

The Coming Final Persecution

by Steven J. Lawson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being on guard and ready for the time of the second coming, as the world will become increasingly hostile towards believers and persecution will be used by God to spread the gospel.

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Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Zechariah 4:6, Matthew 10:34-36, Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:9-13, Philippians 1:6

Topics: "End Times", "Persecution"

Description

This sermon delves into the prophetic warnings of persecution and betrayal in the last days as outlined in Mark chapter 13. Jesus foretells the intense animosity believers will face, even from their own families, emphasizing the need for spiritual alertness and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Despite the escalating opposition, the message encourages believers to endure faithfully to the end, trusting in God's sustaining grace and the assurance of salvation.

Transcript

Well, we come now to the time to look together into the Word of God, and I invite you to take your Bibles, turn with me to the Gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 13, and today we want to begin our study in verse 9, the title of the message today is The Coming Final Persecution. Mark chapter 13, and I want to begin reading in verse 9. Our focus today will be verses 9 through 13. I want to read these verses and reintroduce them to you, set them before your eyes and your heart, and we will spend our time today extracting from this text what our Lord is saying to us, trying to discern how it is applicable for our lives.

The Word of God reads, beginning in verse 9, "...and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.

You will be hated by all because of my name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." Now, we have been standing with our Lord and with His disciples as Jesus is giving this instruction in what is known as the Mount of Olivet discourse. Our Lord has been coming into the Holy City, Jerusalem, each day of this, the last week of His life, and this is found on Tuesday. At the end of Tuesday, He has spent an entire day ministering the Word of God inside the Holy City.

And as the end of the day approaches, He withdraws and crosses through the Kidron Valley with His disciples, and He makes the ascent up to the Mount of Olives. It will be from this Mount of Olives that He will ascend back to heaven after His resurrection. And it will be back to this very Mount of Olives that He will return at the sign at the time of His second coming.

Jesus now looks across the way, across the Kidron Valley, to the Holy City, Jerusalem, and no doubt it was an extraordinary sight to behold, as they are positioned some 1,000 feet above the city of Jerusalem. And as Jesus sees the Holy City, He sees beyond the city, He sees into the future. He sees into the end of the age.

He sees the consummation of history that will be played out right here in the midst of the Middle East, right here involving the city of Jerusalem. It will be just to the north that the battle of Armageddon will be fought, where the nations of the world will come parading into the Middle East and fight that last great battle, the battle of Armageddon, as our Lord prepares to die upon the cross in only three days. He nevertheless is looking beyond the sacrifice of that death and to the triumph that awaits Him on the other side.

And our Lord knows that at the end of this age, He will come bursting back onto the scene of human history, and He will bring to consummation the events of this world as they have been preordained by our Father. Jesus now gives this instruction regarding how the end of the age will come to pass. And it is to be an encouragement to every disciple that as the end of the age approaches and as these signs will be fulfilled at the end, we are to know that nothing is completely out of control, that our Lord has everything in its appointed place, and that there is a plan for the end of this age and for the end of history, and Jesus Christ and God the Father and God the Holy Spirit will be bringing it all together.

That is the point of this chapter. Jesus has been identified by theologians as prophet, as priest, and as king. As prophet, He gives instruction from God and sees into the future and makes it known to us.

As priest, He dies upon the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. And becomes our great high priest. And as king, He is given all authority in heaven and earth, and rules and reigns at the right hand of God the Father.

In this passage, Jesus dons the role of prophet, and He looks into the future, and He makes known to us how this age will come to completion. And so in verses 9 through 13, here is yet another installment of how the age, this age, will come to completion. To this point, He has already told us in verse 7 and 8, that at the end of this age, there will be false Christs who will appear.

There will be wars, and there will be rumors of wars. There will be earthquakes, and there will be famines. It will be an unprecedented time of disturbance and difficulty upon this earth.

And now, beginning in verse 9, Jesus adds to what will be the end of this age as we know it, and He speaks of the persecution that will come to believers that will result from the world. And as we look at this today, it should serve as a reminder to all of us that in reality, this world is not our home. We are simply aliens and strangers here, and that we are involved in a great invisible warfare.

There is spiritual warfare taking place all around us between God and between Satan, between light and darkness, between the truth and between error, and it will all come to a cataclysmic conclusion in the time of the tribulation. And so this is another plank that our Lord is laying in giving us the understanding of what awaits those who will be alive the time immediately before His return. Now there are six main headings

that I want to give you here as we walk through this.

