

Persecution: Faith Under Fire | 2 Timothy 3:12 | Christian Sermon on Standing Firm in Christ

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Date: 16 September 2025

[0 : 00] We're going to go to God's Word to 2 Timothy 3. Now, as I say, I don't know all of this man's theology.

I didn't particularly follow him, but lots of his quotes and interviews speak very strongly of his personal faith. He wasn't just a political activist, but he did have a very strong faith, and he often gave the gospel and shared his faith and testimony.

So we think of this man, his body now lies in a wooden casket ready to be buried. Yet the haters still call him names and hate most everything that he stood for.

That's what boggles my mind. They still hate him. And this is the world that we live in, isn't it? Now, I'm talking about persecution this morning, and this message is not to alarm you, but to alert you.

I believe we need to be prepared for persecution. And the people who govern us are increasingly more and more Christless, and even more Antichrist in their mindset.

[1 : 33] And the next generations are being raised to think this way, as was shared earlier. They go to the university and they come out warped and twisted.

And the ones who don't go to university are the same, because they get it through the media, through the constant barraging of Antichrist messaging. And this generation, I feel sorry for this generation, I think.

There's very few that I can think of, and I thank God there's a few in our number here this morning who are in their maybe teens or 20s or 30s, and you're kind of unusual.

Thank God for you. We need more of the 15s, 20s, 30-year-olds who are going to go against this tide of evil. But the next generations are being raised with this culture that hates the Bible, hates principles, hates the truth.

And you think, what's going on in our world today? And before long, they're the ones who are going to be in government. They're the ones who are going to be in authority over the rest of us. So God help us, Australia.

[2 : 43] Talking about persecution. Now, here's a map of persecution around the world, the top 50 persecuted countries. It's called the World Watch List.

And they say high-level persecution and discrimination impacts 380 million Christians around the world. That's one in seven.

One in seven. One in seven Christians are facing high-level, high-level persecution and discrimination because of their faith.

Now, we're just a bit tad removed, aren't we, in Australia from some of this. But the signs are more and more concerning about this rising trend of godlessness.

And we're going to go to a verse that speaks to this. And the context of this verse, it speaks in the context of perilous times.

[3 : 40] 2 Timothy chapter 3 talks about perilous times. It talks about some of how they form of godliness without the substance, without the real power.

And it tells of people who resist the truth. Brothers and sisters, Australian culture hates the truth. More so and more so, it seems.

And it tells in the context of this verse of evil men who will deceive and be themselves deceived.

2 Timothy 3 verse 12, it says, Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Now, this is a sobering truth.

Again, this is not to alarm you, but to alert you. This verse speaks to us. Persecution is not optional.

[4 : 39] Now, I know some of you have shared different circumstances where there's a persecution going on, in the workplace even. There's a persecution going on. I'm facing some things that I'm not at liberty to elaborate.

But, brothers and sisters, persecution is not optional. We are told it will happen. And it is inevitable for those who follow the Lord.

It tells us if we're serious about our faith to expect suffering. Let's unpack a little what this verse tells us. Yea. Yea.

We could overlook that little word, yea. But it means emphasis. It says, yea. Let this be clear, is what it's saying.

There's an emphasis here, yea. It reads further, yea and all. All means everyone.

[5 : 40] No exceptions, no exemptions. Not some. Not many. Not the exceptionally holy. All. Not a select few.

Not the martyrs. Not the missionaries in hostile lands. Yea and all. All. Shall.

Shall. It is unavoidable. And this verse speaks to us of the reality. The doctrine of persecution.

This is not possibility. It is certainty. Persecution is certain. Yea and all that will live God.

It speaks of a deliberate choice and action. For those who will. For those who make this deliberate choice. For those who have that act of volition. And say, I'm going to choose to pursue godliness.

[6 : 38] To determine to live godly. This speaks to you. Those who dare to live godly can expect real opposition. Yea and all that will. They have that intent.

To live godly. To live. The word live means to have life. To live. To live fully, vibrantly, meaningfully. In accordance with divine purpose.

Yea and all you that will live. That Christ is your life. And the grammar has the sense of an ongoing lifestyle.

It's a lifestyle. Yea and all that will live. So live. Live godly. The word godly means to live with reverence toward God.

Reflecting his character in conduct. This is not outward religion. This is holiness. Yea and all that will live. Godly. Godly. Titus 2 tells us of grace.

[7 : 41] It teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. We should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Looking for the glorious hope of his returning.

