



THE BLESSING OF PERSECUTION

This week's text – 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Sermon ideas

1. In Christ suffering is inevitable

Additional Text: 2 Timothy 3:12

Paul suffered because of the gospel. He was beaten, mocked and imprisoned for sharing his faith. Additionally, the false teachers who had infiltrated the church in Corinth, teaching a different message about Jesus, accused him of having no credibility because of his suffering and persecution. So, instead of being encouraged and strengthened to persevere through his suffering, the church turned on him as well.

Paul warns us that persecution will always follow believers as they share the truth, because it stands in direct opposition to the culture. If we are living for God's glory, then we WILL face persecution. Most of us try and escape any form of suffering, bowing to fear, and we become useless to the Kingdom of God. In our context, where we do not face political persecution for our faith, we choose to keep quiet because it's too uncomfortable to share with people. We know that we will feel awkward, and that we will most likely be rejected for it. Instead of facing the fear and dealing with the suffering that rejection and humiliation brings us, we stop sharing our faith, and we put an end to the persecution. We opt out of being on God's mission for the sake of comfort.

Paul wanted the Corinthians, and the church after them, to know that persecution for our faith is part of the Christian life. It is not something that we can choose to opt out of. We need to be careful about false teaching, like the church in Corinth were taking on board, that tells us that if we are suffering, we have too little faith. The truth is, in fact, the opposite. Suffering is a mark of those who are faithful. But there is purpose in the suffering and we will be given grace to endure it.

Some of us have already suffered various forms of persecution for our faith by losing friendships, partners or even family members. Whether or not we have already faced this kind of suffering, we need to ask ourselves if we are willing to suffer for the gospel?

2. In Christ comfort is assured

God does not just leave us in our persecution though. He comes to us himself and comforts us. This is supernatural and all sufficient, and therefore in our worst time we can be assured that we will be strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.



Igniting our missional impulse

A study in the book of 2 Corinthians



God never promises us something that he cannot, or will not, fulfil. When he says that he WILL comfort us in our suffering, we can have absolute assurance that he will do just that. This is why we see throughout history that the martyrs faced their end with such joy. We see this happening again and again throughout the scriptures, and we see it today in the lives of persecuted Christians across the globe.

When we prize our idol of earthly comfort and avoid persecution, we rob ourselves and others of receiving God's comfort, which brings about a deep joy and hope in God. When we are comforted by God, we are able to comfort other believers with the same comfort that God gave to us.

3. In Christ deliverance is guaranteed

Paul had been persecuted so badly that he thought he was going to die. In those moments, he knew that God was his only hope. God allows us to get to the point of desperation so that we will recognise that he is all we ever need.

Jesus was persecuted, and he died, for us. God did not comfort him or deliver him from death because he needed to pay the price for our sin. And because he did that for us, our persecution is only limited to this lifetime. We will receive his comfort in life, and we will receive full deliverance in the life to come.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what way is suffering for the gospel different to suffering for sinful decisions we have made, or for being foolish/irresponsible?
2. Why is suffering for the gospel inevitable in our lives?
3. In what way have you personally experienced suffering for the sake of the gospel, and what effect has it had on your faith?
4. Our biggest persecution comes when sharing our faith with people. What idols are we serving when we back out and keep quiet?
5. How does God comfort us when we are persecuted for our faith?
6. If the scripture tells us that we will be comforted in our suffering, why do we still back out and run in the other direction, and why is this so tragic?
7. Have you ever experienced the supernatural comfort of God in your life, and what has that done to strengthen and encourage you in other difficult situations?
8. Why does severe persecution strengthen our faith and joy in Christ?
9. Are you genuinely willing to suffer for the gospel? Discuss this among yourselves and then spend some time in prayer, asking God for the faith to believe, and the courage to trust him in the process.