And I want you to note first, at the beginning of verse 9, the alertness of the disciples. Jesus begins in verse 9, but be on your guard. Jesus is calling for us to be alert as we live our Christian lives, and especially these who will be alive at the time immediately before the return of Jesus Christ.

In fact, this is the dominant note that Jesus gives in this Olivet Discourse, and I'd like to draw this to your attention. In verse 5, Jesus said, see to it that no one misleads you. Now in verse 9, be on your guard.

Verse 23, take heed. Verse 33, take heed. Verse 35, be on the alert.

Verse 37, the final words of this discourse, be on the alert. Only someone who is not on the alert could miss hearing our Lord say, be on the alert. This is the dominant exhortation.

This is the primary application of all of the teaching that Jesus is giving here in the Upper Room Discourse. He has said it six times in this chapter alone, that we must be spiritually alert and spiritually on guard as we live while we're here on the earth. Now this word, you see it in verse 9, be on your guard, is a Greek word that means literally to see, but it means more than just merely to see, but to size up what you see with discernment.

In certain contexts, this word means to see so as to be aware, to see so as to take heed. So often we see things, but we do not understand their significance. We do not understand their importance.

Jesus is calling us here to take heed and to be on guard in light of the danger and the threats that He reveals to us in this coming persecution. So He says, do not let these fulfillments catch you off guard. Stay on the watch.

Do not panic. Have your spiritual antenna up. And as you see these beginning to be fulfilled, you need to be ready and know how to respond properly in your spiritual life.

In other words, we must not be asleep when Christ returns. We must not be drowsy when He comes again. We must not be preoccupied with the things of this world.

We must be setting our mind continually upon the Lord in heaven and not upon the things of this earth. If we are living for the things of this world, we will not be prepared and we will not be ready at the time of the fulfillment of these things. And so He begins with this call for the alertness of the believers.

We need to have our spiritual eyes open, and though we do not know the hour in which our Lord returns, nevertheless, He has given us the indicators of the larger season. And as you see these things beginning to come to pass, you need to be on guard. You need to be ready.

As I was walking through the airport yesterday, preparing to fly back here and just going through the newspaper stands and where they had the magazines, it was almost as if I was reading Mark chapter 13. Now that Iran has the bomb, what is next? There were indicators of earthquakes and typhoons and all kinds of national disasters and the appeal for things with famines taking place because of these natural disasters. Only someone who has little discernment could see things like that and at least not ask themselves the questions, Lord, could I be living in this generation that would be alive when we would hear the trumpet sound and the Lord return? So we need to pull our heads out of the sand.

We need to be looking up for the Lord Jesus Christ and His return. We need to be on guard. We need to take heed.

We need to be ready for the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ. If Jesus said this 2,000 years ago to His disciples living then, how much more of a state of heightened readiness must we be living with as we live in these days? These are unprecedented times, unparalleled times in many ways in which we are living and we need to be ready and the very one who says, oh, you know what, the Lord's not going to return in my lifetime is the very one who most needs to wake up and who most needs to guard, take guard of their own eyes and heart. That's what Jesus is emphasizing again and again and again through this discourse.

Be on guard. Take heed. Be ready.

Have your spiritual eyes open. Have your spiritual antenna up. Be looking around.

Don't be caught off guard. Don't let it throw you into panic. Have your heart fixed upon the Lord.

That is the first thing that we see and I trust that that is true in your spiritual life today. Now second, I want you to see the animosity of the world. As we continue to look in verse 9, the animosity of the world.

Note the very next word after what Jesus has just said, but be on your guard for. He now tells us why we should be on our guard, why you should be on guard. For they will deliver you to the courts.

Well that should get all of our attention here today. There should not be one of us here today who would think, wow, that has nothing to do with me. For they will deliver you to the courts.

This deliver you is the second key word that is found in this passage. The first is to be on your guard. Six times we're told that.

Three times in just verses 9 through 12, we are told that at the time of this fulfillment, believers will be delivered up to the government officials and will be publicly flogged and beaten and whipped and many of them unto martyrdom and unto death. No wonder he says be on your guard, to be ready so that your confidence is strong in the Lord when such a time of tribulation would come upon the scene. He says, for they will deliver you to the courts.

The very same word is used in verse 11 when he says they will hand you over. And again the same word is used in verse 12, brother will betray brother. In four verses, the same verb is used three times that we will be given over to the government officials.

