

Certainty of Suffering Persecution

Let us turn to our Bibles. 2 Timothy chapter 3, 2 Timothy chapter 3. Going through here, I've done 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and then we will hit Titus after this. Verses 10-15, verses 10-15, let us listen attentively to the word of God.

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra. What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Let us pray.

Father God above, guide the preaching here, bring the truth to bear of Paul's admonition, warning encouragement to the pastor here, young Timothy, that he, Lord God, would learn these things and that we would also learn these lessons in particular, Lord, 2,000 years later, and to see and understand that we as believers, we will and have been and certainly will sometime in our life be under some form of persecution, hardship and difficulty by others who hate us for loving you. And therefore, God, may this sermon remind us of this truth and that we would not be caught off guard, but rather always hold firm the holy scriptures that you have given us. May we learn this lesson anew, we pray this evening.

Amen. In this set of verses here, the bulk of it is taken up with the topic of suffering persecution as the theme. Paul describes his own life there, thankful that Timothy, of course, was able to understand and to follow his experiences, see it and even to learn from it.

But Paul also offers a way to survive the persecution and difficulty and suffering that he himself had gone through, which seems to be a continuation of the theme in verse 1, but know this, that in the last days perilous or dangerous times will come. Paul is living proof of that, because it moves from the future to the present here, the present at that time of what Paul had gone through himself. And Paul gives him a way to persevere through perilous times, that is to cling to the word of God and from childhood you've known the holy scriptures, cling to this truth, the things that you have learned to continue therein, verse 14.

These well-known verses at the end, of course, fit the larger point of Paul. The persecution is coming, but protection is found in Christ and He is found in the holy scriptures.

Commendation for Imitation

So the first point here, commendation, that is commending young Pastor Timothy for imitating him, verses 10-11.

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, continues on to describe various things that he's gone through in his ministry and he ends up on the point of persecution. Carefully follow. He commends him to carefully follow, following the true teaching that every Christian, of course, should follow as well.

You have carefully followed, not just followed, but were concerned and did it thoughtfully, paying attention as need and following my doctrine, my teaching as the Apostle Paul. Not Paul qua Paul, that is Paul as of himself, but rather Paul as the mouthpiece of God and the truth of the gospel and the application in the New Testament era. That's what it's about, not as though Paul is claiming to be a Pope of some sort, but rather it's the teaching therein, commending him for believing and learning this, which of course means for us that we have to follow in his footsteps as well.

It's the goal of every Christian. Yes, this letter is written to the young Pastor Timothy, but to the extent that it's very much what we have to do as well, it's still applicable for us. And we too must learn the doctrines and the truths of the Bible and to grow thereby and to find other Christians who wish to learn these things with us as well and to relearn it even.

As you grow old, we're all growing old day by day, you will realize, especially as you're older, that you forgot some stuff and it's good to hear these things again. And even if you remember it, it's good to hear it in a fresh way from a preacher and a different perspective at times. And so we are called to ever be students, in fact, the remainder of our days.

The imitation here that you carefully followed my doctrine, not just of course, that's interesting, but the implication being he's doing the same thing. Manner of life as well, purpose, faith, and the like. Manner of life, perhaps, he means here in the very broadest sense, of course, of him being a godly man, Paul being a godly man, but also everything else here, his purpose, his faith, his long-suffering.

All these describe what he's done in his life, what he's going to do or has done in his life. And it's a reminder again that we should follow godly leaders who have godly practices, even to look to each other, to bear one of those burdens as Galatians tells us, but also to follow in the footsteps of those around us, not just leaders, who are doing a good thing, good examples. As we say, actions speak louder than words.

And Paul certainly showed a lot of action in the book of Acts, and we'll cover a little bit about that in a bit here. And so, his describing here and commending and thanking him to be careful of following, that is, imitating and doing the doctrine and teaching it, as well as the manner of life and all that's involved here, I'll go through this list of words that he goes, almost like a flow of thoughts it seems here, in verses 10 and 11 of 2 Timothy 3. You've carefully followed my doctrine, carefully followed the implication, the verb is still there, manner of life, you've carefully followed my purpose, you've paid attention to my faith, my long-suffering, and the like. Purpose, it seems to me, probably Paul's desire to glorify Christ in preaching as a minister.