Tells us how to live. To live soberly, righteously and godly. Sounds the opposite of what Hollywood wants to live, doesn't it? Hollywood would want to live the opposite of all of those three things.

Soberly, righteously, godly. In this present world, we. Grace teaches us. The saved. The wish that so live. Live godly. And this godliness, brothers and sisters, it's not our own achievement.

It's his life in us. In the context of 2 Corinthians 4, it's talking about various sufferings of the believers. And it says, For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

He's saying in this context of suffering, of trials for our faith, we're delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. Why? That the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

[8 : 59] And this godliness, it's not our own achievement, as I say. It's his life in us. Our values, our morals, our priorities, our very purpose, they're different from this world.

Back to our text. Yea, and all that will live. Godly in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus. In other words, living in union with him.

Living in Christ. Living for Christ. Christ living in us. Christ in you. The hope of glory. You, believer. Christ Jesus is in you.

And you are in him. And he is the source of your holiness. We draw from his life and power. In the sphere of his lordship. That the godliness spoken of here, it's not moral effort.

Apart from him. It is him. In you. It is the fruit of abiding. John 15. As we abide in the vine.

[10 : 02] We draw his life. And his fruit comes through that branch that we are grafted into. That true vine. And we know as we are the godly in Christ Jesus that we so live.

Our righteousness. Our strength. Our courage. It's all from him. It's all unto him. It's all by him.

Through him. And living godly outside of Christ degenerates into legalism or hypocrisy.

Some have tried to live godly. But if they are not in Christ Jesus, they can't do it. In Christ, the holiness flows from his life in us. And here is the Christ-centered life.

It's the God-honoring life. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus. It's the Christ-centered life.

Living in union with him. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

There's a promise again. I know the Bible's full of promises. And 2 Timothy 3 verse 12 is a Bible promise. It tells us, yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

[11 : 12] We think, what does that mean? Persecution. Persecution. We're not in those top 50 countries on the world watch list. But nevertheless, there is persecution in the fine land of Australia, is there not?

There is persecution. For you that live for Christ, that suffer persecution. And that persecution, it can mean all kinds of things. It's interesting, the word persecution, it's got this sense of the word that we translate persecution.

But it's got this sense of being pursued, of being hounded, harassed. It speaks of an act of hostility. Now, when you're standing for Christ, when you happen to be one of the ones who dare to say, I'm a Christian, or make some stand, then you will be targeted.

They'll come after you. They'll come after you. And we think of persecution, what does it mean? We may not go to prison for our faith, but it can mean mockery and rejection, can't it?

It can mean ridicule. It can mean a loss of work, a loss of status, a loss of position, a loss of friends, of freedoms. In some lands, of course, we do know, it can lead to the loss of life itself.

[12 : 32] Life itself. And Paul knew this well. We know of Paul. He was stoned at Lystra, beaten, shipwrecked, betrayed, and now scarred in this Roman dungeon.

Yet he still is strong. And he writes these words amongst his final words recorded of the Apostle Paul. As we know, it tells, he writes, For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the fame. Here he is on the last leg of his running race. Here he is in that last stand of his fight, and he knows that he's a victor in Christ.

He says, I'm ready. I'm ready. Here he is as he writes these words of 2 Timothy 3, scarred but strong, knowing that his earthly ministry is coming to a close.

And he warns of perilous times. Again, in the context of 2 Timothy 3, he says, For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud.

[13 : 49] Blasphemous, disobedient to parents, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. He warns of perilous times.

And he says, yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall. It is certain. Shall suffer persecution.

There's a certainty here. This is no maybe. This is a certainty. Brother, sister, get ready. Persecution isn't a maybe.

It's a shall. It's a certainty. It is certain. Shall. The sense of the grammar is that persecution will hunt you down. It is a surety, a guarantee. You shall face pushback for your faith because you're different.

Because you've got a saviour. Because you've got a stand. It could be mockery, coldness, rejection, hostility, a pressure to conform.

[14 : 50] Go along with the boys. Join in with the jokes. The coarseness. The crudity. The threats. It can mean imprisonment or worse.

So consider the reality of persecution. Firstly, why? Why? Why is persecution inevitable? Because the world hates Christ.

The world hates your saviour. Hates him still. And so it hates his followers. We think, brother, sister, when you think of this world. And I've seen some memes where there's certain folk that think, well, if Christ came again, we'd nail him again.

