

Living in Union With Christ in Dangerous Times - Part 1

by Josef Tson

Josef Tson discusses the importance of living in union with Christ amidst the dangers of persecution and the need for a clear worldview in faith.

Duration: 54:38

Scripture: Matthew 10:16, John 12:32, Romans 6:6, Romans 13:14, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 3:3, Hebrews 2:14-15, Revelation 3:21

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Sovereignty Of God"

Description

This sermon delves into the theology of martyrdom, emphasizing the author's journey of researching and writing on suffering, martyrdom, and rewards in heaven. It explores the challenges faced in dangerous times, the importance of having a clear worldview in Christ, and the revelation of being liberated from the fear of death through Christ's sacrifice. The sermon highlights the concepts of sovereignty of God, living as lambs among wolves, and the aggression of love in spiritual warfare.

Transcript

Let me start by saying that, yes indeed, I faced many times the possibility of being killed for my ministry, for my preaching, for my writing, and I asked myself, I am a theological mind, whatever I do I have to ask what's the theology of that thing? So when I pondered on the possibility of dying for the Lord, I said what's the theology of it? That means why does God choose some of his elect to die? What does he gain out of that? What is he up to with that? That's theology of martyrdom, and I looked for books for that, and I discovered that nobody has ever written a book on that. And then I said, well that's then the possibility for me to write in an area where nobody else has gone. And for 20 years I meditated, I researched, and eventually this book was born, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*.

It was written as a PhD dissertation, so it's heavy stuff, but it's the only book that attempts to put together a theology of martyrdom, both from the Bible and from the Christian history. And so as you come from the foyer into the room with the books, right there as you come in on the right, it's the table with my books, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*. You have to become a martyr just to buy it because it's \$25.

Now, in 1981 when I was exiled here, we started this ministry to Romania through the Romanian Missionary Society. In 1990, when communism collapsed, I went back to Romania, but I'm still the president of the mission here, so I commute between Romania and America. And actually now we have a condominium in Portland, Oregon, the office is in Witten, Illinois, and I minister in Romania.

Okay, let me put it this way. If what I do by my preaching helps you, then you should help me to do my ministry in Romania. And on that table you have this blue brochure that will tell you all that you have to know about our mission, but you have this little brochure in red only with the projects for which we need help.

So please buy or take any one of them, they are free. There is this pamphlet, thank you for the beating. Now, I don't know if you ever heard somebody thanking somebody for a big beating.

I did thank that general for beating me, so you read why. And then you will find these newsletters there and see what we do in Romania. Now, that part is off, that's my job.

I completed that job now I come into my territory, the preacher. The title of my three talks is Living in Union with Christ in Dangerous Times. Dangerous times.

After September 11, America is one of the most dangerous places in the world. When I came to this country, it was the safest place in the world. You have arrived, nobody would touch you here.

No more so. Now, I lived in dangerous times all my life. Romania is an Eastern Orthodox country and my parents were the first Baptists in our area.

And Baptists were traitors of the nation, that's how they were considered. Under the Nazis in 1942, when I was just eight years old, I remember they just finished with exterminating the Jews in a labor camp, in an extermination camp east of Romania and east of Moldova. And they decided that the next in line to be exterminated there would be the Baptists.

They were all listed and our parents were asked to go to the authorities and they were told, if you don't come back to Eastern Orthodox faith, you will be deported and you will, well, they didn't tell them exactly that they were going to be butchered there. And I remember how my parents were talking with the pastor and how they made their minds. We'll stay faithful to the Lord and packed everything, waiting to be loaded in train cars and send there.

We found they never came to pick us up. Later on, we found out that the Prime Minister, who was to sign the final decree for our deportation, his mother got converted at that time. And she found out about this plan and she pleaded with her son not to sign that decree and he didn't sign it.

A few months later, the Russians came and so that plan was gone. So, dangerous times. Then the Communists came and all the time we, our lives were in balance.

Dangerous times. Now, somehow, I always complicate my life and we got involved with the ministry to the Muslim world from the Republic of Moldova. And we bring students from different Muslim countries there and train them.

