

John 10: 31-42; “The Persecution of our Lord”, Sermon # 60 in the series – “That All May Honor the Son”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on April 18th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.

We find here that the Lord Jesus revealed many wonderful truths of the greatness and glory of His Person to those Jews who were most opposed to Him. They did not want to receive the truth from Him; that He was the Son of God, and one with the Father. It says in verse 31 that they took up stones again to stone Him.” They had done this once before in chapter 8 of John, when He said to them, that before Abraham was born, *I Am*. Here they take up stones once again; great fine ones, in order to immediately put to death this good Man who they wrongly thought was a blasphemer. At this hour I want to give you 3 observations on how the Lord Jesus faced this persecution that was coming to our Him.

1st of all – I want to show you that the Lord Jesus was persecuted because He declared both that He was God, and that He was a Man doing good works. 2nd – The Lord Jesus knew the Scripture well enough to defend Himself against the charge of blasphemy and declare his Deity in the process. And 3rd – Even though the Lord Jesus was persecuted in this way, still, many people did come to Him in faith. In making these observations, I also want to show you that if persecution came to the Lord Jesus because He was not afraid to declare His true identity, then persecution will also come to us when we declare His true identity. There are many good things that we can learn from our Lord, here, that will help us very much.

1st of all – I want to show you that the Lord Jesus was persecuted because He declared both that He was God, and that He was a Man doing good works.

As we look back over this passage, we find that Jesus had come up to the temple to observe the Feast of the Dedication, and to confront His own people, the Jews with their unbelief. When they saw Him there, they had asked Him – “How long do You keep us in doubt?” “If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” And so, instead of giving them the answer that they were looking for, He had told them plainly and that they did not believe. The miraculous works that He had been doing, He said; these bore witness to of Him. But He says to them in verse 26, that they did not believe, because they were not of His sheep. Now, I want you to know that the Lord Jesus was not speaking of the doctrine of election when He said this. Actually, He was trying to tell them that they were not His sheep because they would not hear His voice, or follow Him.

That is the real issue in your coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is whether or not you will hear His voice speaking to you in the word of God, which is His word. He said to these Jews in verse 28 that He was the One who gives eternal life, and once that life is given, He says, it can never be taken away, or lost, because it is God who gives salvation. If it depended upon the man, it could be lost or stolen from him, but it is not so with God. And then He plainly told them of His Deity. He plainly told them that His sheep would never perish because no one could snatch them out of His hand. Now, if He were only a man, then their salvation could be lost. But because He is was both God and Man, it would be utterly impossible.

And then He revealed to them the Divine relationship that He had with the Father. In verse 29 He says – “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. When He said this, He was not at all saying that He Himself was inferior to Father, but that all men trying to snatch His sheep from Him would not be able to do it, because the Father was greater than all men. He then adds – “I and My Father are one.” This is why the Jews took up stones to stone Him. They knew that He was plainly telling them that He was God, just as much as the Father was God. And that is why they took up stones to stone Him. But You will notice that the Lord Jesus responds to this by saying – “Many good works I have shown you from My Father.” “For which of those works do you stone Me?” He knew that they should have been able to see that He was their Messiah, that He was God

made manifest in the flesh, because of the miraculous works that He did. The works bore witness to His Deity.

They should have been able to draw the right conclusion but they could not, because they did not want to believe that they were wrong about God and their need of salvation altogether. There were many verses in the Scriptures which they should have been able to remember, and those verses would have led them to the right conclusion. Isaiah 9: 6 – “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder.” “And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.” “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Evidently, they did not think of this verse as pertaining to Jesus. They no doubt thought that their Messiah would be different from this man. Their Christ would be a political king who would conquer their enemies and deliver them from Roman domination. He would be one who would approve of their works-righteousness mentality. They thought that they deserved to be delivered from the Romans. They thought that they deserved to consider themselves as the people of God because they were Abraham’s descendants physically. They thought that they were righteous by their own righteousness. They were righteous because of their supposed good works, which supposedly God approved of.

