

# THE INSANITY OF OBEDIENCE

## WALKING WITH JESUS IN HARD PLACES

John 15:20-21 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

<sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

*“Suffering is one of God’s ordained means for the growth of his church. He brought salvation to the world through Christ, our suffering Savior, and he now spreads salvation in the world through Christians as suffering saints. In the words of Paul, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Clearly, there is a sense in which the danger of our lives increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ.” - Nik Ripken*

The Bible actually \_\_\_\_\_ us persecution and suffering for our faith. The world is in rebellion against God. It hates God, and when he came as a man in the person of Jesus Christ, the world responded by murdering him. Jesus promised us that the world would treat us the way it treated him (John 15:20, ESV).

The first followers of Jesus consistently experienced suffering for the sake of Jesus, in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), Galatia (Gal. 3:4), Philippi (Phil. 1:29), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:14), and Asia Minor (1 Peter 4:12), along with the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 10:32). Paul went through horrible suffering (2 Cor. 11:23–29), as did the other apostles (Acts 5–8). Paul was quite explicit in saying this was to be expected by everyone who follows Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12, ESV).

In the Bible, suffering and opposition are a \_\_\_\_\_ part of the \_\_\_\_\_ Christian life.

6 Big Life Questions: (*The Insanity of Obedience*, p. 14)

1. What does it really mean to \_\_\_\_\_?
2. How might followers of Jesus best “go and make \_\_\_\_\_”?
3. What role do \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ play in this assignment that Jesus has given His followers?
4. Is the Bible merely past \_\_\_\_\_, or is it also the living, life-giving story of God’s \_\_\_\_\_ today?
5. What would it mean to the church to have its Bible lived out in present tense?
6. When you read that persecution for followers of God was \_\_\_\_\_ in the Bible and \_\_\_\_\_ today, what is your response?

### Faithfulness and the Furnace of Fire

#### Daniel 3:8-28 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. <sup>11</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup> There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So, they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

<sup>17</sup> If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

<sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. <sup>20</sup> And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup> Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their

tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>22</sup> Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

<sup>23</sup> And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

<sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?"

They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

<sup>25</sup> He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!"

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. <sup>27</sup> And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

<sup>28</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

### A few observations:

1. Their obedience and faithfulness was \_\_\_\_\_. They didn't have to think about it.
2. Their obedience and faithfulness was not predicated upon a certainty of \_\_\_\_\_. They knew God \_\_\_\_\_, but they did not know if He \_\_\_\_\_. And it didn't matter.
3. The end result was a miraculous salvation and deliverance and God was \_\_\_\_\_. But was glorified \_\_\_\_\_ the deliverance came. He was glorified in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the three young men.

## Faithfulness and the Philippian Jail

### Acts 16:16-34 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." <sup>18</sup> And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

<sup>19</sup> But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. <sup>20</sup> And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. <sup>21</sup> They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice."

<sup>22</sup> The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. <sup>24</sup> Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

<sup>27</sup> When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

<sup>29</sup> And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

<sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup> Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

### A few observations:

1. Notice what Paul and Silas \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ do in that jail.
2. Consider the very real possibility (likelihood) that the only way to get the Gospel to the \_\_\_\_\_ and his family was through the \_\_\_\_\_ of these two missionaries.
3. Persecution – meant to \_\_\_\_\_ the gospel – in fact \_\_\_\_\_ the Gospel!

## Our response:

Change how we \_\_\_\_\_ persecution ...

*"I had always assumed that persecution was abnormal, exceptional, unusual, out of the ordinary. In my mind, persecution was something to avoid. It was a problem, a setback, a barrier. I was captivated by the thought: what if persecution is the normal, expected situation for a believer? And what if the persecution is, in fact, soil in which faith can grow?"*

Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God*, pp. 176

Nik lists five standard Western responses to persecution:

1. We want persecution to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. We want to \_\_\_\_\_ the persecuted.
3. We desire for the persecutors to be \_\_\_\_\_.
4. We tend to believe that Western forms of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ will usher in the kingdom of God.
5. We try to raise \_\_\_\_\_ in order to rescue Christian workers from persecution.

Significantly, however, all five of these responses fail on \_\_\_\_\_ grounds.

First, Jesus has clearly told us that persecution is \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

The only way to stop persecution is \_\_\_\_\_.

Persecuted believers discovered that the best way to deal with persecutors and to stop their persecution was to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ so that their persecutors would become brothers and sisters in Christ! (p.33)

Change how we \_\_\_\_\_ for our persecuted brothers and sisters ...

Nik lists four responses to persecution that start at an immature level and proceed to the highest level of maturity:

1. God, \_\_\_\_\_!
2. God, \_\_\_\_\_!
3. God, \_\_\_\_\_!
4. God, \_\_\_\_\_!

So, don't pray persecution \_\_\_\_\_!

Pray instead that those enduring persecution would be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ through their persecution and suffering.

And pray that God \_\_\_\_\_ in their walk, work, and witness.

Change how we \_\_\_\_\_ for persecution right here ...

*"I cannot forget the words of my friend, Stoyan ...*

*"I took great joy that I was suffering in my country so that you could be free to witness in your country."*

*And then he raised his voice to say: "Don't you ever give up in freedom what we would never give up in persecution - and that is our witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!"*