And you know, if somebody finds out that they will just slit our throats. So, dangerous times. Well, living in union with Christ in dangerous times, the most important thing in that thing is to have a clear worldview.

I don't like too much the word worldview. In Romanian, we say the conception of the world and of life. The way you conceive the world and the life.

And this is the most important thing for you. To have a clear and accurate worldview or conception of the world and of life. Let me illustrate and this will stay with you.

I told you we bought a condominium in Portland, Oregon and I asked some friends there, I wanted to buy a car for our retirement. We are supposed to retire soon, but not from ministry, only from administration. So, I asked the friends there, what sort of car should I buy? And somebody immediately said, Joseph, there are so many hills and mountains here, steep slopes.

You need a four-wheel drive car. Subaru Outback, that's the best. So, that's what I bought.

Now, I had to learn the car, even how to open the door, how to switch the key. Everything in that car, it has a back shield and you imagine when everything is dirty, if you don't know, you just switch something and there is a windshield for the back and you have a clear view in the back. So, I made the conception of the car, learning the car.

I have a very clear picture in my mind of everything in the car. Now, that picture in my mind has to be conformed to the image of the car. What if my image is not accurate? If in my mind, that car drinks diesel instead of gasoline, what a tragedy I would create.

So, my mental picture of my car has to be exactly like the reality of the car. And if my mental picture is correct, I can master the car. I can use the car.

I am free with the car. What a freedom. Just jump in it and it takes me anywhere I want and I do everything that has to be done because I am free with it because of my accurate mental picture of that reality.

Well, when I was 16, I gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. I was an avid reader and I immediately asked people, Christian books. And all the Christian books that existed in Romanian language at that time were no more than a foot on a shelf.

And I went to somebody who had them all. You know, most of them were about life in Christ. Andrew Murray, S. D. Gordon, and people in that camp, the ones who were the first given by the Lord the revelation of the importance of life in Christ.

And they made my mental picture of what it is to be a Christian. Once I was in Adam, I was transferred in Christ. And the mental picture here is two spheres.

You can exist in this sphere or you can exist in this sphere, in Adam or in Christ. And in Christ, you have all the fullness of God, and you have all the riches of God, and you have the wisdom, and you have the power, and you have life, and you have joy, and you have triumph, you have victory. Everything in that sphere if you are in that sphere.

Now, first thing first, I was in dangerous times. Being in Christ means that I know that the one who is in me is stronger than the one in the world. I was under communism, but Christ was in me and I was in Christ.

And to put it in another more beautiful mental picture, it's in Colossians 3, you are hidden with Christ in God. And I explained to my people there, look, it's me here, Christ is around me, God is around Christ. Now, every enemy that wants to get to me has to go through God and through Christ.

Rather difficult. I was safe because I was hidden with Christ in God. Now, let me show you even more important than that.

All the teaching about being in Christ that you find in Paul is always given to you in order for you to understand why sin should not master you anymore. That teaching about being in Christ is so that you understand that the power of sin is broken for you. That's the reason of all the explanations.

Now, how does it work? Sin cannot have dominion on me. I can be victorious over sin because I am in Christ. What does that mean? How does it work? Again, we have to have a very clear understanding in order to master it.

Let me give you three places for that. First, Ephesians 2.10, you are created in Jesus Christ in view of the holy living that God prepared for you to walk in it. Good words.

That's holy living. You are created in Christ in view of a holy living. And immediately, Paul says, therefore, you remember.

Remember who you were and remember that now you are in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and in the family of God. So whenever temptation comes, the first thing is remember. Remember that you are in Christ.

Or let's go now to Romans 6. We are made one with Christ. We died with him so that the power of the sin be broken for us. Therefore, you consider yourselves in Christ.

Think yourselves as there. Visualize yourself there. And when I am in Christ, remember, I am in Christ and that means I am dead to sin and alive to God.

I am in Christ. It means dead to sin and alive to God. Well, how does it work? Let's go further.

The next key verse is Romans 13.14. Paul tells us to live as a light in this world. Don't live anymore like the world. Temptations like drug temptations, sexual temptations come.

