



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 2nd - 8th

Sermon: August 1st



August 2

2 Timothy 3:12

The Bible is clear in its teaching that living like Christ in a fallen and sinful world will bring persecution upon you. Paul wrote to Timothy these words, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). Paul had just finished reminding young Timothy of how he had been persecuted for teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in various cities throughout his missionary journeys. As you consider this somewhat frightening and yet true passage of Scripture, let us not forget how verse 11 ends, "and out of them all the Lord rescued me." The Christian life is often a difficult one but through it all, the Lord is faithful and ever present. As we march on into the unknown, remember that the Lord said He would never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Here is the point that I want you to ponder today: what does it mean for me that I am not experiencing persecution? Folks, I remind you that we believe the Bible is God-breathed, inerrant, and completely true. That being the case, we must receive this passage as true too. So, a genuine follower of Christ cannot say, "This doesn't apply to me." Paul is clear, all will, not may but will, be persecuted. The first part of that verse is the clincher – "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus." What does that mean? Well, we have to believe it means that we will walk as He walked and talk the way He talked. It means we will stand for what He taught and defend the truth as He gave it to us. It means that we will conduct ourselves in accordance with the Scriptures and agree with Him on what is sin and what is right and wrong. It means we will pursue Christ and conduct our relationships on every front the way He would. It means we will live to represent our King accurately.

Now, the reality is that as we do that, we are doing that in a hostile and fallen world. We are living that way in a culture where Christ is hated, and Satan is currently prince." Let me be as plain as I can be, the only reason you are not suffering or being persecuted for following Jesus in a world that hates him is because you are not following in a public and obvious manner. You are following in secret or in fear. Again, I remind you that Paul said all will be persecuted. There will be no persecution if every time your family or friends begin to say things or take stances that you know are not biblically true or are just downright sinful, you remain silent or quietly agree. If you never oppose the ungodliness of this culture, then certainly you will not be persecuted because you are not standing in opposition to it which means you are not standing with Jesus Christ which means you are denying Him. This means you are siding with the devil, and he does not need to persecute you because you are living as if you are on his team.

Brothers and sisters, being persecuted is not fun or easy. Fortunately, we do not have to face it alone. Peter, John, and the other disciples stood strong in the face of the religious elite because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who was giving them the courage and conviction to stand and speak truth. Their faith was so real at this point that they knew Jesus was worth dying for if it should come to that. Friends don't be afraid. Trust God and the amazing work of the Trinity as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit do their part to keep you strong and get you safely through the fire.

August 3

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

The passage that I have chosen for us today follows the moment in Paul's life when he speaks of the "thorn in his flesh" that was given to him to keep him humble and from bragging about his abilities and/or privileges. You may recall that he prayed to God on three occasions to have this "thorn" removed and each time God told him no. Then we get the beautiful and comforting passage of hope that says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:8). That means that the weaker the human capabilities or the ability he or she has to handle a situation in their own strength, the more clearly God's grace, presence, and strength shines forth. The result of seeing and experiencing His majesty is increased faith and hope.

Paul says this, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). The tense of the verb in verse 9 translated "is sufficient" shows the constant availability of God's divine grace. Consider for a moment the impact of living in awareness of His grace being poured out on you. Surely that would change your life for the better. Paul says that as a result of that reality, he would rather live in a state of weakness and dependence upon Christ for it is in those times that he is actually strongest. We must understand that this does not mean there is some mystical, magical shield around him that takes away the pain, suffering, or stresses of the persecution and hard things that he is facing. Look back at how he describes his circumstances in verse 10 – "insults, distresses, persecutions, and difficulties." Beloved, these challenges were real and, in many ways, unpleasant. What is he talking about then?

At least on one level, he is encouraged and comforted knowing that in his weakness and sufferings Christ is being exalted and revealed. We are the representation of Christ on earth to this world. As we suffer well, they get to see how He suffered. As we handle our circumstances with His heart, attitude and actions, they get a picture of who Jesus was and is. Paul is strengthened as he understands that his life is being poured out for the glory of the One who died for him. I also believe that what he is referring to is the truth that when he is suffering well, he is being pruned and God is producing in him Christlike characteristics that otherwise would not have become part of his nature. I cannot think of this passage without considering what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4 where he wrote, "Though my outer man is decaying (wasting away), my inner man is being strengthened and renewed day by day." So, when Paul says that in his weakness, he is strong, surely he is talking about in his inner man or spirit.