Really this word that is translated here, deliver you, technically represents the idea of being arrested by police or by soldiers and being handed over to the authorities for examination and even execution. And this very word that is translated in verse 9, deliver you, will be used ten times in Mark 14 and 15 for exactly what will happen to Jesus Christ. He will be betrayed.

He will be arrested. He will be handed over. He will be examined.

He will be cross-examined. And he will be put to death by the government officials. So what Jesus says to be on guard for is exactly what will happen to him in three days and is exactly what takes place in the book of Acts when we read of Peter and John and their arrest and being brought before the government officials and their being flogged and so many of them being put to death, James even having his head severed.

It speaks to the animosity that will continue to escalate as the end of this age approaches. Jesus is warning his disciples that you will be arrested as violators of the law and you will be taken before courts and civil authorities and you will be delivered to take your stand on trial. What we obviously draw from this is that it will become a crime, a capital crime to be a Christian and it will become a crime worthy of death to hold to Christian values in a godless society.

And religious freedoms will be removed as it relates to Christianity. Mark it down. There is no other implication to draw from this.

To be a Christian and to stand for Christian values in the last day will be a punishable offense in the courts that will lead even to death. And do we not see before our very eyes the changing of a culture and the changing of a society before our very eyes? It would not take very much more altercation in the times in which we live than to see these verses fulfilled in the immediate future. I have no idea when Jesus Christ is returning.

I don't want to suffer. I don't want to see you suffer. But more than that, I want us to be on guard and to be ready and to be living our Christian lives in the way that Jesus has prescribed.

And so he talks about the animosity of the world toward believers. And it will escalate and it will heighten as the end of the age approaches. In fact, in the world there will be a tolerance for anything and everything except Christians.

All religions will be tolerated. All kinds of deviant behavior will be tolerated. All kinds of deviant groups will be tolerated.

The one thing that will not be tolerated in the last days is to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this should sober up every one of us here today that I need to set down deep roots in the Lord Jesus Christ before these hard times come, if I should be living in that last generation. He says in verse 9, Be on your guard, for they will deliver you to the courts.

And these courts are halls of judgment. They are courts of law. And he says, And you will be flogged in the synagogues.

These synagogues are places of public assembly. Now, this was in a small way fulfilled in the first century in the early churches. But this larger context is looking ahead to the time of the tribulation.

It's looking ahead to the time of the second coming of Christ. It's looking ahead to the time at the end of the age. And in fullest measure, there will be an anti-Christian bias that will develop.

And it will lead to the apprehension and arrest of disciples of Christ. And they're being publicly beaten and roughed up and abused and intimidated and whipped. And even in places such as where many would gather together.

And he says, And you will stand before governors and before kings. Now, this obviously cannot refer to every single disciple. There are not enough governors and enough kings for every Christian on the earth and the end to stand before one.

It probably is a designation for the leaders in the church. Just as it was in the first century, it was Peter and John that they came after. It was Paul that they came after.

It was James that they chopped off his head. And probably this refers to those who are spiritual leaders in the church. It will be these that the government will come after and arrest them and drag them off.

And they will stand before governors and kings. And the reason will be, Jesus tells us, for my sake. Because of one's association, identification with Jesus Christ.

This tells us this, the real issue that the world has with us is Christ. The real hatred is towards Christ. And we who bear the name of Christ and we who preach Christ and we who preach the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone and we who preach the Ten Commandments and the morals that are laid out for the family in the home.

We will become public enemy number one in the world and the reason will be ultimately because of Christ. Christ is the stumbling block. Christ is the rock of offense that causes the world to be offended.

And because we simply speak His message, they will come and arrest us. Then he says, and this is so gracious of God, notice the last five words of verse 9. As a testimony to them, this is the mercy and the kindness of God in His patience towards this Christ-rejecting world, still yet offering the gospel to those who are the very ones who are instigating this persecution. Please note that it does not say a testimony against them.

It says a testimony to them. God is always about getting our testimony out to the world. And even if it means our suffering, number one on God's agenda list is to get the gospel out and for His testimony to go far and wide, even if it means that we suffer.

He allows us to be sick at times so that we can give a testimony to nurses and to doctors when we're in the hospital. He allows us to be robbed so that we can give a testimony to policemen and judges of the one who provides all things for us and the one who is controlling all circumstances and the one who causes all things to work together for good, even in the midst of our difficulties. And He will allow us to be persecuted so that we as believers can give a testimony to the world of the love and the mercy and the grace of God, which alone can save corrupt sinners.

