

The Persecuted Church

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[0 : 00] Struggling with knowing what to share this morning, I actually had an entire message already prepared as of a day ago.

! So, I have, in view of it being the day of prayer for the persecuted church, I just want you to be aware that I feel very unworthy to even be standing up here to even speak about them a lot of the time.

I don't want to put myself on their level. This is just a personal conviction. You don't have to follow it, but I refuse to say that I've been persecuted just because I've faced some humiliation or ridicule by people that are around me.

Here in the U.S., where there really is no threat of anything other than your wounded pride, I just don't want to wear that badge. If it happens, you know, fine.

But I do, over the years, our brothers and sisters around the world really have convicted me of how I've lived and what I'm doing in my life.

[1 : 28] I encourage you to read Richard Wambron's book, *Torture for Christ*. I've read it at least five or six times, and every time there's always like a new desire to reach people for Christ at all costs.

Just after I've read it. And so just with that in mind, just knowing that, like, I take this very seriously, and I'm praying that God uses this time.

We may run a little bit over 12 o'clock, so it's okay. You can wait to eat lunch when so many people are without in the world. You're going to get there. So those of you who are hungry, just get over it and just learn that it's not justified.

So we're going to be in John 15, but we're going to look at some other places today. So I hope you have your Bible, flipping fingers, ready. We're going to start in John 15.

Just look at verse 18. We're just going to read through 21. This is Jesus talking to his disciples. He's preparing to die and to face crucifixion.

[2 : 37] And this is what he says, verse 18. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Remember the word that I have 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 would also keep yours. But all these things they do to you on the account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Just join me in prayer. Father, I just ask that this morning you would use your word to break down any kind of entitlement or any desire that we have to flee your presence.

[3 : 46] That we would face you. That you would show us our sin. That we would have the faith to know how to deal with it in our hearts and in our lives.

Challenge us this day. And thank you for the examples we find in your word of people who suffered and died for the cause of Christ and are still doing so today.

Make us aware of that, Lord. And just ask that in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So, do you know that nearly, nearly 160,000 Christians will be killed this year?

That was roughly what the statistics have been over the last few years and they're increasing. And we're going to just use this text just to kind of start walking through, kind of setting the background for persecution.

But you'll notice a word that pops up a lot here in these few verses. And it's just the term, the world. Okay? And the word here is cosmos.

[4 : 57] It means the order or the system. It's not talking about like the beauty of creation or the beauty of nature or the created order. It's speaking in terms of, it's using a negative sense here to talk about like how the people of this world are alienated from God.

It's the world is a way of thinking, an ideology, a perception of life and the purpose of life that sets itself against God and God's purposes.

It's a whole system of organized humanity that is hostile towards God and alienated from God. So, that's the truth of what we're talking about here.

It's the way that the world is going and flowing. So, when Jesus says, he warns his disciples that the world will hate you, the cosmos will hate you.

And then he explains why. Because the world has hated him. You know, Christ came into the world in love and grace to a rebellious creation to show them the way to be reconciled to the Father.

[6 : 05] Showed them that it was by grace, through faith in him. And the result is they spat on this offer of grace from God.

They hated him. And it says, you know, this Greek word for hate is a very strong word indicating to detest, to abhor. And it even pictures like an ongoing persecution against someone that you hate. So, that's what we're talking about in this term. But he says, if they hate me, they're going to hate you. And he says why? In two ways.

He says, for one, you don't belong to the world. And then secondly, not only do you not belong to the world, but you belong to me. And I chose you out of the world. And so, therefore, you will suffer. And he says, if you were of the world, if you belonged to it and not to me, the world would befriend you. The world would love you. It would treat you as one of its own. But I chose you out of the world, and therefore the world will hate you.

[7 : 11] And he gives you that illustration of a servant is not greater than his master. And he's saying, like, look, I'm your master. I'm your Lord. The one that you seek to be like.

The one that I'm your example. You listen to me, and you follow me, and you believe the words that I teach. So, very clearly, he concludes that they're going to reject you because they've rejected me. And so, then he goes on to conclude at the end of that, in verse 21, a lot of people in this world think that they're okay with God, but they reject Christ.

But, in reality, if you reject Christ, you're rejecting the Father. That's what he says here. Because they do not know him who sent me. In verse 21, Jesus says, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

That's in chapter 14, 9. And he also says, in other places in the gospel, whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. So, all these other world religions who think that they know God, but yet reject the one he sent, do not know the Father.

[8 : 25] See, it's just a text to look at just to say that those of us who really belong to Christ, we're going to face some measure of hostility by the cosmos because we are not going along with it.

We're pressing up against it. We're saying, no, life is about this. This is what matters and not this. And we're going to confront them with evil that is in this world and say, the only hope you have is to be reconciled to God through Christ.

And so, the Apostle Paul in Colossians 1, 24, he talks about how he's sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Then he goes on, he says, In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church.

And what he means in this is not that Christ's sufferings were inadequate to achieve salvation for us, but what he is saying is there are many places in the world that don't know about the suffering of Christ.

They haven't physically seen Jesus come and suffer on their behalf. So what he is saying is that through his life, through his body, through his suffering, he's going to betray to the world the sufferings of Christ.

[9 : 42] So believers going out into the world to preach the gospel, they are an extension of Christ and his sufferings. Joseph's son, who I recommend a book that he wrote as well, Joseph's son, he was a Baptist pastor in Romania in the 1980s, exiled by the government, imprisoned, tortured, interrogated over and over to try to get him to renounce the gospel.

But as you'll read, like in Torture for Christ and a lot of these other books, they just embraced it and often converted many of the people that were interrogating them and many of the people that were torturing them out there.