Long-suffering and perseverance are clearly overlapping ideas here, and he does this again for the sake of Jesus Christ and the gospel. Love, he mentions love here, love of God, of

course, and Christ Jesus, love of the saints. He's not very specific, it's just boom, boom, boom, boom, like bullets.

Persecution, of course, and afflictions, and there he drills in and picks up that idea and runs with it, verses 11, 12, and even into 14.

Certainty of Suffering

And that leads us to the second point, certitude of, or certainty of suffering. As a pastor, I have to have alliterations right, so I got my three C's here.

Certitude, or certainty of suffering, verses 12 to 13, or even 11 to 13, where he says, in afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, in Iconium, at Lystris. Remember these things, Timothy? Remember what I went through back there? Of course, Timothy does. We probably don't, because these are foreign cities and foreign lands, and we don't remember these names.

I've been reading the Bible for a long time, and I still always forget, where exactly is this place? Where is it over there in the Middle East? Because I didn't grow up in that country, in that culture. Timothy understood all this, so I'm going to explain a little bit here for you. Antioch is in southern central Turkey, the one he's referring to, because there's another one down in the armpit, I call it, up in Syria and Turkey.

So this is Turkey that cuts across, right? Central southern Turkey. Acts chapter 13, verse 45. Acts 13, 45, you read, "...but when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." Paul went there, as he went everywhere by foot.

Everyone walked back then. The rich people had donkeys and horses. Goes into the city.

Of course, the first thing he does is, you remember, he goes right to the synagogues. That's where the religious Jewish center is. And he's going to tell them who the Messiah is, because he's zealous that his own people be saved.

And of course, the Jews, just like the Pharisees, probably other Pharisees at the time, see this, and they're filled with envy. He gets a bigger audience. Everyone knows who this guy is.

They say, I don't like this. And so they contradict him. They even blaspheme.

And they oppose him. And all that they could do, they persecuted him. That's what that is.

Persecution doesn't have to mean being shot. It's a very broad term. And it's going to happen.

These things are going to happen. Acts 13, verse 50, the end of this section here at Antioch, "...but the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women, and the chief men of the city raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region." In

other words, they played hardball in politics. That's how it worked back then, and that's how it works today.

"...and they drove them out of the city. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and came to Iconium." So Antioch, Iconium, that's the actual sequence there in Acts. It's 80 miles south of Antioch in the middle of Turkey, modern-day Turkey.

Verse 19 of chapter 14 we read of the city of Iconium. "...Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came together..." They traveled 80 miles. They hated them so much.

"...came down to Iconium from Antioch, and they gathered with the Jews at Iconium to persuade, and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." And then lastly, Lystris, we don't have much there other than we know it's Timothy's hometown. He obviously faced suffering and difficulties there.

That's his pattern. He goes, he preaches, people hate him. And he goes to the next town.

His time's done. They don't want me here. It's a waste of time.

I'm out of here. One thing I want to note about the deliverance here is often the deliverance for Paul was, as we say, providential. They weren't often miraculous.

He went over the wall. Damascus, that wasn't a miracle. That was them planning and thinking and using common sense to avoid death.

And this is something we shouldn't, of course, lose track of. In other words, there's no guarantee, even for the Apostle. As we know, they eventually died, and history, that is tradition, says they all suffered one way or the other.

Like Peter, they believe, was crucified upside down. Paul, God's protection of the Apostle and of the early church wasn't going to last forever. God did it on purpose.

You're going to have suffering. You're going to survive, but eventually you won't. I'll bring you to heaven.

Suffering in general, verse 12. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. That's why I call this point the certainty of suffering.

If you love Jesus, people will see it one way or the other. Usually people close to you, like family members. And they're not going to like it because they don't.

And they're going to feel some guilt because they know you see your guilt and you've acknowledged your sins and you've pleaded the blood of Christ Jesus to cover your wickedness. He has and he does and he continues to protect and preserve you. You want to follow him and people don't like it.

It's just as simple as that. We don't want to hear that. We have people we love, family members and close friends.

They may even say nice things and do nice things. That's good. I'm not downplaying any of that.

At the end of the day, they're not believers if that's the case. And it makes all the difference in the world. And something will happen.