And what shall you do? Put on Christ. Clothe yourself in Christ. Now, what does that mean? Well, let me take them again, all three of them.

First of all, when I am tempted, remember who you are. These words were said by a king of England about a century ago. He was training his son to be the next king and the son would go to play football with his friends or something like that.

And the king always said, son, if somebody kicks you and you get nervous and you want to say something ugly, son, remember who you are. Speak like the king. Behave like the king.

Remember who you are. So the first thing, remember who you are. You are in Christ.

In Christ, that is to live a holy life. And then consider yourself in Christ. Bring the mental picture back.

I am clothed in Christ. And that's how you put on Christ. Actually, you, at that moment, are what you are told by the Bible that you are because of that correct mental picture.

Now, in order to show you how important that mental picture, that worldview is, do you know what's the definition of eternal life? Given by the Son of God. To know God and to know Jesus Christ. That's eternal life.

When I have that clear understanding of who God is and of who Christ is and knowing that they made me in their image and to dwell with them in all eternity. That's eternal life. When I correctly know what is out there.

Now, if my mental picture is that life is only here and now. Life has no meaning, no purpose. My mental picture of life is untrue.

I live in darkness. I live in an unreal world. Now, that was the mental picture of being in Christ.

Let me go a step further with you. In 1969, God made a fantastic miracle for me. Out of that communist country, I was able to come out, went straight to England, and by a series of miracles, I got a scholarship in Oxford University to study theology there.

But very soon, somebody told me, every first Monday of the month, Martin Lloyd-Jones has a meeting of 150 pastors for a whole day. And again, longer story short, they accepted me in the fellowship. And for two years, I sat under Martin Lloyd-Jones and his lectures.

Changed my life completely. Now, one of the things that that old man of God kept hammering in us was, make sovereignty of God the main pillar of your theology. And I immediately said, wait a minute, that's maybe the main pillar, but my next pillar is union with Christ.

So, sovereignty of God. I started to think of it. What does it mean? I want to go back to Romania.

What does sovereignty of God mean there? And I came to understand that sovereignty of God means that God is so much in command that he always uses all his enemies for our good. God is so much in command that all God's enemies who always plot to harm God's cause, at the end of every operation, they only discover they pushed God's purposes onward. That is the sovereignty of God.

Now, I went back to Romania. And two years later, I got in big trouble. I was arrested.

And that first day at the secret police headquarters, I was taken in a room. There was a long table covered with a red cloth there. There were six ferocious men behind it.

There was a little table in front, and they had me sit behind that one. Now, imagine that. Scary thing.

A colonel stood up and he started to tell me, you are charged with propaganda which endangers the security of the state. You will be put on trial. And you will be condemned maybe to 10 to 15 years in prison.

And he went on to tell me how grave my situation, how grim my situation was. And eventually, when I had the chance to speak, I said, Mr. Colonel, let me explain to you how I see the situation here. What happens here is not between you and me.

What happens here is between my God and myself. Now, here is how it works. I don't know, sir, what God wants to do with me.

But sir, I know that you will do to me only what my God plans you to do. And you will not go one inch beyond that. He didn't like that.

But how I loved it, because that very moment, it was just like not seeing six ferocious men there. I saw above them my beloved father pulling six strings. See the image? Six puppets there and my father moving

them.

Now, that is sovereignty of God seen at the secret police headquarters in Romania. How do you apply that in your own life? Think right now of the people who make your life really miserable. There are a few people whom you say, if they didn't exist, my life would be heaven on earth.

Now, they are not your enemies. They are God's puppets for you. They are God's instruments to work on you, to shape you and model you in his image.

Instead of lamenting, say, God, how do you use them to produce in me Christlikeness? Because that is the ultimate issue. He is sovereign and he only has only one plan on this planet, to make people in his own image. That's what he's up to on this planet, making people like Jesus Christ so that he becomes the firstborn among many brethren and so bring many children to glory.

And all these evil people are God's instruments for you. Now, if you obtain that mental picture of the sovereignty of God with the puppets, you see life in a totally different way. Everything changes.