Jesus speaks to this animosity, and it is brewing right this very moment, and it is escalating. And at the time of the end, it will come to full ripeness, and there will be extreme hatred and hostility by the world toward us. If we are to be on guard, we must be preparing ourselves, even in these days of living closely with the Lord and drawing even closer in our personal relationship with Him and having an understanding of His providence and that God causes all things to work together for our good.

This is the animosity of the world. But I want you to note third, in verse 10, the advance of the gospel. Because verse 10 is directly connected to what immediately preceded in verse 9 and what will be said in verse 11, persecution has always been the means by which the gospel has gone forward.

And never will this be more so than in the last hour of history. It will not be a season of prosperity that will fulfill the Great Commission. It will be a season of persecution and adversity that God will use to spread the gospel to all the nations of the world.

Wasn't it that way in the first century? Wasn't it persecution that God brought in Acts chapter 7 and Acts chapter 8 to scatter the church out of Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria? Isn't that how the Lord advanced Paul to Rome? It was in chains as he was being persecuted. God has always used the persecution of the world to fan the flame of our hearts to fulfill the Great Commission. And so it will be in the last days.

So in verse 10 we read, the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. That word must should leap off the page to every one of us here today. It is divine necessity.

The gospel must be preached to all the nations before the return of Jesus Christ. The word first is very important as well. It underscores that the preaching of the gospel to all of the nations will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ.

And as we have already said how interesting this is that what the world means for evil, God will use for good. The persecution that will come against the world will be translated into good by God to use it as the means by which we will give testimonies before governors and kings and by which we will be so removed from our comfort zones that we will be giving a witness for Christ. I say we depending upon who is in this terminal generation.

Jesus said in Matthew 24 verse 14, Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse, and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations and then the end shall come. What will precede the end and the time of Christ's coming is the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world to all the nations. It was Tertullian who said years ago, writing as a church father, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

Never will this be more true than in the last hour of human history and God will use this gathering storm in a way to scatter the Christians and to scatter the good seed of the gospel and we will at last fulfill Jesus' mandate to go into all the world and make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We've had 2,000 years to do it to this point. God will use the evil persecution in the last days to bring this to fulfillment.

Psalms 96, verse 10, the psalmist says, say among the nations, the Lord reigns. That will be the confident message that will be given by the believers to all of the nations, the Lord reigns. So this is the advance of the gospel and in this context, it will be brought to completion by the persecution that the believers will face in the last days.

Think about right now even circumstances in your own lives, times of difficulty, times of adversity, times of suffering, and how God has worked in and through those circumstances in your life to speak to others about Christ, to make the gospel all the more at the very center of your life, for you to walk and to live with a heightened sense of wanting to be used by God such as never before. Even now, it is times of difficulty in our lives that God uses to launch us out and to tell others about Jesus Christ. Think about how it will be in the last days when all hell will break loose here upon the earth, and yet God is greater than all, and God will even use the devil and the persecution he will bring against the church to expand his witness and to advance the preaching of the Word of God.

This should bring great comfort to our hearts. Sometimes we want to throw our hands up in the air and say, oh God, what is wrong? Your church just seems to be being hammered and hammered and subject to intimidation by the world. We must realize that it is in those hours that God so often is doing his deepest and most significant work of mysteriously, providentially using those times to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There's a fourth heading that I want you to see, and it's in verse 11. And again, context is so important for our understanding this. But I want you to see number four, the activity of the Spirit.

Such a worldwide proclamation of the gospel in verse 10 can only occur in the power of the Holy Spirit as we see in verse 11. And before I read these verses, I think of Zechariah 4, verse 6, not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord. Any work of God, any advancement of the gospel will never be in our own strength.

It will never be in our own ingenuity. It will always be in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit of God. And so it will be in the last days.

So we see in verse 11, when they arrest you, please note it does not say if they arrest you, but when they arrest you, as if this is inevitable, it is looming out on the horizon. This is what is awaiting the church in the last days. And when this day comes, when they arrest you and hand you over, meaning to hand us over to the courts and to the principalities and to the places of authority, when they hand us over to be examined and cross-examined and to be prosecuted, do not worry, Jesus said.

Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. In other words, when we're called on the carpet and we're put on the witness stand and there is prosecution that is being brought against us for the crime of being a Christian and being one who speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we're being drilled for our faith and we know that our neck is on the line, Jesus says, do not worry, because God will never be more in control than He will be in that very hour. Do not worry beforehand about what you are to say.

And we may, should we find ourselves in this or something like this, we may say, I want an attorney, I need a lawyer, I need someone to be my representative. Jesus says, you do not worry, there is a greater advocate who will come and take His stand with you. In fact, He will be inside of you and He will give you the very words to say and it will be supernatural.

God will never be more at work in your life than in this hour when your testimony is on the line. That is when the Holy Spirit will give you what to say. Now notice, say whatever is given you in that hour.

It is implied that God is the giver. In fact, it will be stated very clearly at the end of this verse that it will be God the Holy Spirit. Notice He says, in that hour, God gives the grace that we need at the moment we need it.

He does not give it to us before, He gives us what we need as we need it. He says, for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. That is a wonderful confidence that we need to have.

That no matter what situation we find ourselves in in life, as the Holy Spirit of God who indwells us, He gives us what to say in that very hour. And as the difficulty becomes heightened, so does the ministry of the Holy Spirit become heightened as well. He says, it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.

That is really another way of saying there are two who speak. There's a primary speaker and there's a secondary speaker. And the primary speaker is the source, the secondary speaker is just the mouthpiece.

And it is the primary speaker who is the one who is ultimately giving us what to say and how to say it in that very hour. And it is the Holy Spirit of God who is powerfully at work in the hearts of believers. You remember when Moses, God told Moses, I want you to go before Pharaoh, and I want you to talk to Pharaoh, and I want you to tell him the truth.

And Moses goes, but I don't know how to speak, I wouldn't know what to say. And God says, you go and it will be given to you what to say in that very hour. God told Jeremiah the very same thing as well.

I will put my word in your mouth, and I will give you what to say as you speak to the rulers of that day. So it will be of believers in this hour. And so it is in our own lives as we live our Christian life in this world, and God gives us opportunities to witness, and God ordains divine appointments as we know the Word of God, and as we learn the Word of God, the Spirit of God draws from that, and He frames it in our minds, and He gives us just the right words to say.

What a great gift has been given to us in the Holy Spirit of God. I would remind you that John writes, greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. And the one who is in the world is the devil, and all of his demons, and all of the forces of darkness.

But John says, greater is He who is in you, and the light is always greater than the darkness. And the Holy Spirit of God is greater than Satan, and He will give us what to say in those very hours. The Spirit gives us a greater grace.

He bestows upon us all that we need in every difficulty of life. The Spirit gives great comfort and great courage to us as we live our Christian lives. And so it will be to these believers in this hour.

They will be thrown into an arena of which they have never put a foot. They will be put out into such an exposure before the powers that be in that day. And Jesus said, you don't worry about a thing.

Do not worry. The Holy Spirit of God will give you what to say in just that very hour. I trust that all of us here today walk with the Lord with such confidence and with such readiness and such a desire to be used by God that we do not worry either.

We know that our God is with us, and He gives us the words to say as we find ourselves in very difficult situations of life. That's how real the ministry of the Holy Spirit is in the life of the believer. You're not alone.

Jesus said, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. And I want to tell you, at the end of the age, never will He be more with believers than when He by His Spirit is giving to His people what to say in that very hour. I want you to see fifth, in verse 12, the attack of the family, Jesus is already warned that the gospel will be so provocative in the world.

He also now brings this home in the context of life's closest relationships in the family. And He says that this will only intensify in the last days. So notice verse 12, brother will betray brother to death.

What that is saying is unbelieving brother will deliver over the believing brother to the point of death. This word betray is the very same word that is used in verse 9, they will deliver you to the courts. It's used in verse 11, you will be arrested and you will be handed over.

Now the very same word is used in verse 12, and it is saying that unbelieving brothers will be the ones who will turn in their own flesh and blood brothers and sisters. They will be the informants to tell the government where their brother is, where he is living, how to find him, and that he is in fact a Christian and his public enemy number one for the uniting of this society. That's what verse 12 is saying.

Brother will betray brother to death. And then He drives it home even yet more deeply into family relationships, and there's no way it could be even deeper than this. And a father, his child.

