

In Spite of Persecution—Go!

Jesus was perfect. He was the epitome of love, the exact expression of the Father's heart, made manifest in the flesh--yet He was hated and despised--rejected and abandoned by many who said they followed Him. In the same way, it says in John 15:18: "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first." Such people really don't hate you; the truth is that they hate the JESUS in you. In Proverbs 29:27 we read: "The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright." Unfortunately, my precious friends, even those in the church who claim to be "Christians" may despise you--may reject you, may become jealous and envious and even work against you to make you look bad. The Bible clearly spells out the results of that behavior: "Jealousy is as cruel as the grave" (Song of Solomon 8:6). In fact, throughout history all kinds of evil have been done to Christians by others who call themselves Christians.

Usually this occurs when lukewarm believers see the passion and excitement of those who are truly following hard after God, having laid down their own agendas--dying, as it were, to themselves. As a result, the contrast between the two groups is stunningly obvious. Of course the lukewarm group can see it too, and it convicts and humbles them without saying a single word, exactly the way God intended it to. But the outcome is often hatred and persecution of one kind or another. Scripture goes on to say that we shouldn't be surprised when that happens.

So how are we to respond to such people? As hard as it may be, the Lord encourages us to let go of hatred toward them: "Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers *don't have eternal life within them*" (1 John 3:15). Read that verse again; does it really mean that those who hate others won't be in heaven? That's exactly what it says. How often have you heard that preached from the pulpit? Ever?

And if that's the case, now is the time to repent and ask God to help us love one another the way He loves us. Jesus is our example of how to respond to those who hate us. Scripture says He was despised and rejected yet He did not respond in anger and revenge. He didn't even try to defend himself. Rather He *chose* to give His feelings of hurt and anger to God, and let God take care of the outcome. He also *chose* to love them in return, whether they deserved it or not, in the same way He loved us when we didn't deserve His love.

In 1 Corinthians 13 we are encouraged to love and not hate lest we become that "clanging cymbal" who makes our religion worthless by the negative things we say and our un-Christ-like behavior. (See James 1:26.) In fact, right now the belief systems of persecutors are being challenged and transformed by the love they see in the eyes of true Christians, moments before they kill them for their faith in Christ. That thought should take our breath away and bring us to our knees, knowing that we must be sold out to Christ, depending on Him for our very breath, in order to love like that. Let me bring that thought home by asking this question: Can you see yourself loving your executioner that way?

1 Corinthians 13:4 makes this incredible statement: “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant.” Are we patient and kind toward each other and toward those who despise and reject us? The world is watching. Did you know that “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my (His) disciples” (John 13:35). That spells it out pretty clearly, doesn’t it? Our love will be the proof—the evidence that He is in us. And if that’s the case, *what are we without that kind of love?*

We are to – “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

In order to actually love others from a cup overflowing with that kind of love, we must bask in, and be secure in the never-ending love of God that changes us forever.

The point is this: Jesus is coming much sooner than we think, so we must use every opportunity to examine our own hearts for character qualities—attitudes and behaviors that will disqualify us from our eternal reward. It’s time to bow down to Him in true worship, asking Him what He wants to accomplish through us while there’s still time. We need to say yes to whatever He asks us to do, knowing we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We need to put away the petty disputes and jealousy or one-upmanship that’s ravaging the body of Christ, and choose to repent, asking forgiveness of our brothers and sisters, then loving them with the love of Christ. Can you imagine how that alone would transform the church, allowing it to move in power—in signs and wonders as never before?

It’s time to put feet to our prayers and unite with those of like precious faith to win the souls God has prepared—people who will suddenly have ears to hear when they’ve rejected the gospel time after time for years. We must look with the eyes of heaven, to find these people, instead of writing them off with this line: “Oh, I’ve talked to that person before, and he outright rejected Him, so I need to go elsewhere.” No, keep returning to the one who rejected and lovingly say it again. For many people, ***it actually takes seven exposures to the gospel before they accept the incredible truth that they need a Savior.***

The fields are white unto harvest, so it’s time to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to our King, to be Jesus with skin on to the lost, whose eyes are opening to the truth that things can’t go on as they are. They’re beginning to see that they’re rushing fast toward an eternity that terrifies them, and they’re desperate for answers. He will do the work of convicting and convincing them as we simply submit to God, and allow the Holy Spirit to flow through us. So go in power, claiming them for the Kingdom, refusing to be afraid, knowing the battle has already been won, if we will but accept the challenge to obey His leading, because He’s prepared the way before us, and will, therefore, do the work to bring in that amazing harvest of dear souls.

It’s time to reject the devil’s lie that you’re only one person, and that you have no power or influence to win souls. You were created by an all-powerful God, to move in the power of the Holy Spirit, following His leading, to accomplish a supernatural feat—changing the destiny of those around you from hell to heaven. Now is the time to take courage as never before! Today is

the day of salvation, and many are waiting for someone to come, so do it now! Go and tell them about Jesus while there's still time!

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