

13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;16 ¶ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

The first thing we must realize in our text this morning is what it does not say.

Even though the scripture says “who is there to harm you” it does not mean that we may not or will not ever be harmed by someone who opposes us. If this were so then God would have to ask forgiveness from countless numbers of believers in Christ through the centuries who have been maimed, tortured, murdered and killed because of their faith in Christ. Here is a recent example.

Pastors Attacked in Bangalore, One Held Hostage

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INDIA – On March 16, 2007 Pastor John Selvan and Brother Vijay were attacked by more than 30 Hindu extremists when they were returning home from conducting prayer meetings in Bhelahalli, Bangalore, India.

“They [the extremists] severely beat the men with sticks, axes and other weapons. The extremists are still holding Brother Vijay, the motorbike and their cell phones,” reported The Voice of the Martyrs contacts working in India.

The Hindu extremists are demanding Pastor Selvan bring the senior pastor of the church to them or “face serious consequences.” Pray for the safety of Vijay and for Christians in India who continue to face difficult and dangerous situations because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

The fifth day of November, about the year of our Lord 1560, Mr. Nicholas Burton, citizen sometime of London, and merchant, dwelling in the parish of Little St. Bartholomew, peaceably and quietly, following his traffic in the trade of merchandise, and being in the city of Cadiz, in the party of Andalusia, in Spain, there came into his lodging a Judas, or, as they term them, a familiar of the fathers of Inquisition; who asking for the said Nicholas Burton, feigned that he had a letter to deliver into his own

hands; by which means he spake with him immediately. And having no letter to deliver to him, then the said promoter, or familiar, at the motion of the devil his master, whose messenger he was, invented another lie, and said he would take lading for London in such ships as the said Nicholas Burton had freighted to lade, if he would let any; which was partly to know where he loaded his goods, that they might attach them, and chiefly to protract the time until the sergeant of the Inquisition might come and apprehend the body of the said Nicholas Burton; which they did incontinently. He then well perceiving that they were not able to burden or charge him that he had written, spoken, or done any thing there in that country against the ecclesiastical or temporal laws of the same realm, boldly asked them what they had to lay to his charge that they did so arrest him, and bade them to declare the cause, and he would answer them. Notwithstanding they answered nothing, but commanded him with threatening words to hold his peace, and not speak one word to them.

And so they carried him to the filthy common prison of the town of Cadiz where he remained in irons fourteen days amongst thieves.

All which time he so instructed the poor prisoners in the Word of God, according to the good talent which God had given him in that behalf, and also in the Spanish tongue to utter the same, that in that short space he had well reclaimed several of those superstitious and ignorant Spaniards to embrace the Word of God, and to reject their popish traditions.

Which being known unto the officers of the Inquisition, they conveyed him laden with irons from thence to a city called Seville, into a more cruel and straiter prison called Triana, where the said fathers of the Inquisition proceeded against him secretly according to their accustomed cruel tyranny, that never after he could be suffered to write or speak to any of his nation: so that to this day it is unknown who was his accuser.

Afterward, the twentieth of December, they brought the said Nicholas Burton, with a great number of other prisoners, for professing the true Christian religion, into the city of Seville, to a place where the said inquisitors sat in judgment which they called auto, with a canvas coat, whereupon in divers parts was painted the figure of a huge devil, tormenting a soul in a flame of fire, and on his head a copping tank of the same work. His tongue was forced out of his mouth with a cloven stick fastened upon it, that he should not utter his conscience and faith to the people, and so he was set with another Englishman of Southampton, and divers other condemned men for religion, as well Frenchmen as Spaniards, upon a scaffold over against the said Inquisition, where their sentences and judgments were read and pronounced against them.

And immediately after the said sentences given, they were carried from there to the place of execution without the city, where they most cruelly burned them, for whose constant faith, God is praised.

This Nicholas Burton by the way, and in the flames of fire, had so cheerful a countenance, embracing death with all patience and gladness, that the tormentors and enemies which stood by, said, that the devil had his soul before he came to the fire; and therefore they said his senses of feeling were past him. Foxes Book of Martyrs Chapter 5

Verse 14 of our text this morning says:

14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

There is always the possibility of suffering for the sake of the righteousness which

Christ has imputed to us as His own people, we the aliens in the strange land who are

to live as good citizens and be good slaves and concerned husbands and respecting wives. We are also to be exceptional in our conduct to one another because of the new kind of people Christ has made us because of His righteousness as we studied last week.

So we may be harmed or killed but we are not to fear it or be intimidated by it.

Remember, Peter was writing to a people who were being prepared for persecution.

