

# Church History Series - Part 2

by Mike Attwood

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*Mike Attwood discusses the historical and biblical significance of church leadership and the challenges faced by early Christians in maintaining their faith amidst persecution.*

**Duration:** 44:39

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 5:1

**Topics:** "Church History", "Church Leadership", "Perseverance in Persecution"

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## Description

Mike Attwood discusses the early church's history, focusing on the church in Ephesus and the emergence of the clergy-laity system, which he argues undermines the biblical principle of shared leadership among elders. He emphasizes the importance of true shepherding and warns against the dangers of elevating church leaders to a status that diminishes Christ's preeminence. Attwood also highlights the persecution faced by the church in Smyrna, illustrating how suffering can lead to spiritual richness and growth, despite the challenges posed by societal pressures and false teachings. He encourages believers to live sacrificially for Christ, drawing inspiration from the martyrs of the early church who exemplified unwavering faith in the face of persecution.

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## Transcript

Okay, I'd like us to turn to 1 Peter 5, please. 1 Peter 5. Just want to kind of wrap something up about last night as we looked at the first church, Ephesus. Name means beloved or desired, and of course the Lord desires the fellowship of his people, doesn't he? And there was a leaving of that first love relationship, even though they were busy and active and all the rest of it, and so that was a concern.

And we just also mentioned it was a time of rapid gospel expansion, but it was also a time where what we now today term the clergy laity system was beginning to raise its ugly head. And people like diatrophies in the Bible, and then followers of the apostles, men like Irenaeus began to teach that you were to treat the bishop like he was God himself, the bishop singular, rather than bishops plural. And all this kind of began to come in to play, and I want to just talk about, just briefly, why the clergy laity system is such a hideous thing.

And I want to just look at scripture just for a second, because I want to bring out not only church history, but the biblical principles that were being violated, and why we need to stand for truth. Ourselves, our generation, because this battle's still going on. And there are people that would pragmatically say, well you go to a local assembly, and unfortunately many of our assemblies, instead of a plural gifting ministry, we

have an anyman ministry, and now you can listen to five messages on the radio before you even get to the meeting.

And by very slick professional preachers, and people gravitate to that kind of thing. And it's easy to compromise scripture, because I like this preacher, and I get something out of it, rather than following what the word of God says. So, 1 Peter 5, it says, the elders, and again, usually that term is always in plurality.

The elders which are among you. And of course, a true elder is among the flock, he's among them. That's how he knows the state of the flock, because he's among them.

The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder. Interesting, the so-called first pope, doesn't call himself the first papa, he says, I'm also a fellow elder. Just interesting, isn't it, the language of scripture is so careful.

A fellow elder, a witness of the suffering of Christ, a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed, feed the flock of God. That idea of pastor, poyman, so let me just say this, don't be scared of the word pastor, it's never the title, but sometimes what we do is, because we're so allergic to the word pastor, sometimes we're allergic to pastoral work. Shepherd care.

And listen, we should have a plurality of elders, but they ought to be shepherding the flock. And if they're not, they're not really functioning the way God intended. So we want true shepherd care, and that's a good biblical word, and we need to just understand it, because it describes, again, the languages of the sheepfold, and the pasture, leading them into good food.

The language is all to do with shepherding and sheep. My wife told me an interesting story. Some person in their village, whose name will remain nameless, but this individual ended up getting thrown into prison because he stole somebody else's sheep.

And then when he got the sheep, because usually what they'll do is they'll use rattle, and they'll put their name on the coat, you see, so you've got whatever their owner is, say Kevin Yip, K-Y, would be on the sheep. So what this guy did is he stole the sheep and he sheared them all, immediately. So the name came up.

But somebody kind of thought, and he saw this guy, where he shouldn't have been, so they called the police. The police came, and the owner came to the field. Now, these sheep were mixed in with the guy's own sheep, but the owner called the sheep.

And even though they didn't have the name on, they all came to the guy, because they knew the shepherd's voice. Isn't that interesting? So this is the language we're talking about. We're just talking about simple shepherd care.

