

When Your Christian Faith is Under Attack...

- I. Recognize who you are up against
- II. Realize who you are connected to
- III. Anticipate what God will do for you

¹²Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Tell me, would you say that, these days, it's easy to be a Christian? Or would you say that there are times when it feels like your Christian faith, what you believe, what you hold to be true, is increasingly coming under attack? Do you feel like your ability to openly express your beliefs with your words and actions is becoming more and more difficult? Are there forces that are actively opposed to what you stand for as a Bible believing Christian? Or to put it another way, is there such a thing as persecution of Christians in 2026?

Well, how you answered that last question may depend on where you live. If you live in North Korea where merely owning a Bible can get you in prison, tortured, or even executed. Or in Nigeria we're extreme groups like the Boko Haram have slaughtered entire Christian congregations gathered for worship, or in Iran or Pakistan where converts to Christianity are charged with blasphemy and regarded as a threat to national security—in these countries and many more, the persecution of Christians is very real, and results in the death of thousands, if not tens or hundreds of thousands of believers.

But what about here in the United States? Is there such a thing as the persecution of Christians today? Well, again, maybe that depends on how you define persecution. Are Christians being literally beheaded in public square? No. But are biblical doctrines being openly opposed by people on social media? Are there university students being ridiculed by their professors because of their views on the origin of the universe? Are there people who regard your Christian faith not as a reason to respect you, but rather as a reason to despise you, to regard you as intolerant or judgmental? Are there times when that kind of hostility toward your faith

makes you want to just kind of clam up, hide what you believe, or worse, give in, and abandon your faith altogether?

My friends, if there are times when you feel like Christianity in general, and your Christian faith in particular, is under attack, take heart, because the apostle Peter has something to say to you. Here in our text for today, Peter is writing to Christians who were enduring a great deal of persecution. He is writing during a time when Roman emperors like Nero were crucifying Christians or throwing them to the lions, or dipping them in tar and using them as torches to light their courtyards. While you and I may not be enduring that kind of torture, (at least not yet, by God's grace), the fact is, our faith is still under attack by forces inside of us and around us. And so, Peter's words still apply to us today. Our theme for today:

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First, recognize who you are up against. Peter begins with the words, *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* In other words, as Christians, we shouldn't think that it is unusual that our faith is under attack. The fact is, we are up against three distinct, yet interconnected, enemies. St. Peter writes, for example, *Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* There is our first enemy. Satan is not a figment of our imagination. He's not a comic book character. He is the very real enemy of God and therefore the enemy of God's people. His goal is not to merely hurt us, to inflict pain into our lives, (although he can certainly do that as he did in the case of Job). His goal is to devour us, that is, to separate us from God forever. And he does that by getting us to fear, love or trust in anything other than the true God. The second enemy we face is the one inside of us, that is, our sinful nature. Each one of us is born with an Old Adam, that wars against everything that Jesus stands for. Our sinful nature is predisposed to sins like pride and self-righteousness and at the same time, fear and anxiety, all of which eat away at saving faith. I don't know about you, but sometimes I feel like the biggest opponent to my Christian faith is not the people out there, it's the person in here. It's me. Paul said it well, "The good that I want to do, I don't do, and the evil I don't want to do, this I keep on doing."

Now, does that mean that there aren't also people out there who are opposed to what you and I believe? No, there are plenty of them. Unbelievers in the world are, by definition, opposed to God. Or more specifically, are opposed to a God who demands perfect obedience to his commandments, but also gives perfect righteousness to the worst of sinners purely by faith in Jesus. By nature, human beings hate that kind of God and therefore they hate those who believe in that God. Isn't that what Jesus told his disciples in John 15? *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."*

So, there is the first thing to keep in mind when you feel like your faith is under attack. Don't be surprised by it. Instead, recognize who you are up against. The devil, the world, and your sinful flesh are not going to make living as a Christian easy. In fact, what did St Paul write in his second letter to Timothy? *Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)*

Fortunately, that's not the end of the story. Even if we are enduring persecution, even if our faith is being assaulted, the fact is, as Christians, we're not alone. Or to put it another way, when your Christian faith is under attack, yes I. Recognize who you are up against, but more

importantly, II. Realize who you are connected to. Isn't that right? I mean, if your faith is being attacked, if you're enduring persecution because you are a Christian, well, that says something about your relationship to Christ, doesn't it? It says that there is connection between you and your Lord, a connection that other people see. And if the world identifies you as a follower of Jesus, it only stands to reason that they might treat you like they once treated Jesus. What did Jesus say to his disciples? "*Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*" (John 15:20)

