all get blessings; but our Lord started and ended with this particular promise in order to impress upon His listeners that the important thing was membership of the kingdom of heaven. As we have seen, the Jews had a false notion about the kingdom. "But," our Lord says in effect, "I am not talking of this kind of kingdom. The important thing is that you should realize what My kingdom is, and you should know how to become members of it." So He starts and ends with it. Over and above all these particular blessings which we receive, and which we are to receive in greater measure and greater fullness, the great thing is that we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and thus belong to that spiritual realm.

Here, again, I think we are entitled to say that we are confronted by one of the most searching tests that can ever face us. Let no-one imagine that this Beatitude is a kind of appendix to the others. In its way it is as positive a description as any that precede it, though it may be indirect; and it is one of the most searching of all. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." What an amazing, astounding and unexpected statement. Yet remember that it is part of the description of the Christian quite as much as being pure in heart, quite as much as being peacemakers, quite as much as being merciful. This is one of the characteristics of the Christian, as I am going to remind you, and that is why it is one of the most searching tests that we can ever face. All these Beatitudes have been searching, but there are ways in which this is even more searching than the others. But let me hasten to add that perhaps there is no Beatitude where we have to be quite so careful, there is no Beatitude that is so liable to misconstruction and misunderstanding. There is certainly no Beatitude that has been so frequently misunderstood and misapplied. Therefore we must approach it with great circumspection and care. It is a vital statement, an essential and integral part of the whole teaching of the New Testament. You will find it right through the Gospels and the Epistles. Indeed, we can go so far as to say that it is one of the great characteristic messages of the whole Bible, which carries its inevitable implication with it. I suggest, therefore, that the most important thing to emphasize is this phrase, "for righteousness' sake." It does not merely say, "blessed are they which are persecuted," but "blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

Now I need not, I am sure, take any time in pointing out what a relevant statement this is for Christian people in every country at this moment. There is more persecution of Christians today, some would say, than there has been since the first centuries of the Christian era;

and I think a good case can be made out for that statement. There have been grievous periods of persecution at various epochs in the long history of the Church, but they have generally been more or less localized. Now, however, persecution has spread throughout the world. There are Christian people who are being actively and bitterly persecuted in many countries at this very moment, and there may well be a strong case for saying that this may be the most important verse in your life and mine. There are so many indications that the Church may indeed be facing that fiery trial of which the apostle Peter writes and speaks. He was thinking primarily, of course, of one that was coming in his own day. But it may well be that we in this country, in apparent safety and ease, may know and experience something of the fiery trial and furnace of affliction and of persecution. Let us be clear, then, that we understand this verse and know exactly what it does say.

To that end let us start with a few negatives. It does not say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are objectionable." It does not say, "Blessed are those who are having a hard time in their Christian life because they are being difficult." It does not say, "Blessed are those who are being persecuted as Christians because they are seriously lacking in wisdom and are really foolish and unwise in what they regard as being their testimony." It is not that. There is no need for one to elaborate this, but so often one has known Christian people who are suffering mild persecution entirely because of their own folly, because of something either in themselves or in what they are doing. But the promise does not apply to such people. It is for righteousness' sake. Let us be very clear about that. We can bring endless suffering upon ourselves, we can create difficulties for ourselves which are quite unnecessary, because we have some rather foolish notion of witnessing and testifying, or because, in a spirit of self-righteousness, we really do call it down on our own heads. We are often so foolish in these matters. We are slow to realize the difference between prejudice and principle; and we are so slow to understand the difference between being offensive, in a natural sense, because of our particular make-up and temperament, and causing offence because we are righteous.

So let me put another negative. We are not told, "Blessed are the persecuted because they are fanatical." Neither does it say, "Blessed are the persecuted because they are over-zealous." Fanaticism can lead to persecution; but fanaticism is never commended in the New Testament. There are so many temptations that tend to come to us in the spiritual and Christian life. Some people, even in worship, seem to think that they must say their "Amen" in a particular way, or must say

it often. Thinking that this is a sign of spirituality, they make themselves a nuisance at times to others and so get into trouble about that. That is not commended in Scripture; it is a false notion of worship. The spirit of fanaticism has also very often led people into grievous difficulties. I once remember a poor man who not only brought suffering upon himself, but also upon his wife on account of his zeal. He was over-zealous, and he was not facing some of the injunctions given by our Lord Himself, because he was so anxious to be testifying. Now let us be careful that we do not bring unnecessary suffering upon ourselves. We are to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” God forbid that any of us should suffer because we fail to remember that. In other words we are not told, “Blessed are they who are persecuted because they are doing something wrong,” or because they themselves are wrong in some respect. You remember how Peter put it in his wisdom, “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer.” Let us notice, also, what he put into the same category as murderers, evildoers, thieves and so on—busybodies in other men’s matters (1Pe 4:15).

Let me now add another negative from a different category. This text surely does not even mean “blessed are they that are persecuted for a cause.” This is a little subtle and we must be careful. I say that there is a difference between being persecuted for righteousness’ sake and being persecuted for a cause. I know that the two things often become one, and many of the great martyrs and confessors were at one and the same time suffering for righteousness’ sake and for a cause. But it does not follow by any means that the two are always identical. Now I think that this is one of the most vital points for us to bear in mind just at this present moment. I think that in the last twenty years there have been men, some of them very well known, who have suffered, and have even been put into prisons and concentration camps, for religion. But they have not been suffering for righteousness’ sake. We have to be careful about that very distinction. There is always this danger of our developing the martyr spirit. There are some people who seem anxious for martyrdom; they almost court it. That is not the thing about which our Lord is talking.

We must also realize that it does not mean suffering persecution for religio-political reasons. Now it is the simple truth to say that there were Christian people in Nazi Germany who were not only ready to practice and live the Christian faith but who preached it in the open air and yet were not molested. But we know of certain others who were put into prisons and concentration camps, and we should be careful to see why this happened to them. And I think if you draw that

distinction you will find it was generally something political. I need not point out that I am not attempting to excuse Hitlerism; but I am trying to remind every Christian person of this vital distinction. If you and I begin to mix our religion and politics, then we must not be surprised if we receive persecution. But I suggest that it will not of necessity be persecution for righteousness' sake. This is something very distinct and particular, and one of the greatest dangers confronting us is that of not discriminating between these two things. There are Christian people in China and on the Continent at the present time to whom this is the most acute problem of all. Are they standing for righteousness' sake, or for a cause? After all, they have their political views and ideas. They are citizens of that particular country. I am not saying that a man should not stand for his political principles; I am simply reminding you that the promise attached to this Beatitude does not apply to that. If you choose to suffer politically, go on and do so. But do not have a grudge against God if you find that this Beatitude, this promise, is not verified in your life. The Beatitude and the promise refer specifically to suffering for righteousness' sake. May God give us grace and wisdom and understanding to discriminate between our political prejudices and our spiritual principles.

There is much confusion on this very matter at the present time. Much talk which appears to be, and is said to be, Christian, in its denunciation of certain things that are happening in the world, is, I believe, nothing but the expression of political prejudices. My desire is that we might all be saved from this serious and sad misinterpretation of Scripture, which may lead to such needless and unnecessary suffering. Another great danger in these days is that this pure Christian faith should be thought of by those who are outside in terms of certain political and social views. They are eternally distinct and have nothing to do with one another. Let me illustrate this; the Christian faith as such is not anti-communism, and I trust that none of us will be foolish enough and ignorant enough to allow the Roman Catholic Church, or any other interest, to delude and mislead us. As Christians we are to be concerned for the souls of communists, and their salvation, in exactly the same way as we are concerned about all other people. And if once we give them the impression that Christianity is just anti-communism we are ourselves shutting and barring the doors, and almost preventing them from listening to our gospel message of salvation. Let us be very careful, Christian people, and take the words of Scripture as they are.

Let us look at one final negative; this Beatitude does not even say, Blessed are they that are persecuted for being good, or noble, or self-

sacrificing. There again, of course, is another vital and, it seems to some people, subtle distinction. The Beatitude does not say we are blessed if we suffer for being good or noble, for the excellent reason that you will probably not be persecuted for being good. I doubt very much also if you will ever be persecuted for being noble. The world, as a matter of fact, generally praises and admires and loves the good and the noble; it only persecutes the righteous. There are people who have made great sacrifices, those who have given up careers, prospects and wealth and who sometimes have even sacrificed their lives; and the world has thought of them as great heroes and has praised them. So we should suspect immediately that that is not true righteousness. There are certain men today who are acclaimed as very great Christians by the world simply because they have made such sacrifices. That, I suggest, should raise at once a query in our minds as to whether they are really practicing the Christian faith, or whether it is not just something else—perhaps a general nobility of character.

What, then, does this Beatitude mean? Let me put it like this. Being righteous, practising righteousness, really means being like the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore they are blessed who are persecuted for being like Him. What is more, those who are like Him always will be persecuted. Let me show this first of all from the teaching of the Bible. Listen to the way in which our Lord Himself puts it. “If the world hate 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” (Joh 15:18-20). Now there is no qualification, it is a categorical statement. Listen to His servant Paul putting it in this way, “Yea,” says Paul, writing to Timothy, who did not understand this teaching and was therefore unhappy because he was being persecuted, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Ti 3:12). It is again a categorical statement. That is why I said at the beginning that I sometimes think this is the most searching of all the Beatitudes. Are you suffering persecution?

That is the teaching. Let us look at its out-working right through the Bible. For instance, Abel was persecuted by his brother Cain. Moses received grievous persecution. Look at the way in which David was persecuted by Saul, and at the terrible persecution that Elijah and Jeremiah had to endure. Do you remember the story of Daniel, and how he was persecuted? These are some of the most outstanding righteous men of the Old Testament, and every one of them verifies the biblical

teaching. They were persecuted, not because they were difficult, or over-zealous, but simply because they were righteous. In the New Testament we find exactly the same thing. Think of the apostles, and the persecution they had to endure. I wonder whether any man has ever suffered more than the apostle Paul, in spite of his gentleness and kindness and righteousness. Read his occasional descriptions of the sufferings that he had to endure. It is not surprising that he said that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” He had known and experienced it. But, of course, the supreme example is our Lord Himself. Here He is in all His utter, absolute perfection, and His gentleness and meekness, of whom it can be said that “a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.” Never was anyone so gentle and so kind. But look at what happened to Him and at what the world did to Him. Read also the long history of the Christian Church and you will find that this statement has been verified endlessly. Read the lives of the martyrs, of John Huss,¹ or the Covenanters,² or the Protestant Fathers. Read about it also in more modern times and observe the persecution endured by the leaders of the Evangelical Awakening in the eighteenth century. Not many men have known what it is to suffer as did Hudson Taylor, who lived into our century. He knew what it was to undergo at times grievous persecution. It is just a verification of the statement of this Beatitude.

By whom are the righteous persecuted? You will find as you go through the Scriptures, and as you study the history of the Church, that the persecution is not confined to the world. Some of the most grievous persecution has been suffered by the righteous at the hands of the Church herself, and at the hands of religious people. It has often come from nominal Christians. Take our Lord Himself. Who were His chief persecutors? The Pharisees and scribes and the doctors of the Law! The first Christians, too, were persecuted most bitterly of all by the Jews. Then read the history of the Church, and watch it in the Roman Catholic persecution of some of those men in the Middle Ages who had seen the pure truth and were trying to live it out quietly. How they were persecuted by nominal, religious people! That was also the story of the Puritan Fathers. This is the teaching of the Bible, and it has been substantiated by the history of the Church, that the persecu-

¹ **John Huss** (or *Jan Hus*) – c. 1370-1415 Reformer of Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) and advocate of the theology of English Reformer John Wycliffe (c. 1328-84), condemned by the Council of Constance and burned at the stake.

² **Covenanters** – the Scottish Presbyterians (1638-90) who held to the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. In these they pledged to maintain the Presbyterian form of church government and worship against episcopacy (the form of church government ruled by bishops).

tion may come, not from the outside but from within. There are ideas of Christianity far removed from the New Testament which are held by many and which cause them to persecute those who are trying in sincerity and truth to follow the Lord Jesus Christ along the narrow way. You may well find it in your own personal experience. I have often been told by converts that they get much more opposition from supposedly Christian people than they do from the man of the world outside, who is often glad to see them changed and wants to know something about it. Formal Christianity is often the greatest enemy of the pure faith.

