

Blessed Are The Persecuted

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of living for Christ's sake and righteousness, even in the face of persecution. It highlights how true Christianity exposes darkness, condemns self-righteousness, and provokes hostility from the world. The speaker encourages rejoicing in persecution as a confirmation of belonging to Christ and a promise of great reward in heaven.

Scripture: Matthew 5:10, John 15:18, 1 Peter 2:12, John 16:33, Matthew 10:22, Acts 5:41, 2 Timothy 3:12, Matthew 5:11, John 17:14

Topics: "Living for Christ", "Rejoicing in Persecution"

Description

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Transcript

Okay, here we are at the end of the Beatitudes. Now what we're going to do is, after this, we're going to launch out into the Sermon on the Mount. But you all recognize that basically what we've had, look this is very practical.

This is a composite picture. This is various qualities of what describes the Christian man or the Christian woman. That's what the Beatitudes are all about.

They reveal certain qualities about true Christianity. Look Christ is coming. There has been a death on a cross.

Look, the reason that we have a message for the world and we even want to go downtown is because this is the only hope. There is no other hope. And what the salvation that Christ gives, that salvation, the salvation that His Father bestows upon humanity through Christ, this is it.

This is how it's described. And we all have to come face to face with this. This is the picture of those whose is the Kingdom of Heaven.

And the truth is that if we don't measure up to these standards, then that says something. And here's the thing, here we have another Beatitude. God is the one who creates the Christian.

It's the Spirit of God who regenerates. It's the Spirit of God that sanctifies. And this growth is going on and He creates.

It's not just random. It's not, well, you know, He kind of does this work in one person. Yes, our gifts, our spiritual gifts may vary.

But these Beatitudes don't vary. There are certain qualities and certain characteristics that are going to be true in every single person that God saves. He weaves this into the very fabric of who a Christian is.

And so, what do we have here? You know, we had pure in heart, poor in spirit, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, peacemaker. You know, we had these things. What is that quality that He weaves into the Christian fabric here in this last Beatitude? And, you know, you might all be ready to say, well, yes, of course, we see it's persecution.

I would say no. It's not persecution. That's not it.

The beautiful quality of the Christian that's found in this last Beatitude, in these verses, 10 through 12, is precisely this. It is that we are so committed. Here's what God does in the life of lost people that He saves.

He causes them to be so committed for living for Christ's sake and so committed to living for righteousness' sake that the world sits up and takes notice. You see, the real quality here is not that we get persecuted. That's a by-product.

The real quality here, you want six words to jump out of these three verses at you. And it's namely this, for righteousness' sake. That's in verse 10.

And in verse 11, for my sake. You want those to jump out at you. You see, the thing is, what He's saying is this, there's going to be such a righteousness in our life, which a little bit later He says, your righteousness better exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees, otherwise, no kingdom.

See, our righteousness goes higher than just religious people. It is a type of righteousness that the world, it somehow irritates them so that they persecute us. And there's a devotion to Christ, there's a living for Christ's sake that the world takes notice of.

I mean, do you all see that? That's really the nature here. So, one of the questions that I ask is, how would a person live who is not persecuted? And I just thought about a picture. My wife and I, we went to Tesco yesterday.

Okay, you can imagine this. Ruby and I did not get persecuted at Tesco yesterday. Does that surprise anybody? Anybody get persecuted at Tesco? Probably not, because here's the thing, put a mask on, walk into Tesco, go get your leg of lamb or whatever you're there, that's not what we got, but I like leg of lamb because Tim bought one one time.

Not at Tesco, but you walk in there, you get your stuff, your loaf of bread, you walk to the cashier, and you smile at her through your mask, and you pay for it, you walk out with your bags, you don't get persecuted. That doesn't surprise anybody. Why? Because there is a way to live in this world, not to get persecuted, but I'll tell you this, if you work at Tesco, and you both, by your life, and the righteousness that comes from you, and by your mouth, how you speak, and what you say, you know this, if you're on time all the time, when certain other people aren't, when you're a hard worker, and the boss comes around the corner, and

