

THE TRAGIC SIGN PRIOR TO THE END: PERSECUTION LUKE 21:12–19

Introduction

The discussion of the present passage focuses upon the signs of the end time (See *End Time*, Lk. 21:5-38). There is one sign of the end time that must be proclaimed to all believers. It is the sign of *persecution*. It is true that believers are persecuted in every generation, but right before the end time there will be a great intensification of persecution throughout the whole world. Believers will be persecuted as never before. Note the words, “But before all this, they will lay hands on you, and persecute you.” Believers must be prepared. This is the purpose of the present passage. The passage can be applied to believers in every generation to prepare them for facing persecution.

- I. The persecution of believers (vv. 12-15).
- II. The betrayers and traitors of believers (vv. 16-17).
- III. The promise to believers (vv. 18-19).

I. *Luke 21:12–15 Persecution: Reasons and Results*

The persecution of believers. Note three facts.

1. The persecution will be carried out by both civil and religious authorities. Both the government and religion will persecute true believers right before the end time. The idea is, of course, an intensification of persecution in the end time (Note, Lk. 21:5-8). This is the very reason Jesus made a distinction between the end time and the church age persecutors. Right before the end of the world, believers will be opposed, abused, arrested, tried, and martyred as never before in human history. Both the courts of the world and the councils of religion will take believers and rake them over the hot coals of persecution. Believers will be...
 - afflicted (see Acts 4:3; 8:1; 12:4; 13:50; 14:19; 2 Cor. 11:23-25).
 - killed (Acts 7:59; 12:2).
 - hated by all nations (Acts 28:22; Notes, Mt. 10:16-23. See Jn. 15:20; 16:2.)
 2. The reason believers will be persecuted is clearly stated by Jesus: “*On account of my name.*” The world will try to stamp out and silence believers because they are true followers of Christ. Their intense hatred of the believer will be due to at least three reasons.
 - a. The standard of true godliness. The believer sets before the world a different standard — the standard of true godliness. The world is not godly nor is its standard godly. Therefore by his *very nature*, any man who lives for the world and does not wish to change opposes godliness.
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2 Cor 6:17-18 *“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

- b. The life of purity. The genuine believer lives a life of purity, clean and just. True morality and godliness controls the mind, dresses modestly, converses respectfully, and behaves justly. The worldly live to fulfil the lust of their flesh and to have possessions as they wish. Therefore, the believer is opposed by any person who does not wish to live a pure and just life.

Gal 5:19-24 *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.*

- c. The message of repentance and of self-denial. The genuine believer proclaims the message of Christ: repentance and self-denial. Very practically, few men are willing to change (repent) to the degree that self is totally denied (person and possessions) in order to meet the needs of desperate people. Therefore most, even the religious, oppose the idea that men are to live sacrificially in order to save a starving and dying world (both a physically and spiritually starving and dying world). (See notes, Mt. 19:21-22; 19:23-26.)

Luke 9:23-24 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

Rom 14:21 *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

1 Cor 10:24 *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*

3. The result of the persecution will be a glorious witness for the Lord. The persecutors will try to silence the believer, but the very persecution itself will turn out to be a glorious witness for the Lord. How? The believer, standing there suffering, will show such loyalty and supernatural strength that some, even some of the persecutors, will be attracted to Christ. The believer will show that Christ and eternity are real, and he will be a testimony even as he receives the beatings and the swords of the persecutors.

Acts 9:16 "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

2 Cor 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Cor 4:11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

4. The preparation of a defence will not be necessary. When the genuine believer has to give an answer or a defence to his persecutors, God will fill his heart and mouth with a reply. The believer will be so filled with wisdom that his persecutors will not be able to resist his defence.

Note: Jesus was not promising the believer that he would be freed. He was promising a strong, unanswerable testimony. It will be time for many believers to go on home with the Lord. The end time will be filled with the blood of many martyrs for the Lord.

2 Tim 4:16-18 At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Heb 13:6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isa 50:9 It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

II. *Luke 21:16–17 Persecution: Betrayal*

The betrayal of believers will be heart-rending. Believers will be betrayed by their *own families and relatives*, friends and neighbours. Some believers will even be put to death because of their betrayal. Note three points.

1. Jesus was speaking of the end time. Betrayal by loved ones will intensify in the end time.
2. The reason for the betrayal will cut the human heart. Families and friends will hate the believer because of Christ (v. 17). The believer will stand for the name and righteousness of Christ; therefore, loved ones will betray him...
 - to save their own lives
 - to escape embarrassment
 - to secure vengeance
 - to escape fear
 - to secure some favour
 - to escape persecution themselves
 - to gain the favour of authorities
 - to preserve selfish honour or position

Mat 10:21 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”

3. All shall hate the believer. Few will be kind, tender, and loving; dissension and division will prevail in the last days. Most will begrudge what another has or is doing or is not doing. Unfortunately, such behaviour has been the case down through the centuries, and too often the church has experienced one person’s disliking and opposing another person. Envy, greed, and concern for security and recognition — all the sins of selfishness — have caused too many to stand against another person’s position, beliefs, abilities and leadership. Criticism and judging, dissension and division among believers have been and are some of the most visible traits of the church, both locally and universally. Jesus said that such hatred will increase and intensify in the end time.

Mat 10:17 “Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.”

Mat 24:9 “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” (see Lk.21:12-13)

John 15:20 “Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”

John 16:1-3 “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.”

2 Tim 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Psa 7:1 O Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me.

***Psa 31:15** My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.*

***Psa 119:86** All your commands are trustworthy; help me, for men persecute me without cause.*

***Psa 143:3** The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead.*

III. Luke 21:18–19 Promise to Believer

The promise is glorious and assuring to the believer. It is twofold.

1. First, the promise is that God is in control of the believer's life, total control. "Not a hair of your head will perish." Jesus meant, of course, spiritual security. He had just said some would be "put...to death" (v. 16). God knows every hair on the believer's head (Lk. 12:7); God is in total control of every single thing concerning the believer. Therefore, if the believer is persecuted, he is under God's care; and if he is being killed, he is under God's care. No matter the persecution and suffering...
 - God sees and is in control. He holds the believer in His hands.
 - God turns the suffering into a "an eternal glory [and reward] that far outweighs them all."
2. Second, the promise is the eternal security of the believer's soul. If the believer endures the persecution, he shall possess his soul eternally. The idea is that endurance to the end is *required*. The genuine believer *will* stand fast and endure. He will *not deny* his Lord; he could never give in to such, for he knows the presence and salvation (deliverance) of the Lord. (Note, Mk. 13:13.)

Very simply, persecution is not to be feared by the Christian believer. Persecution, even martyrdom, is nothing in light of eternity (see Rev. 6:9-11). Despite death (v. 16) and hatred (v. 17), Jesus promised "not a hair of your head will perish" (v. 18). The believer is secure in the arms of Jesus eternally.

***Rev 2:10** Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

***Rom 2:7-9** To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

***James 1:12** Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

James 5:11 *As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

1 Pet 2:9 *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ■*