That is to say an unbelieving father will betray his own child who has been born again and who has come into the kingdom of God and is now a turned on follower of Christ and a true believer and the unbelieving

father will turn into the courts and to the government officials his own child and be the informant and it will lead to death. In fact death is mentioned twice here in verse 12 to heighten and underscore the seriousness of this betrayal and being delivered over. It's not just for a few fines, no it will be capital punishment and it will lead to the death of your own family members.

And then at the end of verse 12 he says the same. This works both ways. Not only the father turning in his child but now he concludes the child turning in his parents.

The unbelieving children will rise up against believing parents and have them put to death. Is this not extraordinary? Yet it comes from the lips of our Lord and it speaks to the gathering storm of this last day and how polarized society will become and the contrast that will be made between light and darkness and the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God in the last days that even children who have parents who will become born again in this hour will rise up against their parents and have them put to death. Please note that the children do not actually do the killing, they have them put to death which means they have turned them over to the government officials so that the government will put them to death.

And again the government is looming very large in this last day scenario such that all children have to do is pick up their cell phone, call the government number if that were to be the fulfillment in this day and just give their parents name and their address or a social security number and they're there to arrest them, take them off, guilty as charged. You are a follower of Jesus Christ. Of course Jesus said that it would be this way earlier in Matthew 10 verse 34.

Jesus said, do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth, I did not come to bring peace but a sword. What is a sword parenthetically? But an instrument of execution and an instrument of death. Verse 35 Jesus said of Matthew 10, for I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a man's enemies will be the members of his own household, close quote.

Jesus said that loyalty to Christ must supersede every other loyalty in this world and in the last days society will be so stretched to the extremities and the issues will become so explosive and so heightened that in the last days even children will be turning their parents over to the government and it will lead to the death of the believing parents. That is how high the cost will be for being a follower of Jesus Christ in the last days. And that is how great will be the spiritual warfare in the time preceding the return of Christ.

There's a final heading that I want you to see, it's in verse 13, number 6, the allegiance of the believers. Such hatred towards believers will not be limited to households, in fact opposition will come from every side imaginable. Look at verse 13, you will be hated by all.

There is a note of certainty about these words. There will be a fulfillment in the last day of these words. What must Jesus be warning of? No wonder He says be on your guard.

No wonder He says take heed. No wonder He says you need to be discerning in the last days so that you're not caught off guard. You will be hated by all.

This word all, I would take to being all classes and all kinds of people. This hatred will come from all religions and from all races and from all regions and from all nationalities. There will be this worldwide revolt against believers, and this worldwide, to use Jesus's word, hatred against us, but it's really not us.

It's never been about us. It never will be about us. What about us could be that explosive? It's what follows that becomes the rock of offense and the stone of stumbling.

We but speak what our Master says, and that directs the hostility of the world against our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. So He says you will be hated by all because of My name. There it is, because of My name.

Understand this. There is no name on this earth that is more loved than the name Jesus Christ, and there is no name more hated than the name Jesus Christ. No name more loved by believers and no name more hated by unbelievers.

Christ is the continental divide of the human race. Christ is the divide of the eternities. You will be hated by all because of My name, and the world will be united in its hatred of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will unleash its fury against those who bear His name in the last days.

But notice how Jesus ends this part of the manna of that discourse. It's meant to encourage us wherever we find ourselves in time, whenever we are alive in human history, as we put our nose out there and give a testimony and a witness for Christ, He concludes with these strongly encouraging words, drink these in, take these words into your bosom, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. What is Jesus saying here? Two things I want to bring to your attention.

Number one, this is not referring to the end of the age, it is referring to the end of one's life. The previous verse spoke of the death of believers because of their faith in Christ. Obviously, not all believers will live to the end of the age, because there will be martyrs during the time of the tribulation.

This surely is not saying, well, if your life is taken because you're identified with the name of Christ, well then you lose your salvation because you didn't make it to the end. No, this is saying instead that the true believer will remain faithful to Christ to the end of their lives. Whether they are living in the last days or not is a secondary matter.

This is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This is the doctrine that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Saving faith is a gift that God gives to those whom He will save.

Saving faith is a sovereign, supernatural gift bestowed upon those whom He will save. God is the author of faith. God is the architect of faith.

And the faith that God gives is so supernatural and it is so divine, it will never implode. It will never disintegrate. It will bend.

It will suffer hardship. It will at times fall into temptation, but it will never apostatize. It will never fall away from the faith.

