

Suffering For Jesus, part 4 of Dealing with Suffering  
May 27, 2018

Today's message is the last in this sermon series on dealing with pain and suffering. So far we have seen two reasons from the Bible for a Christian experiencing pain or suffering. The first reason is that God uses pain and suffering to shape our character. Pain and suffering are necessary experiences for our maturity in Christ. A second reason we might experience some pain or suffering is God's discipline upon us, not to punish us, but to call us to repent of sin.

This morning we are dealing with a third reason revealed in the Bible that Christians might experience pain or suffering. Your pain or suffering may be persecution because you are a follower of Jesus.

**Jesus warned that His followers would be rejected by the world.** See his words in John 15.

**John 15:18-19 (NIV) "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.**

Jesus warns that non-Christians will reject us because we are different from them. One way we are different is that Christianity is exclusive. Christianity is a very different religion from what many people in America believe today. They believe that there are many religious paths to God. **We believe there is only one way to God and Heaven.** That way is by faith in Jesus. For this some reject us.

There are other exclusive religions who believe in only one way to heaven. But it is a different way than we believe. They believe heaven is a reward that is earned for good behavior or good deeds. **Christianity is the only religion that teaches heaven is an undeserved gift.** We teach that God became human to atone for the sins of mankind. So even among exclusive religions, we are different. For this some reject us.

Christians are also different in morality than many in America. We are different in our sexual ethics. **We hold different beliefs about the goodness of mankind and the sin of mankind.** This sets us apart from others. For such things some reject us.

**Christians are also different in our final allegiance.** While we can serve faithfully the country we live in, our highest allegiance is to Jesus. We are a part of His heavenly kingdom over any earthly kingdom. For this some reject us.

Christians are still in the world, but we are not of the world, not like the world of unbelievers. And as those differences play out in our lives the unbelieving world will reject us, just as they have always rejected Christians. In the New Testament we see Christians suffered for Jesus.

**Acts 8:1 (NIV) On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered.**

Christianity was persecuted until it became the official religion of the Roman empire in 323 AD. Christianity was under attack by rival religious groups, by businessmen, and by government leaders.

Christians were misunderstood and misquoted. For example, because of the language of the Lord's Supper, they were accused of being cannibals. Because they called their gatherings the Agape', the love feast", they were accused of sexual immorality. Because they refused to participate in the common salute to the Roman empire by offering a pinch of incense to Caesar and declaring Caesar as Lord, they were declared to be traitors.

Today, Christians are still persecuted around the world. They are lied about, jailed, tortured, their homes and church buildings are burned or confiscated, sometimes with the governing authorities turning a blind eye to what is happening.

This year about 215 million Christians face significant levels of persecution according to **The Open Doors' World Watch List**. Open Doors is an organization that tracks persecution of Christians around the world. Researchers for the organization estimate 1 in 12 Christians live where their Christian faith is "illegal, forbidden, or punished." During reporting for the 2018 World Watch List, 3,066 Christians were killed. And 793 churches were attacked.

The World Watch List is a list of the top 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. The second most dangerous country on the list is Afghanistan. Afghanistan has a law that says it is illegal for anyone to change from one religion to another. The most dangerous country for Christians is North Korea. Christians are either killed outright or sent to prison camps to work and live out the rest of their lives.

We are blessed to live in a country where there is a strong emphasis on freedom of religion. Christians here are not facing the same kinds of danger that our brothers and sisters in Christ are facing elsewhere around the world. But it could, eventually happen here. There is growing opposition to the Christian faith in America.

Jesus calls us the light of the world. We are the light of the truth of sin and salvation in the world today. But the world prefers darkness. So when Christians preach modesty over nudity, we are rejected. When we preach justice for all that limits business profits, we are rejected. When we preach sex for marriage only instead of the hookup culture, we are rejected. When we preach marriage as one man and one woman instead of gay marriage, we are rejected. When we preach the existence of God over atheism, we are rejected. When we preach Jesus as the only path to God instead of many paths to God, we are rejected. When we preach God's standards of right and wrong over man-made standards, we are rejected. When we preach judgment, condemnation, and hell for most people instead of most people going to heaven, we are rejected.

In America our worst critics used to say "Christians are mistaken, stupid, ignorant." Then our worst critics said, "Christians are intolerant, bigots." And while many still say such things our worst critics now are saying, "Christians are dangerous." And when enough people say that and believe that, the severe persecution of Christians will grow. All it takes is for those in power to turn a blind eye. That is what is happening in some other countries that are supposed to have religious freedom.

Our culture is moving away from Biblical morality. Our culture is moving away from adherence to the Bible. Religion is as popular as ever, but not the Christian religion.

The world doesn't care if we accept Jesus as long as we keep Him to ourselves. The world doesn't want us to proclaim Jesus as the only way to heaven. For this we are hated. For this we are persecuted.

Jesus has a word for us in such persecution.

**Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV) Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

**So even if non-Christians reject you...**

... admit to your own sinfulness and need for a savior.

... confess belief in the Bible as God's revelation of truth to us.

... claim Jesus as Savior and Lord.

**Accept that you may...**

... be misunderstood.

... be labeled a loser, hater, bigot, intolerant, ignorant, stupid, and worse.

... be ostracized.

So Christians may experience pain and suffering because they follow Jesus. Peter writes...

**1 Peter 4:16 (NIV) ...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.**

Jesus died for us. He died a horrible death for us. We must stand up for Him, with Him, against the sin and unbelief of the world. But some fear being different. This is a strong temptation for teens. It is common of teens to want to fit in with your peers. But if your peers are not Christians, then be willing to be different. Be different with Jesus.

**Don't let fear of persecution keep you from salvation.**

Jesus told a parable in Matthew 13. He tells of a farmer throwing seed out on the ground. He explained the parable to his disciples. The seed is the good news. And the four different types of ground upon which the seed falls are people. The difference in them is how they respond to the good news.

Some, Jesus said, hear the good news gladly. They are attracted to it. They like it. They want it. But when opposition to their new interest grows, they back off. The interest of such people is short lived. Jesus says it like this.

**Matthew 13:21 (NIV) When trouble or persecution comes because of the word (good news), he quickly falls away.**

Such people are in churches today. They like church. They like the emphasis on traditional moral values, traditional family values. They like to learn about God. They like the people. They are making friends. Church is a good influence on their children. But they have not fully accepted Jesus. They have not received Jesus as savior and lord. When opposition to their faith arises, they back off and drop out of the Christian faith. They were never really, fully, saved. They never made a commitment to Jesus.

Don't let a fear of persecution keep you from salvation. Yes, there is a price to be paid to being a Christian. But it is worth it. The benefits of salvation are worth the price Jesus paid and worth the price you may have to pay in the face of opposition and persecution.