



CLASS 1: Persecution

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, before whom all in heaven and earth shall bow, grant courage that all who are persecuted for Your sake may confess Your saving name in the face of any opposition from a world hostile to the Gospel. Help them to remember the long line of Your faithful witnesses who endured persecution and even faced death rather than dishonor You. By Your Spirit, strengthen them to confess You before all, knowing that You will confess them before Your Father in heaven; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God's Children Have Always Endured Persecution.

Since the beginning of time, God's children have always endured persecution. There are many examples of this throughout the Scriptures. Read the following Scriptures to see the pattern.

Exodus 1:8-22

Daniel 3:15-20

Daniel 6:7-17

Acts 7:54-8:1

What are the common themes in these readings?

Jesus Tells His Followers To Expect Persecution.

Bearing the Cross is part of following Jesus. Jesus warns His Church that they will be persecuted.

Matthew 5:10-12

What does Jesus say is the reason for persecution?

Jesus Shows that Increasing Persecution is a Sign That His Coming is Near.

Matthew 24:1-14

There are some who believe that the Church will not be present on earth for the "Tribulation." However, this is not what Jesus is saying. The presence of the Church on earth is the *cause* of tribulation. What are some of the things that Jesus says will happen to those who love Him?



REFLECTION:

- There is much persecution in the world today, often at the hands of governments or other religions. Discuss the persecution of the Church today throughout the world. What is occurring? Why do you think much of this is not reported by the press? Name some governments and religions who are inflicting persecution on the Church.
- Does persecution have to be physical? Are Christians in our Country being persecuted today? If so, how?
- How does Jesus tell us to respond to persecution as His own? What promises are attached?

RESOURCES:

Internet

The Voice of the Martyrs, www.persecution.net

Persecution: International Christian Concern www.persecution.org

CLASS 2: Persecution Today

Opening Prayer

Merciful and holy Father, remember in Your unfailing love those who suffer now for the name of Christ. Strengthen them for a good confession, and uphold them by Your Spirit. Look in Your mercy on all who are entrusted with civil authority here and in all places throughout the world. Make them bold to stand against and fight every injustice. Especially bring to an end this widespread destruction of the fundamental human right to worship freely, according to the dictates of conscience. “Grant peace, we pray, in mercy, Lord; Peace in our time, O send us! For there is none on earth but You, None other to defend us. You only, Lord, can fight for us. Amen” (LSB 778). In Jesus’ holy and precious name we beg it. Amen!

The Purpose of Persecution

The Lord allows persecution to happen for several reasons. Read the following passages:

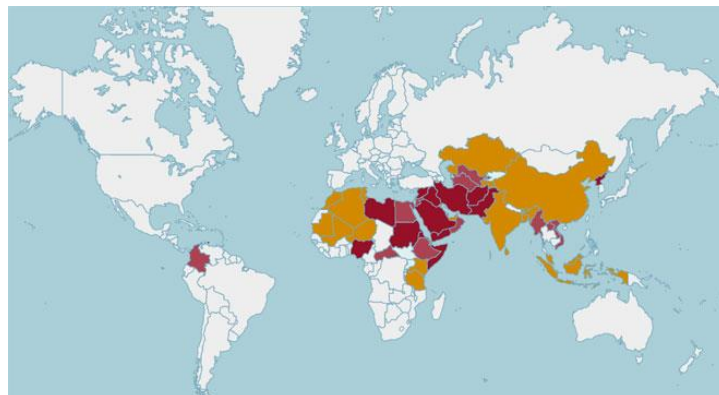
- Matthew 11:28
- Luke 21:20-28
- 1 Corinthians 4:11-13
- Revelation 2:10

How does persecution strengthen faith?

In the previous lesson we learned that the Church has always been persecuted. Read **Matthew 24:9-13**. What promise does Jesus attach to persecution?

Sources of Persecution Today:

- **Governmental:**





- According to The Pew Research Center, over 75% of the world's population live in areas with severe religious restrictions. Many of these people are Christians. Also, according to the United States Department of State, Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Extreme Persecution: North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Maldives, Pakistan, Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea, Libya, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Viet Nam, Qatar, Turkmenistan, Laos, Egypt, Myanmar, Brunei, Columbia, Jordan and Oman.
- Moderate Persecution: India, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Bhutan, Algeria, Mali, Palestinian Territories, United Arab Emirates, Mauritania, China, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Bahrain, Comoros, Kenya, Morocco, Tajikistan, Djibouti, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Niger.

The United States

While all people have a Constitutional right to worship, restrictions are appearing:

- Restrictions on prayer, gathering together (California University Systems new ruling not recognizing religious clubs on their campuses).
- Penalties for going against the “moral grain” of society –Robert and Cynthia Gifford of Schaghticoke, NY were fined \$13,000 by the State Division of Human Rights for refusing to marry a lesbian couple this summer.
- Traditional, Biblically centered churches are under constant fire for being “bigoted, narrow, unscientific, “meteorite worshipers.”
- Where do you think this is going?

Persecution of Christians by Religious Groups

- Atheism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Secular Humanism
- Satanism and Paganism

What should the Church’s response be to this? What is this saying to the Church today? What is the hope that remains for us?