

Prepare for Persecution: A Message From Billy Graham

In the event of a national catastrophe, much confusion, terror and consternation would reign. What would the Christian do? What should our attitude be? Which way would we turn if the country in which we live were suddenly wrecked and all the props gone?

As a whole, our nation does not know what privation is. We do not know what sacrifice is. We do not know what suffering is. Suppose persecution were to come to the church in America, as it has come in other countries.

The immunity to persecution that Christians in our country have experienced in the past two or three centuries is unusual. Christ strongly warned Christians that to follow Him would not be popular, and that in most circumstances it would mean cross-bearing and persecution.

The Bible says that all who “desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus said that as the time of His return draws nigh, “They will seize you and persecute you” (Luke 21:12). We have no scriptural foundation for believing that we can forever escape being persecuted for Christ’s sake. The normal condition for Christians is that we should suffer persecution. Are you willing to face persecution and death for Christ’s sake?

What Would You Do?

Since we have experienced little religious persecution in this country, it is likely that under pressure many would deny Christ. Those who shout the loudest about their faith may surrender soonest. Many who boast of being courageous would be cowardly. Many who say, “Though all others deny Christ, yet I

will never deny Him," would be the first to warm their hands at the campfires of the enemy.

Jesus, in speaking of the last times, warned, "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). The Scripture says, "because iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

The apostle Paul, referring to the coming evil day, said, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13).

Here are five ways to fortify yourself so that you will be able to stand in that day.

1. Make Sure

First, make sure of your relationship to God. Amos the prophet saw the Day of Judgment fast approaching for Israel. He warned the people to prepare to meet God. The word *preparedness* should be a key word for everyone.

It is strange that we prepare for everything except meeting God. We prepare for marriage. We prepare for a career. We prepare for education.

But we do not prepare to meet God. Even though most Americans see the storm clouds gathering on the horizon, by and large we are making few preparations to meet God. This is a time for repentance and faith. It is a time for soul-searching, to see if our anchor holds.

Have you been to the cross where Christ shed His blood for your sins? Have you had the past forgiven? Have you come by faith, confessing that you are a sinner and receiving Christ as your Savior? I tell you that this cross is the only place of refuge in the midst of the storm of judgment that is fast

approaching. Make sure of your relationship with God.

2. Walk With God

Second, learn now to walk with God in your daily life. Abraham walked with God and was called a friend of God. Walk with God as Moses did on the back side of the desert; when the hour of judgment fell upon Egypt, Moses was the one who led his people to freedom. Walk with God as David did as a shepherd boy; when the time of crisis came, David was prepared to meet it. Daniel and his three young friends walked with God in Babylon, and when trouble came, God was beside them—whether it was in the lions' den or in the fiery furnace.

However, God does not always deliver His saints from adversity. God says in Hebrews 11 that others were just as faithful as Abraham, Moses, Daniel or David. They, too, walked with God—but they perished. God has not promised to deliver us from trouble.

But He has promised to go with us through the trouble. Stephen was a young man “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). They stoned him to death, but his was a triumphal entry into heaven. If you are not strengthening the inner man or woman by daily walking with God now, when a crisis comes you will quake with fear and give in, having no strength to stand up for Christ.

3. Assimilate Scripture

Third, we should fortify ourselves with the Word of God. Begin reading, studying and memorizing Scripture as never before. The Bible says, “Stand therefore, having your waist girded with truth” (Ephesians 6:14). The truth is the Word of God. We are to be girded and undergirded with the Word. Read it, assimilate it, feed on it; let it be your staff and strength. It is quick and powerful. It is the bulwark of the soul. Too

many Christians today are entangled with the affairs of this world, caught in a net of material interest and diversion. Scripture, to many, is little more than a reference book for biblical facts. It is seldom opened and rarely relished as the spiritual staff of life that it is.

Many souls are anemic and starved for the things of God. They are totally unprepared for a time of crisis. Store these Scriptures away so that if your Bible is ever taken from you, you will have the Word of God written on the tablet of your heart. Many stories have come out of prison camps, of Christians who had no Bibles but had committed to memory great portions of Scripture. What a comfort, blessing and strength these Scriptures were as they repeated them over and over again to themselves. One missionary who was in a concentration camp for three years in China told me that during that time his greatest regret was that he had not memorized more of the Bible.

4. Pray Always

Fourth, fortify yourself with prayer. The Bible, referring to "the evil day," says, "Pray in the Spirit always with all kinds of prayer and supplication" (Ephesians 6:18). If we are to stand uncompromisingly for Christ when a national crisis comes, we must rediscover the power of prayer.

The early church knew the value and necessity of prayer. Earnest, fervent prayer preceded every major triumph. Prayer preceded Pentecost. Peter and John were en route to the temple to pray when they witnessed for Christ, and thousands were converted. Paul and Silas prayed in prison, the Philippian jailer found Christ, and Paul and Silas were delivered.

If Christianity is to survive in a world filled with materialism, the church must have a revival of prayer. As individuals, we must repent of prayerlessness. The prayer meeting must become the vital institution it was when

evangelical Christianity was the mightiest force in the world.

5. Meditate on Christ

Fifth, we must fortify ourselves by meditating upon the person of Christ. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "There have never been 15 minutes in my life when I did not sense the presence of Christ." We must learn again to practice the presence of God. We must say with David, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Christ must be vitally real to us if we are to prove loyal to Him in the hours of crisis.

Will You Stand?

Today our nation ranks as the greatest power on the face of the earth. But if we put our trust in armed might instead of Almighty God, the coming conflict could conceivably go against us. History and the Bible indicate that mechanical and material might are insufficient in times of great crisis. We need the inner strength that comes from a personal, vital relationship with God's Son, Jesus Christ.

The wheels of God's judgment can be heard by discerning souls across the length and breadth of nations. Things are happening fast! The need for a return to God has never been more urgent.

The words of Isaiah are appropriate for us today: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

God needs men and women who will "stand in the evil day." Will you be one of them? Will you come to the cross and in humility confess your sins to God and receive Jesus Christ as Savior?

Will you become one of God's warriors in this crisis hour? You can enlist today in the army of God by giving your life to His Son Jesus Christ and letting Him become the Captain of your soul. "Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become sons of God, to those who believed in His name" (John 1:12). ©1957 BGEA