That's the idea. We need that. And so he says, feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint.

In other words, you should never be an elder because people are putting your arm up your back and saying, come on, be an elder, we need you to be an elder. It shouldn't be something that you can, if there's a constraint, it's the Holy Spirit's constraining you to do that. In fact, a shepherd should be caring for the flock long before he's recognised, because the Spirit of God has put that burden for the flock in his heart.

So he's already doing the work, and then he's just recognised for that. But not by constraint, not forced to do it. Well, we need a plurality, and somebody's got to do it, so somebody steps in.

And often times, you get somebody who's not a shepherd, who's really not raised up by the Holy Spirit, he's more of a problem than if he didn't have one. Just have a brother's meeting until such time as the Spirit raises up one, rather than put somebody in there, because once you get them in, you can't get them out. And they can just be devastating to the flock, because they're really not shepherds.

And so don't do it just to fill the numbers, or out of any other motivation, other than the Spirit of God has burdened you for the work. Taking over, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Actually, it's going to cost you to shepherd God's flock.

It's not going to be financially in your advantage to shepherd the flock. It's all at your expense. And you won't get any remuneration until the chief shepherd appears.

And then you'll get proper reward, a crown of glory that will not fade away. And so you work now, reward is later. So it's not for financial reasons that you're doing it.

So it says, not in that way, but of a ready mind. And this is the verse I wanted to get to. It says, neither has been lords over God's heritage.

Don't lord it over God's heritage. Now this word heritage, very important word, in the Greek it's the word kleros, from which we get our English word clergy. Don't you dare lord it over God's clergy.

The implication is, all God's people are his special people. There's not a special class, clergy and laity. Every believer is special.

We're all his special people. So don't you dare lord it over them. But instead, be it an example, a pattern for the flock to follow.

And so we just want to see this. And notice, again, just one other thought before we move on to the next church. Verse 4, when the chief shepherd shall appear.

That word chief shepherd, let me put it in modern terminology, when the senior pastor appears. That's the idea. When somebody says they're the senior pastor, I say you're an imposter.

Because the Lord Jesus is the senior pastor. And by the way, somebody asks you, who is your pastor? Tell them, we have a great pastor. Our pastor is wonderful.

And unlike your pastor, our pastor is never going to die. He lives in the power of an endless light. And he can shepherd his people perfectly.

So the question is, who shepherds the shepherds? Remember David, what did David do before he became a king? He was a shepherd, wasn't he? What did he write in Psalm 23? The Lord, yeah, the word is in italics. The Lord, my shepherd. See, let the Lord Jesus shepherd your heart.

He's a wonderful shepherd, right? And he could effectively shepherd others when you're being shepherded by him. He's the chief shepherd. And so, why these things are so important is because, why do we get so hot about New Testament principles? Because every violation of New Testament principles causes the person of Christ to be somehow lowered.

Every New Testament principle goes back to, one person said to me, why do you keep preaching New Testament principles? Just preach Christ. I said, you're not listening. I am preaching Christ.

I don't like people taking titles that undermine the place of the chief shepherd. I don't like people taking preeminence from the one who God has already determined to have the preeminence. You see, it affects the person of Christ.

It really does. And every principle, maybe we'll have a chance to look at it as we go through, but every violation of a New Testament principle somehow impinges on our appreciation and understanding of the person of the Lord Jesus. And that's why we get hot about these things.

Now again, we love the one body and we love all God's people. Please don't misunderstand me. And I love Bill McDonough's saying that we hold on to New Testament truth with a narrow mind and heart, but yet with a wide heart that takes in all the people of God.

We love all God's people. And many, let me just say this, many pastors, using that term the way they would use it, the last thing on their minds is taking away from the preeminence of Christ. And many of them are humble, godly men.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. But their very position undermines his preeminence. So we just need to distinguish.

I don't think they're out to take his place, but their very position does so. So I just want to again emphasize, we don't want to just look at the history. We want to look at why these violations are so important.