Friend, it goes against the grain and our natural instinct to think that as we are being broken and taught to depend on God and not self, that we are actually being built up and made strong. These bodies of ours are eventually going to wear out and all that will matter in the end is that our spirits were growing stronger as time passed. We can boast in our frailty, our inabilities, and our weaknesses because it is there that we MUST lean on God, and it is there that we learn that we can trust Him with everything because He is infinitely good and able.

August 4

Philippians 4:13

Our passage to ponder today, may be the verse most printed on t-shirts, coffee cups, tennis shoes, and bumper stickers. Who doesn't like, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me?" Truly it is a great verse but what is Paul actually talking about in the context of this chapter of God's Word? I mean, do you really think you can do all things? I for one can think of tons of things that I cannot do, and it has nothing to do with how much faith I have. So, in light of the sermon on Sunday and the reality of persecution for godly living, how does this fit in? Well, let me show you, dear ones, because this entire passage, including verse 13, is all about being content in the midst of the hardships that come our way because we are living godly lives for Christ glory and honor.

Beginning in verses 11 and 12 of Philippians 4, Paul lists circumstances in which he had learned to be content. He tells us that he has learned to be content when he has just enough to make ends meet and when he is in a season of plenty. He continues with peace and contentment in times of hunger and times of having plenty to eat. He recalls life when he had great need and when he had more than enough. What he is talking about is seasons of life. Friends, are you only "okay" when everything is going your way and you feel safe and secure in your own on hand provisions? You see, anybody can feel strong when the cupboards are full, there is gas in the tank, and money in the bank. But how do you do when the opposite is true? What about those times when you are wondering if you are going to make it to the end of the month? What about when the news is depressing and discouraging, and you wonder what the future is going to hold? How do you do then? What about when the world turns against you and the persecution begins?

What Paul is writing about in Philippians 4:13 is not his ability, by faith, to do anything he sets his mind to. He is writing about the grace and strength that comes from Christ to be strong, faithful, and courageous when the wind is blowing hard against him and he is in great need. God's promise here, through faith in Christ, is that you can maintain contentment, peace, and joy in the midst of the trying times too. The reason that I am writing about this now as a point to ponder is because as we face persecution for seeking to live godly lives in Christ Jesus, we are going to need to know that we "can do all things through Christ who strengthens us" and that is going to include being faithful to the Word of God in the face of cultural pressure. When you reach a point and you say, "I just can't do this. I'm not that strong." Remember, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Imagine the moment that Peter, John, and the other disciples were facing in Acts 4. The chief priests were the men of influence and power and they positioned themselves against the disciples. They had the authority to have them jailed or even killed. It would have been easy and even understandable for the disciples to change their message or at least water it down. But they did not! Why? The answer is simply that Christ, through the Holy Spirit indwelling them, gave them the strength to remain faithful, strong, and true to God. How will we be able to stand? The same way they did – by the strength of Christ.

August 5

Luke 12:11-12

A vital part of everything we do as Christians is willingness to simply yield to the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned in yesterday's devotion, Paul learned to be content in every circumstance of his life due in large part to his willingness to submit to the ministry and guidance of the Holy Spirit. When one learns that everything that comes into your life passed through the throne room of heaven before it reached you, then you rest with this thought, "If it is okay with God then it must be okay with me." As is always the case, this requires trust in God and knowledge that He is always good. You can't really trust if you don't have confidence in His character or knowledge of His ways. Of course, that can only come as you spend time in an intimate relationship with Him.

Let's focus today on some of the ways the Holy Spirit actually ministers in our lives. First of all, the text I chose for today deals specifically with what the disciples were facing in our text for Sunday. Luke writes in 12:11-12, "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." This should give us comfort for many reasons, but one is certainly the truth that in our time of need, He will be there. Friends, this is God that we are talking about. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, and He will be keenly aware of the situation that He has led you, or at least allowed you, to enter. Not only that, but He is orchestrating the whole thing in such a way that He is locked and loaded for that very moment with all that you will need to do and say. He brought you into the place of challenge and He will see you through. That to me is quite encouraging.