you're never the one who all of a sudden jumps to get back to work because you weren't working, when you're the guy that never exceeds your break times, you speak truth, you won't lie, people can begin to recognize that, and then you use your mouth, you tell people you're a Christian, and you tell people there is no other way to God, except by the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is but one way, and if you're working with Muslims, you tell them that way does not lead to life, and you're working with atheists, and you tell them they need to repent, and believe the gospel, I'll tell you what will happen, you will get persecuted at Tesco, because that is the righteousness sake, that is the Christ sake, that we have here, what did Paul tell Timothy, about living godly? Yeah, the reality is exactly that, that all who desire to live godly in this world, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, they will suffer persecution, and listen, there's a reason why we don't suffer persecution, Jesus came into the world, there was never a more righteous man than him, and the world didn't leave him alone, if anybody came into the world to love others, you know the last one we looked at was peacemaker, there almost seems to be a tension here, we're supposed to be peacemakers, and yet the very lifestyle that we live, and the very living for Christ sake, living for righteousness sake, evokes something from the world, that doesn't end up in peace, I'll tell you this, one of the things we can gather from this, is we're never supposed to seek peace, at the expense of righteousness, or at the expense of Christ, we never want to deny him, we want to live for him, what our Lord is teaching in this beatitude, is that, look at it, it's, these people, who he says theirs is the kingdom of heaven, what he's teaching in this beatitude, is that such people as possess the kingdom, and are headed to heaven, the blessed men and women of this world, they have a quality about their lives, in other words, they live with such a dedication to Christ, and righteousness, that it does provoke, and evoke an evil response from the world, that's clearly what he's saying here, and here's the thing, if the world doesn't realize this about you, if the world just basically leaves you alone, you recognize what that says, you recognize what Jesus is saying here, the very way that you don't get persecuted, when you go shopping for a loaf of bread at Tesco, is the very way that somebody just moving through life, doesn't get persecuted, we understand not getting persecuted at Tesco, unless of course we stopped, and we started speaking to people, we're just not there long enough for people to observe righteousness, because we're not acting any different from the rest of the people, most of the people in there are not stealing, most of the people in there are not swearing, most of the people in there are just basically doing what you're doing, and when you just basically do what the world does, and you do it like they do it, you don't get persecuted, why? Because you're in the flow, there was one time we followed the course of the world, that's what it says in Ephesians chapter 2, following the course of the world, that's just the way the flow goes, and we recognize there's many things that we do, that don't differ a whole lot, I can go out and mow my lawn, and if you were basically watching me and my neighbor do it, you would recognize there maybe isn't a whole lot of difference between the way I mow my lawn, and the way he mows his lawn, nothing's going to jump out that's going to make the lost guy think, oh I need to go persecute that guy, because look how he's mowing his lawn, that isn't it, we recognize what it is, what is it that causes the world to be caustic, to have this reaction, well it's when we have a sufficiently obvious, devotion to Christ, and we mention his name, and we are seeking to live and honor him, that the world really sits up and takes notice, when it's visible, when it's in the fabric of our life, sufficient enough for the world to take notice of it, now listen to this verse, Jesus said, if you were of the world, the world would love it's own, yet because you are not of the world, Christian did you know that about yourself? You're not of the world, you're in the world, but you're not of the world, he says because you are not of the world, what are we of? We're citizens of somewhere else, do you all recognize that? Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world, anybody know how it ends? The world hates you, Christians are not like everybody else, which is like a little bit of religion thrown on top, that's not it, do you recognize, you are not of the world, and

everybody else is, we recognize, we've got Polish guys here, we've got some Americans sprinkled in, we've got people from different places, Nigeria, Angola, or by way of Portugal, or Italy, Holland, Switzerland, we know about people being transplanted, people that, well I'm not really born here, I come from somewhere else, but I became a resident, but you know the thing about it is, as we move through this life, the reality is our citizenship, our passports, if we could pull out our spiritual passport, those of us that are Christians, it doesn't give you an address here, this isn't your place, and what you need to recognize about this, is what do you call somebody, who comes from somewhere else, well we can maybe call it foreigner, we call it different, but you know one of the things we call it, is a stranger, do you know, strange almost has a negative connotation to it, but do you realize, Jesus Christ, was the stranger, if anybody didn't fit, it was him, he was the ultimate stranger, and you know what, if we walk in his tracks, so go we, we are unworldly, we are different, do you realize this, we are essentially different, the true Christian, has been made born again, he is a new creation, we are different kinds of people, we are these new men, that the scripture speaks about, we are these strange new men, thrown into an ocean, of old men, and it creates, a chemical reaction, that's precisely, what this says, it's a volatile reaction, do you know, over in Luke chapter 6, where Jesus gives, he really gives Luke's, rendition of the beatitudes, and he comes at these things, in the negative, do you know what he says there, woe to you, when all men, speak well of you, that's how they spoke about, the false prophets, I was very troubled, when Ravi Zacharias, went to Salt Lake City, among all those Mormons, and he preached, and they applauded him, that's troubling, nobody persecuted him, in the heart, of a false religion, that should be, see that right there, is very telling, about who he belongs to, woe to you, when all men speak well, you know very often, what's the popular idea, I can tell you when I was lost, what was the popular idea, about a Christian, oh they're like my grandma, my grandma Richmond, who was Catholic, and they're like that, they're nice, they're not offensive, and they go do things, at the nursing home sometimes, they're like Mother Teresa, Gandhi, but folks, that isn't, what we're getting here, if this beatitude is true, what it says, is mark that man who gets along with everybody, there's a problem, and I'll tell you this, Christians that get along with everybody, that's a problem, that is a problem, because Jesus doesn't say, that people that are religious, that get along with everybody, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, that's not what he says, he says that there are people in this world, that are very specifically characterized, by a persecution in their life, it can be mocking, it can be people speaking evil, it can be people not wanting to sit with you at lunch, it can be people that avoid you, it can be people that laugh at you, they make jokes about you, they avoid you, but there is going to be, a level of hostility, and if there isn't, it doesn't matter how religious, it doesn't matter the names we claim to be, that's the thing about these beatitudes, this doesn't have to do with name, this has to do with the reality, is the reality, that we are sufficiently living, righteously, pursuing righteousness, living it, that's what Jesus said, he said, in the beatitudes, that we need to show our good works, in other words, our righteousness and our good works, we need to demonstrate it in front of the watching world, not because we are self-righteous, but because that's precisely what he wants, that's what he saved us to do, to be these lights in the world, to be salt in the world, to live these lives of basically, calling out, you know what light does? You know what light does? It exposes darkness, and when you shine the light, you ever just, you know, pop into a dark place, and turn on a flashlight real fast, you might be outside, and all of a sudden, you see things on the ground, things scurry, this, last beatitude, you know what, it's really a reflection of how they treated the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and what they're saying is this, false prophets, they spoke well of them, but you know what, if they persecute you, you're just like the prophets themselves, and you're just like Jesus, the world did not praise Jesus, the world did not praise the prophets, they praised the false prophets, and it's been that way since the beginning, what did Cain and Abel, I mean you go back to the very beginning, what was it about Abel? Well Abel was accepted by God,