We'd crucify him again. We'd spit on him again. We curse Christ today. There's people like that in our world. And they don't care when someone gets shot who stood for faith.

They'll mock him still while he's in his grave. The godly shall suffer persecution. That's you. That's me. Because the world hates Christ.

[15 : 56] It hates his followers also. And we live in this hostile world. Our Lord Jesus, and this was just hours before his arrest, he says to the disciples, John 15, 18 through 20 in part, If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.

If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. There's a promise there. The world has always hated the prophets. The world hates Christ, crucifying him on a Roman cross, and it hates us because we bear his name.

And think of it, brother, sister, Satan opposes God's people. That means you. The adversary wants to silence you and discourage godly living.

Persecution is inevitable. It's the badge of the godly. This is the history of the word of God. Some names we could name.

Abel, he was slain. Joseph was sold. Moses fled Egypt because he chose reproach over the riches. David was hunted by Saul.

[17:13] Daniel was cast into the lion's den. Stephen was stoned to death. Peter was jailed. Paul himself, he was beaten with rods, stoned, left for dead.

The early church rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Persecution, it's the norm. Don't be surprised if you get persecuted for your faith.

I can't tell you that Christian life is going to be comfortable for you. It's going to be your best life now. And it's a bed of roses. No.

Suffering for righteousness sake is the gospel record. We see it is the master's path. And he tells us, blessed are you. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake.

Hey, not blessed are you because you're persecuted because you're a bit of a loud mouth and a brash kind of person. But because of righteousness.

[18:20] For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you. When they're going to bad mouth you.

Rejoice, he says, and be exceeding glad. For great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Notice our text tells of those in Christ Jesus.

It says those in Christ Jesus are going to suffer persecution. It tells of a union with Christ. Christ. We are one with him. Our saviour. We're in Christ.

The believer's life is hidden with Christ. In Colossians 3 verse 3. We are conformed to Christ's image. Romans 8 verse 17. And we share his sufferings.

There's a conformity to Christ. Those that are in Christ Jesus. Do you know him? Do you know him today? Him to know his life eternal. The same spirit that empowered Christ.

[19:24] Empowers us. And gives us the grace to endure persecution. What does persecution do? Persecution, while painful, it serves to refine our faith.

For one. It refines our faith. 1 Peter 1 tells of the trial of your faith. It says greatly rejoice. Wow. Greatly rejoice.

In the trial of your faith. In the manifold temptations. Those many trials. In the heaviness it says. That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold which perished earth.

Though it be tried with fire. Might be found unto praise and honour and glory. At the appearing of Jesus Christ. Think of it. This picture of this fire. It's like a furnace.

The refinance fire. That burns away the dross. It tests the authenticity of our faith. And persecution is the Christian's calling. We see men of God through history record these words of faith.

[20:31] Of endurance like Bunyan. He testifies in the darkest dungeon. Or under the heaviest yoke of persecution. God's grace is sufficient.

He will not leave his own to perish. But will uphold them by his mighty hand. He also said the pathway of the Christian is not always smooth.

Nor is journey without opposition. Persecution is the fire through which God refines his saints. And in it we find his presence more precious than gold.

Bunyan knew what he was talking about. He spent years in prison. Simply because he was not authorised by the established church to preach the gospel. He simply was telling people the gospel. And they jailed him for it. Persecution. It deepens our dependence on our Lord. When we're weak and under attack. We learn how we can lean upon our Lord more than ever before.

[21:37] Persecution. It strengthens the church. Where is the church strongest? It's in those lands. It's in those places. It's amongst those people that are the most tested and tried.

There's an ancient quote. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. When believers are scattered through persecution. For example, Acts 8.

They carried the gospel. The gospel went out. It's almost alike to what's happening presently. When someone who was outspoken for their faith.

That suffers. Is killed. There's a spreading out of the message. Because God uses even persecution to bring himself glory.

And persecution at Marxist is different, doesn't it? As citizens of another kingdom. And it identifies us with our Lord. As Paul says, Paul said, I want that fellowship.

[22 : 51] The fellowship of his sufferings. The fellowship of his sufferings. And persecution produces spiritual maturity. As James tells my brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.

When you have these different trials and tests. He says, count it all joy. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. It's going to produce that perseverance.

That enduring faith. And persecution builds that endurance. It refines character. How are we to endure?

Persecution doesn't have to crush us. God's presence is for you. There's promises such as this one. We could, I think, apply the same principle.

