

Prepare for Persecution and Practice Peace

- Msg we share in this sermon today: going be really/really hard – not necsrly hard undrstnd but put prctc. Hard bec it's going tug raw emtns, & bring us face/face w/hard realities, & maybe even bring bck painfl mems. Today in worship we're talking re persctn, pain, hatred, vengnc. Paul: **vs. 14a; 17a; 19a**. And he obvslly has in mind wrds/J fr today's Gos: **"Love enemies; do good those hate you; bless...curse; pray... mistreat;" turn other cheek (Lk 6:27-29)**. And what makes msg this so incrdibly hard: in sinful nature we absltly wired for vengnc. It's: in our bld; our default respns. If wrongd, our instnctv reaction: get'em back, make'em pay, bring'em down, hit'em harder than they hit you; no one messes w/#1; and if you do, going wish hadn't – vengnc, pure/simple. We're born w/it. Take a PK clssrm: one kids takes toy fr anthr, and you've got hitting, crying, vengnc. The outward exprssn of that vengnc morphs as we move fr PK into GS, HS, adlthd/workplc. Smtms: physcl vengnc; othrtms: verbal vengnc; excldng/ostracznng; passive/agrssve apprch. But it's vengnc nntlss – that's how we're wired. So today when J says, **"Love enemies; do good those hate you;"** and Paul, **vs. 14a; 17a; 19a** – we hear, think: that's crazy! What else we suppsd do if ppl persct us?! This sounds like recipe for being walked all over! It's not right, not just, not fair! This is really hard! In fact, today we have what may be single hardest tching/Xianity.
- So let's start w/this: we have to prepare for persctn. These wrds presuppose persctn. J/Paul not saying: possbl; cld hap. No: will hap; will face persctn, to some degree. Not an if but a when. So you need be preprd for it! We need acknldg reality/persctn & prepare selves for how we will handle it when comes.
- Persctn comes in varying degrees, like on scale. Cld just be rude ppl who smtms mean to you/kid. Next, cld be persistent/ongoing unkndnss, like bullying school/wrkplc. Neither/these probly has anythng do w/faith. But then there's persctn for being Xian. Relgs persctn can, in mild form, incld: mockery, ridicule, prejudice, pressure to comprms your belfs/morals – think re public unvrsty where Xianity is openly discrmtnd agnst. More severe forms of relgs persctn may involve: threats, vandlsm, loss job/property, physcl abuse, false acctns. And most extreme forms relgs persctn include: kidnppng, imprsnmnt, torture, & execution. That's the scale. Where you fall on that scale? Where others fall? You might have some bullies in your life; maybe you were/are were mocked in college for faith. Probly none/us have exprncd most extreme forms Xian persctn. But DO NOT pretend they don't exist!
- 2 websites: Open Doorsⁱ & Voice of the Martyrsⁱⁱ. Provide info re Xian persecutn arnd wrld. For exmpl, 5 most dangrs countries for Xians: N. Korea; Somalia, Yemen, Libya, & Sudan. I read re woman code-named Zahraⁱⁱⁱ; lives Yemen; life's goal: share J w/other girls & women. In Yemen, very diffclt for women travel freely outside home. So Zahra tries visit women secretly in homes to share J. Can't carry Bible bec authorts can: search her, intrrgt, imprsn, even sentnc her dth. Ppl w/whom she's talked re J: killed bec/her. In Yemen, Xians are consdrd infidels. She: "surndd by wolvs." Websites also provide relief for persctd Xians, & teach ppl how put these wrds Paul/J into prctc: love enemies & prctc peace.
- How do we prctc peace? Paul, **vs. 14**; J, **"Bless...curse; pray...mistreat."** Bless litrly means speak well of. So we prctc peace by, in hrts/prayrs/wrds, thinking/speaking well of those who wish us harm. Easy to say; not easy do, esp if victim/persctn. **Vs. 17a; 19a**. J: turn other cheek. Pt: **"Do not repay evil w/evil or insult w/insult. On contrary, repay evil w/blessing, bec to this you were called" (1 Pt 3:9)** – it's consistnt msg thruout Bible. **Vs. 19b**. And we struggle w/that bec wonder: when, Lord – when will you avenge/rescue me; when stop my persctn? This life? Maybe/not; we don't know what God's plan is!
- But it is okay for Xians cry out to Lord for divine jdgmnt. Pss do all/time. **Ps 10: "Break arm wickd man; call evildoer to acct for his wickdnss" (15)**. **Ps 35: "Contend, Lord, w/those who contend w/me; fight vs those who fight vs me" (1)**. **Ps 69: "Deliver me fr those who hate me. Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. Charge them w/crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvtn. May they be blotted out book/life & not be listd w/righteous" (14, 24, 27-28)**. Even if it takes until J-Day, Lord'll avenge his ppl. J proms that on Last Day, **"Angels'll come & seprt wickd fr righteous & throw them into blazing furnace where weeping gnashing teeth" (Mt 13:49-50)**. So it's okay for Xians cry out Lord for divine jdgmnt. And also: for earthly justice. There's a big diff btwn vengnc & justice. Today, Rom 12. Know what comes in Rom 13, very next ch? Paul's huge section on justice, gov't, lawbrkng, punshmnt for lawbrkrs. If smone breaks law vs us, it is okay