But you see, that is the real picture. You only saw how evil they were. You only saw how wicked.

You were afraid that they may destroy you. Now, when you have the true picture, you say, well, life is safe, even with them here, because they only do God's purposes in my life. So, this was the second pillar of my theology.

Let me quickly tell you now that facing the dangers in the communist world, facing the possibility to be killed, all of a sudden I stumbled on Hebrews 2, 14 and 15. By his death, Christ liberated us from the fear of death, by which Satan was keeping us in slavery all our lives. When I saw that scripture, it was just like it hit me in the head.

Your fear of dying is Satan's instrument of enslavement. And don't you see all these people who say they are believers, but they hide. They don't do anything.

They are paralyzed. Because Satan says, if you move, they kill you. If you move, they will fire you from your job, and you will have nothing on your table, and you will die.

By fear of dying, we were kept in slavery. And then I said, Lord, let me understand you. By your death, you liberated me from the fear of death.

How does it work? Well, Joseph, I didn't die my death. I died your death. I died your death.

And therefore, Joseph, you never die. You only come home. You only come to glory.

The great, great revelation, great discovery for me was, I never die. Then why be afraid? And I well remember in 1977, I was in a very tight situation when the Minister of Interior of Romania told me he was going to shoot me. And then a major came and said, don't you see they are going to shoot you? Do something to save your life.

I said, sir, there's no need to save my life. Let them shoot me. He looked to me and said, look, what sort of creature are you? When we threaten somebody else with shooting them, at least they jump.

They are scared. But you smile to your ears. You are not normal.

Sir, don't you understand when you shoot me, you send me to glory? How can I be scared by glory? You see? So, and you know the most dangerous people on this planet are people who are not afraid to die. Because you cannot do anything with them. And so that liberation from fear of dying was one of the major, major moments of my life when I understood I never die.

I only go to glory. Understanding death. But that's not enough.

Let me give you another mental picture that the Lord gave me. I told you I was in Oxford. I studied theology there.

I was very much involved in the intervarsity of Oxford. And my friends there, at the end of my stay there, just a few months before I left back for Romania, had a meeting and said, Joseph, we want to hear from you. Why do you go home? Or what do you expect when you go? What are your plans? What are the dangers? We want to know how to pray for you.

And I started to tell them my dream. I want to train a new generation of pastors and preachers in Romania. I am the first one to be trained for that in my generation.

I'll go back and they want to do this training. And I just raved about training and training. And when I finished, one of the students, sort of with pain in his voice, said, Joseph, it all sounds marvelous, but what chances of success of implementing your dream do you have? And when I heard that word success, I said, this is typically Western way of thinking, success.

In Romania, when they call you and invite you to come to Jesus, they immediately stop you and say, but wait a minute. Do you know that if you come, they will throw you out of the university or throw you out of your job? You know that you will be never given promotion. You will be treated always like an unwanted person.

You will be hated even by your family. Do you know that this is what it means to follow Christ? Now, if you mean, if you know, and if you mean it, come. So that's how we invited people, not come to Jesus and he will make your success and give you a second Cadillac and so on.

No, talk about success. Come to Jesus and expect to be a sacrifice. But this man threw to me that challenge.

What are your chances of success of doing your dream? Oh Lord, I have an idea. I turn that question to you. What chances do you give me? He was quick.

He said, Joseph, my answer is in Matthew 10, 16. I send you a sheep in the midst of wolves. In that instant, I saw, never circle of wolves, and I was told that they sit before they attack.

So those wolves there, a sheep in the center of the circle, and the Lord pointed to that and said, you see that image, Joseph? Tell me what chances has that sheep to stay alive five or ten minutes, let alone of converting the wolves. Joseph, that's how I send you, with no chance of staying alive. Totally undefended.

If you accept to go there this way, go to Romania. If you don't accept that position, never go back there. I want to tell you that the result of that is this book.

I went back to my room, sat down, said, Lord, I want to talk to you. Look, Lord, you are my king, and you say, go to the wolves. And I say, yes, majesty, and they go to the wolves.