Maybe not them in particular, other people perhaps, but sometime in your life you're going to have some kind of difficulty, some kind of struggle. There is a certainty there of this suffering or hardship or trouble or difficulty or however you want to describe this word persecution. It means to be pressed upon.

The purpose of persecution, as I talk about suffering and persecution in general, James 1 verse 2 we read, My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, and lest the patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. And so James reminds his audience here that you will have various trials, persecutions, sufferings, hardships, something in your life for following Jesus, doing the right thing, standing up for him and his truth, but you've got to know that it's a testing of your faith. God, as he controls and guides all things in history, uses this particular trouble in your life to make you a better Christian.

And he says we ought to therefore understand and count it all joy when you fall into various trials and tribulations. What does James mean by that there in James chapter 1? That you should count it all joy. That we should be happy that we're being beaten up, hated upon, spat upon, thrown into prison or whatever the case is.

No, not as such. It's a figure of speech, a metonymy we call it, that is, it consists of the use of the name of one object or concept for another object which is related to it. For example, we talk about reading Shakespeare, but no one really thinks you actually literally dig up Shakespeare and read the man.

It's shorthand for what? Reading his works. And so when he says rejoice in your trials and tribulations, he's not saying rejoice in tribulations as much but as what? What's attached to the tribulations? Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, the fruit of the Spirit. You rejoice because something good's going to come out of it as only God can bring something good out of it.

That's what he's talking about. He's not commending you for being a masochist. That's not the point.

It's a figure of speech. And so we should rejoice that it is through and beyond the trials in our life, realizing God uses it for our good, even if we don't fully recognize what that's going to look like. And that's hard.

And what's that called? Faith, because you don't fully see it, do you? But you believe. The Spirit is working somehow, somehow, through the difficulties in your life. And of course, the

difficulties I mean, the trials I mean here, are you doing the right thing, not you sinning, although that's still used for your good.

God will use it for your good somehow. But particularly here, he's talking about following Jesus, doing the right thing, and loving the church and the saints. And it's various.

James talks about various trials and tribulations, kind of interesting, he uses the word multicolored. It means all kinds, all kinds of varieties and different things. Temptation within, temptation without, hardship within, hardship without, hardship of the future, hardship of the past, things you remember, things you're concerned about that may not happen or maybe will happen, you're not sure.

People talking behind your back, talking before your face, mocking you, ridiculing you, and the like. And the fruit therein, of course, is the testing of your faith, produces patience, and of course, amongst other things, is endurance, fortitude, perseverance, other fruits of the Spirit as well, not only that. But we read of persecutions and suffering as well by Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 5. I'm still talking about persecution and suffering in general.

Matthew 5, verse 10, on the Sermon on the Mount, we read, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And this description here on the Sermon on the Mount of the great blessings, the beatitudes they're called, being blessed here is an objective fact.

You may not feel blessed. Sometimes you don't feel like you're much of a Christian. It's not really relevant when it's objectively the case.

You do believe in Jesus, you were baptized, and in here you are being blessed even though it doesn't feel like it because you're suffering in persecution. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. They hate you because you love God and you love righteousness.

And Jesus is reminding them in contrast to the Pharisees and others who had added to the Word of God their own traditions and their way of looking at things. And Jesus is like, no, look, you've got to understand, being persecuted for righteousness' sake is a blessing. It's not evidence that somehow you're a sinner and bad that you're being persecuted because they had kind of this prosperity gospel approach to Pharisees.

If you're really holy, God's going to bless you. Really? Maybe, maybe not. It's in God's plans.

Your command before God is do whatever is right and good regardless of the consequences, whether you're blessed or not. And so he says in contrast to those Pharisees, it's a good thing that you are being persecuted for righteousness' sake. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven, right? The mediatorial kingdom of God.

There's that idea there as I preached in the morning sermons that we are a part of that's invisible. People don't see our hearts. They don't understand the joy that we have that we are saved and forgiven by our Lord and Savior and that we are suffering because we believe in Him and following Him.

Persecution in particular, what he's dealing with in this text seems to mean, besides of course reminding us again that suffering is a very broad idea here that he's referring to, but he's drilling down in here and talking about a certain kind of suffering. Yes, all who desire, verse 12, to live, what? Godly, one, in Christ Jesus, two, will suffer persecution. That's what he is referring to.