Abel was doing things in a righteous manner, and Cain didn't like it, one of the things that we need to recognize is this, what this beatitude does not say, it does not say, blessed are the persecuted, it can be so easy to hear that, it's, those two prepositional phrases, need to literally jump off the page, and hit the ground running, and hit us right between the eyes, those two prepositional phrases, for righteousness sake, for my sake, now listen, it's not for ethnicity sake, people get persecuted, because they're a Jew, people get persecuted, because they're black, let's just be honest, and the truth is, that depending on, the culture you find yourself in, there is probably not a single one of us in this room, there's not a place, that we could go, that we would not, there is some place on the earth, any one of us could go, and be persecuted for reasons, that had nothing to do with righteousness sake, or to do with Christ sake, that's just reality, there are places where I would get persecuted, there are places where you would get persecuted, simply because of your ethnicity, your skin color, or whatever, the language you spoke, the country you're from, that there is some place, where there is hostility, this is not saying that I'm blessed or persecuted, because you're obnoxious, you know there are obnoxious people, you talk about, we go down to the city center, and there are some people down there, in the name of some religion, there are people that bang drums, there are people that carry signs, and bark all these strange things, and if you get persecuted, for that, that is not righteousness sake, that is not Christ sake, you're being obnoxious, listen, some people, like in school, you get persecuted, because you're just not socially, right on, you get people that are socially awkward, people get persecuted, because they're overweight, it's none of that, or you just get somebody, that's hard to get along with, you ever get around somebody, they're just proud, they're haughty, they're just difficult, they're mean, people like that would get persecuted, at different times, that's not what it's talking about, and it doesn't say, blessed are those who get persecuted, for stupidity sake, and there are Christians, listen, we need to be wise, as serpents, and harmless as doves, do you think, if we went down to the city center, after the service is over today, with this agenda, we're going to do nothing, but speak against homosexuality, you think we might even get thrown in jail, perhaps, you think that was wise, you know, you could go down to the city center, and do nothing, but say nasty things, about Allah, and Mohammed, what do you think would happen, have you ever noticed, that Paul did not preach against Zeus, have you ever noticed that, in fact, what he did say was, you've got this altar to an unknown God, let me tell you about him, very, when you listen to Christ speak, Christ lived in the days, of the Roman Empire, I never hear of him, mentioning one of the Greek, or Roman Gods, ever, do you? Because, there was a wisdom there, do you know something, I did not realize this, but I read something, that Lloyd-Jones said, he said, it is the simple truth, to say, that there were Christian people, in Nazi Germany, who were not only ready, to practice and live, the Christian faith, but who preached it, in the open air, and were not molested, now I didn't know that, my mindset of Hitler, would have been, if you were Christian, you were going to the gas chamber, if you were Christian, you were going to end up, in one of the concentration camps, but you know what Lloyd-Jones said, who lived through that era, he said no, he said as a matter of fact, you had Christians in Germany, who were preaching the truth, what do you think would have happened, if they would have stood up, and preached against the Nazis, concentration camp, but see, they got up, and they preached Christ, I'll tell you this, you mix, your politics, with your religion, don't be surprised, that you get persecuted, see this is for righteousness sake, this is seeking, to do what we are talking about, among the men in the ethics class, to figure out, how to live, so as to please God, in everything that we do, this is living for Christ, this is all devoted to Him, now let's look deeper at this, why, see I want to ask this question, where does the, where does that persecution come from, now I don't know how you were, when you were lost, and what age different people got saved at, I came from a pretty rebel crowd, pagan crowd, of guys, our mindset towards religious people, I remember, in high school, we had to do a class project, and we made a movie, and while we were making this movie, we did,

