

末世的征兆（中）：一个常常被人遗忘的基督徒期望——马可福音 13:9-13

Signs of the End Times (Part 2) — A Christian Expectation That People Always Forget—Mark 13:9-13

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture Reading: Mark 13:9-13; Hebrews 10:32-39

Mark 13: 9-13(NASB1995)

9 “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. 10 The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. 12 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. 13 You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

- As the saying goes, “The higher the expectations, the greater the disappointment.” When Christians have wrong expectations for their life, they’ll inevitably suffer disappointment and be frustrated with the weakness of their own faith.
- One of the expectations that Christians should have for their lives is found in today's Scripture. Jesus said, “You will be hated by all because of My name” (Mark 13:13). One of the essential Christian expectations, then, is that you will be hated by all.
- Do you have this expectation? Ever had the temptation to use your Christian identity to make others like you? Conversely, have you ever had the courage to risk being hated by others in order to defend the truth?
- Outline
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Source of Persecution—Jews and Gentiles (v.9a)

- Contextual Background: Jesus is talking about the signs of the end times here. Verses 5-8 Jesus mentions three signs of the end times: false christs, international warfare, and natural disasters; and here in verses 9-13 is the fourth: persecution of the faith. Severe persecution of the faith.

Timing of the end times: Jesus was referring specifically to the seven years of tribulation prior to His return, but the principle applies generally to the entire end-time age (cf. previous sermon). Matthew

24:10 states that persecution occurs “at that time” (the Great Tribulation), while Luke 21:12 says it also happens “before all these things” (the entire end-time age).

Concept of the end times: In the broadest sense, the entire church age belongs to the end times (Heb. 1:2); in a slightly narrower sense, the end times can refer to the entire time period of the future return of Jesus—the resurrection and rapture of believers, the seven years of tribulation, after which Jesus returns to earth to set up the millennial kingdom, and finally the eternal new heaven and new earth, (most of the Old Testament end-time prophecies are in this sense); in the narrowest sense, the end times can also refer to the final end, after the Great Tribulation, when the Kingdom of God is established (Mark 13:7). So you could say that we are the ones who are living in the end times and waiting for the final end times.

- “Be on your guard”: a repeated command (vv. 5, 9, 23, 33). The whole end-time message is about maintaining a keen watchfulness, otherwise we will panic, be deceived, and stumble in faith. All the end-time signs can cause faith to stumble—false christs, wars, natural disasters, not to mention persecution of the faith, which is especially prone to cause faith to stumble.

【Principle】 If you are bent on escaping persecution, if you just won't accept being hated by all, then as soon as you face the pressure of persecution, you'll compromise your faith, and you'll violate the Bible and your conscience. If the favor and praise of man is the idol of your heart, then you will find yourself weak and prone to fall in the face of persecution.

- “Courts ... synagogues ... governors and kings”: “Courts” and “synagogues” refer to persecution from the Jews, and “governors and kings” refer to persecution from the gentiles. That’s exactly what the Book of Acts shows us. Christians are persecuted everywhere they go.

The entire church history of 2,000 years is a history of persecution. In the middle of the 16th century, during the reign of Bloody Mary, Christian scholar John Foxe risked his life to write a *Book of Martyrs*, in which he compiled the stories of martyrdom of a great many Christians since the birth of the church into a lengthy biography. With just a little skimming, it becomes clear that the 2,000 years of church history really is a history of persecution.

【Example 1】 In 64 A.D., Emperor Nero blamed the Great Fire of Rome on the Christians and madly persecuted them, throwing some in the amphitheater for hungry beasts to devour, and tying others to stakes to be burned as human torches to lighten up the night.

【Example 2】 In the early second century, when Pliny the Younger, a Roman official, accused the Christians of three crimes—atheism (for not worshiping the Roman gods), cannibalism (for eating and drinking the Lord's body and blood at Communion), and immorality (for loving one another and calling each other brothers and sisters)—and the Roman emperor Trajan ordered that the Christians be put to death for no other reason than that they're Christians.

Significance of Persecution——Gospel Testimony to All Nations (vv.9b-10)

- “As a testimony to them”: Why would God allow His dear children to suffer like this? The reason is in these words: as a testimony to them. Persecution is a great opportunity for Christians to witness, and it is God's perfect will that through persecution the gospel will be spread to the whole world.

