

~Other Speakers G-L: Allan Halton:

I can sum up in one sentence a book I've been reading on early Christian history. The early Christians lived in a world that hated God and loved blood. The populace of Rome and other cities of the Empire came out to the arenas for their blood sports as passionately—and as routinely—as North Americans to a football or hockey game, cheering and jeering and betting on the outcomes. Professional gladiators fought to the death; Christians and criminals died horrible deaths. It was entertainment to a society that had become completely depraved. They loved blood. And ultimately God gave them blood to drink—their own at the hands of the barbarian hordes.

This is the kind of world the early Christians were up against and in which many of them became martyrs. The story of their sacrifice is deeply moving. But that was just the beginning. Apparently the number of Christian martyrs all through history amounts to about 70 million. Half of that total—something like 45 million—took place in the 20th century. The world has not changed all that much, has it. We're in the early years of the 21st century now, and stories of Christian persecution are frequent news.

Notice what I just said: stories of Christian persecution are frequent news. Here in North America we don't experience this first hand. We enjoy religious freedom; the world about us more or less leaves us alone. That is, so far. There's a foreboding by certain Christians on a website I sometimes visit (SermonIndex) that persecution is at the door in the United States. This likely means Canada too, I would think. Considering the past—and what is happening in other nations even today—it's inevitable that severe persecution will be the portion of western Christians too.

The question is, what will bring this persecution on? In many countries to identify yourself as a Christian is to imperil your life. Not here. Being a Christian does not get you persecuted in Canada or the United States. So how is it that persecution is likely to come upon us here? What will change?

I hear someone saying it will happen because our society is more and more ready to openly express its growing hatred for God. I agree. But what will cause that latent hatred to be manifested openly?

Psalm 2 comes to mind.

Why do the heathen rage, and the peoples imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His anointed, saying,

Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us.

Is not this increasingly the mindset of our western societies? Enough of the confining cords and restraints of righteousness! God is not going to tell us what to do. We want loose!

But that means dealing with and silencing those who reprove them. That means gathering together "against the Lord and against His Christ"—His Anointed One. Yes, and, as the Christians in the book of Acts who quoted these words discovered, that means gathering together against the "anointed ones" as well—the Christians (Acts 4.26).

Jesus said:

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you (Jn. 15.18).

I've read these words often. One day the light came on as I read them. The whole context of this verse is... Jesus is speaking to His disciples about the coming of the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. It was a "coming" that was in a very real sense the coming of Christ Himself to them. For, He has just said to them, "I will not leave you comfortless (orphans); I will come to you" (Jn. 14.18). And He is talking of the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. In other words, the full reality of the coming of the Holy Spirit to you and me is that Christ Himself has come, and is seen in our lives. This is not going to be taken kindly by a world that hates God. And so John says in one of his letters, "Marvel not if the world hate you" (1 Jn. 3.13). Why are we not to marvel? It's because we live in a world that hates God... and suddenly, because of the Holy Spirit in you and me, they see God manifested in you and me.

This is the significance of Jesus' words. "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated

you.” He goes on:

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (Jn. 15.18,19).

In other words, the world doesn’t hate its own. If we are like the world, we are in no danger of persecution. But those who are not of the world, those Christ has chosen out of the world and in whom His Spirit has come to dwell... the world that hates God will hate these anointed ones.

And what do we mean by the world? When Jesus spoke these words to His disciples He was including many who boasted they loved Jehovah. Yet their religion was just a cloak. Very religious they might be, but they actually hated God. See what He says?

If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also.

If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father (Jn. 15.22,24).

That’s the significance of the Son of God. They couldn’t go around professing they loved Jehovah when their God appeared in the person of His Son... and they hated Him. In like manner, the coming of the Holy Spirit reveals the hearts of all men—those out there in the world... and professing Christians as well. They won’t be able to continue saying they love Jesus when they hate those who are one with Him because of the Spirit of Jesus in their lives.

Most everyone likes to think of themselves as a nice person; most people would protest indignantly being told they hate God. But it’s their reaction to the Holy Spirit—their reaction to a vessel in whom God dwells by the Holy Spirit—that tells on them.

Some, upon this revelation of their own hearts, will be convicted and broken. And deeply repentant.

Others will harden their hearts, and take out their hatred of God and His Christ on those in whom He is shining forth.

There are many genuine Christians who live in countries where they are persecuted merely for being identified with the literal Name of Christ. What about us here? But remember, ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who is sent in Christ’s Name. “...The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name” (Jn. 14.26). It is this that we Christians need in the western world, where ordinary churchgoers are not persecuted but rather ignored. There are many Christians in the West who are grieved to the quick over the state of their world—and their church. They are seeking God about it. They have a great cry on their heart. I believe God is going to answer that cry with a baptism of His Presence that will mean Christ Himself is seen in them.

That makes me tremble. Christ Himself? Oh, how deeply we need this Testimony. It’s something we seek to give ourselves to day by day... and sow to, and pray for, and long for, and cry for... and expect.

But this is the Presence of One that the world has demonstrated time and again it hates. This is a visitation with a price tag on it.