But let me ask another question. Why are the righteous thus persecuted? And, especially, why is it that the righteous are persecuted rather than the good and noble? The answer, I think, is quite simple. The good and noble are very rarely persecuted because we all have the feeling that they are just like ourselves at our best. We think, "I am capable of that myself if I only put my mind to it," and we admire them because it is a way of paying a compliment to ourselves. But the righteous are persecuted because they are different. That was why the Pharisees and the scribes hated our Lord. It was not because He was good; it was because He was different. There was something about Him that condemned them. They felt all their righteousness was being made to look very tawdry. That was what they disliked. The righteous may not say anything; they do not condemn us in words. But just because they are what they are, they do in fact condemn us, they make us feel unhappy, and we shrivel into nothing. So we hate them for it and try to find fault with them.

"You know," people say, "I believe in being a Christian; but that is much too much, that is going too far." That was the explanation of Daniel's persecution. He suffered all he did because he was righteous. He did not make a show of it, he did it quietly in his own way. But they said, "This man condemns us by what he is doing; we shall have to catch him." That is always the trouble, and that was the explanation in the case of our Lord Himself. The Pharisees and others hated Him just because of His utter, absolute holiness and righteousness and truth. And that is why you find gentle, loving, lovable people like Hudson Taylor, to whom I have already referred, suffering terrible and bitter persecution sometimes at the hands of ostensible Christians.

Obviously, then, we can draw certain conclusions from all this. For one thing, it tells us a great deal about our ideas concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If our conception of Him is such that He can be admired and applauded by the non-Christian, we have a wrong

view of Him. The effect of Jesus Christ upon His contemporaries was that many threw stones at Him. They hated Him; and finally, choosing a murderer instead of Him, they put Him to death. This is the effect Jesus Christ always has upon the world. But you see there are other ideas about Him. There are worldly people who tell us they admire Jesus Christ, but that is because they have never seen Him. If they saw Him, they would hate Him as His contemporaries did. He does not change; man does not change. So let us be careful that our ideas about Christ are such that the natural man cannot easily admire or applaud.

That leads to the second conclusion. This Beatitude tests our ideas as to what the Christian is. The Christian is like his Lord, and this is what our Lord said about him. "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luk 6:26). And yet is not our idea of what we call the perfect Christian nearly always that he is a nice, popular man who never offends anybody, and is so easy to get on with? But if this Beatitude is true, that is not the real Christian, because the real Christian is a man who is not praised by everybody. They did not praise our Lord, and they will never praise the man who is like Him. "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" That is what they did to the false prophets; they did not do that to Christ Himself.

So I draw my next deduction. It concerns the natural, unregenerate man, and it is this. The natural mind, as Paul says, "is enmity against God." Though he talks about God, he really hates God. And when the Son of God came on earth he hated and crucified Him. And that is the attitude of the world towards Him now.

This leads to the last deduction, which is that the new birth is an absolute necessity before anybody can become a Christian. To be Christian, ultimately, is to be like Christ; and one can never be like Christ without being entirely changed. We must get rid of the old nature that hates Christ and hates righteousness; we need a new nature that will love these things and love Him and thus become like Him. If you try to imitate Christ the world will praise you; if you become Christlike it will hate you.

Finally, let us ask ourselves this question: Do we know what it is to be persecuted for righteousness' sake? To become like Him we have to become light; light always exposes darkness, and the darkness therefore always hates the light. We are not to be offensive; we are not to be foolish; we are not to be unwise; we are not even to parade the Christian faith. We are not to do anything that calls for persecution. But by just being like Christ persecution becomes inevitable. But that is the glorious thing. Rejoice in this, say Peter and James. And our Lord

Himself says, “Blessed are ye, happy are ye, if you are like that.” Because if ever you find yourself persecuted for Christ and for righteousness’ sake, you have in a sense got the final proof of the fact that you are a Christian, that you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. “Unto you,” says Paul to the Philippians, “unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phi 1:29). And I look at those first Christians persecuted by the authorities and I hear them thanking God that at last they had been accounted worthy to suffer for the Name’s sake.

May God through His Holy Spirit give us great wisdom, discrimination, knowledge and understanding in these things, so that if ever we are called upon to suffer, we may know for certain that it is for righteousness’ sake, and may have the full comfort and consolation of this glorious Beatitude.

Excerpted from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, ©1981
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David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Perhaps the greatest expository preacher of the 20th century. He left a promising medical career to preach the Gospel. Successor to G. Campbell Morgan as minister of Westminster Chapel, London, England, 1938-1968. Born in Cardiff, Wales.



A WORD FOR THE PERSECUTED

C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“What if thy father answer thee roughly?”—1 Samuel 20:10.

IT was not an unlikely thing that his father would answer Jonathan roughly. Saul had taken great umbrage¹ against David, while Jonathan his eldest son, on the contrary, loved David as his own soul. Jonathan could hardly think that his father really meant harm to so good a man as David, and he expressed to David that opinion, and then David, to be prepared for the worst, put to him this question, “What if thy father answer thee roughly?” It did so turn out. Saul answered his son with bitter words, and in the desperation of his anger he even hurled a javelin at him to smite him; yet Jonathan did not forsake David, he clung to him with all the faithfulness of love, and until his death, which was much mourned by David, he remained his fast and faithful friend. Now, this question of David to Jonathan is one which I wish to put this morning to all believers in Christ, especially to the younger ones who have lately entered into covenant with the great Son of David, and who, in the ardor of their hearts, feel that they could live and die for Him. I want to put before them the supposition that they will meet with opposition from their dearest friends, that perhaps their father, brother, husband, or uncle will answer them roughly, or perhaps their mother, wife, or sister will become a persecutor to them. What then? What will they do under such circumstances? Will they follow the Lord through evil report? “What if thy father answer thee roughly?”

Remember that this supposition is a very likely one. There are a few Christians so favorably circumstanced that all their friends accompany them in the pilgrimage to heaven. What advances they ought to make in the sacred journey! What excellent Christians they ought to be! They are like plants in a conservatory—they ought to grow and bring forth the loveliest flowers of divine grace. But there are not very many who are altogether in that case. The large proportion of Christians find themselves opposed by those of their own family, or by those with whom they labor or trade. Is it not likely to be so? Was it not so from the beginning? Is there not enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman? Did not Cain slay his brother Abel

¹ umbrage – offense; resentment.

because he was accepted of the Lord? In the family of Abraham was there not an Ishmael born after the flesh, who persecuted Isaac, who was born after the Spirit? Was not Joseph hated of his brethren? Was not David persecuted by Saul, Daniel by the Persian princes, and Jeremiah by the kings of Israel? Has it not ever been so? Did not the Lord Jesus Christ Himself meet with slander, cruelty, and death, and did He not tell us that we must not look for favor where he found rejection? He said plainly, "I came not to send peace upon the earth, but a sword;" and He declared that the immediate result of the preaching of the gospel would be to set the son against the father and the father against the son, so that a man's foes should be they of his own household. Did He not carefully inquire of every recruit who wished to enlist in His army, "Have you counted the cost?" Have you not admired His perfect honesty and admirable caution in dealing with men, when He bids them remember that if they follow Him they must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and be content to be hated of all men for His sake? He warns us not to expect that the disciple will be above his Master, for if men have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, they will assuredly confer no sweet titles upon his household. Since our Lord has forewarned us, it is well for us to stand ready for the trial which He predicts, and to ask ourselves whether we are ready to bear oppression for Christ's sake. I press the question upon you who think of avowing yourselves believers, for most likely it will come practically home to you, and it is well when you begin to build a house to calculate whether you will be able to finish it.

There are very many of God's servants here, whose life is made bitter by the continual worry they endure from their ungodly relatives and associates. Often do they sigh for the wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest. I feel the deepest sympathy with them, and it is not only with the intention of forearming the younger ones, but with the hope of cheering and consoling those who have been long in the fiery furnace, that I shall speak this morning upon this text, "What if thy father answer thee roughly?"

I. Our first point is this: What you may do, what there is a possibility of your doing, should your friends answer you roughly. In the first confidence of your love to Christ you go and tell father of your conversion; well, what if he should ridicule it all? You run to mother, and communicate your change of heart; what if she should scoff at it? You tell a little of your heart to some friend; what if that friend should turn again and rend you? I will tell you what perhaps you will do, though I earnestly pray that you may do no such thing. You may "*by-and-by be offended.*" I mean that you may leave Christ altogether, because you

cannot bear His cross, and though willing enough to go to heaven with Him if the way were smooth, it may be that, like Mr. Pliable, finding that there is a slough to be got through, you will turn your back upon the good country and return to the City of Destruction. Many have done so. Our Lord's parable of the seed sown in stony places teaches us that many shoots which promise fair for harvest, perish when the sun arises with burning heat because they have no root. Observation confirms this statement. If yonder fair-weather professors of religion could have been daily hailed with general acclamation, they would, after a certain fashion, have continued but inasmuch as they have met with rebuffs² and chills which they never bargained for, they have cast off all religion and joined with the fashionable world. To such the earthly father is dearer than the Father who is in heaven; the brother after the flesh is dearer than that Brother who is born for adversity, and the ungodly husband is more precious than the everlasting bridegroom; and so they desert their Lord.

Or, it may happen to you that, instead of being by-and-by offended, you may continue for awhile, but you may gradually give way, and at last yield *altogether*. There are many among us who could bear to lose our heads at a stroke for Christ, but to be burned at a slow fire—ah, that would try us! And if that slow fire lasted not for a day or so, but for weeks, and months, and years! How then? If, after much patient endurance, the cruel mockings still continue, if the hard words and bitter speeches never cease—how then? Surely, unless grace sustains us, the flesh will clamor to be rid of this uneasy yoke, and will look out for some by-path by which it may escape the rigor of the rough road and go back again to the world. Grace will hold on and out to the end, but nature at her best, with firmest resolutions, has only to be tried up to a certain point, and it will surely yield. This is what we may do; but may God grant that we may be preserved from such a wretched course of action, for, if we do give way because of opposition from ungodly friends, it involves tremendous guilt. To give up religion because of persecution is to prefer ourselves to Christ, to be selfish enough to regard our own ease rather than His glory, to consult our own peace rather than His honor, though we have said that we love Him beyond all else for redeeming us by His blood. It will show that we love Him not at all, but are ungrateful, false, and hypocritical. With all our true professions, if we flinch from persecution it will prove that we only want our price, and, like the traitor Judas, we too will sell our Master, not

² **rebuffs** – blunt rejections.

for thirty pieces of silver possibly, but to escape ridicule or avoid ill-will.

It will become clear, also, that we prefer the praise of man to the approval of God. A smile from a face which is soon to die we value at a higher price than the love of God, or the Redeemer's approbation. Peter for a moment was more affected by the question of a silly maid than by his allegiance to his Lord, but how dreadful to fall into that condition deliberately, and think more of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that is but as a worm, than of the Lord our Maker and Judge, who alone is to be feared. Is not this folly, treason, and dire iniquity?

To forsake the Lord through persecution is to set time before eternity, to barter heaven for this world's pleasures, to renounce eternal life for a few hours of ease, and to involve ourselves in endless misery rather than endure a stupid jest or a senseless jibe.³ It comes to that. Many a man has had life and death set before him, the life has been shaded with the cross, and the death has been gilded over with transient merriment, and he has chosen the everlasting death with its glitter in preference to eternal life with its momentary trial. May God grant we may never be of so insane a mind, for if we are, we shall be numbered with those mentioned in the Revelation, of whom it is said that "the fearful," which is being interpreted the cowardly, "and the unbelieving, the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars"—for that is the class of persons with whom cowards are numbered—"shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev 21:8), from which death may the infinite mercy of God deliver us. Like true soldiers may we buckle on our harness and resolve that let the battle rage as it may, through divine grace we will not desert our colors. We prefer death itself to the disgrace of forsaking a cause so true, a doctrine so pure, a Savior so gracious, a Prince so noble, and so worthy of our most loyal service.

But if left to ourselves we may fall into what is as bad as open apostasy. When we find the father, or the wife, or the friend answering us roughly, *we* may make a pitiful compromise between Christ and the world. I warn you solemnly against this above everything else. It has the look of being the prudent and proper thing to do. "Can I not please men and please God? May I not go a little way with Christ and a little way with the world?" O soul, if you attempt this you must fail, and moreover you will have chosen the roughest road of all, for if a

³ **jibe** – taunting or jeering remark

man serves God, and serves him thoroughly, he will meet with many comforts to balance his crosses; and if a man serves Satan thoroughly he will enjoy whatever poor comfort is to be got out of sin; but if he goes betwixt and between he will feel the discomforts of both, and the pleasures of neither.

