

Persecution in Early Church History

by Compilations

The sermon explores the historical persecution of early Christians and their unwavering faith amidst suffering.

Duration: 5:03

Scripture: Matthew 6:14-15, Luke 6:37, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Christian Living"

Description

This sermon focuses on the power of forgiveness, emphasizing the importance of forgiving others as God has forgiven us. It explores how harboring unforgiveness can hinder our relationship with God and others, and how choosing to forgive can bring freedom and healing. The sermon also delves into the concept of forgiveness being a commandment from God, not just a suggestion, and how it reflects the love and mercy of Christ.

Transcript

Jesus Christ predicted the persecution of His followers:

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you... if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:18-20)

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." (Matthew 24:9)

Jesus' prophecy was true. For the next 300 years Rome led the worst persecution upon the Christian people. This is the story of the early Church.

Pliny the Younger, governor of Pontus/Bithynia from 111-113 A.D. wrote the following to Emperor Trajan:

"Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians, those who confessed I interrogated a second and third time threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed." (Letters 10.96-97 to Emperor Trajan)

Second-century Roman historian Tacitus describes the Christian persecution in his work annals, Book 15, Chapter 44:

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflated the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace... Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired."

Early Christian apologist and martyr, Justin Martyr (103-165 A.D.), in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew stated:

"Though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but, the more such things happen, the more do others in larger numbers become faithful," (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 110).

Ignatius of Antioch was a first-century student of the original Apostles of Jesus. Ignatius wrote letters while on a final trip to martyrdom in Rome knowing what lay ahead. He then suffered death by being eaten by lions in a Roman colosseum.

"From Syria even to Rome I fight with wild beasts, by land and sea, by night and by day, being bound amidst ten leopards, even a company of soldiers, who only grow worse when they are kindly treated." (Ignatius to the Romans 5).

In an early document called the Martyrdom of Polycarp written by the church of Smyrna to the church of Philomelium we read about Polycarp (69-155 AD), a student of the Apostle John being sentenced to being burnt at the stake. The burning failed and he was stabbed to death by the Romans.

Roman historian Suetonius (76-138 A.D.) documented the early Christian persecution:

"Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." (Life of the Emperor Nero, chapter 16).

Tertullian (160-220 A.D.), an early Christian defender of the doctrine of the Trinity wrote of the brutal Christian persecution:

"The more often we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed." (Tertullian, Part First, apology, chapter 50).

Church historian Eusebius (263-339 A.D.) details the heinous torture inflicted on the Christian people:

"But we must we admire those also who suffered martyrdom in their native land; where thousands of men, women, and children, despising the present life for the sake of the teaching of our Saviour, endured various deaths... numberless other kinds of tortures, terrible even to hear of, were committed to the flames; some were drowned in the sea; some offered their heads bravely to those who cut them off; some died under their tortures, and others perished with hunger. And yet others were crucified; some according to the method commonly employed for malefactors; others yet more cruelly, being nailed to the cross with their heads downward, and being kept alive until they perished on the cross with hunger." (Church History, Book VII, Chapter 8)

Clement of Rome (96 AD) was a first-century elder of the church at Rome who served as the secretary of the elders in his epistle to the Corinthians he mentioned the martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul:

"Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two but numerous labours, and when he had finally suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him. Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee and stoned."

"After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience." (Clement, Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 5).

In our culture we sometimes forget how lucky we are to be able to serve Christ. Keep our ancient brothers/sisters in mind and press on for Christ knowing that we stand on the shoulders of giants having the true faith. God bless.

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