Being persecuted for wanting to be holy and godly and to follow Jesus. Because the two are supposed to go hand in hand. Can't be godly without Christ.

And if you're going to follow Christ, you're going to be godly. To one degree or another. You're not going to be obviously perfect.

There's a level of godliness, a level of sanctification and maturity by the power of the Spirit within us that it's obvious to others. They hate us for it. They mock us for it, collectively often.

Sometimes individually perhaps you have your own stories. And so this is a specific kind of persecution. Not just internal struggle against sin.

That's going to be there. That's true. That's dealt with elsewhere like in Romans 7. Not external temptation necessarily.

The world, the flesh, and the devil tempting us and trying to draw us away from Jesus. That's a form of persecution of sorts. They keep dangling in front of your eyes sin and trying to draw you from righteousness.

But rather, those who know you believe in Jesus and you want to do the right thing, those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer. Mocked and ridiculed for believing in him. This is clearly the case of the book of Acts.

The one after Paul for preaching the gospel for the suffering martyrs that we know in the early church history. In the book of Acts, Stephan being the first one in the early parts of Acts chapter 8. And then the martyrs after the close of the book of Revelation about 100 A.D. Rome went after them. The Jews went after them for believing in Jesus.

But also suffering for being godly. Of doing things that those around them wouldn't want to do. They mock them for trying to be a goody two-shoe as they used to say.

You always trying to be the good guy? What's up with that? You think you're better than I am? I've heard that. Why are we talking about? That never crossed my mind. You can see what's going through their mind when they open their mouth.

And so the haters are not always thinking of your confession of Christ. Sometimes the first thing that hits them in the face is you're godly living. And they find it offensive.

So they harass you for it. You don't swear. You don't fight.

You don't steal. What's your problem? What kind of a co-worker are you? What kind of neighbor are you? And of course often the two are tied together. It's Christ and godliness.

They are in reality although conceptually the person may not even know you're a Christian sometimes. Different kind of methods of persecution that Paul dealt with here and I'm sure Timothy did as well. Name calling, mocking, lying.

Legal harassment as he gathered all the powers that be there in Iconium coming after him. He even had jail time as we know. That's part of the persecution that he suffered.

Afflictions, verse 11. Timothy certainly knew about that. And today and even back then outright murder.

Stoning. They stoned Paul. That's what I read there.

All you read in that text there in Acts 14, he just gets up and walks off like it never happened. They had murder in their hearts. That's the kind of persecution they wanted to do because that's how much hatred they had towards Christ and godliness amongst Christians.

And what's interesting here, it continues on with this theme. Persecution is going to happen. Be prepared.

Understand this. Know what you're getting into. Don't lie to new converts to Christianity.

It's not all a bed of roses. But evil men, verse 13, and imposters will grow worse and worse deceiving and being deceived. So you can see there the continuation of thought and theme from verse 1 where in the last days perilous times shall come.

And it continues on to describe that perilous times are even here and now. We're in them. Evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse.

So again, what's he referring to? He's talking about the churches. Persecution coming within the church. It happens without the church.

That's true. That is outside the church. But people close to us, leaders and denominations turning on the truth as they turned upon Timothy.

And we dealt with earlier in these verses and mentioned even by name those that were corrected by Paul and Timothy for lying and denying the resurrection. Those are the men. Imposters.

Fake pastors. Fake ruling elders and the like. Going after Timothy apparently.

We're not giving a lot of details here. We know they went after the Apostle Paul in Acts. A little more detail there.

We expect, at least I expect, hatred from the world. Unbelievers. They're not baptized.

They make no confession of faith. And eventually I'm going to step on their toes as it were. And they're mine.

I'm stepping on their toes. You're stepping on their toes. You're being better than me.

You're such a goody-two-shoe. Whatever their problem is. But we forget sometimes, historically, some of the worst persecution was within the church itself.

Church leaders going after people speaking the truth. And in my sad experience, some of the strongest vitriol spewed is from self-described Christians who fight against the truth in the name of Jesus Christ. You see this, of course, as we deal with these matters like male leadership in the church.