you probably don't know, Patty Hearst, anyway, this is a woman that was abducted, and we did the film with this, and I remember, I don't even know who it was, Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, or if they were even genuine Christians, showed up at the door of this abandoned, it was some beat up old house, that we were using as kind of a hideout, and they showed up there, and I mean, we just let them have it, and I don't know if you were like that, but people that, people that, came across religious, why does it happen, why does that happen, why does the world love it, is that when Christians fail, and fall, listen to this, this is one of the most, extensive portions of our Bible, that deal, with this, subject matter, Jesus says, if the world hates you, you know that it hated me, before it hated you, if you were of the world, the world would love it's own, yet, because you're not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you, remember the word that I said to you, a servant is not greater, than his master, if they persecuted me, they will also, persecute you, if they kept my word, they will keep yours also, but all these things, they will do to you, for my namesake, you see right there it is, for my namesake, because they do not know, him who sent me, if I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin, he who hates me, hates my father also, if I had not done among them, the works which no one else did, they would have no sin, but now they have seen, and also hated both me and my father, but this happened, that the word might be fulfilled, which is written in their law, they hated me, without a cause, now when scripture says, they hated me without a cause, what it means is without a righteous cause, it doesn't mean that they had, nothing producing the animosity, scripture is very plain, about what produced the animosity, Jesus said, you remember the time, when his brothers were going up to the feast, he said I'm not going yet, then he went up later, he said to them, the world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because, I testify of it, that its works, are evil, that's it right there, basically, you know this is true, I saw Ray Comfort, he went into a maximum security prison, on the east coast, of the United States, and he interviewed, men who were murderers, and rapists, and armed robbers, and he asked them this question, are you a good person, it is amazing, you've got these convicted criminals, and across the board, the testimony was, they said, I admit, I have done some bad things, but basically at heart, I am a pretty good person, that would sum up, what all these people were saying there, see here's the thing, the world is proud, lost people are proud, lost people believe that they're good, do you know, why the vast majority of humanity, is not hyperventilating right now, at the fact that death is coming, Christ is going to return, and they're not ready, do you know why, well they try to suppress the truth, they don't want to know about God, but even if you're an atheist, you talk to these people, and they basically think, that they're good people, do you know what Christ did, he came into this world, and he said you are bad, your righteousness is filth, you are in trouble, and he said to those righteous, spiritual leaders in that day, it's only the sick, and see he came to show men, how sick they are, he came to show men, how ugly, how diseased, how backwards, how broken, how fallen, and he says, I testify, that it's works are evil, that's in John 7, in John 3 it says, this is the condemnation, light has come into the world, men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil, for everyone practicing evil, hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed, and you see, when I was lost, yeah I thought I was a pretty good guy, and if I would have worked in a place, say it's Tesco, and you know what, I regularly take 20 minute breaks, when it's a 10 minute break, but there's that guy over there, he's always back to work, at 9 minutes and 30 seconds, he's back to work, he always tells the truth, and when I was lost, I would have easily stolen something, I would have easily lied, I would have easily come in late, or called one of the guys, hey put my time card in, and stamp it for me, and that's what the world does, and yet we all think we're pretty good people, but then you get this thorn in your side, what's this guy over here, and we tell a joke, and he doesn't laugh, and see what happens is, it condemns us, because there's a conscience in there, and this thing is stirring it up, what you need to recognize is this, Jesus did not come, as simply a