So now we're going to go to the second thing. Look at Revelation. And by the way, this man Irenaeus died as a martyr.

So again, even though he says, you know, treat the bishop as if he's God himself. And these men weren't all evil men. He was a true believer who sealed his faith by giving his blood.

And he died as a martyr. Right? So we've got to be careful that we don't give credit where credit is due. He's done something I've never done.

I've never given my life as a martyr. Irenaeus did. Although we'll talk more about that in a little while.

But the church at Smyrna, we'll look at verses 8 through 11 here. And so it says, to the angel of the church in Smyrna write these things, sayeth the first and the last which was dead and is alive. I know your works and tribulation and poverty, but thou art rich.

I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of these things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison that you may be tried, and you shall have tribulation ten days.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church. He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.

Now Smyrna, the name Smyrna, it comes from the word myrrh, right? Frankincense and myrrh. You've heard of myrrh in the Bible, right? And myrrh is a shrubby tree, a resin taken from a shrubby tree, and it has a very bitter taste, but it has a very sweet aroma, especially when it's crushed, and out of it comes a

lovely aroma. And so it's a wonderful name in a sense for a church that's undergoing persecution.

Because on the one hand, there's an attempt to crush it. The enemy, the devil, is behind it, right? In the early days, he's trying to wipe the testimony of Christianity off the face of the earth by severe government persecution. And so he's trying to crush the church, but in the very process of doing it, a beautiful, fragrant aroma comes out of these martyrs' lives of the Lord Jesus.

It's really an amazing thing. So that's the idea of the very name. And he talks about that they're going to endure persecution, and that the devil is behind it, and that this persecution is going to be ten periods of persecution that they would experience under the Roman emperors.

Revelation 2, A through 11, deals with A.D. 100 to A.D. 312, and these various kinds of persecutions that were against the church. We'll look at some of them, but notice he says, I know your tribulation, your poverty, but you're rich, in verse 9. George has just come back from Kenya. I don't know if he had this experience, but when I was in Kenya, remember one of the assemblies that I spoke in is called Haruma Chapel, and it's actually in a garbage dump in Nairobi.

And you're literally walking over open sewers to get to this place, and they brought bread with a single rusty tin can. It's one of those times you pray, thank you for the cup, but please help. I don't want to die.

But an amazing place. But one thing, these believers, they wanted me to go to visit their homes. Their homes were made out of bits of tin and cardboard and stuff like that.

I mean, you're just shacks, unbelievable. But they had such joy. I mean, just beaming smiles.

All they want you to do is just go and pray with them. It was amazing. It was such a joy.

And I remember thinking, here are these people. We're in the West. We're supposed to be rich.

And we walk around with our faces out. And here are these people. They've got nothing, but they recognize in Christ they have everything.

And you can see it. It's written all over their faces. There's a joy about them.

And so we just need to see that the Lord recognized that. Yeah, they're going through tribulation. They're enjoying deep poverty, but there's a richness to these people.

And clearly the devil is behind this. It says that the synagogue of Satan is mentioned here. And it was his desire to destroy the church.

And so what were the issues that were going on at this time? And part of it was this, that actually the Roman system was very tolerant of religion. It really was. And there were myriads of gods that were worshipped throughout the Roman Empire.

So how come Christians got persecuted? Because along with worshipping these various deities that were all incorporated in the pantheon of the Roman gods, one aspect of worship began to develop. And the place it started developing was a place called Smyrna. There was a temple erected to the emperor.

And neral worship, or emperor worship, became a thing. And eventually it became such a thing that you could worship any god you wanted as long as, at least once a year, you would offer an offering and say,

Caesar is Lord. And you could worship whoever you wanted as long as you were willing to say, Caesar is Lord.

And for the Christians, that was a bridge too far. Because they already have said, Jesus is Lord. 1 Corinthians, you just saw that, right? The Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

They've already said that. And so they can't say, they won't say, Caesar is Lord. And so because of that, they're considered to be disloyal to the empire because of their refusal.