Running the gauntlet on board ship is not worse than attempting to be friends with Christ and Satan at the same time. I believe many a professing woman has given way at first to her ungodly husband, where she should have been decided, and she was embittered all the rest of her life; and many a husband, many a son, many a man of business, has been undecided in a minor matter for peace sake, and from that very moment the other side has never believed in his sincerity, and having given an inch, the world has demanded its mile, and there has been an end to all liberty henceforth. If you yield a single point of honesty or true religion, the unconverted will not believe in you as they would have done if you had been firm throughout; men respect a thoroughbred Christian, but nobody has a good word for a mongrel. Be one thing or the other, either hot or cold, or Christ will reject you, and the world too. If a thing be right, do it; if you resolve to serve the Lord, do it, offend or please; and if, on the other hand, you prefer the service of Satan, do at least be honest enough not to pretend to be on the Lord's side. Remember the challenge of Elijah, "If God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, serve him;" but do not attempt a compromise, which will end in a miserable breakdown. Mark Antony drove two lions yoked together through the streets of Rome, but no Mark Antony could ever drive the lion of the tribe of Judah and the lion of the pit in a leash together. They will never agree. Be ye warned, then, against falling into the meanness⁴ of compromise, for compromise is nothing better than varnished rebellion against God, a mockery of His claims, and an insult to His judgment. May the grace of God keep us from this, for left to ourselves we shall fall into this snare.

I will tell you what you may do also, and I pray that the Holy Spirit may lead you to do it. You may take up humbly, but firmly, this decided stand: "If my father answer me roughly he must do so, but I have another Father who is in heaven, and I shall appeal to Him. If the world condemn me, I shall accept its condemnation as a confirmation of that gracious verdict of acquittal which comes from the great Judge of all, for I do remember it is written, 'If the world hate you ye know that it hated me before it hated you,' and 'If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the

⁴ **meanness** – the lack of honor; lowness of mind.

world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” Be it ours to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. May we count the reproach of Christ greater riches than all earth’s treasures. Never may a coward-blush defile our cheek because we are ashamed of Jesus; far rather may we be willing to be made a gazing-stock than for a moment think of turning aside from our Beloved Lord. False or fearful may we never be; firmly and calmly, with the confidence of a love which cannot falter, let us cleave to our Lord, even though all men should forsake Him:

*“Oh, learn to scorn the praise of men! Oh, learn to lose with God;
For Jesus won the world through shame, And beckons thee His road.”*

II. The second head is, What the trial will do for us if we are helped to bear up under it. “What if thy father answer thee roughly?”

First, *it will grieve us* It is by no means pleasant to be opposed in doing right by those who ought to help us in it. It is very painful to flesh and blood to go contrary to those we love. Moreover, those who hate Christians have a way of putting their revilings⁵ so that they are sure to make us wince. They watch our weak points, and with very wonderful skill they turn their discoveries to account; trained by the old master of all malice, they are not slow to ply their lash where we are most tender. If one thing is more provoking than another, they will be sure to say it, and say it when we are least able to bear it. It may be they are very polite people, and if so, your refined persecutors have a very dainty way of cutting to the bone, and yet smiling all the while. They can say a malicious thing so delicately that you can neither resent it nor endure it. The art of persecuting has been so long studied by the seed of the serpent that they are perfect masters of it, and know how to make the iron enter into the soul. Do not be astonished, therefore, if you are sorely vexed, neither be amazed, as though some strange thing happened unto you. The martyrs did not suffer sham pains; the racks on which they were stretched were not beds of ease, nor were their prisons parlors of comfort. Their pains were agonies, their martyrdoms were torments. If you had sham griefs you might expect counterfeit joys; let the reality of your tribulation assure you of the reality of the coming glory.

The opposition of your friends *will try your sincerity*. If you are a hypocrite you will soon yield to opposition. “The game is not worth the candle,” say you, and you will be off, and for the church’s sake very likely it will be a blessing, for the wheat is all the better for being rid of the chaff, and if the wind of persecution can blow you away you

⁵ **revilings** – verbal abuses.

are chaff. The rough answers of opponents will *try your faith*. You say you believe in Jesus: now we shall see if you do, for if you cannot bear a little trial from men and women, surely you will not be able to bear the worse trials from the devil and his angels. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" If you cannot bear the trials of life, how will you endure the ordeals of death?

Persecution will *try your love to Jesus* If you really love Him you will cheerfully stand in the pillory of reproach with Him, and when enemies have filth to hurl you will say, "Throw it upon me rather than upon Him: if there is a hard thing to be said, say it about me rather than against my Lord."

*"If on my face for His dear name, Shame and reproach shall be,
I'll hail reproach and welcome shame, For He'll remember me."*

It will try your love, I say, and so it will all your graces in their turn; and this is good for you. These virtues will not increase in strength unless they are brought into action; and if they are not tested, who is to know of what sort they are? Your valiant soldier in quiet barracks at home could fight, no doubt, but how do you know till he has passed through a campaign? He who has charged up to the cannon's mouth, he who is adorned with a saber cut across his brow, and bears many a wound beside, which he gained in the service of his king, he is brave beyond question. Good gold must expect to be tried in the fire, and these oppositions are sent on purpose that our faith, and our love, and all our graces should be proved genuine by enduring the test.

The rough answers of those who should be our friends *will keep us awake* I think it was Erskine who used to say, "Lord, deliver me from a sleepy devil"; and truly it is a prayer well worth praying. When everything goes on smoothly, and nobody ridicules us, we are very apt to be off our guard, but when we are stung by undeserved reproaches and insults, and when for our love we receive only anger or unkindness, we are not very likely to go to sleep. Such afflictions *drive you to your knees*. Perhaps you have read the story of Mr. Fraser, one of the ministers in Ross-shire, who had a cold, unfeeling woman for a wife; she was very cruel to him, and would never allow light or fire in his study, so that he had actually worn two holes in the plaster at the ends of his room, where his hand had touched as he paced to and fro in the dark. At a meeting of ministers who were not of his mind in divine things, one of them thought to make sport of him by remarking that he would no doubt very heartily agree with the toast of "Health to our wives." To their astonishment he answered, "Mine has been a better wife to

me than any of yours has been to you, she has sent me to my knees seven times a day, when I would not otherwise have gone, which is more than any of you can say of yours." Personally I should greatly prefer not to have such a perpetual blister applied to me, but had the good Physician appointed me so severe a trial, I doubt not that he would have had good reason for it. Out of what men call weeds the wise man extracts a medicine, and out of these bitter trials the Lord produces a sacred tonic which braces us for a higher life of communion with himself.

Trials from the enemies of Jesus *confirm our faith*. Those who are never tried usually possess a poor, tottering faith, but trial, especially persecution, is like the rough March wind which goes howling through the forest, and while the young oaks are almost torn up by the roots at first, it loosens the soil for them, and they send out more rootlets, till they get such a firm grip that they defy the hurricane. That which shakes them at first strengthens them afterwards. The tried saint is the bold saint, and the firm saint; therefore take the rough answer joyfully, and look for good results from it. A little persecution for the church in England would be a grand thing for her. We have fallen on very velvety days, when zeal for God is rare and decision for truth scarcely to be met with. The church has made terms with the world and goes to sleep, Satan rocking her cradle. Many a man professes to be a Christian, who is nothing better than a baptized worldling, and many a man sets up to be a minister of Christ who is a mere reader of other people's sermons, and a hireling who cares not for the sheep. The fan of persecution, if it purged the threshing floor of the church, would bestow great benefits upon her.

Rough speeches, too, will have this good effect upon genuine Christians, it will *lead them to plead for those who utter them*. I remember a good man who used to say of a certain swearing fellow who took delight to vex him with his horrid taunts and oaths, "Well, after all, I might forget to pray for him, but he reminds me of it, for he will not let me go by without a curse." If our friends were all very smooth-spoken, and concealed their enmity to Christ, we might entertain a false hope about them, and we might not pray for them; but when we see that the old nature is there, and very rampant, it drives us to intercession for them, and who can tell but what the Lord may give us their souls as our reward?

Certainly opposition has another good effect, that *it drives those subject to it into the truly separated path*, they are known to be Christians, and proclaimed as such by their revilers. I do not think it is a bad thing, young man, when you go to that warehouse that they should

advertise you as a Christian by crying out “Hallosa,⁶ here comes one of the Methodist⁷ sort.” It is good for you to be known. If you are what you should be, you will not mind being labelled, nor being tested either. It will help to keep you right when temptations arise; and it will frequently deliver you from trials of a more fascinating kind; for, suppose they forsake your company because you are a Christian, will not that be well? Those who leave you on that account are a very gainful loss. An honorable lady, now with God, when she joined this church told me how after her baptism many of her aristocratic friends had ceased to call upon her, or invite her to their houses. I congratulated her upon it, for it rendered it all the easier for her to select her own company. Her real worth of character and kindness of spirit soon won back all who were worth having, and the rest were happily removed. Such as shun you for following the Lord are persons whom you yourself might shun. We gain nothing by the love of those who love not God.

One good effect of being persecuted at home is this, it makes you gentler abroad. If, my brother Christian, you have those at home who make you unhappy, if you are a wise man you will be the better able to have patience with outsiders. Men wondered why Socrates was so patient with his pupils, and so good-tempered, but he ascribed it to having been hardened by the opposition of others, by being schooled at home by his shrewish wife, Xanthippe.⁸ Perhaps you will have the greater patience with those who scoff, and the greater sympathy with those who are scoffed at, from having had your share in the common lot of the saints. Thus to you as to Samson, out of the eater cometh forth meat, and out of the strong cometh forth sweetness. This lion roars upon you, but the day shall come when you will find honey in it, and bless the name of the Lord.

III. My third point is, How should you behave under the trial? May the Holy Spirit enable you to act very discreetly as well as decidedly. *Never court opposition.* God forbid we should do so. Some zealots seem bent on making religion objectionable. The cup we hold to a sinful world is in itself repugnant enough to fallen nature; there can be no wisdom in making it yet more objectionable by presenting it with a scowling face. It is as well when you have medicine to give to a child to show him a piece of sugar too: so let your kindness, and cheerfulness,

⁶ **hallosa** – a shout to catch someone’s attention.

⁷ **Methodist** – used in those days as an insult or jibe against one who lived in strict observance of religious duties.

⁸ **Xanthippe** – pronounced zan-THIP-ee, wife of Socrates about 5th century B.C. Proverbial for her nagging and scolding temper.

and gentleness sweeten that which the world is not very likely to receive anyhow, but which it will the less resent if you present it with love, showing a desire to live peaceably with all men, and to consult the comfort of others rather than your own.

And then endure whatever you have to *endure with the greatest possible meekness* There was a farmer whose wife was very irritated with him because of his attending a dissenting place of worship, and joining with Christian people. She often declared that she would not bear it much longer, but he was very patient, and made no harsh reply to her. One day she fetched him out of the harvest field, and said, "Now it is come to this; you will give up those people, or give me up"; and she brought out a web of cloth and said, "Now you take half of this and I'll take the other half; for I am going." He said, "No, my dear, you are welcome to it all. You have always been a very good industrious wife, take it all." Then she proposed taking a part of their household goods and settling everything for a final separation, but again he said, "Take all there is. If you will go away take everything you like, for I should not wish you to be uncomfortable; and come back again whenever you please, I shall always be glad to see you." Seeing that he talked in that way, she said, "Do you mean me to go?" "No," said he, "it is your own wish, not mine. I cannot give up my religion, but anything else I can do to make you stay and be happy, I will do." This was too much for her, she resolved to cease her opposition, and in a short time went with her husband to the place of worship, and became herself a believer. This is the surest way to victory. Yield everything but what it would be wrong to yield. Never grow angry. Keep cool, and let the railing be all on one side.

There was a poor godly woman who used to attend the ministry of Mr. Robinson, of Leicester, and her husband, a very coarse brutal man, said to her one day in his wrath, "If you ever go to St. Mary's church again I'll cut both your legs off." He was a dreadful man, and equal to any violence, but on the next occasion of worship his wife went as aforetime. As she came home, she commended herself to the care of God, expecting to be assailed. Her husband said to her, "Where have you been?" "I have been to St. Mary's church," said she. With that he felled her to the ground with a terrible blow on the face. Rising up, she gently said, "If you strike me on the other side I shall as freely forgive you as I do now." She had been a very passionate woman before conversion, and had been accustomed to give her husband as good as he could send, and therefore he was struck with her gentleness. "Where did you learn this patience?" said he. Her reply was, "By God's grace I learned it at St. Mary's." "Then you may go as often as

you like.” Presently he went also, and the war was over. There is nothing like meekness. It will conquer the strongest.

