

SUFFERING PERSECUTION

(PART 1)

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The New Testament is truly “a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6). It contains “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Pet 1:4). But not all of those promises may seem to be “great and precious” on the surface. For example, 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” A diligent study of God’s word will provide us an opportunity to understand that even the promise of persecution for righteousness’ sake is indeed great and precious.

Nothing new

First Peter 4:12 says, “*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*” No, being persecuted for righteousness’ sake goes back to the beginning of time. In Genesis 4:3-8, Cain killed his brother Abel “*because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous*” (1 John 3:12). Isaac, the heir of God’s promises, was mocked by Ishmael (Gen 21:8-10). Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers (Gen 37). Job was falsely accused by his friends and rejected by his own family when he had done no wrong. Moses was rejected by his own people and fled to the wilderness (Exod 2:11-15). And how many prophets were persecuted and killed? Jesus testified of the city of Jerusalem’s long association with persecuting and killing God’s prophets (Matt 23:37; Luke 13:33). Stephen was stoned to death for preaching the truth, and a major part of his sermon was reminding the Jews of their long history of persecuting the prophets, which culminated in their murdering of God’s own Son (Acts 7:51-52). And Christ told his disciples that what happened to him would happen to them. In Matthew 10:24-25, he said, “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. *If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?*” In John 15:18-21, he said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. *If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.* But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.” Again, we have been *promised* that we will suffer for doing what is right in God’s sight. Philippians 1:29 says, “*For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to*

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suffer for his sake.”

A reason to rejoice

How should we respond to what may seem at first glance to be a strange promise? The response we are told to have may also seem just as strange. Romans 5:3-4 says that “we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.” We *glory* in tribulation? Yes! And when we understand the reason why we should, then we should also understand why it is promised in the first place that we must suffer for righteousness’ sake. It is how we grow spiritually. Similarly, 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Paul was told that Christ’s strength is made perfect in weakness. For this reason, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*” These are the very steps that Christ walked. “For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (1 Pet 2:19-23). We must remember that Jesus grew spiritually as well as physically (Luke 2:40,52). And he grew spiritually to be perfect (literally, *complete*) through his sufferings (Heb 2:10; 5:8-9). We reach the same goal that Christ did in the same way that he did. James 1:2-4 says, “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*” Understanding the purpose of these trials on our faith will enable us to rejoice when they come, and enable us to endure them so that purpose can be fulfilled. And growing spiritually in the image of Christ is a blessing that we are partaking of *now*, while we are enduring the trials on our faith!