But they were very wrong about this. Let us understand that it is never our own evaluation of ourselves and our own righteousness that God looks at. He knows that each of us is a sinner. He knows that all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. He knows that we all fall short of His glory in many ways. But these men thought that they knew better than Christ Himself, who was God Himself. They thought it was blasphemy that Jesus said that He and the Father were one. One in Essence, One in Substance. They think that they are not thinking of stoning Him for doing a good work, but really, if they would have believed that the good work of healing the man born blind could have only been done by the power of God, they would have drawn the right conclusion, that He was not only from God, but He was their Christ, and God made manifest in the flesh.

The man born blind who was healed, he drew the right conclusion. When the Jews called upon him to give God the glory; that they knew that Jesus was a sinner, and that they did not know where He was from, he answered – Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes!” He went on to say – “Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind.” “If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.” And those men were so hard-hearted and hateful toward the Lord Jesus. Actually they were blaspheming Him.

What is blasphemy anyway? It is talked about in the Mosaic law in Leviticus 24: 16, when an Israelite woman’s son blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed. And so they brought him to Moses and the Lord spoke to Moses and said – Let him be taken outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. These Jews who stood before Jesus were thinking of this verse when they picked up stones to stone Jesus. They thought Jesus was just as guilty as that man. But blasphemy is when God’s honor is defamed; when He is spoken of in a demeaning way, and when a person speaks evil of His Persons, or His word, or His works.

Actually it was not Jesus who blasphemed when He said that He and the Father were one. It was that these men were blaspheming Jesus by speaking against Him, and dishonoring Him by saying that He was a sinner, that He had a demon and He was mad; when actually, He was a Perfect Man in every way, and He was also very God of very God. So, as we think about what

happened to Jesus here, we need to see that we ourselves will no doubt be spoken against as well, when we identify with Him. At times, we will even be persecuted, because we belong to Christ. Let us remember that most other people around us, who are not Christians, do not realize that He has done a miracle in our hearts by His mighty power. He has raised us from our death in trespasses and sins and making us spiritually alive by His Spirit.

Religious, but unsaved people around us, people who trust in their own righteousness, will always find ways to persecute us, if they are strong enough in their own beliefs. They think that by their good works or their sacramental works that they are Christians, that God approves of them, and that they are on their way to heaven when actually they do not really believe in Christ at all. They are trusting in their own evaluation of themselves and not receiving God's word straightforwardly. If these Jews spoke against our Perfect Savior and Lord, blaspheming Him, then they will also speak against us, and some will even persecute us, depending on how much they hate the truth of the Bible.

Jesus says in Matthew 10: 24 – “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.” “It is enough for a disciples that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.” “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household.” So there it is. We are called to be Christ's disciples and servants. Let us not be ashamed of it, but boldly declare that our Lord is the greatest of all human beings; His Perfect Humanity is united with His Deity in His one Blessed Person. Let us boldly proclaim that no person can be saved without believing that Jesus Christ is God made manifest in the flesh. Let us trust that He will care for the welfare of our soul when no one else will. He was faithful and He can give us to be faithful in our witness for Him.

2nd – The Lord Jesus knew the Scripture well enough to defend Himself against the charge of blasphemy and to be able to declare His Deity in the process.

Verse 33 says – “The Jews answered Him saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’” “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, ‘You are gods?’” “If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’” “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

Here is the charge brought directly to our Lord. They believed that He was guilty of the sin of blasphemy. They believed that He was guilty of taking to Himself unlawfully, the title of being God's Son, and in speaking this way that He was doing, calling God His Father, He was “making Himself God”. Truly, if Jesus was guilty of this, it would be a charge worthy of death. But the fault here was not with the Lord Jesus. It was with those who would not look at the Jesus and think correctly about what He was doing. Jesus always went about doing good things and good works. He always spoke the truth and spoke it graciously to those who were teachable. The way that He spoke here is an instance of it.