After bearing with meekness *return good for evil*. For cruel words return warmer love and increased kindness. The most renowned weapon for a Christian to fight his antagonists with is that of overcoming evil with good. Evil to evil is beastlike, and no Christian will indulge in it; but good for evil is Christlike, and we must practice it. I think I have before told you the story of the husband who was a very loose, gay, depraved, man of the world, but he had a wife who for many years bore with his ridicule and unkindness, praying for him day and night, though no change came over him, except that he grew even more bold in sin. One night, being at a drunken feast with a number of his boon⁹ companions, he boasted that his wife would do anything he wished, she was as submissive as a lamb. “Now,” he said, “She has gone to bed hours ago; but if I take you all to my house at once she will get up and entertain you and make no complaint.” “Not she,” they said, and the matter ended in a bet, and away they went. It was in the small hours of the night, but in a few minutes she was up, and remarked that she was glad that she had two chickens ready, and if they would wait a little she would soon have a supper spread for them. They waited, and ere long, at that late hour, the table was spread, and she took her place at it as if it was quite an ordinary matter, acting the part of hostess with cheerfulness. One of the company, touched in his better feelings, exclaimed, “Madam, we ought to apologize to you for intruding upon you in this way, and at such an hour, but I am at a loss to understand how it is you receive us so cheerfully, for being a religious person you cannot approve of our conduct.” Her reply was, “I and my husband were both formerly unconverted, but, by the grace of God, I am now a believer in the Lord Jesus. I have daily prayed for my husband, and I have done all I can to bring him to a better mind, but as I see no change in him, I fear he will be lost for ever; and I have made up my mind to make him as happy as I can while he is here.” They went away, and her husband said, “Do you really think I shall be unhappy for ever?” “I fear so,” said she, “I would to God you would repent and seek forgiveness.” That night patience accomplished her desire. He was soon found with her on the way to heaven. Yield on no point of principle, but in everything else be willing to bear reproach, and to be despised and mocked at for Christ’s sake. *In hoc signo vinces*—by the cross patiently borne thou conquerest. “This is a hard saying,” says

⁹ boon – merry.

one. I know it is, but grace can make the heaviest burden light, and transform duty into delight.

Here let one also remark that to this gentle endurance there must be added by the persecuted Christian *much exactness of life*. We must be very particular when such lynx-eyes¹⁰ are upon us, because if they can find us trespassing they will pounce upon us at once. If it is only a little wrong, a thing which they would not have noticed in anybody else, they will magnify it and raise quite a clamor about it. "Ah, that is your religion," say they, as if we claimed to be absolutely perfect. Be watchful, therefore, walk circumspectly, do not put yourself into their hands; let them have nothing to say against you save only upon the point of your religion. Nothing bothers opponents like integrity, truthfulness, and holiness: they long to speak against you, but cannot find a fair opportunity. Take care that you daily pray for grace to keep your temper, for if you fail there they will boast of having conquered you, and will assail you again in the same way. Ask for grace to be patient, and say as little as you can, except to God. Pray much for them, for prayer is still heard, and how knowest thou, O believing woman, but thou mayest save thy unbelieving husband? Only watch on and pray on, and a blessing will come.

IV. In doing all this what comfort may you expect? You may have this for your comfort, that *the persecutor is in God's hands*. He cannot do more than God lets him, and if God permits him to annoy, you may cheerfully bear it. Next, remember, if you keep your conscience clear it is a great joy. Conscience is a little bird that sings more sweetly than any lark or nightingale. Rough answers outside need not trouble you while within there is the answer of a good conscience towards God. Injure your conscience and you lose that consolation; preserve it from evil and you must be happy. Remember that by patiently enduring and persevering you will have fellowship with the *grandest spirits that ever lived*. You cannot be a martyr and wear the blood-red crown in these days, but you can at least suffer as far as you are called to do: grace enabling you, you may have a share in the martyr's honors. "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Remember, too, that if you have extraordinary troubles *Jesus will be doubly near to you*. This is the greatest comfort of all, for in all your afflictions he is afflicted. You will find his presence in the ordinances to be very delightful. Those stolen waters which he gives you in secret fellowship are very choice, those morsels which you get by stealth, how

¹⁰ **lynx-eyes** – the lynx is celebrated for its keenness of vision.

sweet they are! The old Covenanters¹¹ said they never worshipped God with so much joy as in the glens¹² and among the hills when Claverhouse's dragoons¹³ were after them. The living is very refreshing to the Lord's hunted harts. His bosom is very soft and warm for those who are rejected of all men for His sake. He has a marvellous way of unveiling His face to those whose faces are covered with shame because of their love to Him. Oh, be content, dear friends, to watch with your Lord.

You have the sweet thought also that *you are doing more good where you are than if you were placed altogether among the godly*. Yonder light, set up in mid ocean on the Eddystone rock,¹⁴ see how the storm sweeps around it, and the waters leap over it, threatening to put out its flame, but shall the light complain? Standing where it is, beaten by the Atlantic rollers, and braving the full fury of the storm, it is doing more good than if it were set up in Hyde Park for my lords and ladies to look at. The persecuted saint occupies a place where he warns and enlightens, and therefore suffers. He is like an advanced guard, to whom the place of danger is the place of honor: only let him ask for strength to bear and forbear, and he shall have glory at the last. Remember the rougher the road *the sweeter the rest*, and the greater the suffering the brighter the crown at the last. Those who have to bear most for Jesus will be those to whom He will most sweetly say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Ah, brethren, if you have a little rough language to put up with, what is it, compared with what many of the Lord's afflicted ones have to endure? I will tell you a little incident bearing upon that point, and then have done. Yesterday the postman brought me, amongst many others, a letter from Australia, which I prize more than any that have come to hand for a long while; it has touched my heart, and when you hear it you will not wonder. It is written at the desire of a man who is described by the gentleman who writes for him in the following terms: "I have known the writer for near eight years, during which time he has been quite helpless, being paralyzed, he has had one leg cut off, the sight has left his eye, he cannot move hand or feet; as he is placed

¹¹ **Covenanters** – the Scottish Presbyterians (1638-90) who held to the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. In these they pledged to maintain the Presbyterian form of church government and worship against episcopacy (the form of church government ruled by bishops).

¹² **glens** – secluded, narrow valleys.

¹³ **Claverhouse's dragoons** – the heavily armed European mounted troops led by John Graham of Claverhouse, a.k.a. "Bonnie Dundee," sent to suppress the Presbyterians who opposed the Anglican regime of King Charles II.

¹⁴ **Yonder light...on the Eddystone rock** – a reference to a famous lighthouse standing on the Eddystone rocks 14 miles off Plymouth, England, in the English Channel.

on his bed so must he lie and endure the annoyance of flies, or anything that may molest him. So that I am sure you will be pleased to be the means of giving comfort to such an one, and yet he is mostly rejoicing; and few are more apt to teach and exhort those who come to see him, and direct them to suitable portions of God's word for their reading." Now this poor man, who has been helpless ever since the year 1858, or sixteen long years, writes me thus: "Being moved by the Holy Spirit I send you these few lines to thank you for the benefit I have received by reading your sermons. In the year 1850 I was brought to the knowledge of the truth, and found peace through believing in Jesus. In 1858 I met with a serious accident, so that I was not able to earn my bread, but trusting in the Lord he has led me in the right way. In 1866 it pleased Him to confine me entirely to my bed. I bless His Holy Name that I can say I am bound by the cords of His love, that He has upheld and comforted me through all my long confinement, and enabled me to rejoice in hope of his glory; and the reading of your excellent sermons, which privilege I have enjoyed for some years, having been a source of great comfort and delight to my soul, causing me to soar on high and enjoy sweet communion, I am constrained by love to send you this acknowledgment, hoping that perhaps you may be cheered a little by it in your arduous labors; and if our heavenly Father see fit, this my testimony to His faithfulness may be blessed by Him to the comfort and encouragement of some afflicted ones in your flock, as I know that *all* these things work together for good to them that love God."

Think of this unselfish sufferer having a letter written to comfort me. One would have thought he needed comforting himself, but the Lord so cheers him that, instead of asking for consolation, he does not mention in his letter that he has lost his leg, or that he is paralyzed, or has lost his sight. He only tells me of his joy and peace. Now, if children of God in such extremities can yet bear testimony to His faithfulness, are you going to run away because some foolish person or other sneers at you? Will you in cowardly fashion desert the standard because fools point their fingers at you? If so, are you made of the same stuff as the true saints? Have you the same backbone of divine grace as they? Assuredly not. May the Lord in His infinite mercy give you such a sound conversion that, whatever trial comes, you may still sing, "Yet will I rejoice in the Lord and glory in the God of my salvation."

If I am addressing any one who has persecuted God's saints in any way, let me say, "Mind what you are at; there are many things a man will bear, but if you meddle with his children it will stir his soul; that is a tender point with all fathers." Nothing provokes the Lord like in-

terfering with His children. Mind what you are at. And, oh, I pray the Lord, if you have done it ignorantly, really thinking them to be wrong, and only scoffing at them because you thought them hypocrites, may He that spake out of heaven to Saul, and said, “Why persecutest thou me?” let you see that you have really been wounding Jesus Himself. May He make you see that those tears which you have forced from that faithful woman, and those sleepless nights which you have caused to that earnest man, were so much of evil done unto Christ, for which He will reckon with you at the last. Turn you unto the Lord Jesus, and may the Holy Spirit grant you to repent of this your wickedness, for Jesus is willing to receive and bless even you, as He did Paul of old. Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you also shall be saved. God bless you all, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

A Sermon delivered on Lord’s Day Morning, August 16th, 1874.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential Baptist minister in England. History’s most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. Born at Kelvedon, Essex.



ARE WE MAD NOW TO PURSUE AFTER HOLINESS?

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which
no man shall see the Lord”—Hebrews 12:14.*

O*bjection:* Some may object, and say, *We see that no persons on earth are exposed to such troubles, dangers, afflictions, and persecutions, as those are exposed to who mind holiness, who follow after holiness. These are days wherein men labor to frown holiness out of the world, and to scorn and kick holiness out of the world; and do you think that we are mad now to pursue after holiness?* Now to this great and sore objection, I shall give these following answers

1. First, *It must be granted that afflictions and persecutions has been the common lot and portion of the people of God in this world.* Abel was persecuted by Cain, (1Jo 3:12), and Isaac by Ishmael, (Gal 4:29). That seems to be a standing law, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution,” (2Ti 3:12). A man may have many faint wishes and cold desires after godliness, and yet escape persecution; yea, he may make some essays¹ and attempts as if he would be godly, and yet escape persecution; but when a man is thoroughly resolved to be godly, and sets himself in good earnest upon pursuing after holiness and living a life of godliness, then he must expect to meet with afflictions and persecutions. It is neither a Christian’s gifts nor his graces, it is neither his duties nor his services that can secure him. Whoever escapes, the godly man shall not escape persecution in one kind or another, in one degree or another. He that will live up to holy rules, and live out holy principles, must prepare for sufferings. All the roses of holiness are surrounded with pricking briars. The history of the ten persecutions, and that little book of martyrs, the 11th of the Hebrews, and Mr. Foxe his *Acts and Monuments*,² with many other treatises that are extant, do abundantly evidence that from age to age, and from one generation to another, they that have been born after the flesh have persecuted them that have been born after the Spirit, (Gal 4:29), and that the seed of the serpent have

¹ essays – efforts; initial endeavors.

² *Acts and Monuments* – a reference to the great work by John Foxe (1516-1587) originally entitled *Actes and Monuments of These Latter Perilous Days*, known to us as *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.

been still a-multiplying of troubles upon the seed of the woman. Would any man take the church's picture, saith Luther, then let him paint a poor silly maid sitting in a wilderness, compassed about with hungry lions, wolves, boars, and bears, and with all manner of other cruel, hurtful beasts, and in the midst of a great many furious men assaulting her every moment and minute, for this is her condition in the world. As certain as the night follows the day, so certain will that black angel, persecution, follow holiness wherever it goes. In the last of the ten persecutions, seventeen thousand holy martyrs were slain in the space of one month. And in Queen Mary's days, or, if you will, in the Marian days, not of blessed, but of most abhorred memory, the Popish prelates³ in less than four years sacrificed the lives of eight hundred innocents to their idols! And oh that that precious innocent blood did not still cry to heaven for vengeance against this nation! But,

2. Secondly, *Christ and his apostles hath long since foretold us that afflictions and persecutions will attend us in this world.* The Lord hath long since forewarned us, that we may be forearmed, and not surprised on a sudden when they come. Christ hath shot off many a warning piece in his word, and sent many a harbinger,⁴ that so we may stand upon our guard, and not be surprised nor astonished when afflictions and persecutions overtake us: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (Mat 10:22). "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mat 16:24). "But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake" (Luk 21:12). "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than the lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (Joh 15:20).

Ah Christians, since they have crowned your Head with thorns, there is no reason why you should expect to be crowned with rosebuds. "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" (Joh 16:33). "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Act 14:21-22). As there was no way to paradise but by the flaming sword, nor no way to Canaan but

³ **prelate** – a minister or priest of the higher order, as an archbishop, bishop, or patriarch.