nice guy, he was different, and there was that about his life, and there was that about his words, you know what it caused men to do, it caused men to recognize, that their own righteousness was pathetic, it caused them to recognize, that they weren't so good as they thought they were, and what happens, we make the world feel uncomfortable, we make them unhappy, you know, I can remember after getting saved, you go to a family reunion, and it's all of a sudden, or I go see my friends from my lost days, and it's like they want you to do what they do, and when you don't do what they do, they don't like it, they constantly want to get you to do, maybe some of you have heard, the Bob Jennings story, I mean he, probably if you listen to I'll Be Honest, you know that at that Q&A, during one of the fellowship conferences, he was talking about his friend, that wanted him to just have a beer with him, after he was first saved, and he did, and the guy kept after him, and he kept saying no, no, no, no, and finally he broke, and he had one, and the moment he put it to his lips, the guy was like there it is, I knew it, that's how the world is, and isn't it amazing, some professing Christian, some scandal is all of a sudden discovered, some failure, some fall, some blemish on a Christian's life, and the media, the press, the world, they're right there, they're right there, they're sounding all the alarms, it's a big story, but one of their own, does the same exact thing, you don't even hear it, do you hear, what is happening, with the governor, of New York State, if that happened, to a Christian, if that happened to John MacArthur, oh, you know what would happen, and it wouldn't be the same, why, well we shouldn't be surprised at it, because this is exactly the thing here, this is exactly what we're talking about, what we do is we make people feel uncomfortable, we make people feel unhappy, we're constantly a source of light, and we're shining, I remember, not long after I was saved, and there was a, my mom and her sisters, rented a house on Lake Michigan, they want to do that here, so hopefully you'll get to meet all the folks, my aunts, my mom and my three aunts, but my grandparents were still alive, and we got a house, and so the whole family comes there, and we're having a meal, and my one aunt is talking about, how she went to a priest, who can tell the future, and so she basically went, and she was single at that time, and she was wondering about her love life, and she was wondering about the future, and so basically this guy, is a fortune teller, basically, from the Catholic Church, and he said some interesting things, that were actually true, and my uncle, at that time, he just wants to stir things up, and so he asked me, well Tim what do you think? I said, it's demonic, and of course, you could just feel the tension, in the place, I mean you start speaking truth, and there's just this tension, here my aunt's thinking, well this is a great thing, I went and had my future told, it's the topic of interest, but now all of a sudden, I'm making it sound like, she's just dabbling in occultish things, that's exactly what she's doing, but it just, listen, any of you that ran with the crowd before, and then God saves you, you know exactly what I'm talking about, all of a sudden there's this tension, because why? Now you are convinced, that one of the things you're convinced of, is how lost they are, and so you're wanting to show light here, you want to give hope to them, you know Peter, Peter deals with, just the tension here, he says in 1 Peter 2.12, have your conduct honorable, among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you, as evil doers, now isn't that interesting, Peter just assumes, the world is going to speak about Christians, as though we're evil doers, even though look what he's saying, let your conduct be honorable, that when they speak against you, as evil doers, they love to do that, and I remember working as an engineer, I would talk to the guys, I remember one electrical guy, and it was just he and I in the office, and I said, Dan, what if I'm right, he was a professed atheist, he said well, I suppose if you're right, I'm in trouble, see that was one of the few times, I ever had with him alone, typically when I would try to have these discussions, in an office environment, he was like the rabbit, he would lead the attack, but getting him alone, it was a bit more subdued, but they speak against us as evil doers, that they may, by your good works, which they observe, isn't that interesting, see they're watching, they are watching what we do, they glorify God, in the day of visitation, now that may be the day of some judgment visitation, they'll glorify God, because they will admit, that what

they speak evil about, was actually good deeds, or it could be a day of revival, and they'll glorify God, in the sense that, they'll have recognized the whole time, this is real, you just can't explain what's happening, in this person's life, as evil as I speak about them, I know in my conscience, that something is happening here, Peter also says this, we have spent enough, of our past lifetime, in doing the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lewdness, lust, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries, in regard to these, they think it's strange, that you do not run with them, you see they notice, in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you, and there it is again, in chapter 4, Peter sees people speaking, evil of us, because we don't run with them, we don't do the same things, that we used to do, and see this is troubling to the world, this is troubling to family, this is troubling to friends, because you know what, my friends I ran with them, I did what they did, after I got saved, I remember one of my friends, he holds up a fifth of whiskey, and he's like come on, you used to drink this with me, another one came over, and he grabbed me by the throat, and he said it's just like you're dead, and see the reality is, that we walk, we talk, we live with the world, and they're watching, and we're like them, some are a little worse, some are a little better, but we're like them, and we're going along, and suddenly Christ comes in, there's faith, we look to him, God radically saves us, and now our lives are different, and they recognize it, and you know what, it condemns them, because think about what that means, do you realize this, I basically was a black sheep in my family, I think I mentioned that before, I mean among my family, I was kind of out there, now Ruby tells me about her brother before he got saved, I would not have done some of the things that he did, because I guess I was a bit more shielded around family, but I was considered black sheep, and I thought when I got saved, that they would be, they would be happy, they would be pleased, and that wasn't the case, I began to recognize that they liked how I was before, you know why, because before as a black sheep, you know what you make them look like, you make them look better, because when they can look at you, and they can say well I'm better than them, see when you're going through life, and it's like well I'm better than them, and I'm better than them, and I'm better than them, I mean you start feeling pretty good about yourself, ah certainly it will be ok in that day, but see you get around somebody like Jesus, and it's like suddenly you're feeling smaller and smaller, and you're shrinking, and you're looking very pathetic, well it even happens in his followers, I mean why, because our lives get so drastically changed, and see this is one of the things my friends had to deal with, my friends tried to come up with reasons why this happened, that did not have to do with Christ, and see, and I said as much to them, I said guys, because I met with a bunch of these guys after like two decades, I said you know what, if this would have been short term, and three months later, yeah I moved on to something else, but I said guys it's been 25 years, and I'm still following this, and guys what you have to recognize is you know, here we all are in this pool of people, and something has happened to me that has not happened to you, and now if that has to happen to you to get to glory, you guys are in trouble, and see they know that, the conscience tells them that, this person is living at another level, this person is living beyond where I am, it condemns them, they don't like it, I can remember shortly after I got saved, now see this is very interesting, one of my friends, he wasn't real close, he lived next door to me when I was in grade school, he wasn't super close to me just simply because he was religious, but he was in the group, sort of, this guy was Catholic, and he got his bachelors degree, and then he got his masters degree, and then he got his doctorate degree, and he was getting it in theology, he is a Jesuit priest today, preaching at a major Catholic university in the US, well he is advancing in his studies towards his masters in theology, so you can understand where he is at intellectually when it comes to theology, I have only been saved just a few months, I know next to nothing, and I wasn't raised in the bible, I was absolutely ignorant, and so here we are, Christmas break, he is back from school, I am already working as an engineer, we are in a bar somewhere, and I was spending time with my friends, because I was preaching the gospel, and I wanted to go there, I wanted to be around my