He brings this matter of the charge of blasphemy to the touchstone of the Scripture. He gives these Jews an answer from their own law, words from the book of Psalms, Psalm 82, verse 6. He says – “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said You are gods?’” He begins by reasoning with them from the lesser to the greater; from men in authority on earth, the Lord of men, the Man from heaven, which He was. If we go back to Psalm 82 and look at it more carefully, in verse 1 it says that – “God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.” This Psalm was being literally fulfilled at the very time that Jesus was having this conversation with this congregation of the Jews, the mighty ones, the ones who had authority to speak on Ecclesiastical and Political issues.

No doubt whoever was speaking for these Jews was one of the magistrates or rulers in Israel, or someone sent on their behalf to give Jesus this answer. Christ was standing there in the midst of them, judging among the gods. He would do this at a number of points in his earthly ministry. But this incident was of particular importance. What Jesus was saying was that if God, in giving Asaph who wrote the Psalm, the inspired revelation to write down this word “gods” in the Scripture, calling those men “gods” who were rulers over Israel, on earth, then it was certainly not wrong for Him, the Lord of glory, the One whom God the Father had sanctified and sent into the world, to say that He was the Son of God. He was saying – If you have reverential respect for earthly rulers among you, then why would you not have reverential respect for Me, when I say to you that I am the Son of God, and that the Father and I are one?

It was a very good application of Scriptural truth. He goes on then, with the follow-up argument by saying, that if He was not doing the works of God the Father, then they should not believe Him, that He was His Son. But if He was doing them, that, even if they did not believe in Him, they should at least believe the works. Because if they would believe that the works were the works of God, they would be able to conclude rightly that the Father was in the Lord Jesus and that the Lord Jesus was in the Father. What tremendous truth He was giving to them. He was telling them that the Father had sanctified Him as His only begotten Son, to the work of coming into the world, speaking the truth, healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead; doing all of the creative miraculous works of the Father. And they still could not believe.

Interestingly, in Psalm 82, Asaph prophetically goes on to describe the exact reaction of these Jews to what Jesus was saying here in our text. In John 10: 39, it says that “they sought again to seize Jesus, but He escaped out of their hand.” In Psalm 82: 2 it says – “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” In verse 5 it says – “They do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are unstable.” (That is, government in Israel at this time) Verse 6 says – “I said, ‘You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.’ “But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes.” This is exactly what happened, unless there were some among them who repented later on.

Verse 8 of Psalm 82 says – “Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations.” Well, the Father was watching over his word to perform it. He was then, and He is still doing so now. For it is Christ who will inherit all nations. And He will inherit them because He is the Lord of glory, who persevered through all obstacles to speak the truth about Himself, and the truth of our need of Him. He was persecuted for the truth that He was the Son of God. Let us see how awful the spiritual blindness of religious self-justifying men really is, and let us pity them. For how would any person have been saved if Jesus had not been willing to have endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself. Let us always be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within us, yet with gentleness and reverence as Jesus did.

Are you willing to suffer the antagonistic words and actions of self-righteous unbelieving people against you, because of your identification with the Lord Jesus? This is something that each of us needs to think about. It is something which we should calmly reflect upon, and decide to accept. How can people be saved unless we tell them of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ? How can truth make progress in all the earth unless we declare that Jesus Christ was the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. He far above all gods; all leaders, all rulers, all Kings, and the most important Person of history; because He is the central focus of history. History is his story. Let us not be ashamed of it, but rather glory in it, and speak of it to others.

And 3rd – Even though the Lord Jesus was persecuted in this way, still, many people did come to Him in faith later.