【Principal】 On the one hand, persecution scatters Christians so they can go elsewhere to preach the gospel (Acts 8:1, 4); on the other hand, persecution reveals the strength of the Christian faith, which is often much more powerfully seen than in normal circumstances.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” — Tertullian, early church leader

【Example 1】 Many Christians in the New Testament were persecutors before they became Christians—Paul (Acts 9), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), the Roman Praetorian guards (Philippians 1:13), and even Caesar's own household had converts (Philippians 4:22).

【Example 2】 Polycarp, a 2nd century pastor of the church in Smyrna, treated the soldiers who captured him with a meal. When given the opportunity to be free if he denounced Christ, he said, *“For eighty-six years I have served him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and Savior?”*

【Example 3】 Jan Hus, a 15th century European church leader who was condemned as a heretic by Catholic authorities for his opposition to their sale of indulgence and his defense of the authority of the Bible; when they asked him to put on a paper crown with three ugly devils drawn on it, he said, *“My Lord, Jesus Christ, for my sake, wore a crown of thorns; why should not I then, for His sake, wear this light crown, be it ever so ignominious? Truly I will do it willingly.”* When they gave him one last chance before execution to retract what he had taught, he said, *“What I taught with my lips, I will now seal with my blood.”* His faithful example deeply affected Martin Luther some 100 years later.

【Principle】 Such testimony can have two results: on the one hand, it can lead others to the Lord, which is what we hope to see; on the other hand, if someone sees such a powerful testimony and still chooses to harden his heart and resist the Lord, then this testimony will be his condemnation. In a broad sense, every time we evangelize, it is such a double testimony. Of course, both results ultimately glorify God, so we don't have to worry about their rejection.

- “The gospel must first be preached to all the nations”: The original text has an ‘and’ at the beginning of this verse, implying a logical progression from the above. Not only will God use the persecution of believers as a testimony, but this testimony will be carried to the ends of the earth, so that all nations will receive the testimony of the gospel!

【Application】 Some will encounter persecution at home, and others at their workplace, such as from a boss who doesn't fear God. For example, when you risk being fired and say to your boss, “I'm sorry, I can't work on Sunday mornings. My Lord commands me to not forsake gathering with my brothers and sisters for worship;” when you respond in this way to a small persecution at work, it is a testimony to your life of faith. Whether or not they like it is another matter, but as for your relationship with the Lord, this indeed is a testimony of your obedience to following the Lord.

【Clarification】 What does it mean that the gospel “must first be preached to all the nations”? Is it accomplished today? How about in the 1st century? Was it accomplished back then? Is it really right to say Jesus can come at any time? If your eschatology is right, this won't be a problem at all. The end time in this context before which the gospel must be preached to all the nations is the final end, when Jesus comes to earth to establish His kingdom; but the event of Jesus coming to mid-air to rapture believers is the first event of the entire end times, where Jesus did not say the gospel would be preached

to all the nations before this event. So, Jesus' return to rapture believers could definitely happen at any time (I Thess. 4:13-18). If there is any place where the gospel has not been preached then, don't forget that during the seven-year Tribulation, God will send an angel to preach the gospel directly to the whole world (Revelation 14:6).

Strategy in Persecution——Relying on the Spirit-Given Words (v.11)

- “Do not worry beforehand”: Not an excuse for laziness, as if we don't need to prepare diligently for our daily responsibilities of worship. What Jesus is saying is that in the face of persecution, the Holy Spirit will personally give us wisdom to respond to the circumstances.

【Example】 In Acts 23:6, Paul, facing two groups of persecutors, responded with a word of wisdom which immediately caused the persecutors to fight among themselves. Where did such wisdom come from? From the Holy Spirit Himself. It is not prepared in advance.

Severity of Persecution——Being Put to Death by Family (v.12)

- “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child.....”: such things happen all the time in Muslim countries.

【Principle】 When the cost of following Jesus is literally one's life, no one will make a superficial sinner's prayer without a real life commitment. We have many such people in our environment, and one reason is there's so little persecution that many simply don't realize that being a Christian could literally mean the cost of life.

Stretch of Persecution——Enduring to the End for Salvation (v.13)

- “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved”: Everyone must endure to the end of his life; but in context, “to the end” here refers to the end of the 7-year tribulation. The persecution at that time has a definite end—as soon as the seven years end, the Savior will come, and so this is the final endurance. That is why in Revelation it says twice, “Here is the perseverance of the saints,” referring to the final persecution by the Antichrist.

Summary and Application

- Those who cannot obey the Lord in peacetime should not expect to be able to hold fast to the Lord in persecution. If you don't do your best to learn to live by the Spirit now, don't expect to suddenly learn how to do so and witness boldly for the Lord when persecution comes. **So, the application of today's sermon is—obey the Lord daily.**