for us seek justice – just not vengnc. And remem: this is written to Romans; don't ever forget what they did to Xians in Rome. Talk re persctn – Xians in Rome: fed to lions in Colism; burned alive as torches that lined streets; nailed to crosses just like Sav – men, women, chldrn, fams, evone who bore name/Xp. Bk/Heb: **“Some faced jeers & flogging, and even chains & imprsnmnt. They were: put/dth by stoning; sawed in two; killed by sword... The wrld was not worthy/them” (11:36-38).** It hapnd back then & haps today. And yet, to Xians in Rome & to Xians today, Paul still: **vs. 19b.**

- **Vs. 20a.** Same as J: **“Do good...hate you” (Lk 6:27).** Man, that's hard! But goal: repntnc; that persctr'd repent! That's what means by burning coals: if you show Xian love, if practc peace, that is noticed! That chngs ppl & might lead them feel burning coals/guilt & repent/sins – that's goal. But even if they don't repent, Paul still: **vs. 18.** There are some ppl you're never going be able have peace with. Just make sure you're not the reason! Do whtvr you can to practc peace & live at peace w/evone. J: **“Blssd: peacmkrs” (Mt 5:9).** And if they refuse live at peace w/you, then that's on them, not you. But, **vs. 18.**
- So the difflt msg for us today is this: we need prep perstn & practc peace. May be hard. But do you realize: that's exctly what J did? J enterd wrld on mission save us; & knew exctly what faced. The cross: no surprs to him! The hatrd, mockery, punches, spit, thrns, whps: no surprs to him! Knew exctly what was coming, faced it anyway, bec loves you! He could do anything; but hung there on cross doing nothing, to accmpsh evthng! Even prayed for his persctrs; **“Fr, frgv them” (Lk 23:34).** And I imagine centrn cld feel burning coals/guilt on head when: **“Surely this man: Son of God” (Mk 15:39).** J preprd persctn & practcd peace, to bring you peace – forgvns for your sins hatred/vengnc; forgvns for times you have persctd/hurt others; and the peace of knowing: that your etrl home is in hvn, where you'll nvr be wronged again; and that the God/justice will avenge you for wrongs done vs you.
- Doesn't make it easy for us love enemies; but does give us proper perspcvtv. J bore cross for us (when we were his enemies); and now asks us carry cross w/him, which is exctly what we're doing when we are persctd. In final vs, Paul: **vs. 21.** Worst thing persctr can do to you: not mock, hurt, even kill you. Worst thing: turn you into person like them. Don't let that hap! Today J tchs us to stop cycle/evil. If we practc vengnc instd of peace, if we repay evil for evil, if we allow the evil done to us to become evil done by us, then we are overcome by evil, and evil wins, and we lose. Instd, stop the cycle of evil. **Vs. 21.**
- This wk I watched docmntry^{iv} re elderly holocst survivor who travelled back to Germany to see recently declassfd Nazi docmntn of his imprisnmnt at Buchenwald conctrtn camp. When he saw his records (& teenage signtr), he immdty recalled what it was like on his cell block. He remembrd how: large trough to urinate into; and how: there was Nazi guard who'd take a prisoner who was about to die & was too frail to move and would throw him into trough to die there. And as he recalled this horrific brutality, this elderly man was on verge of breaking down. And when he was asked, “What do you do in face of such hatred, wickedness, evil?”, the response he choked out what this: “You have to overcome it.”
- **Vs. 21.** How do that? How do that when surrounded by & suffering under pure evil? You look at Xp on cross, not being ovrcm w/evil but ovrcmng evil w/good, w/love – love for persctrs & for you/me. Prep for persctn & practc peace, by looking to Xp & imitating Xp. **Vs. 21.**

Romans 12:14-21

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ⁱ opendoorsus.org

ⁱⁱ persecution.com

ⁱⁱⁱ opendoorsus.org/en-US/stories/2025zahra

^{iv} youtube.com/watch?v=cwqlHYEQEDc