That God's presence sustains his people. As it reads, Isaiah 43.2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.

[23 : 54] When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned. Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. He says, thou shalt not be burned. Daniel's three friends in Daniel 3.

They found Christ walking with them in the furnace. Our Lord says to us, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. We have his presence. And Peter was no stranger to flogging and threats from religious leaders.

He tells believers, do not be surprised when opposition comes. It reads, 1 Peter 4.12. Beloved, think not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's offerings. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.

Peter's saying, don't be surprised. Don't be surprised. Believer, don't be surprised. When you are one of the few, of the saved, in a workplace, in a setting, don't be surprised when they start to pick on you.

[25 : 11] They say, they point the finger, they make the whispers, they make the snide remarks.

That's normal. That's the normal Christian life. It's not unusual. It's not something that we should be surprised about. And notice it says, that the spirit himself rests upon you.

The spirit himself rests upon you. The spirit of God rests upon the persecuted, turning shame into glory amongst family. We can get that kind of that whispering, that attack, whether it's subtle or not so subtle.

But the spirit himself rests upon you, the persecuted. He says, rejoice in suffering. Yes, in suffering. And persecution, it refines, it strengthens our faith, like gold in a furnace.

Here's another quote from a man of faith. Spurgeon says, the furnace of persecution is but the fire that purifies, the gold of faith.

[26 : 22] Let us rejoice in it, for it prepares us for glory. The furnace of persecution. The furnace of persecution, brother, sister, when they turn the heat up on you. It's a refining work.

And we can enjoy with joy, rejoice that you're counted worthy, to suffer shame for his name. The fiery trial, it's like Malachi's refiner's fire, purging the dross so the gold can shine.

So, brother, sister here this morning, I suppose my message to you is, as Peter says, don't be surprised when you get some persecution.

Let it be an encouragement. And let your response be to rejoice. And to be prepared. Prepare for it. It tells of Paul and Barnabas, amongst their exhortations to the faithful, as they were confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, they said, we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

It wasn't some prosperity gospel. No, it's a tribulation gospel. Get ready for some opposition. Get ready for some persecution. Strengthen your faith through prayer, through Bible study, through fellowship.

[27 : 40] Brace yourself, still yourself, for the coming challenges. And Paul himself, he knew challenges. He knew persecutions, afflictions. He tells the persecutions that he endured.

But out of them all, he says, the Lord delivered me. God delivered Paul, not always from trial, but through it, to greater ministry.

Even as they chained him, they couldn't silence him. And we can trust God in every trial, that his grace will help us through, and sustain us.

Of course, we know ultimately Paul was martyred for his faith. So, there's no escape necessarily, but in the trial, he will deliver us.

Through the trial, he will sustain us. And our Lord says this, for you that are persecuted, he says, these things have I spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace.

[28 : 38] In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. He's saying that we can know peace, though tribulation is promised.

And the word tribulation, it means the squeeze of a wine press. Literally pressure, crushing. Have you ever felt crushed, pressed?

That pressure, the weight of opposition, it can be crushing, can't it? When we know loved ones don't share our faith, and we can get knocks, and there's a pressure in circumstances in life from those who oppose our Saviour.

Another quote from Richard Baxter, he says, let the world despise and afflict us. Our treasure is in heaven, and our Saviour has overcome the world.

Forget that perspective, our treasure is there. It's not here. This is temporary. And the world can despise and afflict us, but our treasure is there.

[29 : 48] And our Saviour, he has overcome the world. We need not be despairing. Peter tells if you're mocked as a believer, it's actually a blessing.

He says, yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. Brother, sister, do not be afraid to be different from the majority.

To stand alone for Christ in your workplace, in your family, suffer as a Christian, and don't be ashamed.

Do not be ashamed. Glorify God. We are in a spiritual warfare too. Think of it, of this world where this conflict is happening between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.

And this opposition, this is not flesh and blood. Sure, there's some people that act like they're filled with demons, but our battle is not with them.

[30 : 55] It's with the spiritual forces. It's with the spiritual wickedness, isn't it? They're just human agents. But the spiritual forces, that's the enemy. The ones that he uses are really themselves victims.

And we think persecution is not your destroyer. It's like this divine forge, this furnace that's going to make you and shape you. God is doing a work in you for other, sister.

So think of that hope that you have and be prepared for that persecution knowing that he is with you. There is glory beyond the cross. There is glory beyond the cross.