It is obvious that Peter has Christ in mind as the perfect example of suffering for wrong doing and not being intimidated and being troubled and being ready to give a defense to everyone to give an account of the hope that was before Him with gentleness and reverence, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "This day you will be in Paradise with me" and "It is finished." All of these are words of reverence and hope.

And we have been born again to a living hope.

There can be no doubt that Peter and those to whom he was writing understood that being born again is a matter of the grace of God and that being so they could be encouraged that even their present circumstances and the oncoming persecution were also in the sovereign purposes of God for them by His grace.

But Peter is not just rejoicing in the fact of being born again. Being born again brings along a hope for these aliens who are facing persecution. Paul taught the early church that all men were once alienated from God, separated from God without hope and without help in this present world. But now as aliens in the world who are joined to God by adoption, in Christ, we have hope. We have a hope that is absolute and certain, a hope that is the blessed hope, a hope that is grounded in the person of Christ and it is the promise of everlasting life in the kingdom of God. No longer do we have to muse about what the purpose of life is, no longer do we have to search for meaning about life where there is none.

We have the blessed hope, we have the promise of God in Christ that we are His and He is ours and that Christ is coming again to consummate His kingdom, to bring the

kingdom to its completion and fullness for eternity and we are the members of that kingdom if we have been born again to this hope. But not just a hope, but a living hope through the resurrection of Christ.

Our Christ lived as the God-man and suffered and died but He rose again and all of our hope is alive in Him, the breathing living Redeemer of our souls, our Savior, our precious New Covenant, our Lord and the King of our lives Jesus Christ.

We too can then be ready to give an answer of hope with reverence and gentleness as we sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts.

Let's not misunderstand this idea. Christ is Lord the moment we are regenerated and made new creatures in Christ. We cannot make Christ holy, which is the meaning of the word here. He is already holy, he is already set apart as different from all others. He is already hallowed. So how do I sanctify Christ in my heart. I do this by exalting him for who he is and what he has done for those who are his own people. I believe and depend on every act of his for my benefit and every promise he has given regardless of circumstances and here particularly when being persecuted unjustly. I remember to live by faith and in faithfulness in obedience unto Christ and act as Christ did when he was a lamb being led to the slaughter and in this we can prove and keep a good conscience because our life has been lived in a right manner before men therefore proving our innocence in spite of unjust slanders against us that may even lead to our death. This, when final judgement comes will be an indictment against those who may revile us as it is used in judgement against those who revile Christ in the same way whether they were there that day at Calvary or do so today by denying who Christ is.

Let's revisit some of the events leading to Jesus death and then make sure we do not feel sorry for ourselves when we are treated no better than the one who died for our souls.

Mark 14:53-59 "They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the

fire. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, "I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man." Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

We are all familiar with show trials. They have been one of the most prominent features of the 20th century. There was Nuremberg when German Nazi leaders were tried and condemned. They were seen by the victorious allies as the federal heads of National Socialism. There were the trials in Russia of anyone suspected of not supporting Stalin and the party line. There were the thousands of trials in China at the time of the cultural revolution when farmers, teachers, village blacksmiths, civil servants, doctors and businessmen were intimidated, harangued, and shamed for their alleged sympathies to anti-Communist subversion. There was no possibility of a not-guilty verdict in any of those trials.

But the trial of Jesus is the most ridiculous of all, not concerning that it was part of God's redemptive purpose and history but from the view of man.

Geoff Thomas says this:

Here, in the scene of our text, we have specks of dust passing judgment on the immense, eternal Lord of the cosmos, the one without whom was not anything made that was made. Mere mortals, sustained moment by moment by the living God, the one in whom they live and move and have their being, are putting God in the dock, and they are passing judgment on him - "what do we think of him? What shall we do with him? Shall he live or not?" Sinners are evaluating the Holy, Holy, Holy Lord. They are searching for evidence with which to condemn the Ancient of Days. Golgotha and all that surround it is the abyss of man's quest for self-justification. You hear it on the lips of sinners from time to time; "I'll tell God what I think of him when I see him. How could God do a thing like that to me and my family? How could anyone believe in a God of love when these terrible things happen?" Calvary is the logical consequence of that vain mentality.

These accusers did not want justice, They wanted a guilty verdict. They wanted the intruder out of the lives. Jesus as the New Covenant lawgiver was challenging every bit of tradition these power hungry members of the theater of piety promoted themselves by. Nothing they had offered to the people could compete with what Jesus was offering in his teaching even though it required repentance and faith.