But you are my father, and I want to know the mind of my father. I have a father, I just found out, who sent some of his children to the wolves. Tell me why.

Tell me, what do you gain from that? What are you up to? Make me understand you. And the Lord Jesus spoke immediately. Joseph, my father sent me as a lamb, and as my father sent me, so send I you.

I send you as a lamb to the wolves. I was sent to be slaughtered. But I told you, when I am lifted up on that cross, I will attract the whole world to myself.

And don't you see the centurion, when he saw me, how I died, he said, truly, this was the son of God. He said, when I die, people open their eyes to see the truth. Now, you go the same way.

Go to the wolves and tell them the truth, in love. And when they jump on you, with your last breath, you say, but I love you, and God loves you through me. And you will see that at least a few of the wolves become lambs.

But Joseph, the point is, for 2,000 years, that's how I've been conquering. Every piece of land on this planet had to be sprinkled with the blood of a martyr, because it is the blood of the martyrs that makes the seed of the new Christians. It is through suffering and martyrdom that I conquer.

It is my way and your way. And that moment, everything was clear in me. I said, Lord, I accept to go, and I will go, because now I know what you are up to.

And if they kill me, my dying has a chance. It has a purpose. It's not an accident.

So that is why, when I was arrested there, and one of the interrogators one day got angry with me and threatened to kill me, I said, sir, let me explain that issue to you. You know, sir, your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying.

Now, here is how it works, sir. You know that my sermons are on tapes all over the country. When you shoot me, I sprinkle them with my blood.

Sir, whoever has a tape with my sermon will pick it up and say, I better listen again, because that man paid it with his life. Sir, my preaching will speak ten times louder because you killed me, after you killed me. I will win this country for God because you killed me.

Go and do it. Now, he went and reported to his bosses, and I know that they did it because a few weeks later, when I was released from there, another pastor came to me and said, Joseph, the other day I was summoned to the police, and there was a colonel from the secret police there, and he interrogated me about you, and talking with him at one point, here is what he said. He said, we know that Mr. Zorn would love to be a martyr, but we are not that big fools to fulfill his wish.

Now, you know, I believe that they would have killed me if I didn't tell them the value of martyrdom. Maybe that saved my life, because they understood that it didn't work their way, it worked in my court. So, this is another very important thing.

I understand my place in the world. What is my place in the world? A wicked world. I am a lamb among the wolves, safe in Christ, and if my Lord wants me to be killed, he does it because it fulfills his purposes.

That is not that Christ somehow escapes me from his hands at that point, and woe me. No, he is there in me, and through me is doing his purposes, that moment when I die as a martyr. Now, in conclusion for tonight, let me just throw out a very important thing that you have to put in your mind.

We are in a war. The war depicted in the book of Revelation as the war between the lamb and the archbeast. Now, the army of the beast is beasts.

The army of the lamb is lambs. To the one who conquers as I conquer by dying, I will give him to sit with me on my throne as my daddy gave me to sit with him on his throne. And this is the greatest of all the promises of Christ.

You are my soldier. Go there, conquer as I conquered, and here is the outcome. You know why? Because in that process, when you accept to go there and die, you become totally like the Son of God who came to meet his enemies and to die for them.

That's the closest likeness of Christ when you go like that. Now, we are in a war, and we have to understand the nature of the war. It's a spiritual war.

But you also have to understand what are the weapons of Satan and what are the weapons of Christ. Not my weapons, the weapons of Satan and the weapons of Christ. And you look everywhere everywhere in the book or in history, and Satan always uses three weapons.

The lie, hate, and violence. That's always wherever you see the wickedness of man, you have to know that's Satan. And you see there the lie, falsehood, and you see enormous hatred, and you see violence, murder.

Now, when Christ came here, he came equipped with just three weapons. The truth in love and self-sacrifice. That's all that Christ is.

The truth of God. I am the truth. I was born in this world to express the truth of God, to show it.

But the truth, to vindicate itself, to conquer, has only one way, to die. But the important thing is that when I come to meet my enemies, I have to come loving them. I don't come to enemies I want to smash.