And so what God does in the heart of one who is truly regenerate is to give to them a gift that will enable them, even in the darkest hour of human history, to remain loyal to the Lord and to move forward with allegiance to Christ, even if a sword is put to the throat and one is told, recount your testimony of Christ. We cannot deny Christ, not in the ultimate sense. There may be a moment of weakness and if given the opportunity to live longer, we would recant our recanting.

And that has happened many times in history. Yes, there have been those who have backed down in the hour of crisis, but when they are thrown back into the prison, they come to their senses and they say, I cannot deny the one who purchased my salvation on the cross, and they ask to be reinstated before the court and they give a testimony for Christ that I belong to Him. There have been scenes in church history where men have denied the true gospel and have signed their own recantation.

And then the next week, asked to stand before the judge, and they've had their own hand chopped off that signed their denial. And they say verbally, I am a true believer in Jesus Christ and God will not allow me to go in a different direction and to pretend before you as if I am not a Christian. That is, He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

How will you respond? How would I respond when we would be put to such a test, whether it's at the end of history or not? God will remain faithful to His own people. And though we may even temporarily stumble and fall, we will not fall because the Lord is the one who holds His hand. We will be made strong in our weakness.

And it is the one who endures to the end, all the way to the end of their life, who will be saved out of this godless generation. The second thing I want to say is this is not teaching salvation by works. We've discussed this so many times, there's nothing else left to be said.

But suffice to say, it is not by the works of the law that any flesh is justified. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is salvation. And the evidence of this is always the perseverance of the saints.

As this plays out in this context, in these last days, there will be such persecution against the true believers that those who are false believers among the true believers will begin to recant and will begin to deny the Lord and will begin to walk away. And Jesus is saying, those are the false believers. Those who are truly saved will persevere and endure all the way to the end of their lives.

That is a testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord inside of each one of His people. It's a testimony to the sufficiency of His grace. Maybe sometimes you wonder, maybe sometimes you think, how would I respond if my neck was on the line and I was having to give a witness for Christ and I was being put into this situation? I don't know and you don't know until we get to that moment, but I will tell you this.

The Lord will be faithful to you and God will give you supernatural sustaining grace that you never dreamed of having. And you will live larger than life in that moment because of the work of grace that has already begun in your life. And God will enable you to do far abundantly beyond what you could even imagine as you would heroically step forward for Christ.

This is what the Lord is preparing His people and this certainly is a reminder to us, is it not? That this world is not a friend of grace. This world is a battlefield. This world is not a playground.

This world is a place of great conflict between believers and unbelievers. We're not the aggressor and we're not the provoker, but we find ourselves in the crossfire, do we not? The Lord suffered for us upon the cross and now we suffer in His place in this world. How much we need of His grace, is that not true? How much we need of His support, His strength, for God to be at work within us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

It's not of ourselves that we are anything. In ourselves we're all failure, but in the Lord we are more than conquerors. In the Lord we are made to be overcomers.

In the Lord we're able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. In the Lord our labor is not in vain. In the Lord He gives us all that we need.

And my God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

For thou art with me. My rod and my staff, they comfort me. You will prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the way to that table in front of the enemies. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the way to the valley of the shadow of death.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And then what? I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. You can chop my head off, but you can't head me off.

Because I know where I'm headed. I'm headed to be with the Lord. For me to live is Christ, to die is what? Gain.

Death only serves the purpose of bringing us into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and ten thousand joys for ten thousand years and forever more. If you've never believed upon Jesus Christ, I sure wouldn't want to go through this without the Lord. But with the Lord, you can go through anything.

And one day when you die, you will go into the presence of the Lord and there receive a crown from Him. And those who suffer for Him here will be given greater crown then in that day. Oh may the Lord let us suffer for Him.

Let us not have the easy road to heaven. Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? Are there no foes for me to face? Let us all be mightily used by God in this world until the time He calls us home. These days are coming, the Lord says.

His people must be on guard. Let us pray. Father, awaken us.

Let us hear your trumpet call today. Let us hear these verses as though they were the first time spoken by you to us, your people. Stir our hearts that we would be heroic for you.

We know how weak and faltering we are in and of ourselves. We all would just fold up like a tent in a second of confrontation from the world. But what a strange thing that it is that in earthen vessels such as we are, your trophy of grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit would choose to indwell such fragile, breakable people as we are.

It is so of you that you make lambs like us roar. It is so of you that you make your sheep strong in the valley of the shadow of death. Because we know you're with us, and your Holy Spirit is with us, and He will always give us what to say.

Father, even so, come Lord Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.

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