

Subject: *The Soft Pillow of God's Providence, Part 3*

Scripture: *Matthew 10:16-39*

The past two weeks we have considered the nature of God's providence, and we are coming back again this time to think about why we need God's providence and how His providence is a soft pillow to rest on.

We know there are unexpected troubles in life (weather, COVID, outcome of the election).

There are also expected troubles in life, and one of them is persecution for our faith. This is a timely message because committed believers are likely going to face more pressure and persecution in the days ahead. The reason is obvious. Persecution is coming because committed Christians stand in the way of the world's agenda and social progress. The world is tolerant and inclusive, but Christians are considered narrow-minded and unloving. The world believes that every person can decide what is right and wrong, but Christians believe that God determines what is right and wrong. Persecution is coming because Christians not only stand up and speak up for what is right and wrong, but we expose what is wrong.

1. THE CONFLICT BELIEVERS SHOULD EXPECT (vs. 16-25)

When Jesus made the reference to sheep in the midst of wolves, His disciples would have known exactly what He meant. They knew about sheep and wolves. It was one thing for wolves to come looking for sheep, but Jesus says that He was sending them as sheep into wolf territory. It was a place of real danger. Jesus used another analogy when He told them to be wise as snakes and harmless as doves. We have a saying, "as mean as a snake," but Jesus said to be wise as a snake. They were also to be like doves. Doves are harmless and innocent. Taking the two images together, Jesus instructed them to be careful and non-aggressive. Jesus also told them to beware of men. The danger of course was not literal wolves, but men acting like wolves.

***Matthew 5:10-12**¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

A. Religious conflict (vs. 17)

Jesus warned His official representatives, the apostles (sent ones), that they would be persecuted even by religious people. Religious persecution has existed since the days of Cain and Abel.

***1 John 3:11-13**¹¹ For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*

B. Government conflict (vs. 18-20)

The phrase “deliver you up” describes a prisoner being handed over for punishment. This is a warning and wake-up call for believers. In another sense it is an indictment of the unbelieving, lost world. It reveals the world’s hatred of believers, just as it was hostile toward Christ.

C. Family conflict (vs. 21, 34-36)

D. General conflict (vs. 22)

E. All of Christ’s servants can expect conflict (vs. 22-25)

Jesus called disciples to follow Him when they considered the dangers and hardships involved. He did not have any fine print in the contract. Jesus said: “If they have maligned me and they will malign you. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you.” The name “Beelzebub” was the name of a heathen god and came to be used for Satan. They accused Jesus of ministering in the power of Satan. This world was not a friend to Jesus and it will be no friend to us.

John 15:20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

We have the promise of peace, but we also have the promise of persecution.

Philippians 1:29-30²⁹ For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; ³⁰ Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

2 Timothy 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

1 Peter 4:12-13¹² Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: ¹³ But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

2. THE CONFIDENCE BELIEVERS CAN ENJOY (vs. 19-20, 26-31)

A. Rely on God’s help (vs. 19-20)

Persecution was an opportunity for the disciples to trust Christ and His care for them. They were able to speak up for Him without rehearsing what they needed to say. The Holy Spirit gave them the words to say in time of need. Verses 19-20 should never be used as an excuse for a preacher or teacher to be unprepared and presume that the Lord will give them a message whenever they get up to preach or teach.

B. Fear God, not man (vs. 26-28)

Christ’s disciples should not look for conflict, but neither should we fear it.

Proverbs 29:25 *The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.*

The fear of man is a trap to run from, but the fear of God is a tower to run into.

C. Rest in God's providence (vs. 29-31)

The argument in these verses is from the lesser to the greater. If our heavenly Father watches over little birds, how much more does He care for His people? He knows every detail about us. He is concerned about everything that happens to us, and nothing happens to us without His direction or His permission. Christ was talking about His sovereign control of all things. Not only does He know when a sparrow falls to the ground; He providentially controls it. Even things that seem to be luck or chance are under God's control.

Proverbs 16:33 *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.*

Romans 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

3. THE COMMITMENT BELIEVERS WILL EXPRESS (vs. 32-33, 37-39)

A. The confession of following Christ (vs. 32-33)

A genuine disciple acknowledges Jesus as Lord of his life, even if it means suffering or death. He is confident that the Lord will acknowledge him as one of His own before the Father. One of the first marks of a true believer is His confession of Christ as Lord.

Romans 10:9 *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

To confess is to say the same thing as God. It means to agree with God about the person and work of His Son.

B. The cost of following Christ (vs. 37-39)

This was the first time Jesus mentioned the cross to His disciples. The cross was a place to die. It represented a total commitment of their lives to Christ. This was a call to full surrender and death to self. Following Jesus involves total devotion, not a lukewarm, half-hearted commitment.

All the Way My Savior Leads Me

*All the way my Savior leads me; what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my Guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well;
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.*

*All the way my Savior leads me, cheers each winding path I tread,
Gives me grace for every trial, feeds me with the living bread.
Though my weary steps may falter, and my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see;
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see.*

*All the way my Savior leads me; O the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song through endless ages: "Jesus led me all the way."
This my song through endless ages: "Jesus led me all the way."*

~ Fanny Crosby