

Grace be unto you and peace from God our father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word of God upon which we base our meditation this morning is recorded in the third chapter of the second letter of Paul to Timothy reading from the 12th to the 17th verse as follows. Yay. And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Here endeth the text. In Christ Jesus, our beloved Savior. Dear members and friends, last Sunday ushered in the holy season of Advent, that glorious time in the church year which prepares our hearts for a God-pleasing observance of Christmas and especially the gospel's help in this preparation. However, this may not be so evident from today's gospel. In this reading, the Lord mentions various signs that preede his second coming. And then he admonishes us to be watchful and to pray that we might escape eternal doom. Now, one may wonder, what has that to do with Christ's birth at Bethlehem. Let us rather ask this question. How could we fare in the face of the signs of the times? How could we endure the trials and tribulations that come our way? How could we face the heavenly judge if it were not for Bethlehem. When we consider the signs which our Lord mentions in his word as preceding the second coming, Bethlehem becomes all the more precious to us. For whoever has stood at the manger bed of the Lord with believing heart can endure all things for Christ's sake. and can look forward joyously to the second coming of his Lord. Among the things which our Lord mentions as signs of the times is the persecution which his followers must endure for his sake. We read for example in Matthew's gospel, "Ye shall be hated of all nations. for my name's sake. Many are the passages that speak of this experience in the Christian life. And among such passages, we have the text before us. A word from the beloved apostle Paul in which he gives us encouraging instruction on this important matter. On the basis, Word of God. Let us consider the urgent plea directed to all true followers of the Lord. Be prepared to endure persecution for Christ's sake. We note first of all why such persecution comes our way. And second, ly we note how we are to endure it. When a person becomes a Christian, he may imagine that from then on his life should be one of uninterrupted peace. For after all, he's now a follower of the Prince of Peace. He is a disciple of him who said to his disciples during his earthly ministry. These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. Is not this then a dependable word of our Lord? Indeed, it is with reference to man's relation to God. Because of the Savior's glorious work of redemption, there is There is peace. There is harmony between God and man. But that is not the case between man and man, between man and his neighbor, especially between one who holds fast to scripture and one who opposes the truth. Then it is often that bitterness and persecution result. And our text makes it very plain that Christians are to expect this. They are not to be surprised. They are not to say, "I thought my life as a believer would be uninrpted harmony and peace and not even one bit of persecution. Our text by inspiration of God through the Apostle Paul shows that this will be an experience in the Christian life. These words were written by Paul during his last imprisonment in Rome. He is weary and worn from years of strenuous and faithful labors for the gospel. He has come now to the end of his life. He knows it well. A life marked by service, faithfulness, many Godgiven successes, but a life also marked by many persecutions. And in this last letter, the apostle writes to his spiritual son and successor Timothy and points out to him that also in his life, yes, in the life of all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, there will be persecution. The burden of his message is then not to explain to Timothy how to avoid something

like that, but rather to expect it and to be prepared for it and to know how to endure it. In verses preceding our text, the apostle says to Timothy, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, and what persecutions I endured." But out of the All the Lord delivered me. What a wonderful message this is not only to Timothy but also to each and every one of us. A complete record of these experiences of Paul and his co-workers is found in the book of Acts. Wherever the apostle traveled by God's guidance, he preached one thing only. Christ crucified the savior of all mankind. And now we read in the book of Acts in various chapters that when the Gentiles gathered about Paul, eager to hear the word, begging and pleading with him to stay longer in their midst so they could hear more. The leaders of the Jews endeavored to incite bitterness and envy. to raise up persecution and expel the apostle and his co-workers out of their area. And in many instances, the apostles simply shook the dust off their feet and went with the gospel somewhere else, God going with them, God blessing them, and God protecting them. They came to a place where the people had been incited to stone the apostle. It didn't take place. God intervened and led the apostle to another place by the name of Listra. But in this city again Jewish leaders had raised opposition against the apostle and he was stoned and left to lie outside of the city. And they all supposed he was dead. But he wasn't dead. God protected the apostle even in that very severe experience. He didn't die. God caused Paul to stand up. Gave him new strength, new courage to go ahead and continue faithfully to preach the gospel. gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. Paul refers to this in his letter to Timothy in order to point out very clearly to this young pastor not to be surprised if that happens to him. And he's speaking there also to us. For he says all All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. He adds, "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Persecution takes various forms. Satan is too shrewd to deal in the same manner with all people, with all Christians, those who will live godly in Christ. But while the tactics vary, the purpose remains the same. To oppose, to persecute, and if possible, to destroy the faith that the Holy Spirit has implanted in that heart. Persecution may take the form of contempt for one's insistence on purity of doctrine and practice, for one's insistence on full agreement in the same in order to establish fellowship. It may take the form of contempt for one's scriptural position on church and state, which many regard as outmoded contempt for one's position based on the Bible concerning liberalism and unionism also held by many as oldfashioned and out ofdate. Although the Lord's word stands firm and fast that we should mark those who cause divisions and defenses contrary to the doctrine that we have learned and avoid them. As the Lord says in another passage, "Come out, come out from among them and be ye separate, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." Persecution, sometimes in silent form, sometimes a loud condemnation, but it goes on and on and on. And the apostle is saying to Timothy and to each and to every one of us, don't be surprised when it comes. It is a fact. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. Don't be surprised. rather expect it, be ready for it. It is sad to say there are those who declare it doesn't have to be that way. It needn't be that there's persecution facing Christians. If you are careful what you say, when and to whom you can avoid persecution. It needn't be so. As the apostle says, my friends, it is true that we are to be deliberate and careful in our speech and in our conduct. In our conduct among fellow Christians and also among the people of the world. We're not to go out of our way to court persecution so that we gradually develop a martyr complex. But my friends, according to the word of God, we dare not deny the truth by our silence. Because the Bible makes it very plain that if we will not confess the Lord before men, we will be denied by God himself. This is indeed a very serious matter, something that each Christian should seriously consider. It isn't a matter of trying to avoid persecution. It is a matter of being steadfast and faithful and firm, rooted and grounded on the word of God. And then should persecution come and