⁴ **harbinger** – that which precedes and gives notice of the expected arrival of something else.

through a wilderness; so there is no way to heaven but by the gates of hell, there is no way to a glorious exaltation but through a sea of tribulation. They do but dream and deceive their own souls who think to go to heaven upon beds of down, or in a soft and delicate way, or that think to be attended to glory with mirth and music, or with singing or dancing. The way to happiness is not strewed with roses, but full of thorns and briers, as those of whom this world was not worthy have experienced.

Ecclesiastical histories tell us that all the apostles died violent deaths. Peter was crucified with his heels upward—Christ was crucified with his head upwards, but Peter thought this was too great an honour for him to be crucified as his Lord, and therefore he chose to be crucified with his heels upward; and Andrew was crucified by Egeus, king of Edessa; and James the son of Zebedee was slain by Herod with the sword, (Act 12:2); and Philip was crucified at Hierapolis in Asia; and while Bartholomew was preaching the glad tidings of salvation, multitudes fell upon him and beat him down with staves, and then crucified him, and after all this, his skin was flayed off, and he beheaded; Thomas was slain with a dart⁵ at Calumina in India; and Matthew was slain with a spear, say some, others say he was run through with a sword; and James the son of Alpheus, who was called the Just, was thrown down from off a pinnacle of the temple, and yet having some life left in him, he was brained with a fuller's club; Lebbeus was slain by Agbarus, king of Edessa; and Paul was beheaded at Rome under Nero; and Simon the Canaanite was crucified in Egypt, say some, others say that he and Jude were slain in a tumult of the people; and Matthias was stoned to death; and John was banished into Patmos, (Rev 1:9), and afterwards, as some histories tell us, he was by that cruel tyrant Domitian cast into a tun⁶ of scalding lead, and yet delivered by a miracle. Thus all these precious servants of God, except John, died violent deaths, and so through sufferings entered into glory; they found in their own experience the truth of what Christ had foretold concerning their sufferings and persecutions.

When Mr. Bradford was told that his chain was a-buying, and that he must be burnt, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "I thank God for it; I have looked for this a long time; it comes not to me suddenly, but as a thing waited for every day, yea, every hour in the day; the Lord make me worthy thereof." If upon God's warning you will but prepare for sufferings, you will never fear nor faint under sufferings, yea, then you will be able under the greatest persecutions to bear up bravely, and with holy Bradford bless the Lord that has called you to so high an honour as to count you worthy to suffer for his name. But,

⁵ **dart** – a short lance.

⁶ **tun** – a large cask.

3. Thirdly, I answer, *That all the troubles, afflictions, and persecutions that do befall you for holiness' sake, shall never hurt you nor harm you, they shall never prejudice you, nor wrong you in your main and great concerns*: Exodus 3:2, "And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Here you have a bush, a dry bush, a bramble-bush all on a-light fire, and yet not consumed. This burning bush was an excellent emblem of the church in the fire of tribulation and persecution. Though the church may seem to be all on fire by reason of afflictions and persecutions, yet it shall be preserved, it shall not be destroyed. God would not suffer his anointed ones, his sanctified ones, so much as to be touched, hurt, or harmed by those who had malice enough in their hearts, and power enough in their hands, not only to hurt them, but even to destroy them. Sanctified persons are sacred persons, and they that touch them touch the apple of God's eye, and whosoever shall be so bold to touch the apple of God's eye shall dearly smart for it.

It was no small affliction to have no settled habitation. To fly from place to place, from kingdom to kingdom, and from nation to nation, was without all peradventure an afflicted condition. Doubtless many fears and frights, many hazards and dangers did attend them, when they considered that they were as lilies among the thorns, and as a few sheep among a multitude of wolves. In the land of Canaan there were seven mighty nations (Deu 7:1). Now for the people of God, who were so few in number that they might easily and quickly be told, to sojourn and wander among these, could not but be very dangerous and perilous; and yet such was the love of God to them, and the care of God over them, that He suffered no man, whether he was high or low, honorable or base, rich or poor, civil or profane, to hurt or harm them: "And the king answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the form of the fourth is like unto the Son of God. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them" (Dan 3:25, 27). Though these holy men were cast into a furnace, into a fiery furnace, into the midst of a hot fiery furnace, yet God will work a miracle, yea, a glorious miracle, rather than the fire shall in the least hurt or harm them. God gives a commission to the fire to burn those mighty men that made the fire, and that cast His children into the fire, and whom the king would have to be spared and saved; and He lays a law of

restraint upon the fire, that it should not hurt nor harm them whom the king would have destroyed.

Those, whom the King of kings will not have hurt, shall not be hurt, let kings and princes do their worst; that fire that burnt their bonds had no power to burn, no nor to touch, their bodies. God would not suffer the fire to singe a hair of their heads, nor to change the colour of their coats, nor to leave so much as an ill smell upon His people, that those heathen princes might see how tender He was of them, and how willing He was to put forth his almighty power rather than He would see them wronged or harmed. So, “Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angels, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God” (Dan 6:21-23). Holiness, innocency, and integrity will preserve a man even among lions. Daniel preferred the worship of his God before his life. He made no great reckoning of his life when it stood in competition with divine glory, and therefore, rather than Daniel shall be hurt, God will by a miracle preserve him, He will stop the mouths of the hungry lions, and He will tame their rage, and overmaster their cruelty, rather than a hair of Daniel’s head shall perish. When Daniel was taken out of the den, there was no hurt, no wound, no sore, no bruise found upon him. Daniel was a harmless man, and God keeps him from harms in the midst of harms.

“Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city” (Act 18:9-10). Paul met with many trials and troubles, bonds and prisons, oppositions and persecutions, and yet none of all these hurt him, but God miraculously preserved him even to old age (Act 20:23). All the troubles, afflictions, and persecutions that attends holiness, can never reach a Christian’s soul, they can never diminish a Christian’s treasure; they reach the shell, not the kernel; the case, not the jewel; the lumber, not the goods; the outhouse,⁷ not the palace; the ribbon in the hat, not the gold in the purse. The most fiery trials and persecutions can never deprive a Christian of the special presence of God, nor of the light of his countenance, nor of the testimony of a good conscience, nor of the joys of the Spirit, nor of the pardon of sin, nor of fellowship with Christ, nor

⁷ outhouse – outbuilding

of the exercise of grace, nor of the hopes of glory (Psa 23:4; 2Co 1:8-9,12); and therefore certainly they can't hurt a Christian, they can't wrong a Christian in his greatest and chiefest concernments.

O Christian, let persecutors do their worst, they can't reach thy soul, thy God, thy comfort, thy crown, thy paradise, &c.; and therefore let no man be kept off from pursuing after holiness because of afflictions or persecutions, seeing none of these can reach a Christian's great concernments. But,

4. Fourthly, I answer, *That the condition of persecutors, of all conditions under heaven, is the most sad and deplorable condition;* and this will appear by the consideration of these five things:

[1.] First, *By the prayers and indictments that the saints have preferred against them in the highest court of justice, I mean in the parliament of heaven:* "Draw out the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind; and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery," or darkness and slipperiness; "and let the angel of the Lord persecute them. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall" (Psa 35:3-9). "Thou hast heard their reproach, O Lord, and all their imaginations against me. The lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day. Behold their sitting down, and their rising up, I am their music," or I am their song. "Render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger, from under the heavens of the Lord" (Lam 3:61). "Alexander the copper-smith did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works" (2Ti 4:14). Thus you see how the hearts of the saints have been drawn out against their persecutors. Prayers are the arms that in times of persecution the saints have still had recourse to. But,

[2.] Secondly, *Persecutions do but raise, whet, and stir up a more earnest and vehement spirit of prayer among the persecuted saints:* "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:9-10). The blood of the persecuted cries aloud for vengeance upon the persecutors.

There is no blood that cries so loud, and that makes so great a noise in heaven, as the blood of the martyrs, as the blood of butchered persecuted saints. Persecutors, like these Roman emperors, in all ages have causelessly and cruelly destroyed the people of God; they delight in the blood of saints, they love to wallow in the blood of saints, they take pleasure in glutting themselves with the blood of saints, they make no conscience of watering the earth, nor of coloring the sea, nor of quenching the flames with the blood of the saints, yea, if it were possible, they would willingly swim to heaven through their hearts' blood, whom Christ has purchased with His own most precious blood.

Persecution puts an edge, yea, a sharp edge, upon the prayers of the saints: "Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Act 12:5). The Greek word *ektenes* signifies earnest and stretched-out prayer. When Peter was in prison, sleeping between two soldiers, and bound with two chains, and the keepers standing before the prison door, oh, how earnest! Oh, how instant! Oh, how fervent! Oh, how vehement! Oh, how constant were the saints in their prayers for his deliverance! Oh, their hearts, their souls, their spirits were in their prayers! Oh, their prayers were no cold prayers, no formal prayers, no lukewarm prayers, nor no dull or drowsy prayers, but their prayers were full of life, and full of warmth, and full of heat. They knew Herod's bloody intention to destroy this holy apostle by his imprisoning of him, and by the chains that were put on him, and by the strong guards that were set upon him and by his bathing of his sword in the innocent blood of James, that his hand might be the more apt and ready for further acts of murder and cruelty; and oh, how did the consideration of these things whet and provoke their spirits to prayer! Oh, now they will have no nay, now they will give God no rest, till He has overturned the tyrant's counsel and designs, and sent His angel to open the prison doors, and to knock off Peter's chains, and to deliver him from the wrath and fury of Herod; and their prayers were successful, as is evident in the 12th verse, "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying," or rather, as the original has it, "where many thronged together to pray." The violence and rage of their persecutors did so raise, whet, and encourage them to prayer, that they throng together, they crowded together to pray, yea, when others were a-sleeping they were a-praying, and their prayers were no sleepy prayers, they were no lazy dronish prayers, nor they were no book-prayers, but they were powerful and prevalent prayers; for as so many Jacobs, or as so many princes, they prevailed with God; they prayed and wept, and wept and prayed; they called and cried,

and cried and called; they begged and bounced, and they bounced and begged; and they never left knocking at heaven's gates till Peter's chains were knocked off, and Peter given into their arms, yea, their bosoms, as an answer of prayer. Oh the power and force of joint prayer, when Christians do not only beseech God, but besiege him, and beset him too, and when they will not let him go till he has blessed them, and answered their prayers and the desires of their souls!

I have read that Mary Queen of Scots, that was mother to King James, was wont to say that she was more afraid of Mr. Knox's prayers, and the prayers of those Christians that walked with him, than she was of a knocking army of ten thousand men. But,

[3.] Thirdly, *It will appear that the condition of persecutors is the most sad and deplorable condition of all conditions under heaven, if you will but seriously consider and lay to heart the sore judgments that are threatened, and that have been executed upon them*: "And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them which hate thee, which persecuted thee;" (Deu 30:7). "And didst see the afflictions of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red Sea: and shewed signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on the people of his land; for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters" (Neh 9:9-11). Pharaoh and his princes and people were very great oppressors and persecutors of God's Israel, and therefore God visited them with ten dreadful plagues, one after another; but when, after all these plagues, God saw that their enmity against his people was as great, or rather greater than ever, and that they were still set upon persecuting of his people, then God takes up Pharaoh and his mighty host, and throws them as a stone into the mighty waters, (Exo 15:10).

God whets before He strikes, He bends His bow before He shoots, He prepares instruments of death before He brings men down to the grave, His hand takes hold on judgment before His judgments take hold of men; but if all these warnings will not serve their turns, God will overturn them with a witness. "He ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors," or as the Hebrew has it, "against the hot burning persecutors." God hath His hot burning arrows for hot burning persecutors. Let persecutors be never so hot against the saints, God will be as hot against them; and let them be never so much inflamed against the people of God, God will be as much inflamed against them.

When malicious and mischievous persecutors have done all they can to vex and fret, to daunt and affright, to dismay and discourage the people of God, then God will terrify the most terrible among them, and “they shall not prevail nor prosper, yea, they shall stumble and fall, they shall be ashamed and confounded.” When the time is expired that God has pre fixed for His people’s sufferings, then God will retaliate upon their persecutors, then they that spoiled His people shall be spoiled, and they that dealt perfidiously⁸ and treacherously with them, shall be dealt perfidiously and treacherously withal: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2Th 1:6). It is but justice that God should trouble those that are the troublers of His people.

