



Cell Guide



DATE: 13 AUG 2023 | SPEAKER: PS ERNIE SONG

TOPIC: THE PERSECUTED CHURCH | SCRIPTURE: [REVELATION 2:8-11, 3:7-13](#)

SPIRITUAL OBJECTIVES

At the end of the sermon discussion, cell members will:

1. Recognise that we are in persecution and separate ourselves from the world.
2. Remain faithful amid persecution even though it will cost us.

SERMON SUMMARY

There are two types of persecution that a true believer might go through – physical or cultural. The Singapore Church is going through a cultural persecution. The warning of Christ is to “remain faithful” amid persecution. Many Christians in the world today live in countries where they are persecuted. May their steadfastness in the midst of persecution cause us to examine our own lives, and inspire us to be faithful to the end.

SERMON RECAP

1) Persecution of the Early Church

- The early church was persecuted by 3 groups of people:
 - The Jewish Community:
 - A group of Jews who turned to Christianity went around proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and the resurrection of Christ, and included the Gentiles into their faith. This offended and angered the non-Christian Jews.
 - The Jewish Christians were looked down upon, ostracised and treated badly by the Jews and their life was incredibly difficult.
 - The Roman Empire:
 - There have been many people who claimed to be the “Messiah” in the history of Rome’s occupation of Israel. It always led to a revolt against the Roman Empire. Therefore, the Romans are very wary and did not like the Christians who proclaims that Jesus as their Messiah.
 - The Romans also persecuted the Christians because of their refusal to participate in the worship of Caesar.
 - Society in General:
 - Christianity is a threat to traditional values. Many in society were offended by Christian beliefs.
 - Therefore, the Christians were ostracised as they abstained from common social practices such as idol worship (religion, family and work are intertwined and inseparable during those times).

- The early church was persecuted because of their beliefs, the way they lived, and the things/practices they chose to abstain from.
- The end goal of persecution is to force or pressure a believer to deny his/her faith or to conform to the world's values so that God's work in the world is disrupted.

2) Smyrna: Physical Persecution ([Revelation 2:8-11](#))

Smyrna's Persecution

- *"... Be faithful, **even to the point of death**, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."* – **Revelation 2:10 (NIV)**
- The persecution by the Jews (a significant presence in Smyrna) was intense:
 - Thrown out of the synagogue
 - Beatings, flogging, imprisonment
 - Cast out by family, friends, and trade associates
 - Martyrdom of many disciples through stoning
- Smyrna comes from the Greek word myrrh: When myrrh is crushed, a beautiful fragrance is released. When the Christians in Smyrna in being persecuted (crushed) and they remained faithful even unto death, it was a sweet-smelling aroma and God was pleased with the Church.
- Story of Polycarp's Martyrdom
 - Polycarp is a bishop of the Church of Smyrna. During the time of persecution, 86-year-old Polycarp refused to escape. He was faithful all the way till his death.
 - After the death of Polycarp, another 2300 Christians were martyred for their refusal to denounce Christ. They were inspired by Polycarp.

Relevance to Today

- Singapore is very fortunate not to face open persecution, but in many other countries, Christians are persecuted.
- Remembering our brothers and sisters in persecution (statistics from Christianity Today)
 - Every day, 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith.
 - Every day, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked.
 - And every day, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted.
 - 360 million Christians in 76 countries suffer high levels of persecution (Open Doors, 2022)
 - Death, honour killing, rape, kidnapping, slavery, abduction, imprisonment, refusal of aid (Forbes, 2022).

Christians all over the world are simply being persecuted because of their chosen belief and their choice to live counterculturally. Yet they remain faithful and unafraid. When we see such strong faith on display, doesn't it prompt us to reflect on our own faith? What version of Christianity are we living today – one that is Biblical or one that is shaped by our fleshly desires?

Video Played During Service: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKkMDMvzF1o&t=128s>

3) Philadelphia: Cultural Persecution ([Revelation 3:7-13](#))

Philadelphia's Persecution

- *"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name."* – **Revelation 3:8 (NIV)**
- The suffering of the Church of Philadelphia is different from that of Smyrna. But the point is not on the types of suffering, but on how faithful the Christians are.

- There are false Christians ([Revelation 2:9, 3:9](#)) – ones who compromise their faith and worship both Christ and other gods. They blended worldly practices with Christian beliefs. They influenced and pressured believers to conform.
- There was great pressure to compromise one's values, beliefs, lifestyle, and character.