Paul says expect it be ready for it that then we don't express surprise or regret and even go so far as to say if I had known that I don't think I would even have bothered to become Christian. God forbid that we ever think or speak like that those churches and members of churches that aren't concerned anymore about the purity of doctrine where the church has degenerated into practically a social club with countless activities so that there's little or no time for the study of God's word. Such churches and senates and conferences that don't make a bold confession of the truth anymore, but are more interested in compromise, are more interested in emphasizing points of agreement rather than in a godded effort to resolve differences upon the basis of his word. All such don't have to fear persecution. Be because they have long succumbed to Satan's WS and they have long ago drifted far from the pattern of those concerning whom the apostle says in our text. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. God preserve us our congregation and our conference from such a tragedy whereby we would no longer make bold confession to the truth and no longer be interested in purity of doctrine and practice. Persecutions will come because of our faithful testimony to the Lord and his name. But my friends, lest we despair, lest we become discouraged, let us note also how we can endure such persecution. The apostle writes to young Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. How shall we endure persecution when it comes our way? First and foremost, my dear Christians and friends, we must turn to the word of God for help and strength and comfort. And that in effect is what Paul is saying to Timothy when he says, "Continue in the things you've learned." And in the first chapter of this same letter, he speaks this way with reference to what Timothy learned and from whom he learned it. I thank God says Paul, when I called to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also. He is encouraging Timothy first of all to remember what he has learned. and from whom he learned these things, the word of God, the teachings of holy scripture, and to prize that as a blessing and an incentive to continue to be faithful and steadfast in the midst of any persecution that might come. The same would apply to us. Paul is saying to us, too, continue in what you've learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom you learn those things. What a blessing, what a prize, what a gem. If by God's grace you had Christian training and upbringing in your home and have it now for your family and children, what prize and what a blessing. If you also learned these things and were assured of them by a faithful and consecrated pastor. Oh then, how are we going to endure persecution? Continue abide by what you have learned from faithful teachers, from faithful members of the family. Then when persecution comes, you won't begin to shake and quake. You won't begin to tremble. Let those beliefs be attacked in the convictions assailed. Continuing in the word, you know, you know for certain that your faith is built on a sure foundation, not on sinking hand, but on the rock which is Christ Jesus. Continue in the things which you have learned. And we also can endure persecutions when we consider and evaluate the wonderful examples that the Bible gives us. The best one of all, our how he was opposed and persecuted viciously and vehemently and what an example he set for us. Then think of the example of the Apostle Paul in our text and not only Paul but his co-workers as well. Perhaps there were those times when Paul thought why should I bother When people are trying to hinder the progress of the gospel, why should I keep on in the face of all this persecution? People don't appreciate what I'm bringing them. That one thing needful. But my friends, by the grace of God, Paul did not let any thoughts like that dominate him. He kept before his eyes the real purpose of his work and that was the salvation of men's souls. He knew that all those people out there who were acting in such a loveless way to him, they also needed that word of God. And he would continue to

bring them that word. And on one occasion he said, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." The same applies to us, my Friends, as we come into contact with people who just don't appreciate what we are trying to do, what we are trying to tell them for their souls welfare. They may act in a very loveless and bitter and hostile manner. Let us not give up. Let us take strength and comfort out of the word. And let us hold before our eyes all the examples of such as our Lord himself first and foremost and then the Apostle Paul and many others who endured for Christ's sake and endured all things faithfully and steadfastly. Such an endurance in the midst of persecution, my dear Christians, is rooted in holy scripture. And what beautiful terms and expressions the apostle uses concerning this wonderful word of God. He says of it, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." The teaching that the word of God from Genesis to Revelation from the first word to the last is the inspired word of God. Oh, how that teaching is abused today so that the number of those who still hold to verbal inspiration is getting less with every passing year. God help us to hold fast to it because on that doctrine the inspiration of all of Scripture rests our salvation. Paul says concerning scripture, it is profitable for doctrine. The cry goes out today, how can you know the truth? This church says this is the truth. This church says no, we have the truth. How can anybody in this day and age with all that confusion and doctrinal chaos. Know what the truth is. What does God's word say? God's word says that all scriptures given by inspiration of God. That makes it perfect, true each and every word, and is profitable for doctrine. In this inspired word, we learn the truth. We need to hold fast to it. It is for reprove as well. If we learn and accept the truths in scripture, we're going to know how to reprove error and falsehood and remain firm and steadfast. It is also for correction. We see in the word our faults and shortcomings, and we learn how to improve, how to better ourselves, how to become more pleasing to the Lord in our walk of life. It is for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. This word of God shows us the kind of life that we are to lead. A life that sets others an example. A life that will stand fast no matter what attacks rain down upon it. We can endure persecution for Christ's sake if we cling to the word, to its comfort, to its strength, and to its power. My dear Christians, you and I, will be subjected to persecution for our Christ centered faith and our testimony to the Lord. But let us not be shocked by that. Let us not be surprised. Let us not even say I wish somehow I could avoid it. But expect it. Be ready for it. Prepare. prepare yourself to endure it. And you can endure it. And with this word of God, pure and true, you will be victorious. You will be able to rejoice in the midst of persecution. And that's something the world couldn't begin to understand. This is how Peter puts it. If ye be reproached, Ed for the sake of Christ. Happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. To this end may God grant all of us. His abundant grace. The peace of God which passes all understanding. Keep your hearts and minds. through Christ Jesus. Amen.