

In 1865, on Whit Monday, a holiday 7 weeks after Easter, the children of Sabine Baring-Gould's Sunday school were invited to walk in a parade in Yorkshire, England. Baring-Gould thought the children should have a song to sing as they marched carrying their crosses/banners – only he couldn't find an appropriate song. So the night prior, he wrote a song for that's still being sung today.

Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, w/ the cross of Jesus, going on before. Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe; forward into battle, see his banners go.

At the sign of triumph, Satan's host doth flee; on then, Christian soldiers, on to victory! Hell's foundations quiver, at the shout of praise; brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.

Like a mighty army moves the church of God; brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod. We are not divided, all one body we, one in hope and doctrine, one in charity.

Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane, but the church of Jesus constant will remain. Gates of hell can never 'gainst that church prevail; we have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng, blend w/ours
your voices in the triumph song. Glory, laud, and honor unto
Christ the King, this through countless ages men/angels sing.

On a day when we're celebrating our veterans, we're being reminded not just of their service/sacrifice to our nation, but also of the spiritual battle being waged in our land today. It is a battle for life – for decency – for truth – and for eternity.

You therefore, endure hardship, as a good soldier of Christ.

2 Timothy 2:3

Last Sunday, our nation, and our brothers/sisters in Christ in Sutherland Springs, TX, experienced an awful tragedy that reminds us of what we're fighting for as a nation and as followers of Jesus Christ.

As most of you are aware, a lone gunman entered into FBC Sutherland Springs – and under the influence of evil unleashed hate/depravity executing 26 followers of Jesus. In a senseless act of evil – 26 believers gave their lives for the cause of Christ as they stepped into the arms of Jesus.

Throughout this week, as I reflected on this tragedy and the impact it was having across our country two things came to mind. First, I couldn't help but think this isn't why the valiant men/women who've served our country served. And second, even in the midst of tragedy – our God is present!

As you're aware, we've been in a study in Acts discussing the unstoppable ministry of the H.S. And as God would have it, today we come upon a text that reminds us that even in the midst of the movement of God, the enemy of God is still seeking to bring harm to the people of God.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death w/ the sword. When he saw this met w/ approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. Acts 12:1-5

Persecution is a frightening yet rewarding blessing. It's something few of us would prefer, and yet it's an absolute guarantee if we choose to follow Jesus. In times of persecution, I'm reminded of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Blessed are those who are persecuted b/c of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you b/c of me. Rejoice and be glad, b/c great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:10-12

I Persecution is a GIVEN

when (*hotan*) **not if, but when** – at some point in time all believers can expect some kind of persecution.

Every faithful believer will have some resistance/ridicule from the world, while others, for God's own purposes, will endure extreme suffering. *MacArthur*

All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2 Timothy 3:12

Jesus never taught a *prosperity* gospel but a *persecution* gospel. He taught that to follow Him would require denying self and taking up your cross.

II Persecution is a GIFT

Most of us can agree persecution is a given, but to say it's a gift is a stretch. We find it hard to believe we're blessed when people mess w/ us b/c of our faith.

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We're hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 2 Cr. 4:7-10

A Persecution VALIDATES Relationship

Persecution is a certificate of authenticity that people see Jesus in us. You'll only face it if people see Jesus in you.

B Persecution VERIFIES Reliance

Persecution causes us to trust God more. It helps us to examine our lives that we might lean more on God.

C Persecution VOICES the Resurrection

Persecution proclaims the message of Christ – it reveals the truth/hope of Christ in us to everyone we encounter.

I read this week about a young man in India who lived in a village where people were opposed to the gospel. After his brother/wife became believers, Adam wasn't willing to trust Christ. As they began to live the gospel, they also began to experience beatings from the Hindus in the village. It seemed every time his brother was beaten, someone believed in Christ – including Adam – who began to suffer the same persecution as his brother. One day the villagers surrounded them, and in a fit of rage, prepared a pot of boiling water and were going to cook them alive, until one of the persecutors said, "If we do this, even more will become Christians," so they beat them instead. And others came to Christ. And now there's a church of more than 35 families in the village.

Make no mistake – by all estimates, last Sunday was a horrific tragedy. Yet as hard as it might be to fathom, although I'm certain God was grieved, He wasn't caught off-guard or sleeping – He was present. And He was w/ each person in that church building.

There's one suitable response to persecution – surrender. If you've already died to Christ than no man can take your life!

No man can ever take from you that which you have already surrendered. Unknown

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