

# Remember My Chains

## INTRODUCTION

- Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." (John 15:18-21)
- I sometimes find it hard to connect with the kind of treatment of the faithful of which we read in the New Testament church. In our country in 2019 we experience a freedom of religion and tolerance of many different belief systems that never existed during Jesus' day. We will likely never face the kinds of physical persecution, imprisonment, or even death for our faith like they did, but is there something we can learn from their situation in our modern day permissive society?
- Consider the example of Paul. He saw the light on the road to Damascus, where he was originally headed to imprison Christians on behalf of the Jews, and he was converted to Christ. He travelled around the known world preaching primarily to the Gentiles that Jesus was God's Son. After many years of spreading the gospel, he returned to Jerusalem where he was to be taken into custody. He addressed the Jews, though many would not believe his message. Knowing that there were those who conspired to kill him, he uses his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar and begins a long journey to Rome. Once there, he used his time to teach to those in Rome and also wrote many letters to the churches he previously visited when he was a free man.
- As he concluded his letter to the church in Colossae from prison, Paul said, "Remember my chains." (Col 4:18) While these words were certainly meaningful to his audience at the time, I believe even today these words have a special meaning for those of us who might never experience the kinds of hardships Paul faced in his own life.

## AMBASSADORS TO THE KING

- We are all, in a sense, ambassadors for Christ when we take His message out into the world. Though we may never suffer the same level of persecution for standing for the gospel, we stand side by side with those who have, sharing in the same work they risked their lives for. "... To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." (Eph 6:18-20)

- Jesus also stands with His ambassadors and views any mistreatment of them as a direct assault to Himself. As Saul persecuted the church, it was Christ who spoke to him on the road and said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:3-5)

### **SYMPATHY FOR THE SAINTS**

- As members of the church, we consider the mistreatment of each other as mistreatment of ourselves. We can put ourselves in their shoes and connect with their pain in meaningful ways. This is especially important for us today as great time and distance separates us from those who endured the most serious times of mistreatment for their faith. "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body." (Heb 13:3)
- One of the great blessings of the church is our ability to lean on each other for support during difficult times. This was true of those who endured chains due to their faith in the first century and it's still true for us today, as the Hebrew writer said, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Cor 12:26)

### **PROGRESS IN PERIL**

- Times of persecution can actually serve to spread the gospel in real ways. While we often want to look at mistreatment of the saints as a negative thing, God is able to use these events as a way to advance the gospel, as Paul said, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." (Phil 1:12-14)
- This powerful truth is just as important for us today as it was back then. Your trial, mistreatment, and pain can actually be used by God for good when we're His purposeful ambassadors on this earth. As Paul said, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28)

### **A PROMISED POSSESSION**

- Struggle and affliction, whether they come to us or to others, can help us remember the great reward that's awaiting us. This world is not our home, and so when any of us faces our own "chains," we can remain joyful in it, knowing that God is faithful to give us what He promised. "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your

confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised." (Heb 10:32-36)

- Even those in the first century looked back to the mistreatment of those before them and found lessons in it. As they looked back to Moses who chose mistreatment with his people rather than sin, they too could see the value in keeping their eyes fixed on the reward. "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." (Heb 11:24-26)

## **CONCLUSION**

- No, we may never be thrown into prison because of our beliefs, but we should all expect some amount of mistreatment along the way. As we look back to generations past, we can still learn many great and important lessons from those who did endure that kind of treatment!
- As we look back to their struggles, remember that we stand together in service to our King, lifting each other's hands when any of us endure hardships. We see that difficult times are not to be viewed as negative events, but positive and productive in the progress of God's will and intention. Finally, we're able to use our "chains" as a reminder that we're on a lifelong journey toward our heavenly home in which righteousness dwells.