

# Standing With the Persecuted

Psalm 42:9-11

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2019-11-3

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## Introduction

For our communion meditation I will read the last three verses of Psalm 42, a Psalm that records the heart cry of the persecuted church. Though we try to remember the persecuted church every Sunday in our prayers, we are devoting this entire service to that subject. And this Psalm shows God's special heart for them.

Psa. 42:9 I will say to God my Rock, "Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" 10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

You probably all are familiar with the terrorist attack against Christians in Sri Lanka this past Spring. The death toll was over 300 and over 500 were wounded. One news report stated,

Christians are shocked. The question on everyone's lips is, 'Why did this happen?' People were confused. They didn't understand why churches were being targeted.

Given the peace loving nature of those Christians and the charity they continually showed to the poor and the hurting, they didn't seem to be a threat to anyone. They didn't understand why anyone would hate them so much as to try to kill them.

There are three "why" questions in this paragraph that we just read from Psalm 42 that uncover the confusion and hurt that the persecuted church frequently experiences. But since they are inspired "Why" questions, they also show God's sympathy and care for us. He does not make us suffer in silence. He allows us to bring our hurts and confusions to Him.

## I. Why does God allow persecutors to persecute?

The first question is basically, "Why does God allow this?" He asks God, "Why have You forgotten me?" Of course, God has not forgotten this son of Korah who had experienced such persecution. But if Jesus Himself on the cross cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" it shows that there are some things that are difficult for our minds to process, and God allows us to express our confusion - our whys.

Why does God not just destroy the persecutors and protect His people? He could easily do so, but has sometimes chosen not to. Some people have tried

to give rational answers to this: 1) Maybe the church didn't pray the imprecatory Psalms - you have not because you ask not. 2) Maybe the descendants of these persecutors have been ordained to salvation, and killing the persecutors would not allow the descendants to come into existence. 3) Or the reason sometimes given - that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. When pagans see the irrationality of the hatred against Christians, it leads them to consider the claims of Christ.

But even with these and other academic reasons, we still feel abandoned in the process. And it is true - we may realize that our feelings are not reliable, but in verse 1, this son of Korah at least feels distant from God, and the very fact that God includes this in the Bible shows that He cares about our feelings. This persecuted son of Korah has dryness in verse 2, has tears in verse 3, is lonely in verse 4, and as you go through the Psalm shows that his unreliable emotions are making him cry out these "Why" questions. The Bible does not ignore our emotions. Instead, it helps us to resolve them in a godly way.

I counted a couple hundred similar "why" questions in the Bible, and most of these did not receive an answer. And I think that it is written that way on purpose. It shows that even though we may not know the reasons for our sufferings (which are in God's secret councils), we can know that God cares. He cares enough to identify with our suffering via these Psalms.

The Lord's Table is God's pledge that despite the fact that our "Why?" questions not always answered, we can be absolutely assured that if God is for us, no one can successfully be against us. Though we may lose everything, including our lives, no one can rob us of God, our salvation, or eternal glory in heaven. And sometimes we have to process these things over and over to come to grips with our feelings.

### ***A. Why do our persecutors hate us?***

The second why question can be summed up in the words, "Why do our persecutors hate us?" That too is puzzling. He asks, "Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a breaking of my bones, my enemies reproach me, while they say to me all day long, where is your God?" And the "Why?" springs from the fact that their hatred makes no sense. There is nothing Christians do to deserve it. As Jesus said, "They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:25). I think we need to think through that bit of theology - "They hated Me without a cause" If there is no cause for hatred, why the hatred? It certainly does not benefit our persecutors.

We get a hint of an answer in Acts 9 when Jesus asked Saul “why are you persecuting Me” (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). It is ultimately Christ whom these persecutors hate. And the more clearly Christ is seen in the church, the hotter the persecution that the spirit of Antichrist will produce in his people. Ultimately the hatred is a demonic hatred that makes no sense.

It made no sense for France to kill or chase away the cream of the crop of scientists, artists, artisans, scholars, doctors and others from France during the Reformation. That stupid persecution hurt France economically for the next hundred years and hurt it so spiritually that it led to the blood bath of the French Revolution. But you see, when the demonic produces that hatred, the people don't care. Paul said that ultimately we wrestle against demonic spiritual powers that move the children of Satan. So in one sense we should not be surprised that the persecution of Christians is so irrational. Jesus promised in John 15 that the world would hate believers just like it hated Him, and that whole section on the world's hatred for the church boils down to the demonic hatred for Christ. It is an irrational hatred.

When we come to the Lord's Table, we are breaking off our fellowship with demons and all that Satan's kingdom stands for, and we are committing ourselves to Christ and all that Christ's kingdom stands for. And sometimes persecution makes that line of antithesis between the two kingdoms real.

## **II. Why am I troubled by this?**

The third question is basically, “Why am I troubled by this? I'm a child of God and I shouldn't be troubled, but I am. Why?” Several times in this Psalm he expresses puzzlement over why his heart is so discouraged and depressed. He has every reason for joy. He does not doubt God's goodness, God's power, God's wisdom, or God's love. But he still feels bad, and asks, 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? In effect he is preaching to himself and telling himself to cut it out. He shakes himself out of his negative thinking and says,

Hope in God;  
For I shall yet praise Him,  
The help of my countenance and my God.

## **III. Conclusion**

Though the Lord's Supper showcases the irrational hatred that the first century people had against Christ, it does not ultimately promise us full answers this side of eternity. Instead, it calls us to trust Jesus, to commit ourselves to Him, to force ourselves to get out of the rut of negative

thinking, to start praising God, and to be faithful even unto death. When we realize that our life is hidden with Christ in God and that no one can pluck us out of the Father's hand, we have every reason for joy.

But if you lack joy this morning, make your participation in the supper a commitment to fight for that joy; to believe despite your doubts; to commit yourself to Him despite your feelings. Your spirit must be in charge of your feelings so that you submit your entire being to Christ's Lordship in this feast.

But also make it a commitment to remember the persecuted church in other countries. This Meal calls us to recognize that our union and communion with Christ gives us a union and communion with the persecuted church in China, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, and every other part of the world. Let's commit ourselves to praying for them. Amen.