

Text: 1 Pt 4.1-6

I'm not sure how to start tonight. I have been unhappy with my Wednesday messages for the last month. Each time, I have written a message that seems coherent, only to find it extremely difficult to preach.

What can be the cause?

In this case, as I look back, I think I was too rushed with other events and only studied ahead one or two verses at a time. I found lots of data in my commentaries, and spent most of my time trying to give you my research instead of writing a sermon.

At least, I think that was the problem.

Tonight, I want to slow down, look at this problem passage as a whole, and try to give you a message that takes the teaching of the text and gives you something of real relevance to our life today.

First, before we get into the message, I want to establish the theme of Christian reaction to persecution.

Read 1 Pt 3.8-9, 13-14

- The goal of discipleship: kindly, humble Christians (8-9)
- The expectation of discipleship: hardly any persecution (13-14)

Why should this be the expectation of Christians? If you prove zealous for what is good, who would want to harm you? You give no cause if you live righteously.

Notice that v. 14 transitions to persecution though: "if you should suffer..." — despite a godly life, persecution remains a possibility.

Proposition: The Lord's death is a real substitutionary atonement, but it also provides spiritual armament so we can conquer when under persecution.

I. Understanding persecution (4-5)

A. The persecutors: "the Gentiles"

1. These are those with whom you once ran (3)
2. They think the way you run now is strange (4)

B. The nature of persecution ("malign" 4)

1. They "blaspheme" ("malign" = "blaspheme")

2. Remember that the “you” isn’t in the text
3. They are attacking God (blaspheming): but you are the closest target
4. You identify with God by your testimony and your life
5. Your new ways are strange: they blaspheme

C. Their rationale for persecution

1. You do not run *with them*: you’ve made a line of demarcation
2. Your new life is holy, honorable, and good (see 3.8-9)
3. Your very presence brings conviction to the consciences of Gentiles

D. The range of persecution

1. Words (“blaspheme”)
2. Deeds: done to death (“judged in the flesh as men” v. 6)

Persecution comes from men who will not submit to God and can range from words to deeds of violence.

II. Persisting through persecution (2-3, 6)

A. The way we are to live: for the will of God (2)

1. “Will of God” sums up 3.8-9
2. “Will of God” contradicts “lusts of men”
3. New way of life, and a *persistent* way of life
 - a. The word “rest of the time in the flesh” = “the rest in-flesh-daily-life time” — in other words, “the rest of your biography”
 - b. The “rest of your biography” comes last in sentence

“so that no longer for the lusts of men but unto the will of God [is] the rest of your biography”

This is the thing, when we come to Christ, he transforms our daily life and we are to live it out for the will of God

B. We already had enough time living for ourselves (3)

1. The old biography was already full

2. Consequently, the new biography remains, and we are to fill it up for God

C. We are to live for the will of God even into eternity (6)

1. The gospel came to us for this purpose
2. Even if we die (“judged in the flesh as men”)
3. The gospel resurrected us when we were already dead, so that when we die, we can live forever for the will of God

This is the point of persisting through persecution:

- Suppose you endure mocking and scorn: persist living your biography to the will of God
- Suppose your experience of persecution ends in death: persist right through to heaven — “live in the spirit according to the will of God”

III. Power under persecution (1-2)

Well, it is easy for us to say this, isn't it? But how to do?

A. Arm yourself (1)

1. You are to pick up arms to live out your life for the will of God
2. The essential ammunition: “the same purpose” Christ had when he suffered in the flesh

B. Suffering in the flesh = suffering unto death (1)

1. That is what happened to the Lord
2. He “set his face like a flint” (Isa 50.7)
3. One who suffers in the flesh (*i.e.* dies) has ceased from sin
4. Jesus was determined to endure suffering right to its bitter end

that was the resolution he came to through the prayers in the Garden

Heb 12.2 echoes the sentiment

Heb 12.2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

C. Taking up this armor enables the “rest of your biography” in the will of God (2)

Conclusion:

Proposition: The Lord’s death is a real substitutionary atonement, but it also provides spiritual armament so we can conquer when under persecution.

That is the message of this passage: live for the will of God right through to the end, and arm yourself with the same mind that was in Christ Jesus so you can succeed.