

Sunday April 28th sermon: "Our Comfort in Persecution with Christ --
The God of All Comforts (Pt 54)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

Romans 8:17-18; John 15:18-27

All who trust in Jesus have been baptized into Christ by the Holy Ghost, and therefore baptized into His death, into His resurrection, and into His suffering and glory!

We died with Christ at the cross. We are joined with Christ in His dying, and in His resurrection, and in His inheritance. This all has profound implications upon our lives in this world.

Since we are thereby dead to sin in Christ, we ought not to continue in sin any longer, even though there is no longer any judgment left for our sin. We are therefore to yield our bodies as servants of righteousness unto holiness.

Christ works in us good things, which God before ordained that we should walk in them! These works are not our own, but rather wrought by Christ in us and upon us.

Our baptism into Christ creates a union between all the saints and God. This is that union that Christ prayed for the night He was betrayed. This union is principally fulfilled by our union in Christ's death and resurrection. We are all one in Christ and with the Father and Spirit also!

The saints are also joined together with Christ in persecutions and sufferings in this life. Christ promised that we would be persecuted.

But Christ also linked that persecution with our eternal life to come at the end! His teaching on this matter tracks well with Paul's exhortation, that if we suffer with Christ, we will also be glorified with Him.

In Luke 21, Christ outlined the persecution that believers would suffer. He described the catastrophe of the destruction of the Jewish temple. That temple was the very core of Jewish society and religion, yet it would soon be utterly destroyed. Many Jewish believers would be cast down by that, if they had not managed to shift their gaze off of its rituals and rich history, onto the finished work of Christ, and the message of the book of Hebrews about the superiority of Christ.

While the temple's destruction doesn't affect believers today, yet there are similar examples, of beautiful buildings, and stained-glass windows, and costumes, and incense, and rich histories, that some Christians clasp hold of, and will not leave, even when those organizations are apostate. But little by little, the Lord will overthrow and cast down those as well, and such is done for the sanctification and cleansing of His people!

Then Christ warned of great troubles in the world, like wars and earthquakes and famines, and in these, the Lord's people will suffer.

Next, Christ warned of personal betrayals by family and friends, and outright persecution for those who believe in Jesus. Christ promises that He will give us the words to speak as a testimony at the proper time by the Holy Ghost.

Christ even warns the saints that some of us will be put to death for His sake.

But then He promises us, that in all this, not an hair of our heads shall perish! He will raise up all of His people, and vindicate us completely, and restore that which was harmed and taken away, with new glorified bodies like unto His!

Finally, Christ instructs all His people to have patience until the end, when all things will most assuredly be set right by His mighty power.

We are joined with Christ in all these sufferings, because we are Christ's! We suffer with Him in this life, but Christ counts it all as done for His name's sake!

This is because the world hated Christ before it hated us. If they would have persecuted Christ, they will persecute His people. That's because they don't know God at all.

Some saints today suffer far worse persecution than do believers in western countries – in China, in North Korea, in Indonesia, in Iran, in Israel, in Saudi Arabia, in many African countries, in far-left liberal countries in Europe, including England, as well as Canada.

Yet we see a rising tide of persecution even in our own country.

The reason Christ gave for this persecution is His revelation of the world's dark wickedness and sin. His powerful works, and His teaching, ripped the mask right off the faces of all sinners, showing who they really are.

Christ is the only perfect man, which places all other people in a very bad light. He kept all the law, while none of us kept it at all.

Christ's substitutionary sacrifice demonstrated God's wrath against our sin, and displayed the wrath that all the lost will soon receive unless they submit to Christ and trust in His Gospel, and in nothing else.

Christ's entire ministry and work and death are insulting to those who do not believe on Him! The very implication that lost men must have a sacrifice to escape their doom crushes their high opinion of themselves.

But in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus encouraged us with these words: "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for yours is the kingdom of heaven! Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake! Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven!"

Christ has thus taught His people, that persecution results in blessing beyond measure, in glory at the resurrection and forever thereafter!

This brings us back around to what Paul wrote in Romans 8: "If we suffer with Christ, we also shall be glorified together with Him! For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are nothing to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us!"

God has greatly comforted us in our suffering, by union with Christ in His suffering, and in His glory even now, and much more forever!

For He has promised us, that not an hair of our heads shall perish!