Relevance to Today

- There is an intense cultural persecution to bring more of the world into the church – to compromise the way and values of Christ.
- Satan's primary weapon against the Church is deception ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#)). Bondage is disguised as freedom – freedom to do whatever you want.
- Spiritually, cultural persecution forces you to listen to the voice of your flesh. And some of these deceptions have entered into the church. Examples:
 - Sunday Worship is optional
 - Sex before marriage is acceptable
 - Your faith and deeds need not match because God loves you
 - Churches become places of entertainment and not worship
 - Leaders have lost their spiritual authority to speak into their sheep's lives
- The world is pressurising us to conform. The truth is that many of us have.
- The churches that were rebuked in Revelation 2 and 3 – their standard of Christianity might be higher than ours. Our standard has become so low that we do not recognise lukewarmness. That is why our witness is not effective – it has become optional. We need to once again come out and be separate from the world, whatever the cost we may bear.
- Jesus is coming back. We do not know when. But we must constantly be found ready, to be able to stand before Him and not be ashamed/regret the life that we lived.

"You adulterers! Don't you realise that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God."
 – **James 4:4 (NLT)**

"Therefore, 'Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.'" – 2 Corinthians 6:17 (NIV)

4) Closing

As RiverLife starts a new season, let us examine our lives. We have our individual races to run, let us run it well for the glory of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways do you think we are being culturally persecuted today?

Leader's Notes

Persecution may not be so obvious and blatant in Singapore. However, we do face persecution; subtle/underlying hostility towards our beliefs, pressure to agree with the current/popular non-Biblical views and being outcasted socially if we do not conform to the culture.

Have you personally experienced persecution in Singapore? Share with the cell.

Transition

The aim of persecution is to force Christians to compromise the way and values of Christ. The end goal is to force us to deny our faith.

2. Am I lowering my standards of what it means to follow Christ, and conforming to the world's standards, especially in the areas of family and sexuality?

Leader's Notes

There is intense pressure around us to conform to the culture of today, to be inclusive and accepting of diversity. We can see that Singapore is succumbing to liberal ideologies, supporting inclusivity and diversity. The traditional concept of family is eroding. Gender is no longer straightforward. Almost everyone is accepting of these ideologies.

Examine yourself if there are any areas that you have lowered your standards (can be other areas besides family and sexuality). Why? What should you do to stand firm in faith?

Transition

Pray that RiverLife will be a church that will not be afraid to be persecuted, will not give in to the pressures of society, and will not be afraid to stand up for what we believe in, because the day and the hour is here when we must stand up for our faith.

3. How can our persecuted brothers and sisters encourage us amid our own persecutions and sufferings?

Leader's Notes

Ps Ernie has provided examples of Christians in persecution and how they remain strong and overcome it. What can we learn from them? How can their lives inspire our own journey of faith?

On the other hand, what can we do to help brothers and sisters in Christ who are being persecuted today? We can pray, give, and invest in them.

Consider watching this documentary on the Power of Persecuted Church (<https://youtu.be/Eb0OqliYwUQ>, 41 mins). Share your thoughts and learnings after watching this film.

Here are some organisations that you can partner with to support the persecuted churches:

- Open Doors: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/singapore/>
- The Voice of the Martyrs: <https://www.persecution.com/>
- Release International: <https://releaseinternational.org/>
- Help the Persecuted: <https://htp.org/>

Closing

Jesus has already warned us that those who follow Him will be persecuted. The challenge for the church is to remain faithful to His values and His ways.

WORKS

Consider dividing the group into micro-groups for a deeper time of sharing as well as praying for the following items:

1. Sermon Application

- Pray for us to separate ourselves from the world – its values, lifestyles, and mission.
- Pray for the strength to remain faithful in persecution.

2. RiverLife

- Pray for our church that as we have concluded the 21 days of prayer and fasting, we will determine to live in a new normal – one that follows after the example of Christ.

3. World

- Pray for good weather in Singapore during this hot season. Pray also that there will not be any haze.
- Continue to pray for the Russia-Ukraine war and the avoidance of using nuclear weapons.
- Pray for Singapore as we approach the presidential election – that a Godly president will be elected.
- Pray for the heatwave that is affecting many countries in Europe and Asia.
- Pray for Hawaii as catastrophic wild fires are sweeping through the various islands.
- Continue to pray for Thailand as they elect a new Prime Minister.

4. Opportunities for Outreach

- Ask the Lord to bless us as we step out to reach a pre-believer.
- Ask the Lord to grant you opportunities to reach out to a non-believing loved one, friend, or colleague this week as we seek to mature in Christlikeness.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Digital Bulletin: rlc.sg/bulletin

1. **Call for a Suitable Liver Donor.** Father of RiverLifer Beverly Lim is calling for suitable donors for his son, Ryan, who is in need of a liver transplant. Ryan was diagnosed with Autoimmune Hepatitis (AIH) that affected his liver and bile duct. On 22 May 2023, Ryan was brought in to see the doctor due to his bloated stomach and the doctor concluded that a liver transplant was needed for Ryan as his liver was failing. The donor needs to be of blood type A+ or O+, with no prior illness and someone with a healthy diet. Read more about their story in this salt and light article [here](#). Should anyone wish to enquire or volunteer, do contact Ryan's dad, Lim Cheng Kwan, directly at +65 9768 4748.
2. **Marriage Preparation Course.** *For couples exploring marriage in the next two years.* 3, 10 & 17 Sep. Sundays, 11am to 3pm. Sign up online by Sun, 27 Aug: rlc.sg/mpc. Fees: \$50 per couple (Excludes US\$35 for PREPARE-ENRICH)
3. **RiverLife Mission Trips.** Come serve with us on a Mission Trip this year-end!
 - **Trip 2: 1-6 Nov (Wed-Mon) Province Wide Revival Conference in Pangasinan, North Philippines** Registration closes on Tue, 15 Aug.
 - **Trip 3: 7-11 Dec (Thu-Mon) Christmas Celebrations with B'laan Tribe in Sarangani, Philippines** Registration closes on Fri, 1 Sep.
 - Sign up for a trip at rlc.sg/missions-go.