Not only this, but the Bible tells us in John 16:13 that, "He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, he will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come." The truth that He is writing about here is the truth as it relates to the person and work of Jesus Christ. All of this, dear ones, is meant to encourage and comfort us as we realize we are not left on our own to stumble in the dark through life's ups and downs. I love the fact that the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit will sanctify us as we follow Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). To sanctify means to transform us into the likeness of Christ. Beloved, you can and should yield to the Holy Spirit because *everything* that He is leading you into and through in your life is meant to be a blessing to you in the area of sanctification. Everything in this life is intended to produce fruit in us. It is not lie nor stretch of the imagination to say that all things work together for the good of those who are called and love the Lord.

So much time and energy is wasted in life fighting against the will of God for your life. If you will yield to the Spirit and trust His sovereign will for your life, based on His goodness and love for you, then you can spend your time in hot pursuit of the God who sent His own Son to die so that you could have life eternal in heaven with Him and all who have gone before as children of God. That sounds like a pretty good deal to me.

August 6

John 14:6

If your life depended upon one particular way to be saved, fulfilled, or purposeful would you not do anything necessary to discover that way? Unfortunately, we live in an extremely pluralistic society where statements like, "I have my truth and you have yours" or "There are lots of different roads that lead to God." Pluralism simply means that many religious worldviews can coexist and are equally valid or acceptable. This is more than just tolerance; it is believing that multiple paths exists that all lead to God. This is in direct contrast to what Christianity teaches in which we believe in the exclusive path to God being through Jesus Christ and He alone. It is unpopular to stand against religious ecumenism (religions working together as one) or the popular interfaith movement of our day. We believe that both of these movements are dangerous, destructive, and unbiblical and therefore reject them wholeheartedly.

A Barna study has revealed that a growing number of people who claim to be Christians believe there is more than one way to heaven. Be clear that pluralism is not simply sharing some common truths together about helping others, being kind, or generous. Pluralism is specifically understood to be that which lends credence or credibility to competing truth claims regarding God and salvation in particular. Here is where it is of the utmost importance to let the Bible answer the question as to how you get to heaven.

First of all, the Bible clearly acknowledges only One God (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is a direct contradiction to religious pluralism. Secondly, the Bible teaches there is only way to know or to "get to" God. Our text for today states, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me'" (John 14:6). Also, our last verse in the passage for Sunday's message said, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Why am I mentioning this today? Church folk, do you realize that the disciples were jailed, often beaten, and ultimately martyred because they preached the exclusivity of Christ. Christianity is not an inclusive religion. There is only one way in and one way to God. You preach and teach this in this pluralistic society in which we are living, and you will no longer feel so at home in this pagan land.

Do you sincerely believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven, that He is truth, and life? Are you sure that pluralism has not crept into your own mindset and worldview? Friends, if there were another way to heaven, then Jesus got shafted. To have gone through what He went through here on earth if there were other ways makes His death senseless and useless. Think about it though, what is necessary for us to be saved? A sin debt had to be paid by a sinless sacrifice. Don't fall into the fallacious thinking that pretty good people get to heaven because we aren't really that bad after all. You must remember how we are saved and what it took to obtain that redemption. The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is the only way to heaven. It is unpopular and proclaiming it will bring you heartache and criticism, but it is still true. Stand on this all-important truth because no one will get to heaven based on the lies of our culture and all the while that you do, the Holy Spirit will be doing a great work in your life.

August 7

John 16:33

Beloved, there is no doubt that many are afraid and worried about life. Anxiety and mental health issues are commonplace in our culture today. To be honest, they are being treated like badges of honor nowadays. The world is growing more hostile and insane as each day passes. It feels dangerous out there, doesn't it? For Christians, it is even worse. We have reason to be alarmed and concerned but must we be worried and anxious? The answer has to be a resounding no! After all, Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but pray instead" (Phil. 4:6). Dear church family and friends, the reason we can do that is because of what we read at the end of Phil. 4:5 where it says, "For the Lord is near." That is all that matters. If I know God is with me, nothing else matters.