And so, men like Tertullian, in Carthage, northern Tunisia, North Africa, he said, we render honor to Caesar as Caesar, but worship and prayer belongs to God alone. Isn't that a wonderful statement? That's a very biblical statement. We render honor to Caesar as Caesar, but worship and prayer belongs to God alone.

But that kind of language was considered to be subversive to the empire, to Rome itself. And so Smyrna was the first temple to Caesar. It was called Deir Roma, the god Rome, Deir Roma in 195 BC.

And so we just want to run through some of the names. Of course, Nero was one that we're all familiar with. But one of the emperors at the time of Nero, one of the historians at the time of Nero, Tacitus, he said Christianity was a detestable superstition, which at first was suppressed and afterwards broke out afresh and spread not only throughout Judea, the origin of the evil, but through the metropolis also, the common sewer in which everything filthy and fatigous meets and spreads.

And so the idea is this, that he just saw the spread of Christianity, remember he said rapid expansion, reaching the capital of the empire. And even though they're trying to suppress it, it keeps growing. And it's evil in their mind, because it's a threat to the empire, because they're worried that these people that won't say Caesar is Lord, if there's some barbarian attack, they think the Christians are going to rise up and join with them, because they're not loyal, they won't say Caesar is Lord.

So there's this fear upon them. Now, Nero, we all know about him, and it's interesting when it talks about, you know, kind of honour the king, you know, in 1st Peter. Nero is the man who's in view, okay? So whatever you think to Justin Trudeau, you need to honour the office, whether you like the man or not, that's got nothing to do with it, right? And so let me just say this, I'm going to say this more than once.

Don't let politics affect your Christianity. And I'm afraid, south of the border, it's a tragic thing, but Christianity is being associated with one particular party. And I think that's a dangerous thing, I really do.

And we'll see why, we're going to see this. The whole idea of the state and church is together, in any way, is an anathema. We'll think about that, it might not be popular, but we're going to do it anyway.

What does that word mean? Anathema? Yeah. I have no idea what it means. Oh, okay, it's a curse.

It's ultimately a damnation. A damnation, yeah. Okay, so one thing that Nero was kind of a playboy emperor, and he was also a homosexual, a very strange individual in many, many ways, a very perverted man.

And anyway, he saw Rome, and it kind of developed over centuries, and he just thought it needs a makeover. But nobody wanted to allow him the freedom to knock down their houses, to build the city in his image, so to speak, and he wanted to redesign the whole thing. So he had his minions set fire to the city of

Rome.

And while it was burning, because you've heard the saying, Nero fiddles while Rome is burning, actually that's a nice kind of poetic thing, but he was actually playing his favorite guitar, and he was playing about the burning of Troy while it was going on. But people saw that his people had done it. And so when they took a straw poll in the media the following week, his ratings had plummeted.

He wasn't very popular anymore because he was burning their homes, so he could rebuild the city in his image. And so he found a convenient scapegoat. He said, no, what about my people? It was the Christians that were doing it.

And so the first persecution really was from a playboy emperor, but he just needed a scapegoat, and the Christians provided that. And of course Peter warned about it, I think, in 1 Peter 4.12, he talks about a fiery trial that's going to come upon him. And it was a fiery trial.

Peter would die as a result of it, so would Paul. And John, he's going to come later, he would get banished by Domitian, the next emperor. But certainly this time Nero was known to light the gardens of his palace with Christians who were covered in oil-soaked rags and set on fire while he had his parties.

And there were many, many believers that suffered under Nero's persecution. And they were covered in skins of wild beasts to be torn by dogs. Others were crucified.

And it just was a horrendous time, and it lasted for quite some time until Nero died in AD 68, and there was a relative period of peace for about 30 years after the death of Nero, and Christianity was allowed to continue. But in AD 95, a man called Domitian, he treated Christians with the greatest violence. And here's an interesting thing, too, that often the playboy emperors, like Nero, didn't really bother, I mean he did because he needed a scapegoat, but most of the playboy emperors didn't really bother with the Christians because they were too busy having a party.