Somehow if you believe in male leadership you must be in favor of abuse. This is junior high now? What kind of discussion is this that we're having amongst church leaders? Really? Why are you identifying the two? Clearly they're playing this identification game, right? This guilt by association. Anybody can abuse.

In fact, we know the Me Too movement, if you remember, was from what? Oh, the flaming unbelieving liberals of Hollywood who clearly hate male leadership, who clearly hate the church, right, because the Bible tells us you've got to have male leadership. They don't want any of that. They're clearly feminists.

And what? They abuse women left and right. That's not an accident. Not in the least bit.

So, these people describe themselves as Christians. They come after us. They lie about us.

They make things up about, not the general brothers and sisters, about our denomination, the OPC. We had a trial out in the East. It was dealing with a bunch of, as trials are, messy and the like.

Some abuse claims were brought forth. And the Presbytery got a committee together and they put a lot. It was 44 pages.

A lot of work there. I'm sure they could have put more in there. Detailing that very careful.

Walking through the evidence of abuse or claims of abuse. Eyewitnesses and everything else. And I know the people surrounding and the vultures coming after saying, we're the real Christians.

You guys, you people who believe in male authority, i.e. patriarchy, you're the real abusers. And they had nothing. In fact, we found everything to the contrary.

That something else is going on. Lies are going on. But you don't have enough evidence, of course.

Because people keep things close to the vest. What can you do as a committee? You can say, nothing here. It's a nothing burger, as they used to say.

And, in fact, some of the people were officers in the church saying, we believe accusations first and then we look for the facts. As opposed to, we look for the facts and then we find out if we believe it or not. They literally said that.

That's not good. In the church of Jesus Christ. It's a growing persecution.

Medieval men and pastors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. He warned, of course, that in verse 1, as I tied it together here. So the theme is still with us, even as we go to verse 15 and 16, in which we read about the Holy Scriptures.

Because he's pointing out the Holy Scriptures is going to protect us from the persecution is the implication here. And he specifies that as the false teacher. So the biggest problem is public leaders of the church being troublemakers, impostors, fake men, deceiving and being deceived.

The early church, for example, a couple hundred years later, fought the Arian Controversy, in which he denied that Jesus Christ is one of the members of the Trinity. One of the members of the Trinity, God and the flesh. And the debates over the Trinity in general.

The Reformation fought over salvation and the church against the Roman Catholic church. And today, as you know, we fight over the basis of creation. What is a man? What is a woman? In the church! Over time, you see, it's obviously grown worse and worse.

Can you see Rome, during the 1500s, arguing against Luther, saying, no, a man's a woman and a woman's a man. It's whatever the free will decision is. They all agreed with the basics of creation.

In that sense, you can see it's even gotten worse now today, isn't it? When it comes to false teaching. It's absolutely incredible. In other ways, of course, it's even better, because we have greater clarity of revelation by our history and our confession.

Confidence in the Scriptures

And how do you survive these dangers? Verses 14-15. Confidence in Scripture. But you must continue, what, in the things which you have learned.

You have followed carefully, verse 10, in the things which you have learned, and of knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood, that's whom you learned from your parents, and from childhood, you learned the Holy Scriptures. They're able to make you wise, as opposed to being deceived by impostors, verse 13. That's the connection to this famous set of verses about the infallibility and inerrancy and the sufficiency of the Word of God, verses 15-16.

To continue in the truth is to preserve and to persevere through persecution. We can survive the impostors, the liars and evil men who deceive and deceive others, who wish to persecute us if we cling to Christ as found in the Word of God. The truth of the Word, both spoken and the truth of the Word written.

The spoken Word, of course, the preaching and teaching of the Apostles, which you have a long history of there in the book of Acts. Their main focus, as super pastors I call them, the Apostles, was to preach, preach, teach, teach, preach, preach, and teach them more. People needed to hear these things, to be rooted in the Word of God and the truth therein.

So the more truth you know, the better you can be defended against lies and errors and being deceived as these evil men are deceived and deceiving others. And, of course, the truth in the Word of God is written, because the preaching must be based upon the Word of God written. The Holy Scriptures as he describes them.

