

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2012

A Suffering Church (1 Thessalonians 1:6)

(Sunday, May 6)

First Thessalonians 1:6 says, *“ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.”* The Thessalonian church didn’t have it easy. In fact, any church that is saved and surrendered to Christ is going to have a difficult time.

As soon as the Thessalonian assembly had begun, they experienced opposition. Acts 17 records what happened: The Jews who believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them Paul, Silas, and Timothy out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, these have turned the world upside down and come here also! Persecution began immediately for that church.

(Sunday, May 13)

First Thessalonians 2:14-16 reviews the persecution the church had experienced: *“For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.”*

The church that is saved and surrendered to Christ is going to antagonize the world. Consequently, suffering will come. Jesus puts it this way, *“If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you: If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”*

(Sunday, May 20)

In Colossians 1:24, we read that Paul was willing to suffer if it brought about the salvation of others: *“I rejoice in my suffering for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh.”* Paul meant that since the world couldn't directly persecute Jesus anymore, it would persecute His followers. The Apostle was willing to suffer for the one who had suffered for him.

Wouldn't it be great to be persecuted for being Christ-like because you've turned the world upside down?

If unbelievers got irritated about your church, it would probably mean that it was correctly preaching the gospel in a manner that exposes sin. The church that confronts the world is going to suffer! If you don't want to be persecuted then don't try to do right. Standing for right will bring about suffering.

Saints of every age have faced persecution because of their trust in Jesus Christ. Often their persecution was often extreme and brutal. In studying the bible along with church history, we are informed of the extent of these persecutions. There were many times and occasions when Christians were thrown into fiery furnaces, ripped open with the sword, slashed with sharpened knives, baked in ovens, nailed to trees, fed to hungry animals, crucified on crosses and beheaded by axes.

Difficulties have always plagued the saints, but through them, they have become established in the faith, strong in their commitment, mature in their experience, tempered in their souls, confident in their Lord, developed in their patience, and powerful in their testimony.

I have found out that rough and rocky times will deepened your determination to live for the Lord.

I have discovered that:

- Diamonds do not sparkle until they have been cut and polished.
- Stars do not shine their brightest until it is the darkest.
- Roses do not release their true fragrance until they have been bruised or crushed.

So God's purpose in allowing us to suffer is to:

- Help us, not hurt us.
- Bless us, not burden us.
- Develop us, not destroy us.
- Cleanse us, not corrupt us.
- Refine us, not ruin us.
- Mold us, not shatter us.
- Train us, and not to torment or torture us.

(Sunday, May 27)

The Apostle says in 1Peter 4:16, “*yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*” It’s alright to suffer if you are suffering for the glory of God. When you are suffering for the Glory of God, you won’t let problems, difficulties, adversities, afflictions, trials, temptations, or troubles get you down. In spite of his hardship, he remains happy. In spite of his circumstances, he remains cool. And in spite of his difficulties, he remains determined.

The Thessalonians had joy in the midst of suffering and hardship. No matter how difficult the circumstances become, true Christians do not lose their ultimate joy because the Holy Spirit dispenses it to the elect. The church is the elect. We may experience severe persecution, but the genuineness of our salvation transcended that affliction so that we never lose our joy.

We can respond to whatever we are going through with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

We rejoice that we are considered worthy to suffer for the Lord!