We see here in verse 39 that this group of Jews sought to seize Jesus, but He escaped out of their hand. “And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John had been

baptizing at first, and there He stayed, it says. And even though He had been spoken against and persecuted, it says in verse 41 – “Then many came to Him and said, “John performed no sign, but all things that John spoke about this Man were true.” This is what many were saying about Jesus in their hearts, and in their hearts they were believing in Him, and telling His disciples that they believed in Him. Well, let us think about what we should do when people persecute us. Jesus has shown us that we must not be afraid to share the truth about Him. We must not be ashamed of Him.

In Luke 9: 26 He tells us – “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.” Whenever you are ashamed you ought to think of this reality. If I am not ashamed of Jesus now, when others are making fun of men, or persecuting me, the Lord Jesus will commend me on the Day when I see Him face to face and all is made clear. For it will all be made clear in the light of His Presence, in the light of His Father’s same Presence, and in the presence of the holy angels, the heavenly watchers who saw you take your stand for Christ when you were spoken against, and when you were persecuted.

There is never any good reason to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus. He is the greatest of all Persons, the most gentle, the most holy, the most loving, the most careful and wise in His judgments, and in His speech. Remember Him when you are being persecuted for His sake and for righteousness sake that He never changes, and will never disappoint you. Remember also what He did, here in this instance, after He was treated in such a disrespectful way, and insulted as to His Perfect Humanity and Deity. He did not stay and fight with them about it, but after He escaped their hands, He went away again, beyond the Jordan, to a place where He knew that He would be received well. This was the place where He had called His first disciples; Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Nathaniel were called, and they responded.

And it says – Many came to Him at this time. Sometimes, following persecution, will come a time of peace and a time of blessing; a time where you will find that there still are people who will listen to you, and appreciate the word that you are preaching; the truth that you are holding fast to. Remember this, and glory in the work of God in people’s hearts, and His eternal purposes. Glory in the fact that everything that is said about Jesus in the word is true, and that in believing in Him you shall find rest for your soul. Glory in the fact that even if you preach the gospel in one certain place, and your words concerning Christ are rejected, yet you may go to another place and find that many will come to listen. It says that Jesus went and stayed in just such a place. And many believed in Him there in that place, beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing at first.

When the Lord is at work in people’s hearts, they will think about what they have heard preached. It says here that John didn’t perform any sign miracle, but all the things that he said about Jesus were true. Having heard these things that John said about Jesus, they took it to heart, and now they went and listened to Jesus for themselves. The truth that was preached was confirmed by everything that Jesus said and did. And many believed in Him there in that place. The men in Jerusalem had picked up stones to throw at Him in Jerusalem, but He goes to Bethabara, beyond the Jordan, and Jesus knew that God could raise up people who would believe in Him there, from the stones if He so willed to do so.

Let us believe in a definite atonement which is applied by God most particularly. For if God does not have many people in one city, He may have many people there in another city. Let us not become discouraged by lack of conversions or results that seem unworthy of Christ’s great sacrifice. Let us have faith to believe that God has placed us where He has determined that we shall do the most good. But if because of persecution we need to flee, let us also not be ashamed to go away from the place where we are maliciously opposed and persecuted. Jesus left Jerusalem for that time, and went to another place to regroup; to be refreshed and encouraged.

He went to a place where He knew that God had been working, and where He knew that He would work yet again. A little later, He would set His face like a flint to go up to Jerusalem, where He would fulfill all that John had spoken of Him. He would become the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

The people who had heard John had realized that it was Jesus who would baptize them with the Spirit. They came to realize that John was only the friend of the spiritual Bridegroom, but that Jesus was the Bridegroom. They heard John deny that He was the Christ, but they now knew that Jesus was the Christ, their promised Messiah. They had heard him say that one was coming who was greater than he was, the one who ranked higher than Him and was preferred before Him; the One who would have the Spirit without measure, the One whom the Father had given all things into His hands. Now do you believe that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. If so, do not be afraid to confess Him as the greatest and best of Beings, the Savior of sinners, and Your Lord, and Master, and Friend.