In childhood, you, Timothy, have known the Holy Scriptures. Imagine young Timothy, probably in his thirties, little kid, learning the Scriptures. Here's this little Jewish boy learning the Scriptures.

Think about it. What's he learning as a Jewish boy before 30 AD? The Old Testament. That's his Holy Scriptures.

Paul is telling them, because the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament haven't been finished yet, that you, young Timothy, can go to the Old Testament, which is able to make you wise for salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. The Gospel is there in the Old Testament, not just the New. It's not as clear.

We all know what that means to grow up as an adult. You realize, wow, there's a lot of things I missed as a kid. You knew the truth, but you didn't realize how beautiful it was, or in the case of the fallen world, how dangerous it was.

But you knew it either way, enough to be safe and sound with your family. And the same with the Old Testament saints. It wasn't as clear.

That's true. It wasn't as detailed. That's true.

But it was real. It was enough of a truth that they had to believe in Messiah to come. And we believe in the Messiah who has already come.

We have greater revelation, greater illumination, greater light. He had, the Old Testament was the source of salvific wisdom. In other words, you could teach a lot from the Old Testament about Jesus, even without the New Testament.

There's a lot there. Christ came, brought more light upon these old truths and prophecies. And Christianity needs the Christ, but only the Christ of the Bible.

We need this protection from the lies of impostors from the Holy Scriptures, which is able to make us wise in contrast to those who are deceived. And he ties faith here to surviving the

persecution for salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. You must believe in the Messiah to be saved.

And we know this from the Old Testament, without Christ having even come yet. It's the implication here, very clearly. And this is going to protect us from the persecution, not in the sense of stopping the persecution, but that rather we can survive the persecution and know that what we are hanging on to, no matter how much they may beat us with their tongues, or even beat us with a whip as Paul was beaten, we will not let go of Jesus because we have the truth in the Word and in our hearts.

It's a purifying faith. 1 Peter 1.5, you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while.

If need be, you have been grieved by various trials. There's that theme again. That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And so we greatly rejoice, he ties here, to the power of God preserving us, even though our faith is weak. And we persevere through suffering. We have the Spirit upon us.

The genuineness of your faith therefore is part of the reason for the suffering and the persecutions we read there in 1 Peter 1.5. And that genuineness of your faith, of course, is not reducible to feelings. It's again an objective fact that you either have faith or you don't. It may be weak, that's true.

It may be very small, as a grain of mustard seed, nevertheless, it's still real. And the trials are there to strengthen and to give us more encouragement. And not just faith in the abstract, but in the person of Jesus Christ, or Christ Jesus, as we read here.

Trusting him for our justification and our sanctification, for our manner of life, and to preserve us through our persecution. We can overcome, therefore, the persecution, that is stand firm against their desire, because the persecution they're bringing upon us is that we would deny Jesus, we would deny a godly life, we would turn it away and throw it all away into the ditch, and to go their route. That's what they want.

And we can stand that kind of pressure, that bearing upon us, because of our faith in Christ, our only Deliverer. The faith, of course, must be sincere, is the implication here. Not someone faking it, but that's between you and God, I cannot tell you.

I cannot read your heart. Persecution, brothers and sisters, is going to happen. It may not be serious.

I know we typically use the word, at least I do, I hear the word persecution, how can I use that for Americans? Paul wasn't always beaten with stones, they just mocked and blasphemed him earlier, there in Antioch, and he describes that as suffering and a persecution. That, too, is a real thing. And we have that here in America, as we know, unfortunately.

One way or the other, in one form or another, in one degree or another, it's certainly the case, there will be some kind of persecution you will have to suffer through, brothers and sisters, especially church leaders. But you can survive by clinging to our Lord and Savior, as He is found in the Word of God and not in your imagination. May everyone here, young and old, keep learning more of Christ, and to grow in their faith and knowledge of Him, and cling to Him.

Let us pray. Father God above, give us more of Your Spirit, more strength, strengthen our resolve, give us more trust in You, and not in ourselves. May we look beyond what others think or say of us, God, and to think only of what You see and think of us, which is found in the Word of God, that You love us with an everlasting love, that You call us to a life of repentance and to follow You no matter what others may say.

Embolden us, therefore, God, to persevere through these persecutions with the certainty of the Word of God, we pray, by the blood of Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.