

Theme: Nothing But the Truth – Hold Fast to Truth

Title: Persecution & the Church – II Timothy 3:10-12

Aim: What the Bible says about persecution & lifestyle.

Intro: Often we are only interested in matters that directly affect our lives. I'm a Red Sox fan (surprise) & tho I have watched parts of the World Series, it hasn't really mattered to me as much as it would if the Red Sox were in it. But, there are things in life we should give attention to, whether or not they directly touch us. The persecution of Christians (or those of any religion) is one of those issues we should pay attention to, because it affects us more than we realize. Theme: Nothing but the truth, & the sub-theme over a number of weeks has been "Hold fast to truth." We've been addressing some of the cultural issues facing the Church today & today will follow along that theme. Text: II Timothy 3:10-12 [READ]. The context of this passage is Paul's warning to Timothy, that difficult times were coming, because "***people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, w/out self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen w/conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power***" (vs2-5). I don't believe Paul was only referring to those outside the Church, but also w/in. He warned Timothy to "avoid such people." Then he praised Timothy because he was not like that, but rather had followed what Paul had taught him, both by word & by example. Paul's faith was revealed & lived out even through persecutions & sufferings. By doing so he was exhorting Timothy to continue to follow that example. Then he made that incredible statement (not at all encouraging on the surface), that "***all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...***" Then he reminded Timothy that not only Paul but also his mother/grandmother (ided in chap1) had taught Timothy to live

according to the breathed-out Word of God, which would make him able to stand (vs14-17). That same Word of God guides us in countercultural living, if we'll follow. On this National Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (thanks, Mary Ellen), it's is sobering to quote Trevin Wax of the Gospel Coalition, who provides us w/our 1st point today: I) **"The greatest cultural issue worldwide is persecution toward Christians."** This was written in 2018, 4 years ago, but persecution has not slowed. If anything it has increased. Wax continued: "Christians face more persecution than do members of other faiths, & the forms of persecution they experience today are increasingly extreme." According to the dictionary, persecution is, "hostility and ill-treatment, especially on the basis of ethnicity, religion, political beliefs," etc. It's been going on throughout history, certainly in Paul's day, but seems to be more widespread today. It should be no surprise, for Jesus said (John 15:18-19) ***"If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*** Then He said (John 16:33), ***"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*** The author of Hebrews exhorted his readers/us (13:3), ***"Remember those who are in prison (because of their faith), as though in prison w/them, & those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body."*** Wax urged that "Christians should look for ways to advocate for bro/sis across the world who face extraordinary challenges." At the least we should pray for them, for their release, for their families & for them to be able to stand firm. We can give to organizations that seek to reach out to those persecuted & their families. We can urge our government to stand against persecution, etc. We in American (Western world) experience little of persecution, don't we? Is that an indictment of the western church? That brings us to our 2nd point, again

quoting Trevin Wax: II) **“In the West, the most pressing cultural issue facing Christians is not external but internal.** We suffer from a shriveled moral imagination that has led to a shrunken understanding of the gospel & a corresponding crisis of confidence in its power.” That is a sad but amazingly true statement! What does it mean? We have a stunted grasp on the Gospel. We want to have the salvation that the Gospel promises w/out the surrender & transformation for which Scripture calls; the comfort of the Gospel w/out the commitment to Christ; assurance of salvation w/out aspiration to be like Christ. Ken Myers, who wrote a book entitled, All God’s Children & Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture (interesting title), would agree w/Wax. He wrote, “It’s the culture in/of the Church that’s the problem as many believers live not fully transformed by the Gospel. The call of the Gospel [is] a call to embrace a new way of life.” He quotes Eugene Peterson, who said, “It is the task of the Christian community to give witness & guidance in the living of life in a culture that is relentless in reducing, constricting & enervating life.” Myers then continued, “Christians can best serve the health of American culture by striving to be deliberate about & faithful to a way of life that Church historian Robert Wilken has called the ‘culture of the city of God’” – in other words, the way it is supposed to be & will be in the eternal kingdom. We’re to begin to live that way now, tho it will be imperfect & incomplete. We’re called to be like Jesus, to show the world the beauty of Jesus, to live out the gospel. But here’s the caveat, bringing us back to the persecuted Church. Again Myers wrote (3rd & final point): III) **The culture of the city of God is countercultural to the world & thus may well lead to persecution, but also to a brighter & more effective witness.** Myers wrote: “The more faithful we are in living out the ramifications of a Christian understanding of all things, the more out of sync we will be w/American culture.” Are you faithfully living out

the ramifications of a Christian understanding of all things? I guess what I'm saying is that though we don't want nor invite persecution, in reality we ought to be living lives that may bring persecution, because we are living surrendered to Christ, He living His life thru us; lives that are light, exposing the darkness. But the darkness won't go away w/out a fight/opposition. Are you willing to be persecuted for Christ's sake? God help us. The truth is the truth & nothing but the truth will do.