

**Text: Ac 23.12-15**

For our afternoon message we are using the same text as this morning, but I want to use it to set the theme. I'm only going to read the first bit of the text. Our title is:

*Causes of Persecution*

Read Ac 23.12-15

Our text is an extreme example, with men committed to kill another man in cold blood, even if it might mean some of them would also die in the attempt (remember that Paul would go to the Council under guard of Roman soldiers).

That is particularly complete commitment to a cause.

As I was thinking about ways to look at our passage, I came across a list in one of my reference works that spoke of the causes of persecution, as found in the Bible. I thought it might be instructive to just go through that list and think about why men can become so violent against Christianity.

We should say that sometimes people of other faiths have also suffered persecution, animus isn't exclusively against Christianity. Most notably, Jews have also suffered, but their suffering isn't unrelated to Christianity.

In addition, some Christians have suffered at the hands of others who profess Christianity. This is all the more troubling, but I think in it we can find (mostly) those who persecute others don't exhibit a genuine Christian testimony.

Despite these other examples, as we trace out the causes that bring persecution on Christianity, I think we can clearly see the reason the Lord came in the first place: men are desperate sinners!

**Proposition: The reasons for persecution mentioned in Scripture point to one reason men resent Christianity.**

I'm leaving you with a "cliff-hanger" proposition, but maybe you can guess the one reason as we go along on this list.

## I. Mistaken zeal (Acts 13:50. Acts 26:9–11)

Ac 13.50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

Ac 26.9-11 ¶ “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>10</sup> “And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.<sup>11</sup> “And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

## II. Ignorance of God (John 16:1–3)

Jn 16.1-3 ¶ “These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling.<sup>2</sup> “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.<sup>3</sup> “These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me.

## III. Hatred of Christ (1 Thess. 2:15, Rev. 12:13)

1Th 2.15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,

Rev 12.13 ¶ And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *child*.

## IV. Hatred of God (John 15:20–23)

Jn 15.20-23 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.<sup>21</sup> “But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.<sup>22</sup> “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.<sup>23</sup> “He who hates Me hates My Father also.

## V. Preaching the cross (Gal. 5:11, Gal. 6:12)

Gal 5.11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.

Gal 6.12 Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

## VI. Godly living (Matt. 13:21, 2 Tim. 3:12)

Mt 13.21 yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

2 Tim 3.12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

## VII. Man's sinful nature (Gal. 4:29)

Gal 4.29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also.

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** The reasons for persecution mentioned in Scripture point to one reason men resent Christianity.

The one reason? "We will not have this man to rule over us!"

Men oppose Christianity because they will not submit to the rule of God. That is the first sin. That is behind Adam taking the fruit in the garden. That is the essential contest between God and man: who will rule?

I guarantee you, this contest is no contest. God will win.

Will you admit that now, or when you lie defeated at his feet, forced, finally, to submit to his will?