But the emperors that were serious about their job, and serious about the glory of Rome, they were the ones that gave the Christians the hardest time because they saw the Christians as the greatest threat. And Domitian would be one of them. And he certainly had treated the Christians with great violence, and among the sufferers were his own cousin, Flavius Clemens, and his wife, who was Domitian's niece.

And the Apostle John was banished to the Isle of Patmos during his reign, and he demanded that he should be worshipped as both Lord and God, and so as a result of that, Christians suffered tremendously. And then Trajan, AD 98-117, and I don't want to just kind of go through all these just in a rote way, but just it's very well documented. And the Roman governor of Bithynia wrote to the emperor asking how to deal with the Christians.

He said the impact of Christianity was such that the temples were desolate. And a lot of things were said about the Christians at this time. So, some of the things that they said.

First of all, they said they were disloyal to the empire. And then they also said that they were guilty of incest. Because a brother can only marry a sister.

You believe that, don't you? You only marry in the Lord, right? Well, they would hear things like this. Sorry, we can't marry this because they're not a sister. Right? So, incest became... Cannibalism was thrown at the Christians.

Because they heard about this ceremony where they... This is my body. Right? This is my blood. Because often you do this in remembrance, but again, the implication was, these guys were eating Christ.

They're cannibals. So, there's a lot of things that were said against them during these times. And one of the biggest things was because they refused to worship the images of the gods or the emperor.

And so, they suffered tremendously. Marcus Aurelius, 161 to 180. Again, he saw them as a tremendous threat.

Now, without going through all these emperors, I want to just give you a couple of examples of people who were persecuted at this time. In the area of Gaul, which is northern France, there was a lady called Blandina. Actually, in the city of Lyon it was.

And she was bound to a stake. And the wild beasts were basically let loose. And the amazing thing is that they wouldn't touch her.

And they'd starve these wild beasts. So, here's Blandina. She's tied up.

And the beasts, they wouldn't come near her. And so, her friends were then thrown to the beasts. And the beasts ate them.

And she had to watch. And then what they did is they scourged her. And then they placed her on a red-hot grate.

So, her flesh singed. And then, finally, she was gorged by a wild bull until she died. But this lady, Blandina, would not deny her savior.

And all they had to do was offer an offering to the emperor. And they'd get away with it. It's got free.

They'd be done. But she wouldn't. Perpetua, 21 years of age, a young mother.

They put her in prison with her baby. And this is before the days of formula. Next door, in the next cell, the baby's crying for food.

If you just offer to the emperor, you can feed your baby. No, I can't deny my love. Her father appeals to her, holding the baby.

Please. She won't. And so, Perpetua, again, is killed in horrendous fashion.

And we could go on and on. These people, some of them, there was a... During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a third of the population of Rome died as a result of smallpox. So there was just this plague of smallpox that spread through the emperor.

And the Christians were blamed. And so, as a result of that, the Christians suffered tremendously. And Maximus, another one, Decius, he had particularly horrendous persecution under him because he happened to be the king or the emperor during Rome's millennium.

In other words, the empire's been going for a thousand years. And it's under threat. The barbarian hordes are already pushing at the boundaries of the Rhine and the Danube, you see.

And so, again, Rome became great because of our loyalty to the gods. These Christians are undermining this loyalty to the gods. If Rome is gonna... If we're gonna make Rome great again, right? And they're all there with their red baseball caps on.

We gotta make Rome great again, right? This is our millennium. So what are we gonna do? He said, we will destroy Christianity root and branch. And again, they love to somehow heat these red-hot chairs of iron and make the Christians sit on them and watch them burn.

This was their... And again, he was the guy that introduced this certificate of loyalty called the Lebelius. And so, again, to show, in conjunction with the millennium, you're loyal to Rome, you get a certificate called the Lebelius if you will offer incense to Caesar. And if you can't produce that certificate, you'll be arrested and killed.