And God has even in this life been a swift witness against the persecutors of his people. Cain was a persecutor, and his brother’s blood pursued him to hell; Pharaoh was a great oppressor and persecutor of his people, and God followed him with plague upon plague, and judgment upon judgment, till he had overthrown him in the Red Sea; Saul was a persecutor, and falls by his own sword; Haman was a great persecutor of the saints, and he was feasted with the king one day, and made a feast for crows the next; Pashur was a great persecutor, he smote the prophet Jeremiah, and put him in the stocks, and God threatened to make him a Magor-missabib, a terror to himself and to all his friends, (Jer 20:1-3); Zedekiah was a persecutor, he smote the prophet Micaiah on the cheek for dealing plainly and faithfully with the kings, and in the day of trouble and distress he goes from chamber to chamber to hide himself (1Ki 22); Jezebel was a great persecutor, she slew the prophets of God, and she was thrown out of a window, and eaten up of dogs, (1Ki 18:4-13; 2Ki 9:30); Herod the Great, who caused the babes of Bethlehem to be slain, hoping thereby to destroy Christ, shortly after was plagued by God with an incurable disease, having a slow and slack fire continually tormenting his inward parts; he had a vehement and greedy desire to eat, and yet nothing would satisfy him; his inward bowels rotted, his breath was short and stinking, some of his members rotted, and in all his members he had so violent a cramp that nature was not able to bear it; and so growing mad with pain, he died miserably. But,

[4.] Fourthly, *It will appear that persecutors are in the most sad and deplorable condition, if you do but consider that there is a day a-coming wherein God will fully reckon with all persecutors, for their persecuting of his saints*: “When he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them; he forgetteth not the cry of the humble” (Psa 9:12). There is a time when God

⁸ perfidiously – faithlessly, disloyally

will make inquisition for innocent blood. The Hebrew word *doresh* from *darash*, that is here rendered inquisition, signifies not barely to seek, to search, but to seek, search, and inquire with all diligence and care imaginable. Oh, there is a time a-coming, when the Lord will make a very diligent and careful search and inquiry after all the innocent blood of His afflicted and persecuted people, which persecutors and tyrants have spilt as water upon the ground; and woe to persecutors when God shall make a more strict, critical, and careful inquiry after the blood of His people than ever was made in the Inquisition of Spain, where all things are carried with the greatest diligence, subtlety, secrecy, and severity. O persecutors, there is a time acoming, when God will make a strict inquiry after the blood of Hooper, Bradford, Latimer, Taylor, Ridley, &c. There is a time a-coming, wherein God will inquire who silenced and suspended such and such ministers, and who stopped the mouths of such and such, and who imprisoned, confined, and banished such and such, who were once burning and shining lights, and who were willing to spend and be spent, that sinner might be saved, and that Christ might be glorified. There is a time when the Lord will make a very narrow inquiry into all the actions and practices of ecclesiastical courts, high commissions, committees, assizes,⁹ sessions, &c., and deal with persecutors as they have dealt with his people: “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise,” saith the Lord; “I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (Psa 12:5). When oppressors and persecutors do snuff and puff at the people of God, when they defy them, and scorn them, and think that they can with a blast of their breath blow them away, then God will arise to judgment, as the Chaldee has it; at that very nick of time when all seems to be lost, and when the poor oppressed and afflicted people of God can do nothing but sigh and weep, and weep and sigh, then the Lord will arise and ease them of their oppressions, and make their day of extremity a glorious opportunity to work for His own glory, and His people’s good. Alas, all the sorrows, troubles, afflictions, vexations, torments, and punishments that befall the persecutors of the saints in this life, they are but quasi-*tales*, as it were such, they are but the beginnings of sorrows, they are but types and figures of those easeless, endless, and remediless torments and punishments that will at last inevitably fall upon all the persecutors of the saints. But,

[5.] Fifthly and lastly, *Persecutors at present are under an evident token of perdition and destruction; they have the marks and signs of divine displeasure upon them*: “And in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to

⁹ **assize** – formerly a periodic court session held in each of the counties of England for the trial of civil or criminal cases.

them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God” (Phi 1:28). Persecuted Christians ought not to be disheartened or discouraged, but rather to take heart and courage, by all the persecutions that are raised against them, because they are most certain witnesses and evidences from God Himself, both of their own salvation, and of their persecutors’ perdition and destruction. And thus you see by these five things, that there is no condition under heaven that is so sad and deplorable a condition, as the condition of persecutors is. But,

5. Fifthly, I answer, *That God will bear his people company in all their afflictions and persecutions*. If the bush, the church, be all on a-light fire, the angel of the covenant will be in the midst of it: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flames kindle upon thee” (Isa 43:2). Both in the waters of affliction, and in the fire of persecution, God will bear His people company. So in that Daniel 3:24-25, “Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like unto the Son of God.” Christ is never so near to His people as when they are in their fiery trials; and the hotter the furnace is, the more eminently present will Christ be with His people. Saints never enjoy so much of the supporting, emboldening, comforting, and encouraging presence of the Lord, as they do when the sun of persecution shines hottest upon them.

“We are troubled on every side, yet not destroyed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2Co 4:8-9). Divine help is nearest when a saint’s danger is greatest. It is the deriding question which persecutors put to the saints in the time of their trials and troubles, Ubi Deus. Where is now your God? (Psa 42:10); but they may return a bold and confident answer, Hic Deus: “Our God is here,” our God is nigh unto us, our God is round about us, our God is in the midst of us, our God has given us his promise “that he will never, never leave us, nor forsake us,” (Heb 13:5); in every trouble, in every danger, in every death, the Lord will be sure to keep us company. God will bear His children company, not only whilst they are in a delightful paradise, but also when they are in a howling wilderness, (Hos 2:14).

O Christians, in all your sufferings the angel of God’s presence will bear you company, and he will sweeten the most cruel torments, and wipe off all the sweat, and take away all the pain, yea, he will turn your

pains into pleasure, (Isa 63:9). If Joseph be cast into prison, the Lord will be with him there, (Gen 39:20-21). If Jeremiah be thrown into the dungeon, the Lord will be with him there, (Jer 38:6-14). If David walk through the valley of death, God's rod and his staff shall comfort him, (Psa 23:4-5). If the three children be cast into a fiery furnace, the presence of the Son of God shall preserve them; if Daniel must go to the lions' den, God will keep him company there, and chain up the lions' nature, and sew up the lions' mouths, and lay a law of restraint upon the lions' paws, that they shall not have so much as a disposition to touch him, or in the least to hurt him or harm him; if Paul be brought before Nero's judgment-seat, God will stand by him, though all men forsake him, and bring him off with credit and triumph, (2Ti 4:16-18). Thus you see that in all the afflictions and persecutions that do befall the people of God, God will not fail to keep them company; and therefore let not troubles trouble you, let not afflictions afflict you, nor let not persecutions discourage you. But,

6. Sixthly, I answer, *That he shall be sure to suffer from Christ that refuses to suffer, or that is afraid to suffer, for Christ's sake, or holiness' sake, or the gospel's sake.* No man can suffer so much for Christ as he shall be sure to suffer from Christ, if he disdain and refuse to suffer for Christ: "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mar 8:35). He that shall attempt to save his life by crossing his light, by shifting off of truth, or by forsaking of Christ, shall lose it. He that thinks to shun suffering by sinning, shall be sure to suffer with a witness. It is a gainful loss to suffer for the truth, it is a lossful gain, by time-serving and base complying with the lusts and humours of men, to provide for our present safety, security, plenty, peace, and ease, &c., either by denying the truth, or by betraying the truth, or by exchanging the truth, or by forsaking the truth.

So verse 38, "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." Ah, friends, what are prisons and dungeons, and racks and flames, to Christ's being ashamed of a man in the great day, when he shall be attended with troops of saints and millions of angels? When, in the face of the court of heaven, when all the princes of glory shall sit upon their thrones, Christ shall disdain a man, and scorn so much as to look upon him, or take any notice of him, or shew the least respect or favour towards him. Oh, what a sea of sorrow and a hell of horror will this raise in him!

I have read that when Sapor, king of Persia, raised a violent persecution against the Christians, Usthazares, an old nobleman, and one of king Sapor's eunuchs and courtiers, being a Christian, was so terrified that he left off his profession, and sitting at the court gate when Simeon, an aged holy bishop, was led to prison, and rising up to salute him, the good bishop frowned upon him, and turned his face with indignation from him, as disdaining to look upon a man that had denied the faith; upon this Usthazares fell a-weeping, and went into his chamber, and put off his courtly garments, and then brake out into these like words, Ah, how shall I appear before that God that I have denied? With what face shall I behold that God of whom I have been ashamed, when Simeon, my old familiar acquaintance, will not endure to look upon me, but disdains to bestow a civil salute upon me? If he frown now, oh, how will God behold me when I shall stand before His tribunal seat! And this physic so wrought with him, that he recovered his spiritual strength, and went boldly and professed himself a Christian, and died a glorious martyr. The application is easy. Well, sirs, remember this, it is infinitely better to suffer for God, than to suffer from God: "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing" (1Pe 3:17). It is better to suffer for well doing from men, than to suffer for ill doing from God. But,

7. Seventhly, I answer, *That great are the advantages that will redound to you by all the troubles, afflictions, and persecutions that shall befall you, for righteousness' sake, for holiness' sake*, (Luk 21:13). Persecutions are the workmen that will fit you and square you for God's buildings; they are the rods that will beat off the dust, and the scullions¹⁰ that will scour off the rust from your souls; they are the fire that will purge you from your dross, and the water that will cleanse you from your filthiness. Physicians, you know, apply horse-leeches to their distempered¹¹ patients. Now the horse-leech intends nothing but to satiate and fill himself with the blood of the sick patient, but the physician has a more noble aim, even the drawing away of that putrified and corrupt blood that endangers the life of his patient; so though persecutors aim at nothing more than to draw out the heartblood of God's people, that they may satiate and fill themselves with it, yet God has other thoughts and other aims, even the drawing away of that corrupt blood, that pride, that self-love, that worldliness, that carnalness, and that lukewarmness, that otherwise would endanger the life, the health, and welfare of their souls. But this great truth I shall make more evident by an induction of particulars. Thus

¹⁰ **scullions** – a kitchen servant that cleans pots and does other menial tasks

¹¹ **distempered** – disordered or abnormal bodily state

[1.] First, Hereby you will give an evident proof of the *soundness and uprightness of your own hearts*, (Phi 1:27-29). Afflictions and persecutions will discover what metal men are made of. All is not gold that glisters: many there be that glisten, and look like golden Christians, but when they come to the fire, they prove but dross: he is a golden Christian indeed, who remains gold when under fiery trials. The stony ground did glisten and shine very gloriously, for it received the word with joy for a time, but when the sun of persecution rose upon it, it fell away, (Mat 13:20-21). Men that now embrace the word, will, in times of persecution, distaste the word, if it be not rooted in their understandings, judgments, wills, affections, and consciences. Men may court the word, and compliment the word, and applaud the word, and seemingly rejoice in the word, but they will never suffer persecution for the word, if it be only received into their heads, and not rooted in their hearts. The house built upon the sand was as lovely, as comely, as goodly, and as glorious a house to look upon as that which was built upon the rock; but when the rain of affliction descended, and the floods of tribulation came, and the winds of persecution blew and beat upon that house, it fell, and great was the fall of it, (Mat 7:26-27). No professors will be able to stand it out in all winds and weathers, but such as are built upon a rock. All others will sink, shatter, and fall when the wind of persecution blows upon them, (Mal 3:2); as sure as the rain will fall, the floods flow, and the winds blow, so sure will an unsound heart give out when trials come. Nothing speaks out more soundness and uprightness than a pursuing after holiness, even then when holiness is most afflicted, pursued, and persecuted in the world to stand fast in fiery trials argues much integrity within. But,

[2.] Secondly, *All the troubles and persecutions which Satan or his instruments raise against the saints of the Most High shall not diminish their number, but rather increase them*. The kingdom of Christ is set forth by a little stone cut out of a mountain without hands (Dan 2:34-35); and though in all ages there has been many hammers at work to break this little stone in pieces, yet they have not been able to do it, but this little stone has proved a growing stone, and, in spite of the devil and a persecuting world, will grow more and more, till it comes to be a great mountain, and filleth the whole earth. In the 8th chapter of the Acts you read of a great persecution, and the storm beat so hard upon the churches, that it dispersed and scattered them up and down; and this was so far from lessening of the number of believers, that it did mightily increase their number; witness verses 4-6, 8, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people

with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. And there was great joy in that city.” Samaria was a very wicked, corrupt place, and bewitched by the sorceries of Simon Magus, yet God had his people there, and by the ministry of Philip—not Philip the apostle, but Philip the deacon who was a persecuted brother, he called them home to be partakers of his Spirit and grace, verses 14-17. And thus the scattering of the church was the great advantage and increase of the church. The persecution of one church may be the gathering, edifying, multiplying, and erecting of many churches. Such ministers who have been by persecution driven from their own churches have been eminently instrumental in the planting of many other churches. Though the gospel, and the faithful preachers and professors of it, was by the Scribes, Pharisees, high priests, elders, and great Council exploded, blasphemed, and persecuted at Jerusalem, which was once the holy city, yet it was with joy received in the polluted, bewitched, scorned, and despised city of Samaria. Oh, the freeness! Oh, the riches of grace! Persecution is the multiplication of the people of God; in all ages the more the saints have been afflicted, oppressed, and persecuted, the more they have increased.

