

Now Is the Time to Preach Endurance, Not Escape

Living in America, it is easy to develop a theology of escape, one that says, "When times really get hard, God will remove us from the scene. When real tribulation comes, we will be long gone." But is that the attitude we should be encouraging? Is not the gospel made for hard times?

I'm aware, of course, that there are divergent views of the end times among Christians, including the debate over a pretribulation or post-tribulation rapture (or a variation of those themes; for my own views, see [here](#).)

Fine Christians can disagree on this, and my goal here is not to debate eschatology. We can agree to disagree and work together just the same.

Instead, my goal here is to focus on our attitude. What kind of mindset should we have in a difficult time like this? What should our mentality be?

In the last decade, Christians in Syria suffered bombing, hunger, torture, exile and death. They did not escape the hard times.

To this moment, Christians in Nigeria are being butchered and beheaded and raped and kidnapped. They have not escaped the hard times.

Some years ago, pastors in the state of Orissa in India were given a choice as gasoline was poured over their wives and children. Deny Jesus, and you all live; refuse, and your family will be burned alive in front of your eyes. They did not escape the hard times either.

In fact, throughout church history, God's people have

experienced living hell in this world, and throughout history we have survived. What's more, throughout history we have overcome and thrived.

Note what is written in Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter.

Some, by their faith "subdued kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises." They "stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword." [They] "out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in fighting, and turned the armies of foreign enemies to flight." Yes, "Women received their dead raised to life again" (see Hebrews 11:33-35a). This is the fruit of faith.

But, the text continues, "Others were tortured and did not accept deliverance, so that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trials of mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered around in sheepskins and goatskins, while destitute, afflicted, and tormented" (Hebrews 11:35b-37).

So then, some, by faith, escaped the edge of the sword. Others, by faith, had the faith to endure the sword, even to the point of death.

Faith doesn't always deliver us from danger. Often, it gives us the courage and strength to endure the danger. In Jesus we overcome. Through Jesus we endure. As Hebrews 10:36 (ESV) exhorts, "For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."

Look at Paul's words in Romans 8:28-37, words which are not just poetic and beautiful. They are also gritty and real.

Paul had stated that "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose," (Rom. 8:28, MEV) after he which he laid out the glorious plan of salvation (Rom.8:29-31). This prompted

him to write, "He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all—how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32) God already did the hard part, giving up His Son. The rest is easy!

Paul continued, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Rom. 8:33–34). What incredible truths!

And then, based on this confidence, he asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35).

Then his dramatic answer: "As it is written: 'For your sake we are killed all day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:36–37).

Do you see what Paul is saying? We are being slaughtered like sheep (quoting Ps. 44:12). We are experiencing trouble and hardship and persecution and famine and nakedness and danger and sword. We are going through terrible times of suffering and hardship and pain, but none of it can separate us from Messiah's love. Through Him, we are more than conquerors. This is wonderful news.

Harold J. Chadwick asked: "Would you suffer persecution, poverty and prison for Christ? Would you endure cruel tortures that take your mind and body to the very brink of death and beyond? Would you persevere? Would you 'hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering?' (Heb. 10:23) Would you stand boldly without shame and confess Christ as Lord, to your own or to your family's peril? For two thousand years, courageous men and women have been tortured and killed because of their confessions of Jesus Christ as Lord." (Cited in Frank

"J.J." Di Pietro, The Fire That Once Was: Those Who Turned the World Upside Down, 6.)

Yes, throughout history, God's people have experienced hardship of every kind, be it persecution for the faith or be it the difficulties of life. And throughout history, God's grace has carried us through, making His strength perfect in our weakness. There is no shortage of His power and grace today.

So, to the weak God says, "Be strong in the Lord!" (See Joel 3:10b; Eph. 6:10) You might be weak and frail, but in Him, you are an overcomer. And so, the Spirit says to us, "Don't feel sorry for yourself. Don't throw a pity party. Don't identify with your problems. Instead, put on God's armor and be strong in Him. You are a more than a conqueror through Jesus!"

This is the attitude we should be cultivating at such a time as this, especially if the present crisis is only a prelude to much tougher times in the future. And, in particular, this is the kind of attitude we should be cultivating should real persecution arise right here in our country.

We don't fear danger. We don't fear hard times. We don't fear persecution. We don't fear death. We are believers. We are children of God. Enough said.

(Some of the material in this chapter was taken from my just-released book, When the World Stops: Words of Faith, Hope and Wisdom in the Midst of Crisis.)