In fact, here in our text, Peter talks about how Christians, in effect, suffer alongside of Jesus. Peter writes, *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ.* Now, obviously, when Peter says that we are participating in the sufferings of Christ, he doesn't mean that we were nailed to the cross along with Jesus. He simply means that we are suffering BECAUSE we are Christians. We are suffering because people are identifying us with Christ. And that's a good thing. In fact, do you remember what happened to the apostles in Acts chapter 5, when they were called in front of the Sanhedrin and flogged because they were preaching about Jesus? What does Scripture say? *The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus.* (Acts 5:41) In fact, here in our text, the apostle Peter expresses a very similar sentiment when he writes, *If you are insulted because the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of Glory and of God rests on you.* (1 Peter 4:14). In the end, isn't that what we all want to know? We want to know that by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts, we are blessed because we are connected to Christ.

And yet, the persecution we face as Christians not only evidence of our connection to Christ. It's also evidence of our connection to millions of Christians around the world. When we realize that there are others whose faith is being attacked, others who are taking a stand for the truth, it serves as an encouragement to us, to realize that we are not alone in this battle. Here in our text, Peter applies that fact to our ongoing fight against the Devil. Peter tells us to *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.* Right? You are not alone in this fight.

That kind of reminds me of when I was back in high school and it's the end of the semester. Time for that big final exam. And it's hard. And it's long. And I'm sweating it out, wondering if I'm ever going to get to the end of the test, feeling like it's me against that piece of paper. And then I look around and see all these other people taking the same exam, and they all look like they're in pain. They are grimacing. They are grinding away. And I realize I'm not the only one enduring this trial. We're all in this together. (It might not change my grade. But it's nice to know that I'm not the only one taking the test.) Well, so it is when it's our faith that's being tested. It's nice to know that all around the world there are believers who are carrying a cross in one way or another.

So, when your faith is under attack, First, recognize who you're up against. This is a spiritual battle against the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Second, realize who you are connected to, namely, Christ and your fellow believers. And maybe the most important of all, finally, Anticipate what God will do for you.

I suppose that someone might say that up until this point, Peter's message has been a little hard to hear. You know, how Christians are going to be persecuted and how the devil is out to devour us, etc. But notice how Peter balances that reality with what God promises to do for us in the future. For example, Peter writes, *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand,*

that he may lift you up in due time. That he may lift you up. There is God's ultimate goal for our lives, to lift us up, to exalt us, to bring us into eternal glory, where we will live and rule with him forever. Now, maybe that won't happen immediately. Maybe there will be a gap between now and then. But as Peter says, *he will lift us up in due time.* Whether that time is the moment we breathe our last breath, or the moment Jesus returns in glory, you can be sure that it will be at exactly the right time.

But now, maybe you are thinking, "What if that final exaltation is still a long way down the line? What am I supposed to do in the meantime? I mean, the thought of living in a world that seems to be getting more and more ungodly is stressing me out. I don't want to even think about how much worse it could get." If that thought has ever crossed your mind, then St. Peter has a word of advice for us all. He says, *cast all your anxiety on God, because he cares for you.* What a beautiful invitation that is. God, in effect, says, "You don't need to carry your anxiety. Instead, you can cast it. Throw it on my shoulders," God says. "Let me take care of your worries. Let me take care of your future." What did Jesus say? "*Don't worry about tomorrow. Tomorrow will worry about itself.*" (Matthew 6:34) Or in the words of the Psalmist, "*Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you.*" (Psalm 55:22) You can count on God to get you through.

My friends, there's that reality of living as Christians in a world opposed to Christ. On the one hand, our faith is going to come under attack from forces within and from forces without. Our faith is going to be tested. God never said that it was going to be easy to live as one of his disciples. Instead, he said we'd all have a cross to carry. On the other hand, even as we are going through these trials, we know that we have something far better waiting for us, bought and paid for by the blood of the Lamb. How did St. Paul put it? "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18) And again, "*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*"

My friends, that's the sure and certain hope we have as Christians. That even if our faith is tested, we can be sure that in the end, it's not the strength of our faith that matters, it's the object of our faith. It's the person in whom we are putting our faith, namely a God who is good, and powerful and most importantly, gracious. St. Peter sums it up well in the final verse of our text. *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.* And for that, we can echo the words of Peter himself, namely, *to God be the power forever and ever. Amen.*