Jesus said in today's text, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Just prior to that he said, "In Me you may have peace." The flow of His statement was that in spite of the trials and hardship of this life, you can have peace because He overcame the world. Do you see all of the important elements in this statement? There is the recognition and acknowledgement of trouble in this world. There is also the declaration that we can have peace in the midst of the world's troubles. Finally, there is the reason or means by which we can have that peace; namely, His victory over the world. What does that mean?

Our greatest enemy in this world is Satan. The teaching of the Scriptures is that we have a real enemy who hates God and His children. Behind all of the evil in this world is the powers of darkness that operate in the heavenly places and that our real enemy is not humanity (Eph. 6:12). Satan is our greatest enemy and Christ overcame him. Jesus defeated the devil through the cross and the empty tomb – His death and resurrection. John wrote in 1 John 3:8, "For the Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." Praise the Lord, our greatest enemy has been defeated. Oh yes, he still screams, threatens, and accuses, but he does so as a defeated foe whose power has been overcome.

Our biggest problem in this world that keeps us from God is our sin. I have more good news. Jesus overcame our sin too. Paul writes in Romans, "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6). In the 103rd Psalm David wrote, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our sins from us" (v.12). The wages of sin is death. Death is the just punishment for sin so as long as we are left in our sins, we must die. Jesus overcame our sins on the cross and now we stand forgiven. We can have peace in our lives and peace with God solely because of Jesus.

Finally, we can have peace because when He overcame the world, He overcame our greatest fear – death. 2 Timothy 1:9b-10 says, "Grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Oh, my dear church family, we don't even need to fear death because Christ overcame that too. Our last enemy has been defeated. Let them persecute us for loving and following Jesus. It doesn't matter because we can't lose.

August 8

Matthew 16:18

Sometimes when I find myself getting a little anxious about the future of the church, I am comforted with this passage from Matthew, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not overpower it." Notice that Jesus said "I" will build "My" church. I have often rediscovered peace when I remember that it is His church, and He will take care of His bride. Also, please note that the "gates of hell" cannot keep the church from advancing. Gates are not considered offensive weapons they are defensive. Friends, do you see that what Christ is saying here? Regardless of how loud the devil screams and our culture pushes against us, hell cannot stop the growth and advancement of His church. Satan is no match for God, and we are not at the mercy of Satan for our success as a church. There is little doubt that most people have this completely backwards in attitude and action.

What the church is missing today is men and women who are courageous and true to the teaching of God's Word. Too many people are biblically ignorant, weak in faith, and impotent in their spiritless lives. Satan is a defeated enemy and Christ is the Victor and overcomer. The Gospels teach us that He has power over sin, sickness, death, and evil. Our part is to simply have faith in who He is and what He wants to do in and through us as we march towards the end times. Folks, I think that Satan has changed his approach and method of persecuting the church.

An early church father named Tertullian in the second century said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." What he meant was that as Christians were killed for their faith, the church only advanced more effectively and widespread. When people witnessed the strong and courageous faith of the martyrs who would not deny Christ regardless of the threat of death, it was like throwing fuel on the fire of the gospel and many were brought to faith in Christ. Faith under pressure is beautiful and effective as a great witness to the validity and worth of Christianity. So, it appears that Satan has changed his approach. Now, the greatest means of persecution against the church is not outside threats but inside fear of being ostracized.

Satan realized that true believers survive physical persecution of being harmed, imprisoned, and even killed but Christians easily crumble under the social alienation, which very often produces a compromise that steals their testimony and weakens the church as it endeavors to accommodate the hostility of the world. This is everywhere all the time going on in our culture. The non-lethal persecution that comes against the church in our time, it doesn't kill us. It just makes us compromise. We fail to preach the truth because we don't want to be rejected. We don't want to be laughed at or left out. We don't want the animosity. We don't want to be looked at as some kind of outsider who doesn't fit in with the crowd. But in the early church, it was real physical persecution on top of alienation. I think often we'd be better off if somebody was killing Christians because the real Christians would stand up and the church would be purified and strengthened. Then we would see the real power of the Spirit and the ability of Christ to advance His church in spite of and in the face of whatever Satan wants to throw at the church. He is not match for God and it is time we start living like that is true. Be strong and courageous.