And so, again, what a price these people are paying. And we could go on. I'm not gonna mention all of them.

The last great persecution under Diocletian, AD 284, urged on by his pagan adopted son Galerius. And during Diocletian's reign, not only did they want to kill the Christians, but they also tried to destroy the scriptures. So there's a special mission under this particular time, not only to kill the Christians, but the book that they reverence.

You burn those books. So, sometimes you say, well, how come we don't have the original manuscripts of the scriptures? Because a lot of the early copies were burned. Mind you, isn't that a mercy? We don't have the original manuscripts? What do you think we'd do if we had the original manuscripts? We'd worship them, wouldn't we? Right? That's the heart of man, isn't it? Remember the serpent on the pole? Right? They ended up worshiping it, didn't they? And so, during that time... And of course, all these things bring about certain decision-making issues.

So, if I'm going to be caught with the scriptures, and I'm going to end up being burned at the stake, and the scriptures are going to be burned, I'd better be sure that what I'm going to get arrested for really is the word of God. Like, I don't want to die for the apocrypher, right? Or some other spurious writing. So, the big question comes, well, what is scripture? So, this whole process of canonization that we talk about came about as a result of these persecutions.

Right? Because we need to know what's worth dying for, and what isn't worth dying for. Right? So, again, there are consequences to all these things. And we'll talk a little bit about canonization in another session, because, you know, what time is this supposed to end? Oh, I've got seven minutes.

Okay. Well, let's just talk about the cause of the persecution just again, and then we'll talk about the church suffering on two fronts at once, really. So, we said the political and religious, the question of royalty was a big thing.

Social. They were nonconformist. They didn't conform to what society was doing.

For instance, they didn't even attend the games, because every game started with a procession to the gods. So, they didn't. They weren't into sports.

Right? Because it was identified with idol worship. They didn't do it. And so, they were just oddballs.

They were nonconformists. But some of the results were, first of all, the marvellous testimonies under persecution. Caused, actually, it backfired.

People witnessed these people like the Perpetuas and Blandinas. And they said, we would never do this for our gods. There's got to be something real about these people.

And as a result of it, the gospel spread. Another thing about it was, there was no Deadwood in the church. Right? In North America, one of the things we struggle with is that there's a cultural aspect to Christianity.

So, you get people who go to church just because it's the cultural habit. And they weaken the church, because a lot of them are not saved. So, they want to be entertained.

They're not interested in Christ and just Him. Right? They want all the bells and whistles. So, when you're going through a time of persecution, you have a very pure church.

Because you're not going to go to the meeting, unless you can't not go to the meeting. Because you love being with the people of God. And you know you need to be with the people of God.

And you want to be obedient to the Saviour. But, you recognize in going, you're risking your life. So, you have people who are real, genuine.

And so, it really was a time of great purity and a great growth. There was great reality. But it also raised a problem, because what about those that weren't like Perpetua and Blandina? What about those that compromised and burnt incense? And then, after the persecution kind of died down, they came back and wanted to be in fellowship.

The lapsi, they called them. Because they lapsed, you see. Do they have to get saved again? Do they have to get baptized again? Do they have to do penance? And some of these people said, yeah, if you're going to come back, you have to lay in the entrance of the building, kind of in sackcloth and Nazis, and you have to do penance before we let you come back in.

So, a lot of the Catholic doctrines that we think about go back to this time. How do you deal with somebody that's denied the Lord and now comes back, wants to come into fellowship? See, all kinds of issues that are coming out of this time frame. And then, of course, there's a war on two fronts, because not only have you got this persecution from outside, but you've still got errors coming from within during this time frame.

Another reason that you had the need to determine what the canon of Scripture was is the fact that there were some groups, like the Montanists, modern-day charismatic movement, so to speak, very similar to that, put such an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, they thought that inspiration was immediate and continuous. In other words, God was still giving inspiration. We say that the canon of Scripture is complete.