buddies, no matter what they were doing, whether they were going to go to a restaurant, to a bar, to a pool hall, I wanted to be with these guys, because I had a message for them, and I thought they would all jump on board, but I remember talking to Dave, Dave is there, he is Catholic, I am telling Dave about these things, and he just blew up, Conway, you don't even know the first miracle that Christ did, I said, Dave, you are right, I don't, I said, Dave, you know how my life was, and it has been radically changed, and Jesus did it, and he just was angry, that is so interesting, because you know among my friends, this guy was the kind of guy that put rocks in his shoes, when he was a little kid, to earn merit, it was the kind of guy he was, and so see, he saw himself at the top of the pile, hanging around with guys like us, I mean he, if anybody was getting to heaven, he was, and I can remember, two other friends, guys I partied heavily with, went to a restaurant one Friday night, again, same objective, we sat down, and were talking, again even among my friends, I was somewhat of a black sheep, and one of the guys that I had lived with in college, he was the quarterback for a high school football team, and he was a popular guy, and he was a nice guy, and I'm telling him the gospel, I'm telling him what Christ has done for me, and he just says, Conway, if you're going to heaven, I certainly am, see it's just an aggravation, see the thing, the transformed life, it's just, they can't get away from it, if somebody just tags a little religion on, that is entirely different than when suddenly there's a righteousness, and they recognize it, suddenly you're living for Christ in a way that they see this, and it just strikes, you know what it does, it strikes at the self-righteousness of man, it unmask the pride, listen to this, this is your instruction, Christian, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

Do you all remember Leslie Smith? I was talking to Leslie when he was in the nursing home, and the nurses, two nurses were coming in, I think he had just got done being bathed, you know he's old and he needed to be bathed by the nurses there, and I was talking to him and he said that when they took him to the tub, one of the ladies used the Lord's name in vain, and he was telling me how just he shined the light right on them, oh you must use the name of your creator that way. You see when you're an old man, you can kind of get away with it a little bit better. Craig, who's now sort of taken my place back at Grace, Craig told me that when he worked at a factory, he went out to the tool crib in the factory where they loan out different tools, and he went to the cage there, the guys in a screened in area, and the guy used the Lord's name in vain, and Craig said, Craig just blurted out at him, the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes.

He said that guy just exploded. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, rather expose them. See how you're supposed to be light? Look, if we're living this way, it's shameful even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret, but all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light.

Whatever makes manifest is light. Light makes manifest. You know what that means? Go in a dark room, you can't hardly see things, you can see silhouettes, you can see, you turn on the light, now everything appears.

That's what you are. You guys are light bulbs. And see, when light bulbs go into dark rooms, all of a sudden the critters that like to hide out in dark... You know one of the things? My friends and I, we like the dark.

You like to party at night. You like to do things where the light isn't bright so much. You want to escape that kind of thing.

Now listen to this. It's for my sake. Blessed are you when you are reviled and persecuted.

Blessed are you when they revile and they, just says they. We know who they is. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my namesake.

And just think about that. For my namesake. We can draw various conclusions from that very passage.

It tells us a great deal about our own ideas of Christ. Think with me here. How do you imagine Jesus to be? And one of the reasons that I just, one of the reasons that certain Christmas songs are not favorites of mine is because basically they want to create this picture of a harmless babe in a manger.

I like the one we sang today because the emphasis is just as much on the fact that he's Lord. But you know you basically create this picture. Do you know the world? It used to be this way a whole lot more in the UK than it is now obviously.

But people in droves flock into the church on Easter, on Christmas. And do you know what happens? Basically Christ is set forth in a way that the world they're not offended at. And what we can know is this.

Jesus says the world hates me. And if you're mine, I've taken you out of the world, the world hates you too. And it's for my sake.

It's our identity with him. And we can pretty much know whether we've got the right Christ or not based on how the world responds to the Christ. If he's a little harmless babe, do you think the world is going to be offended at that? No.

If you simply say Christ died for you. You know the average guy? I'm a pretty good guy. Of course he died for me.

I love me. He loves me. It all makes sense.

Right? The world is not shocked to hear that Christ would die on a cross. And of course in most places it's preached in a way, well, he died for everybody. He died for you.

He died for you. He died for you. They don't really even hit on the gospel.

They don't hit on sin. They're not trying to bring men to see how sick they are. This is this expression of love.