We see our Lord urges the persecuted church, Smyrna, fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that you may be tried and you shall have persecution.

You shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.

We think of some countries and it's present day that there's much persecution.

[32 : 05] You stand for Christ and you will die for your faith if they know you're a Christian. Persecution though is temporary. Glory is forever.

And Paul could testify for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

The eternal reward outweighs every present suffering. And think, there's joy there. Richard Wurmbrand was a man who spent many years in a Romanian prison simply for his faith in that communist land of the time and he said this, I have found truly joyful Christians only in the Bible, in the underground church and in prison.

The truly joyful Christian is that one who will stand and be counted. I would urge you, brother, sister, today, rise with godly courage.

Commit to live that godly life for the glory of God. Stand unswayed as Daniel in his den. Know that we are more than conquerors, more than conquerors through him that loved us.

[33 : 28] And the context says we're getting killed all the day long. Sometimes we just look at, yeah, we're more than conquerors, yeah, we're getting killed all the day long, but nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

There's a victory, even if they kill us, there's a victory. And Paul tells Timothy to prepare him. He says, yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

He says, get ready for it, believer, get ready for it. And this message speaks to us as well. You're not called to popularity or prosperity of earthly kind necessarily.

You're not called to comfort. You're not called to cultural relevance. Okay, they might try to brainwash us. We might have to attend certain training that we think is a load of garbage. But we know that we are called to Christlikeness, to live godly in Christ Jesus.

You will suffer, but know that hope that you have. Let me remind you of the promise that follows this verse. It's telling us of evil men and seducers.

[34 : 36] They're going to wax worse and worse. Hey, it's going to get harder and harder. It's going to get worse. Evil men deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned.

And has been assured of. Knowing of whom thou hast learned them. That thou from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Continue, he says, hold fast, stand firm, keep reading, keep praying, keep trusting, keep being a witness, keep strong. Endure.

The word of God is your comfort. Knowing of whom you have learned them. Continue in the things. The word of God and the God of grace is your strength. When the world mocks, pray.

When the world threatens, trust. When the world hates, let us love. Even the ones hurting us and hating us, let us even love them. Let us even pray for them.

[35 : 33] Let us even do good to them. Grant us the courage of Daniel, of the patience of Joseph, the joy of Stephen, the endurance of Paul.

The gospel has not changed. And the command to live godly has not changed. Therefore, expect persecution. And let it brace us, let it steal us, let it give us that resolve, that intent to be firm, to be faithful.

For if you live godly in Christ Jesus, you will suffer, but you will overcome. It tells us for our light affliction. This, and the context is again of Paul's manifold sufferings.

He says, for our light affliction, which is, but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. So go, live godly.

And if you suffer, rejoice. another man of God said this, Whitefield, persecution is the lot of the godly, but fear not, for Christ himself walks with us through the flames.

[36 : 53] The certainty of persecution should not discourage us or surprise us. May we rather prepare mentally, yeah, I'm here for the long haul.

I'm going to trust my Lord no matter what comes around the next corner. I'm going to prepare myself mentally and spiritually for trials to come, knowing that he's there with me.

Through the flames, he'll walk with me. We can support one another too. Hey, some of our number are going through some things. There's some testings, there's some trials, some struggles, there's some pressure, some tribulation happening.

Pressure. Let us pray for one another, support one another and evermore depend on the grace of God which is going to get us through. May we determine by God's grace to live godly in Christ Jesus no matter whatever the cost may be.

Are you a believer? Are you in Christ Jesus? As you've trusted him, he'll make you godly. He is your godliness. Be prepared.

[38 : 00] Be prepared, believer. Be strong in him. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that it's only a grace that saves and sustains.

Lord, it's only a grace that enables and empowers. Lord, we pray. It's only a grace that teaches us how to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

Help us, Lord, we pray. We pray if there's any here present, they've yet to lay their trust upon you. They've yet to say, Jesus, save me. I want to be saved. I want your saving grace.

I want to know my sins forgiven. I want to know a home in heaven. I want to know that you're my saviour, that I'm yours. Pray that that one might have that trust today to say, Jesus, save me from my sin.

Make me whole. Forgive me. Save me. I trust you to pay for my sin. Lord, help us to save people, to steel ourselves as we know this world is ever more Christless.

[39 : 02] Think of these current events and the remarks and some are quite hateful to Christianity. Lord, we pray. Help us yet to be the ones who will say, I'm going to stand.

Lord, help us to be those people and we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.