The removing of the seven churches in Asia brought the gospel to Europe and Africa. During the ten cruel persecutions of the heathen emperors, the Christian faith was spread through all places of the empire; because the oftener they were mown down, the more they grew, as Tertullian witnesseth; and the more we are cut down by the sword of persecution, saith the same author, the more still we increase. Persecuted saints are like camomile, which grows and spreads by being trod upon; the more persecutors tread upon the people of God, the more they will spread and grow. But,

[3.] Thirdly, *The troubles, afflictions, and persecutions that befall you in the pursuit after holiness, may issue in the conversion and salvation of others;* as is evident in Acts 8, which chapter I recommend to your most serious perusal. So in that 2 Timothy 2:9-10, “Wherein I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound,” (though Paul was fettered, yet the word was free,) “therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”

Paul, for preaching of the gospel clearly and faithfully, was imprisoned at Rome and handled as if he had been a malefactor, all which he was contented to suffer upon these very grounds, that the elect might be called, converted, saved, and glorified. It is very observable, that though Paul was a prisoner, yet he preached; though he was in bonds, yet he preached; and though he was accounted as an evil-doer, yet he

preached, that the elect might be sanctified and saved. Though his persecutors did lay irons upon his legs, yet they did not lay a law of silence upon his lips; and though they shut him up from going to others, yet they did not shut out others from coming to hear him; for even in bonds he exercised his ministerial office. As cruel as his persecutors were, they would not shut the prison doors upon them that waited on his ministry. So Philemon was converted by Paul when he was in bonds: "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds" (Phm 10). God made Paul's prison to be a paradise to Onesimus; Paul by his preaching, patience, and cheerfulness in suffering, converts Onesimus to the faith.

Prisons in these times were turned into churches; and so they were in Queen Mary's days, for as bloody as her reign was, most of the prisons in England were turned into Christian schools and churches, saith Mr. Foxe: so that there was no greater comfort than for Christians to resort to prisons, and to hear the martyrs to pray and preach, and to behold their holy, humble, heavenly, gracious conversation. So the afflictions and persecutions of the saints in the primitive times issued in the conversion and salvation of many souls. We read that Cecilia, a poor virgin, by her gracious behavior in her martyrdom, was the means of converting four hundred to Christ. Adrianus, by seeing the martyrs suffer so patiently and cheerfully, was converted to the faith, and afterwards sealed to the truth with his blood. Justin Martyr was also converted in the same way. In the third persecution, Faustus and Jobita, citizens of Brixia, suffered martyrdom with such invincible patience, courage, and cheerfulness, that Calocerius cried out, Vere magnus Deus Christianorum, Verily, great is the God of the Christians. Upon which words he was presently apprehended, and so suffered martyrdom with them. And that was a remarkable saying of Luther, Ecclesia totum mundum convertit sanguine et oratione, The church converteth the whole world by blood and prayer. Now if by your troubles, afflictions, and persecutions, and the exercise of grace under them, you shall be instrumental to convert and save a soul or souls from wrath to come, it will turn wonderfully to your advantage, and you shall "shine as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan 12:3). That same power, presence, wisdom, and grace, that converted others by the sufferings of former saints, is able to accomplish the same glorious effects by the sufferings of the saints of this generation; and therefore bear up bravely, and neither fear nor faint under your present sufferings. But,

[4.] Fourthly, *The troubles, afflictions, and persecutions that Christians meet with in their pursuit after holiness, will further the increase and growth of their grace.* Grace never rises to so great a height as it does in times of

persecution. Suffering times are a Christian's harvest times (Psa 69:7-9, 12). Let me instance in that grace of zeal: I remember Moulin speaking of the French Protestants, saith, "When Papists hurt us for reading the Scriptures, we burn with zeal to be reading of them; but now persecution is over, our Bibles are like old almanacs," &c. All the reproaches, frowns, threatenings, oppositions, and persecutions that a Christian meets with in a way of holiness, doth but raise his zeal and courage to a greater height.

In times of greatest affliction and persecution for holiness' sake, a Christian hath, first, a good Captain to lead and encourage him; secondly, a righteous cause to prompt and embolden him; thirdly, a gracious God to relieve and succour him; fourthly, a glorious heaven to receive and reward him; and certainly these things cannot but mightily raise him and inflame him, under the greatest opposition and persecution. These things will keep him from fearing, fawning, fainting, sinking, or flying in a stormy day; yea, these things will make his face like the face of an adamant, as God promised to make Ezekiel's, (Eze 3:7-9 and Job 41:24). Now an adamant is the hardest of stones, it is harder than a flint, yea, it is harder than the nether-millstone. The naturalists [Pliny] observe, that the hardness of this stone is unspeakable: the fire cannot burn it, nor so much as heat it through, nor the hammer cannot break it, nor the water cannot dissolve it, and therefore the Greeks call it an adamant from its untameableness; and in all storms the adamant shrinks not, it fears not, it changeth not its hue; let the times be what they will, the adamant is still the same. In times of persecution, a good cause, a good God, and a good conscience will make a Christian like an adamant; it will make him invincible and unchangeable. But,

[5.] *Fifthly, Persecuting times are uniting times.* Oh! the discord, the division, the wrangling, biting and quarrelling that is to be found among professors in times of peace and prosperity! But when affliction and persecution comes upon them, this unites them together. Though the sheep in sunshine days feed at a distance, and wander one from another; yet when a storm comes, or the wolf comes, then they run all together; and so it is with Christians. Some religious bishops that could by no means agree when they had their freedom and liberty, yet could well enough agree when they were in prison together. Though children in a family may fall out among themselves, yet they quickly unite when a common enemy assaults them. Persecuting times unite Christians closer together in their affections, resolutions, and prayers. They who formerly could hardly be brought to eat together, or trade together, or live together, or walk together, in persecuting times will be brought to hear together, and pray together, and fast together, and communicate experi-

ences together, and stand together, and fall together, and rise together, &c., (Psa 83:3-9). But,

[6.] **Sixthly, As persecuting times are uniting times, so persecuting times are *truth-advancing times*.** *Veritas vincit*, Truth thrives most when it is most opposed and persecuted: “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifested in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Phi 1:12-14). Court, city, and country did ring of Paul’s bonds, and the cause thereof. Paul’s iron chain made more noise, and was more glorious, and wrought more blessed effects, than all the golden chains in Nero’s court; for by his bonds and chains many of the brethren were mightily emboldened and encouraged to preach the word without fear. The brethren, when they saw that Paul preached, and kept up the exercise of his ministry, though a prisoner, and though he was in bonds and chains, could not but reason thus with themselves: if Paul a prisoner holds up and holds on in preaching the word, though he be in bonds and chains; ah, how much more ought we who are at liberty to hold up and hold on in preaching the truth, and advancing the truth, and in spreading of the truth. Now, by what hath been said, it is most evident that persecuting times are truth-advancing times. But,

[7.] **Seventhly and lastly, As persecuting times are truth-advancing times: so persecuting times are a *Christian’s rejoicing times*.** A Christian’s heart is never so full of joy, as it is when he is under sufferings: “And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Act 5:41). They counted it an honour to be dishonoured for Christ; they took it as a grace to be disgraced for Jesus. Stephen found the joys of heaven in his heart as the stones came clattering about his ears (Act 7:55-56). So Paul and Silas, when they were in prison, their hearts were so full of joy that they could not hold, but at midnight when others were a-sleeping, they must fall a-singing out the praises of the Most High (Act 16:25). They found more pleasure than pain, more joy than sorrow, more comfort than torment in their bonds. The rods with which they were whipped were as rods made up all of rosemary branches. Divine consolations rise so high in their souls, that their prison was turned into a palace, yea, into a paradise.

Eusebius tells us of Algerius the Italian martyr, how that, writing to his friend from a stinking dungeon, he dates his letter “from my delicate orchard;” such were his divine consolations, that they turned his dungeon into a pleasant orchard. “I with my fellows,” saith Mr. Philpot,

“were carried to the coal-house, where we do rouze¹² together in the straw, as cheerfully, we thank God, as others do in their beds of down.” Mr. Bradford put off his cap, and thanked the Lord, when his keeper’s wife brought him word that he was to be burned the next day: and Mr. Taylor fetched a frisk¹³ when he was come near to the place where he was to suffer. Henry and John, two Augustine monks, being the first that were burned in Germany, and Mr. Rogers, the first that was burned in Queen Mary’s days, did all sing in the flames. If men did but know by experience the sweet that is in suffering for Christ, they would desire with Chrysostom, if it were put to their choice, rather to be Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ, than Paul rapt up in the third heaven. God reserves the best and strongest wine of consolation to a day of persecution; suitable to that, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ” (2Co 1:3-5). Oh, the sweet looks, the sweet words, the sweet hints, the sweet in-comes, the sweet joggings, the sweet embraces, the sweet influences, the sweet discoveries, the sweet love-letters, the sweet love-tokens, and the sweet comforts that Christians experience in their sufferings for Christ! And thus you see the great and glorious advantages that will redound to the people of God by all their afflictions and persecutions. But,

8. Eighthly, I answer, *That to suffer affliction and persecution for holiness’ sake, is the greatest and highest honour that you are capable of in this world.* The crown of a martyrdom is a crown that the angels, those princes of glory, are not capable of winning or wearing; and oh, who art thou! What art thou, O man! That God should set this crown upon thy head! “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” (1Pe 4:14). The very suffering condition of the people of God is at the present a glorious condition, for “the Spirit of glory rests upon them,” and they must needs be glorious, yea, very glorious, upon whom the Spirit of glory dwells. The sufferings of “the three children,” (Dan 3), tended very much to their honor and advancement, even in this world; and had those vessels of honor slipped their opportunity of suffering, they had lost their glory. The apostles all along counted their sufferings for Christ their highest honor. And that is a remarkable scripture that you have in that Hebrews 11:36-38, “And

¹² **rouze** – lie in filth.

¹³ **frisk** – to leap, skip, or dance in a lively or playful way.

others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, and tormented.” Oh! but these were surely the most sad, miserable, wretched, and forlorn creatures in all the world. Oh no! and that is most evident if the testimony and judgment of the Holy Ghost may be received; for, verse 38, “They were such of whom the world was not worthy.” The persecuting world was not worthy of their love, nor worthy of their prayers, nor worthy of their presence, nor worthy of their fellowship; and therefore God called them home, and set them down upon thrones by himself. And to me it is very observable, that when that great apostle Paul would glory in that which he accounted his honour, glory, and excellency, he does not glory in his high office, nor in his being rapt up in the third heaven, nor in the interest that he had in the hearts of the saints, nor in his arts or parts, &c.; but he glories in his sufferings, in that 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, “In stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck: a night and a day have I been in the deep. In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my 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. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” Thus you see that this blessed apostle looks upon his sufferings as his greatest glory. To suffer for Christ is the greatest honor and promotion that God gives in this world, said old Father Latimer. John Noyes took up a faggot at the fire and kissed it, saying, “Blessed be the time that ever I was born: to come to this preferment.”¹⁴ When they had fastened Alice Driver with a chain to the stake to be burned, “Never,” said she, “did neckerchief become me so well as this chain.” Balilus the martyr, when he was to die, requested this favour of his persecutors—viz.,¹⁵ that he might have his chains buried with him, as the ensigns of his honor. When Ignatius was to suffer, “It is better for me,” saith he, “to be a martyr, than to be a monarch.” What are we poor worms, full of vanities and lies, that we should be called to be maintainers of the truth? For sufferings for Christ are the ensigns of heavenly nobility said Calvin. It was a notable saying of a French martyr, when the rope was about his fellow, “Give me,” said he, “that golden chain, and dub me

¹⁴ **preferment** – advancement or promotion

¹⁵ **viz.** (abbreviation of *videlicet*) – that is to say, namely

knight of that noble order.” “I am the unmeetest¹⁶ man for this high office of suffering for Christ that ever was appointed to it,” said blessed Sanders. I shall conclude this head with that excellent saying of Prudentius: “Their names,” saith he, “that are written in red letters of blood in the church’s calendar, are written in golden letters in Christ’s register, the book of life.” And thus you see on all hands that suffering for Christ is the highest honor that you are capable of in this world: and, therefore, there is little reason why a Christian should shrink or shrug at sufferings. But,