They didn't believe that. God is still speaking. Interestingly, too, that groups like the Montanists, the reason they rose up was because, amongst the regular Christians, a formalism had set in, and it appeared kind of lifeless and dull.

I just want to say something about this. Jim Cymbala, who said a very interesting thing, he said that there are a lot of churches, it's like being in a cemetery. And he said there are others, it's like being in an insane asylum.

And he said there's got to be somewhere in between. I remember saying this, though, a pretty simple soul came up to me afterwards and said, you mean you want us to be half-dead or half-mad? That's not what I'm saying, and that's not what he was saying. But in one sense, oftentimes when there's a cold formalism, there's a pendulum swing, and people go to the other extreme.

And the Montanists were a reaction against the formalism that had set in in the church. You see? We've got to be careful that we don't be overly active. Right? Now, I don't want formalism.

Dead orthodoxy is miserable. But the insane asylum is no place to be either. Right? Truth is in the middle.

Principle and life together. Then just another thing, and we're not really finished, we'll have to pick up next time, but I just wanted to talk about something for a minute, and that is this. That you and I, I don't know about you, but when I read the story of the martyrs, and Foxe's Book of Martyrs, not a bedtime read, but it's an amazing read.

But I often ask myself, Lord, what would I do? I'm sick of changing it. Maybe I'm the only one who feels that way, but I feel like that. I'm not sure.

I sat on a red, hot iron chair. But the Lord never gives you martyr's grace before you need it. Right? His grace is sufficient, but he never gives it in advance.

It's not an advanced supply. People go through deep waters, and you say, how do they go through that? Well, the Lord meets them where they're at, when they need it. But let me just say this.

We may be asked to do what Perpetua did. But there's two ways that you can lay down your life for Jesus Christ. You can do it all at once, like a martyr, like Stephen, or Perpetua, or you can do it incrementally, one day at a time.

And I do believe that God wants all of us to lay down our lives for him. Either all at once, like these people did, or today, you need to present yourself in a fresh way as a living sacrifice. Wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

But either way, if you want real life, you have to die. Right? If anyone will come after me, let him take up his cross daily. And the cross is an instrument of execution.

If you saw a man carrying a cross outside your city, you knew he wasn't coming back. He was a dead man. And maybe it was easy for people like Perpetua to die, because she's already died.

She was already reckoning herself to be dead and alive. With Christ, in resurrection life. And so, yeah, this was a horrendous time.

And it caused all kinds of issues that we have to think more about. But we want to just talk about you and I. You see, New Testament Christianity, the kind of stuff that Randy was talking about in the last session, gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, it doesn't really work for carnal Christians. Because they want to be entertained.

They don't want to give, they want to get. But true New Testament Christianity works really good with people who are spiritually minded and who are willing to live sacrificial lives for the Lord Jesus. If that's what you want, this is the very thing for you.

But it means death. But it means life. Because the Lord Jesus said, it's more a blessing to give than to receive.

So can I encourage us to learn from these and say, this is our day. This is what church history is about. They've ran their race.

They've fought the fight. Now the baton is passed to us. And yeah, I may not have to be a martyr, but I can die to self today and live for Christ today.

And surely he's worthy. He's worthy of their ultimate sacrifice. He's worthy of your living sacrifice every day.

Let's pray. Father, we're so, again, we sense, we feel humbled as we think of these, this 21-year-old woman listening to the cries of her own baby and the appeals of her loving father. And yet she's listening to another voice, the voice of the one who said, if anyone follows me, let him take up his cross.

And so we just thank you for the example of these great saints of God in a former age. And Lord, we pray for us to live that kind of life. And again, we can only do it one, not only one day at a time, one moment at a time.

Because the old self-life keeps rising up. Lord, we just ask that you'd help us. We want to live in a worthy way of our Savior, the Lord Jesus.

Thank you for preserving the scriptures despite every attempt of the enemy to destroy them. And yet, Lord, here we have a treasure. Help us not to waste it.

To be people, to be men of the book. Lord, we look to thee to help us in these things in the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

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