You basically put Christ in a manger and he's this tiny little baby. The Jesus that's applauded and lauded all the time is not the true one. Have you ever noticed the effect that Jesus had on his contemporaries? I mean, have you ever noticed when you're reading the four Gospels and even what Peter says in Acts 3 when he's preaching about what happened in the Gospels? Do you realize what they did to him? Do you realize what happened? Just follow the narrative and see how long it is.

What's he doing? He's healing people. He's feeding people. He's curing leprosy.

He's delivering people from demons that hated him without a cause. If you really look at him, nobody loved mankind like he loved mankind. And yet, with the things that he did, watch how fast they hated him.

Watch how fast they persecuted him. See, they had their little traditions and their little things. See, we've got our righteousness over here and we don't do these certain things on the Sabbath day.

And here comes Jesus and he's just blowing it out of the water and he's making them all look like fools. Which one of you has some animal? You have a son that falls into a well. You won't take him out.

He's just exposing them. He exposes their hypocrisy. He'd call them hypocrites.

He'd call them all... He'd say the truth. But what did he do? He came and he loved on men. He loved people.

He helped people. He healed people. He offered salvation.

He called them to come to him that they might have life. He came to bear witness to the truth. He came to do men good and they hated him.

I mean, you think about this. What did they do? They threw stones at him. They plotted to kill him.

They cried out in the crowd, crucify him. Pilate was ready to let him go. They spared a murderer and they killed him.

You realize what they did? They killed the prince of peace. You see, this is precisely the effect that the true Christ has always had on the world. And can I tell you something? Christ has not changed and man has not changed.

And if we brought Christ into this world right now, they'd kill him. They would crucify him in their... whatever method they have. You see, he would cause the same antagonism in this world today because man has not changed and the devil has not changed and the world is in the power of the evil one.

And you bring somebody not in that power, somebody that's not of the world, somebody that's the absolute stranger, and you throw him in there, he suddenly condemns people. People feel condemned being around him and he said that. He exposed their deeds for what they were.

He showed men that their deeds are wicked. He showed them you know what? Men's deeds are wicked. What he did was he came to bear witness to the truth.

And in seeing the truth, if men would have ran to him, they would have found salvation. See, men would rather go to hell. Men would rather reject the only way possible of being saved.

He doesn't change, man doesn't change. And you can mark my words. They did not praise our Lord and they will never praise you if you bear his resemblance.

Not at all. Blessed are they when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. My sake.

I just want you all to hear this as we're wrapping this. My sake. Do you recognize this? Christianity is not a teaching.

Christianity is about a person. Christianity is about us identifying with this historical person. Christ said, my sake.

Christianity is not about the advice I can give to the UK government about how to deal with COVID. It's, we're not, it's, we start with this historical person. That's where, my sake.

Jesus says, my sake. This is why people are going to persecute you because of me. The Lord Jesus Christ was clearly that which he assumes is going to be that which is going to create the antagonism in the world and it's going to create that antagonism because we're his witnesses.

I mean, you recognize this. Now it's our task to do what he did. What did he do? He revealed their works as dark so that they might come to him and have life.

And now that's what that's our place. Now we're exposing people's deeds. We point them to Christ.

That's exactly what the early church did. They weren't simply going forth to preach truths about Christianity. They went forth to preach Christ.

He recognized we live for his sake. We preach for his sake. What we do with the rest of our day today is for his sake.

As we go out before the world, it's because they're watching. Those early disciples, they went to the people and they told them about this person. I'll tell you, Sonny, last week, Sonny was out there preaching.

You know what the guy said? Why don't you go help the poor person over there in the doorway? See, shut your Bible. Shut your mouth. Don't tell us about Christ.

Go help the poor guy. Oh yeah, they're good with that. Yeah, you can go visit the hospital.

You can go visit the nursing home. They'll be okay with that. You can go visit prisoners.

You start talking about Christ. You see, it's for his sake. Start telling them about this Christ.

Start telling them about the singularity of this Christ. There's none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved. You tell them that.

There's no way to the Father. He's the way, the truth, and the life. That's it.

There's no rest. You come unto me, weary and heavy laden ones that you might have rest. See, rest is only found in him.

Peace. The peace of his cross. You start telling men this.

You see, you know what it does? It attacks people's idols. It attacks their trust. It attacks their traditions.

You just say to those Muslims, you can't get to heaven that way. That way leads to hell. The fangs are going to come out.

Why? Because they have this love in there. They have an animosity towards the true God. They have an animosity towards Christ.

Oh yeah, they got their Christ. But it's not the Christ of the Scriptures. And that's what we need to recognize.

You know what? People that have no problem with Christ, it's because they don't know Christ. They haven't seen him. Listen, there's a volatility between people in this world and the true Christ.

And the only reason certain people in this world will speak well of Christ, like a Muslim, is because it's not the Christ of Scripture. Bank on it. When he says, you're going to be persecuted, they're going to speak evil things for my sake.

It's for that real Christ. It's for the one that came and exposed men's deeds. And if we follow in his path, we'll do the same thing.

You're my witnesses. You go bear witness to me. Right here in Judea and Samaria and right out there into the uttermost parts of the world.