He offered an assurance of forgiveness of sins and an unknown kind of rest that

depended on him alone. The lifestyle that he required of one of his disciples was a radical departure from the theater of piety so well established by the religious hypocrites. He pointed out the sins of the religious hypocrites and forgave the sins of those whom they despised. He received accolades and shouts of Hosanna when he entered Jerusalem on an ass and the words Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord gave him Messianic recognition. No wonder he was hated.

This is why then and now, no one can be neutral about Christ. He is who he is or he is not who he is.

Not only were the accusers hypocrites but the trials were a sham.

Firstly, capital trials (i.e. a trial that contained the death penalty) had to be held during the day; this trial was being held around midnight. Secondly, a capital trial couldn't be held on the eve of one of the great feasts in Jerusalem. There was a charged atmosphere in the city at times like that, not suitable at all for the deliberate processes of law and order, but this trial was on the eve of a feast. There should have been no executions on the Passover, but the Passover lambs were being sacrificed all over the city while Jesus was taken and crucified. Thirdly, the trial should have been held in the law court, that is a building called the Chamber of Hewn Stone, but Jesus' trial was held in the home of the chief priests, one of the most imposing houses in Jerusalem with a large courtyard; it was a private dwelling, not a court of law. You understand the importance of a building where there is some neutrality and concern for truth and righteousness? You realise the danger of having a trial in the atmosphere of a home where the occupants judged the man being tried as their enemy, don't you? It was from an upper room in this private dwelling that our Lord was taken downstairs and flogged against one of the pillars of the villa. Fourthly, a trial in a capital case must begin, said Jewish law, by hearing the case for the defence, but there were no lawyers and no case for the defence in Jesus' trial. Fifthly, if false witnesses spoke and told lies in a trial in which a man might be condemned to death then, according to the Deuteronomic prohibition, their own lives would be

forfeited. Here, we are told, “Many testified falsely against him . . . their statements did not agree” (v.56), and yet they walked away without a rebuke. Sixthly, if an accused man was found guilty and sentenced to death there had to be a second sitting of the court the next day after men had slept on their verdict to think again, and confirm it, or reconsider. Seventhly, Rabbinical law forbade forcing someone to incriminate themselves, and yet this is exactly what the chief priest attempted to do with our Lord when he put him under an oath.

Why was it important to do everything by the book? Because the Sanhedrin could only function with the permission of Rome, and the imperial power had taken from them the right to capital punishment without the Governor’s consent. The high priest had to establish the guilt of the prisoner without contradiction or controversy, and convey the results of their verdict to Pilate because the Roman governor was the one who carried out the execution. So our Saviour was made to undergo such miscarriages of justice.

“Bring him to see me,” said Annas, and they did. That there should be such decadence in the priesthood of Israel was shocking. The party of the Sadducees was centred on the temple; they who did not believe in the resurrection of the body, and their leadership was this power-hungry family of Annas. What had happened to the tribe of Levi? Why weren’t the descendants of Aaron wearing the garments of the High Priest? Hadn’t God made that clear in Scripture? It was gone, like so much else of biblical religion. The whole priesthood was riddled with corruption and held in contempt by the populace. It was no surprise in the parable of the good Samaritan when Jesus said that a priest saw a wounded man and walked by on the other side. “Typical,” thought his hearers. Chief priests were in fact regularly assassinated by rival Jews. The office of chief priest had been made captive by one family and they wouldn’t let go of it without bloodshed. It wouldn’t be long before a mob was to murder Caiaphas’ son when he took over the office from him. There had been 28 chief priests in the previous century.

There is so much more we could say about the illegality of the trials and the proven wicked character of the men who tried Jesus. But in the sense of using this to illustrate our text this morning we can conclude with this.

There stood Jesus enduring all of this, his wrists tied, his face stinging from the punch, the hatred of Caiaphas towards him very plain, hearing this parade of lies about himself. Remember that all this, down to the minutest details, is what God his Father had prescribed for him. Peter at Pentecost said that Jesus was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. So here you have, as Paul said, God not sparing his own Son (Roms. 8:32). Remember that Jesus of Nazareth was ever God's only begotten Son before the world was; the Son in whom he delighted, in whom he was well-pleased, and yet God did not spare him. He was in his divine nature co-equal and co-eternal with his Father, possessing inherently every perfection of Deity; yet still God did not spare him, the one "brought up with him," "daily his delight"; yet God did not spare him from such a humiliating trial.

Our text in verse 17 says:

17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

This is no less that what Christ did for us as we will see in verse 18 next week. But it goes further because it leads to the great and glorious resurrection on the third day according to the Scriptures and in that is our blessed hope for he is the first born from the dead so that all who are his can follow after him, not into eternal judgement but the full and final completion of the work of grace that saved us from our sin for "in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon by his blood."