I want to, I come to enemies I love so much that I die for them. When I was, that day, with those six ferocious people, they told me I was put under house arrest and I had to go every day for interrogation. And six months.

Two experts in breaking people. It wasn't interrogation, they said it's interrogation for preparation for the trial. But in fact, they wanted to break my spirit.

And they used all the techniques in the book to break me. After the downfall of communism, that man who was chief interrogator was exposed as the most vicious of all the interrogators that secret police had. After the second evening in interrogation, I was there all day, he just said, take your coat, it was late fall, and go back home tomorrow morning, be back on the barricade at eight o'clock.

I didn't like that word barricade. So I turned to him, I said, sir, why do you use that bellicose word, like warlike word? You should know, sir, every morning before I come here, I pray for you. I pray for your salvation.

I pray for your family. And I come to talk with the man for whose salvation I just prayed. You should know, I don't come to fight.

You don't fight with the man for whose salvation you just prayed. It was like I hit him in the head. He choked, I could see he couldn't speak.

And then say, oh, okay, go home and come back in the morning. From that day, again and again, when he asked me a question that gave me an opening, I would start to tell him about my experiences with God. And I saw how many times he forgot that we were in interrogation, and he would listen.

Now, I liked it because instead of having interrogation, I preached. But later on, see, they were always two, they didn't trust each other, but sometimes one had to go to the restroom or some other short going out. Anyhow, one day he was alone.

And always when they were alone, they became human. They would tell me something to let me know that they are not like the others. They are a little bit more humane.

So when I was this man, wicked man, he said, Mr. Zorn, I want to tell you something. You should know that whenever I interrogate somebody, I feel how they hate me. Their hate is real.

And they hate me so strong and justly so because I am not nice to them. But Mr. Zorn, with you it's different. I don't know how to put it, but I want you to know it's a delight for me to be with you.

Now, that moment, my first thought was to say, yes, but it's not a delight for me to be with you. Then I froze because I said, oh my Lord, will you forgive me for that thought? I just had the greatest moment of my life. This wicked man told me he found somebody whom he hurt and whom he still loves, loves, still loves him.

Thank you, Lord. This is the greatest victory of my life. Now, the last day of interrogation, he told me the charges were dropped.

There was no going to be no trial. He said, you go free. I shall not see you anymore.

But I want to tell you one thing. I'll miss you, Mr. Zorn. Now, when you have these kind of happenings, what do you do with them? You make them a sermon.

So I made a sermon for my church, which I entitled The Aggression of Love. And I said, look, you think that they jump on us, that they are the aggressors. That's not true.

We are the aggressors here. We disturb them with the message of God, with the gospel of Christ. And they are so disturbed that they jump on us.

But even if they kill us with the last breath, we still say, but we love you. This is the aggression of love. Now, this is the war.

But you know what sort of warriors we are? Equipped with the truth. And remember again those mental pictures. Sovereignty of God.

He's in command. I am hidden in Christ. I have to remember again and again that I am there.

I have to see myself there. That way I clothe myself in Christ. And then I know I am immortal.

They cannot kill me. They only send me to glory. And I know that going there is going as a lamb to the wolves, but they go to those wolves with the truth of God in love to make them lambs.

And that is how we conquer beasts and make them lambs. Will you bow your heads with me for our beloved Father, Sovereign Ruler. What a wonderful thing it is to know we are safe anywhere in the midst of our enemies, because they are your instruments.

Thank you for placing us in Christ and hiding us with Christ in you, yourself. We are in Christ and we are in God and we are in the Spirit. Thank you for putting us in the most wonderful place that exists.

Help us to see it every day. Help us to live by this mental image that is correspondent to the actual situation in which you tell us that we are. Thank you for equipping us with the truth in love.

Thank you. And Lord, if you call us to the supreme, to the supreme task of actually dying for you, show us that that's the greatest honor you could ever bestow on us, because you go all the way in making us just like yourself. We love you.

We open ourselves to you right now. Fill us with yourself. Fill us with the truth.

Fill us with love. And stay in us and teach us to remain in you. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/RrMZ4u5aRfY.mp4>

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