And see, as we take that message forth, it is difficult. You recognize the situation that he's put us in. He's put us in this situation where he's told us right up front, they're going to hate you.

They're going to hate you because they hated me. We recognize that we're called to be the ones today, to be the lights in the world. We have this commission before us.

We're supposed to go out and make disciples. But we recognize that the message that we're bringing to people creates hostility. And they may kill us.

In fact, Jesus said, they're going to think they do God a favor when they kill you. But that's it. It's his sake.

It's that person. Christ. That they hate.

But listen to this. If you're one of those people who act enough like Christ and bear enough of his name in this world to where it's obvious enough to be an irritation and draw forth the ire of the world around us, you know what Jesus says? You're blessed. He says, it's good.

He says, you should, you see the text, you should rejoice and be exceedingly glad. You see, this persecution for Christ's sake is proof of who and what you are. He says, rejoice and be exceedingly glad.

For great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Do you recognize this? By reviling you, speaking evil of you, whatever level of persecution the world is just telling you, you don't belong to it.

You belong to another world. It should remind you of who you are and where you're going and what's going to be there when you get there. Listen.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad. For great is your reward in heaven. You're like the prophets.

So they persecuted the prophets who were before you. The non-Christian does everything he possibly can not to think about death and not to think about eternity, not to think what's out there. Do you recognize? Do you recognize what's happening here? Jesus is the one who said, I go to prepare a place for you.

So you can almost imagine it like this. You can imagine climbing a hill. You can imagine being over in the peak district and you're climbing a hill.

And you can imagine if you go with me and you out climb me to the top and I'm still coming up. I'm about 400 yards behind you. But you're up on the peak and you can see down on the other side.

And you're shouting back to me, Oh brother! Get up here! This is a phenomenal view! Something like that. Do you recognize what's happening here? Jesus is up at the top of the mountain and He's looking down

the other side. Now He created it.

That whole landscape on the other side is His doing. But He's up there and He can see what's over there and you can't. And He's turning back to, He's looking and He's looking back at you and you can't see what He sees.

And He says, Ladies and gentlemen, if you could see what I see, you would come out of your seats right now. You would rejoice and you would be exceedingly glad. You would jump for joy, for gladness at what I see you're going to get.

And so if you're coming up the backside of this mountain and you're living for Him and you're living for righteousness and people are persecuting you, He's saying, you know what? You can thank them. Because they are telling you exactly that you're going to get what's on the other side of this mountain when you get over there. That's the reality.

Your destiny and mine are as certain as we are alive right at this moment that this beatitude describes us if we're living for Christ and we're living for righteousness in a way that gets the attention of the world. They actually proved to me that I belong to Him. Persecution proves to me that I belong to Him.

That I'm going to be with Him. And that I'm going to share in this eternal joy. A few more rolling suns at most.

And so we don't want to back away from this. I'll tell you this. It doesn't matter where you are.

We've got some of our young people in a school. Some of you are in different workplaces. You be determined.

You're going to be a light in this world. You're going to expose. Is it going to be uncomfortable sometimes? Yes, He'll give you grace.

It is uncomfortable sometimes. I know it is. I feel it.

And we don't like to be disliked. We don't like hostility. We don't like to be avoided.

We don't like to be excluded. We don't like that. None of us have been in jail yet for it, but that's actually happening in the world, even in the West, where we might have thought that it wouldn't happen in our lifetimes.

People are being put there. But listen, this is okay. It's okay.

Because it's a witness to where you're headed. And this is a reward. You know, there is another passage that does say, leap for joy.

If the Spirit of God would somehow communicate to you right now the reality of this, there would be cause for you to be jumping up and down. It's like, if I could take all of you to the top of that mountain and we could look over, and then all come back here, we'd be stunned. We'd be absolutely amazed.

And my wife was asking as we were driving here today, what's it going to be like? I mean, does the Bible tell us? You know, the Bible is vague. It's almost like the human words just can't capture it. But isn't it enough? This day you'll be with me in paradise.

Who wants something better than paradise? I mean, just take that word. Paradise or an eternal weight of glory. Can you go higher than that? Can you go bigger, broader, deeper, further? An eternal weight of glory? You see, the wording in Scripture is extremely brief.

And for good reason. Because human language just wouldn't capture it. And I've told you this before, I reckon, that Whitefield, in his diary, he recounts the story of a woman on her deathbed, who went unconscious, and she came back.

She said to her family, I had just seen such things as would not be believed if told. And she was gone. And Whitefield was so moved by that, he put it in his journal.

Father, I pray that you would help us, Lord, help us to live for righteousness sake. Give us the grace to live for Christ's sake. Give us the grace to never deny His precious name.

Though it cost us our lives. And we don't have any guarantee that it won't. But help us, Lord, to be faithful even unto death.

To be faithful no matter what it is that it costs us to be a Christian. Help us, Lord. Give us grace.

I pray in Christ's name. Amen. You are dismissed.

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