9. Ninthly, I answer, *That the afflictions, persecutions, and sufferings that attend Christians in these days, are nothing to the fiery trials that the saints and martyrs of old have met with:* for sevenfold harder measure has been measured forth to them than is this day measured forth to us. Our sufferings are hardly to be named in the day wherein those sore and heavy things are mentioned, that those precious and famous worthies of old have suffered. I may say to most Christians, as the apostle did to the Hebrews, “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb 12:4). Many have, but you have not; you have only met with hard words, when others have met with blows and wounds; you have been only a-contending with men, when others have been a-contending with beasts; you have been only whipped with rosemary branches, when others have been whipped with scorpions; you have been only bound with silken bands, when others have been bound with iron chains. Will you be so favorable to yourselves as to compare your sufferings with the sufferings of former saints; and that you may, let me give you a little breviate¹⁷ of their sufferings “of whom the world was not worthy.” History tells us, that in the ten primitive persecutions, they exercised all manner of cruelty and torments that could be devised against the Christians: 1. In the reign of Hadrian the emperor, there were ten thousand Christians crucified in the Mount Ararat, crowned with crowns of thorns, and thrust into the sides with sharp darts. 2. Others were so whipped, that their very inward arteries and veins appeared, and their entrails and bowels were seen, and afterwards they were set upon sharp shells, taken out of the sea edged and sharp, and certain nails and thorns were sharpened and pointed, called Obelisci,¹⁸ for them to go upon, and after all this cruelty they were thrown to wild beasts to be devoured. 3. Multitudes were banished. 4. Others were drawn asunder with wild horses. 5. Some were racked with bars of iron. 6. Others were cast into loathsome dungeons. 7. Some were burnt in the fire. 8. Others were knocked down

¹⁶ **unmeetest** – most unsuitable

¹⁷ **breviate** – an abridgment or an abbreviation

¹⁸ **obelisci** – From the Greek obeliskos, = a small spit

and had their brains beat out with staves and clubs. 9. Some were pricked in their faces and eyes with sharp reeds. 10. Others were stoned to death with stones, as Stephen was. 11. Some were dashed in pieces against millstones. 12. Others had their teeth dashed out of their jaws, and their joints broken. 13. Some were cast down from very high places. 14. Others were beheaded. 15. Some were tormented with razors. 16. Others were slain with the sword. 17. Some were run through with pikes. 18. Others were driven into the wilderness, where they wandered up and down, suffering hunger and cold, and where they were exposed to the fury both of wild beasts, and also to the rage of the barbarous Arabians. 19. Some fled into caves, which by their persecutors were rammed up with stones, and there they died. 20. Others were trodden to death by the people. 21. Some were hanged on gibbets with fire under their sides. 22. Others were cast into the sea and drowned. 23. Some were slain in metal mines. 24. Others were hanged by the feet, and choked with the smoke of a small fire, their legs being first broken. 25. Some were powdered with salt and vinegar, and then roasted with a soft fire. 26. Others were hung by one hand, that they might feel the weight of their whole bodies, scorching and broiling over burning coals. 27. Some were shot through with arrows, and afterwards thrown into stinking jakes.¹⁹ 28. Others were stripped stark naked as ever they were born, and turned out of doors in cold, frosty nights, and burnt the next day. 29. In Syria, a company of Christian virgins were stripped stark naked to be scorned by the multitude, then shaved, then covered with swill²⁰ and draff,²¹ and then torn in pieces and devoured by swine. 30. Lastly, many women had one joint of their bodies pulled from another, and their flesh and sides scratched with talons of wild beasts to the bones, and their breasts seared with torches till they died. And thus you have an account of thirty several ways by which the precious sons and daughters of Zion have formerly been afflicted, tormented, and destroyed; and what heart of stone can read over this bill of particulars with dry eyes? And now tell me, sirs, whether your sufferings are worth a naming in that day, wherein the sufferings of the precious servants of God in the primitive times are spoken of? Oh, no! Well then, take heed of making molehills mountains, and of crying out, Is there any sorrow to our sorrow, or any sufferings to our sufferings? But,

¹⁹ **jakes** – out houses (author is calling the jail an outhouse due to the horrible conditions that the prisoners were kept in)

²⁰ **swill** – the wash or mixture of liquid substances given to swine

²¹ **draff** – waste matter or refuse given to swine

10. Tenthly, I answer, *That unholy persons have suffered as great and grievous things for the satisfying of their lusts and humors²² and for the compassing of some worldly good, as you have suffered, or are like to suffer for your pursuing after holiness.* Oh the hazards, the dangers, the deaths that many have run through to gratify their lusts! Petrus Blesensis has long since observed, that the courtiers²³ of his time suffered as many vexations, with weariness and painfulness, with hunger and thirst, and with all the catalogue of Paul's afflictions that is reckoned up in that 2 Corinthians 11, as good Christians did for the truth. I have read of a Roman servant, who knowing his master was sought for by officers to be put to death, he, to save his master's life, put himself into his master's clothes that he might be taken for him, and accordingly he was taken and put to death for him, and all this out of a humor of vainglory. Ah what cutting, what lancing, what bleeding, what vomiting, and what searching will many men endure upon the advice of their physicians, and all for a little health, a little strength, or to preserve a wretched life for a few days, yea, for a few hours sometimes. And why then should Christians think so much of suffering afflictions and persecutions for holiness' sake, the least drachm²⁴ of which being more worth than a thousand thousand of those things, for which they have suffered such exquisite pains and torments? Ah! what great things, what hard things do many men daily suffer to gratify their own lusts, and to satisfy the lusts of others! Oh the hell of horrors and terrors, which are worse than a thousand deaths, that many a sinner daily wades through to enjoy his sin! And why then shouldst thou be startled in thy pursuit after holiness, because of afflictions and persecutions that may attend thee? When they are nothing to what many suffer from within and without, to enjoy that which will undo them to all eternity, &c. But,

11. Eleventhly, I answer, *Though persecutions may attend the pursuit of holiness, yet God has a thousand thousand ways to preserve His people, from being ruined and destroyed by persecuting hands.* Several afflictions and persecutions befell Paul at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, "but out of them all the Lord delivered him." As a righteous cause led him into sufferings, so a righteous God led him out of sufferings. Both Jews and Gentiles, barbarians and Grecians, princes and people, were as madly set upon persecuting of him, as he was once madly set upon persecuting of the saints, but God delivered him from every hand of violence. Divine power and wisdom wrought gloriously for him; both in six troubles and in sev-

²² **humors** – whims, desires

²³ **courtier** – a man who frequents or attends the courts of princes

²⁴ **drachm** – A Grecian coin of little value

en it brought him clearly off, and bravely out, not of some, but out of all his dangers and distresses, afflictions and persecutions, &c. Now,

[1.] **First, God sometimes preserves his people from being ruined and destroyed, by laying a law of restraint upon the spirits of their persecutors,** as he did upon Laban's and Esau's, that they could not hurt him; yea, instead of kicking and killing, behold kissing and embracing. God tied up those cursed dogs, and laid such a restraint upon their wrath, rage, and malice, that they could not so much as touch a hair of Jacob's head. God stopped their mouths and bound their hands, that they were not able to act anything to the prejudice of Jacob. That God that laid a restraint upon the fierce wild creatures in Noah's ark, that they might not prey upon the tamer, and that chained up the lions from preying upon Daniel, that God chained up these two lions, that they could not make a prey of innocent Jacob. But,

[2.] **Secondly, God does this sometimes by setting persecutors one against another.** When the Moabites were confederated with the Ammonites and those of mount Seir against Judah, God made them turn their swords into one another's bowels, and so they mutually became their own executioners, and by this means poor Judah escaped. God sometimes saves His lambs by setting the wolf and the dog together by the ears. When that wolf Saul was even ready to devour David the lamb, God lets loose those dogs the Philistines upon Saul, and so by this means David was preserved and secured (1Sa 23:27). And so Paul, by setting the persecuting Pharisees against the persecuting scribes, he escaped persecution (Act 23:6-8). But

[3.] **Thirdly, God does sometimes save His people from persecutions by passing a sentence of death upon their persecutors:** and thus by His sudden and fearful judgment upon Herod He gave rest, liberty, and quiet to His people (Act 12:23-24). And so by His vengeance on persecuting emperors He gave rest to His people. And by giving Ahithophel rope enough, He preserved David from perishing. But,

[4.] **Fourthly, God does this sometimes by altering and changing the very hearts and natures of their persecutors.** And thus by changing Paul's nature, by turning that wolf into a lamb, that devil into a saint, He gave the churches rest throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Act 9:31); and this is one of the most desirable things in the world, that God would save His people from outward ruin by ruining their persecutors' sins, and by changing their hearts and saving their souls. But,

[5.] **Fifthly, God does this sometimes by taking persecutors' feet in the same snares that they have laid for others:** Psalm 9:16, "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Higgaion. Selah;" Higgaion selah signifies matter of great admiration, and of deep meditation; that the

wicked should be snared in the work of his own hands is matter of perpetual admiration, and of most serious meditation. Who will not admire that Goliath should be slain with his own sword, and that proud Haman should hold Mordecai's stirrup, and be the herald of his honor: Psalm 7:15-16, "He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he hath made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." It is usual with God to take persecutors in the snares and pits that they have laid for His people, as many thousands in this nation have experienced; and though Rome and her confederates are this day a-laying of snares and traps, and a-digging of pits for the righteous, who will rather burn than bow to their Baal, yet do but wait and weep, and weep and wait a little, and you shall see that the Lord will take them in the very snares and pits that they have laid and digged for His people. But,

[6.] Sixthly and lastly, God sometimes preserves His people from persecuting hands, by providing cities of refuge to shelter them, and by providing hiding-places to hide them in: Matthew 10:23, "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another." God has always found one city of refuge or another to shelter His persecuted people in. And so when bloody persecuting Jezebel had cut off many of the Lord's prophets, God provided an Obadiah to hide a hundred of them by fifty in a cave (1Ki 18:4, 13). God never wants a chamber of presence, a chamber of providence, a chamber of protection, a chamber of salvation to hide his people in (Isa 26:20). I have read of one that, in the time of the massacre at Paris, crept into a hole to hide himself, and as soon as he was in there came a spider and weaved a web before the hole; the next morning the murderers came to search for him, Search in that hole, said one, and see if he be not there! O no, said another, he can't be there, for there is a cobweb at the hole's mouth; upon which they did not suspect his being there, by which means he was preserved from the rage and fury of those men of blood. But,

12. Twelfthly and lastly, I answer, *That all the persecutions that you meet with on earth shall advance your glory in heaven.* The more saints are persecuted on earth, the greater shall be their reward in heaven; as persecutions do increase a Christian's grace, so they do advance a Christian's glory: Matthew 5:10-12, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' 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." Luke 6:22-23, "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach

you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is in heaven, for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."

They that are now opposed and persecuted by men, shall at last be owned and crowned by God; yea, and the more afflictions and persecutions are multiplied upon them in this world, the greater shall be their recompense in another world. The original words, *agallias* in Matthew, and *skirtesate* in Luke, signifies exceeding great joy, such as men usually express by skipping and dancing; let your hearts leap, and let your bodies leap for joy, for great is your reward in heaven. Look, as wanton young cattle in the spring, when everything is in its prime and pride, do use to leap and skip for joy; so says Christ, do you leap and skip under all the afflictions and persecutions that befalls you for righteousness' sake, for great is your reward in heaven.

O Christians, all your sufferings will certainly increase your future glory; every affliction, every persecution will be a grain put into the scale of your heavenly glory, to make it more weighty in that day, wherein he will richly reward you for every tear, for every sigh, for every groan, for every hazard, and for every hardship that you have met with in the pursuit of holiness, &c. For light afflictions you shall have a weight of glory; and for a few afflictions you shall have as many joys, pleasures, delights, and contents as there be stars in heaven or sands on the sea-shore; and for momentary afflictions you shall have an eternal crown of glory (2Co 4:16-18). If you have suffering for suffering with Christ on earth, you shall have glory for glory with Christ in heaven. Ah Christians, your present sufferings are but the seeds of your future glory, and the more plentifully you sow in tears, the more abundant will be your harvest of glory. Ah Christians! Shall not the hopes of that great reward that attends suffering saints bear you up bravely, and carry you out sweetly under all the storms that may beat upon you whilst you are sailing heavenwards and holiness - wards? Surely yes. I hope none of you will think that I have been too long in answering this objection, considering the present times.

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Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): Nonconformist preacher and advocate of the Congregational way. Born into a Puritan family, he was sent to Emmanuel College, Cambridge. *Author of Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices, The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, and others. He was buried in Bunhill Fields.