4. **Marriage Retreat.** We had a powerful time with 27 married couples in March as we piloted our first Marriage Retreat. It was a powerful time of learning, rejuvenation, healing and restoration for our couples. No couple left unimpacted. We would like to encourage married couples to join us at this retreat and experience God's hand on your marriage.
 - For more information, download the eBrochure here: rlc.sg/mrBrochure
 - Highlights from previous retreat: <https://youtu.be/csHrCtBsuWg>
 - Link to signup: rlc.sg/mr

CHURCH CALENDAR

1. Church Calendar Highlights

- *Quarter 3*
 - 32nd Anniversary Weekend: 26-27 Aug
 - Bible Equipping – Leviticus: 15 & 17, 22 & 24 Sep
 - Cells Prayer Night #2: 29 Sep
- *Quarter 4*
 - Equipping Series: 17 & 19, 24 & 26 Nov
 - Christmas Outreach: Dec
 - Cells Prayer Night #3: 29 Dec

2. **YA Gatherings (For Young Adults in their 20s). First Saturday Every Month, 5pm-8.30pm Victory Chapel (Level 1).** The YA Gathering is a space where young adults can get together to connect and build community. This gathering is made up of two components – Community Conversations & Communal Dinner – both with a focus on relationship building and life conversations. If you are currently in a cell, register your attendance with your cell leader. If you are currently not in a cell, do register online: rlc.sg/YAgathering-apr-reg.

3. RiverLife Prayer Meetings.

- *RLC Prayer Room.* Tue, 8-9.30pm, Victory Chapel. (Online: rlc.sg/rpr-watch)
- *Wed Night Prayer Meeting.* Wed, 8pm – 9.30pm, Victory Chapel.

CHURCH MINISTRIES & OPPORTUNITIES

1. **9M Ministry.** The 9M Ministry provides prayer support for expectant mothers on their 9-month journey of pregnancy. Sisters-in-Christ who are fellow RiverLifers are assigned as Prayer Buddies to walk alongside mums who sign up to receive prayer support.
 - Receive Prayer Support: rlc.sg/9m
 - Provide Prayer Support: rlc.sg/serve
2. **Global Hunger Fund.** This fund will go towards RLC's mission partners to help their local churches and communities gain access to food amid soaring costs. Refer to the Digital Bulletin for more details.
3. **Missions Microsite.** Discover how you can go, give and pray for the nations. Let's make a difference in the nations together! For more information, visit rlc.sg/missions.
4. **RiverLife Cares Opportunities.** Signup: <http://rlc.sg/serve-rlcar>.
5. **Prayer Ministry.** If you require prayer ministry for any issues you face (eg. fear, worry, etc), you can sign up for RLC's RTF ministry: <https://bit.ly/rlcrtf>

RESOURCES & CONNECTING WITH US

- Bible Reading Plan.** The church has provided 3 undated Bible Reading plans that will serve as a resource for those who wish to follow a Bible Reading plan. Link: rlc.sg/brp
 - 2 Year Chronological Bible Reading Plan.
 - 3 Year Bible Reading Schedule (Alternating readings between Old and New Testament passages)
 - Redemptive Historical Bible Reading Plan (At your own pace, focusing on the redemption story)
- RiverLife Podcast.** The RiverLife Podcast allows you to listen to RiverLife content anytime, anywhere! The link to go to is rlc.sg/podcast or simply search **'The RiverLife Podcast'** on Spotify.
- Spiritual Growth Resources.** We have put together a curated list of recommended resources for the RiverLife family. These resources (books, articles, podcasts and videos) are recommendations for the various spiritual growth stages as you seek to grow deeper in the River of God this year. You can access them at rlc.sg/resource. This list will be continually populated throughout the year.
- Testimony.** If you have a testimony to share, you can write to us at stories@riverlife.org.sg to share with us your testimony as an encouragement to others.
- Stay Connected with RLC.** Follow us to stay updated on latest church news and happenings.
 - **WhatsApp Broadcast:** Text 'Subscribe' to 8923 1939
 - **Telegram Channel:** t.me/RiverLifeChurch
 - **Facebook & Instagram:** [@riverlifechurchsg](https://www.facebook.com/riverlifechurchsg)

GIVING LINKS & QR CODES

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