So they were just being tortured, preaching the gospel to them. But in regard to the verse in Colossians that we are filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions to reach the world, he said this, he says, I am an extension of Jesus Christ.

When I was beaten in Romania, he suffered in my body. It is not my suffering. I only had the honor to share in his sufferings.

Suffering and martyrdom have been sent as a part of God's plan. They are instruments by which he achieves his purpose in history and by which he will accomplish his final purpose with man.

[11:06] So I have the privilege, I'm not saying this is anything cool, but for some years I've had the privilege to know David Platt, who is the IMB president in our convention.

And I challenge you to read his books. They are really challenging and life-giving, scriptural. And I remember him telling me one time that he was at this really large Southern Baptist church here in the South, and he was talking about persecution, talking about brothers and sisters around the world that he personally knew, not just that he read about, that were undergoing extreme persecution because of the name of Christ.

And deep down really praying and hoping that they would just, you know, say, hey, let's go and suffer with them or let's be in prayer for them. Let's do whatever we can to, you know, be a part of what they're going through.

He said, after it was over, like, we'll say he didn't even finish. He said he was sharing and the pastor walked up there and just like put his hand on his shoulder and just said, you know, thank you for sharing with us, brother David.

But you know what this just makes me think of? This just makes me think that I'm so thankful that I live in America and so thankful that, you know, I have the freedom to come here and worship and that we live in a country that, you know, the red, white, and blue and, you know, eagle soaring, you know, like that.

[12:37] And David just thought, I thought that, you know, Lee Greenwood was going to walk out and sing God Bless the USA like right as I finish sharing. And what we have to understand is if we really are thankful for freedom we have, it's not going to turn to that kind of response.

It's going to turn into, now let's go and suffer with them. Let's be a part and feel what they're going through. And, you know, we're going to read some things in the Scripture now that I hope are going to challenge you that I'm taking very seriously myself, like even asking, like in my own personal life, in my marriage, like what is this going to look like?

Because it's not just going to be something I store up here. But what I want you to know is in the context of what we're going to be reading today, persecution was real.

Like it was, this is going to happen if you follow me. And it also is real even today for thousands of our brothers and sisters across the world.

And it's not okay for us, as Nathan alluded to earlier, to just say, well, I'm just glad I live in America. Wonderful. But you should know that Jesus demands the same type of loyalty, love, and devotion as He's asking for anyone who's wanted to risk their life.

[13:59] It's the same kind of sacrifice. And so there's three points we're going to walk through today, each one having a specific text, but we're mainly going to be in the Gospel of Luke.

So turn over to Luke 14. Luke chapter 14 and go to verse 25. Luke 14, go to verse 25.

And the first point I'm going to make are things that we must do as believers, even here in the West, in America.

Number one, we must weigh the cost of following Christ. All right? We must weigh the cost of following Christ.

Now, how many of you, when you gave your life to Christ, actually were challenged to think about that? Or was it just, you know, pray this prayer, come down the aisle, maybe be baptized, which in and of itself are not really bad things.

[15:14] But I really feel you see Jesus doing this a lot throughout His ministry. But as soon as people knew who He was, and He began becoming like too popular, He would say things to them that would make them just either split or stay with them.

And I always, whenever I'm sharing the Gospel with someone, like, you know, I'll give you an example. There was a baseball player that I met with for probably two months straight every week, just going through the Gospel, talking about sin and God's holiness and the cross and faith to the point where He got it.

Like, you know, I understand. Like, I get it. And I believe it. I believe it. And I said, well, great. And then I asked Him, what's holding you back from just following Christ now?

And then I usually switch into a couple of weeks of trying to talk them out of following Jesus. And what I mean by that are passages like we're about to read. Luke 14, verse 25.

Now great crowds accompanied Him, and He turned and said to them, If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

[16:38] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down and first deliberate whether he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000?

And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all he has cannot be My disciple.

Very heavy words. And He said this when He was getting momentum. He was becoming cool.

Crowds were following Him. And He kind of turns around and stared at this crowd who, in a way, is just kind of following Him around to see Him do tricks and thinks He's cool.

They're intrigued. Indeed, He turns around and boldly says these heavy words to this crowd that is flirting with Him. And a few things you'll be able to draw out of this is, first of all, Christ says, I am more important.

[18:05] I am more worthy than your family is. That's harsh. Most people in this entire world, including those who are some of the most wicked, vile people ever, they still love their own family.

Right? All of us love our family. And He says, I demand a superior love to all those who you call family and all earthly relationships that you have.

And so, the word hate here is not the same word that's being used in John 15. It's used here in a comparative sense, not like in terms of malice or evil towards somebody, but it's used in a comparative sense to mean loving one thing or a person much less than another thing.

So that love for this one thing, by comparison, looks like hate to the other thing. So, it's not saying have malice and evil in your heart towards your family. It's just saying, I demand a much greater love than your family.

And He's saying, I cultivate such a deep love for Christ and a desire to know Him that all other loves in this world, by comparison, look like hate.

[19:18] And in a similar context, in Matthew chapter 10, you don't have to turn there, but Matthew chapter 10, verse 34, Jesus gives us a clearer picture of what it means so I can actually hate your family in this way.

He says this in verse 34, Listen to this.

So, what He's saying here is like the true living presence of Christ in your life can cause relational division.

It can cause, it can bring a sore to, it means by that, like it can cause some true division in your families. You can be rejected by your family.

He's saying. In this context, it was real. You'd be kicked out of your family more than likely. Still is the case around the world. I would like to just give you an example of a friend of mine, a personal friend.

[20:46] Her name's Kara. She lives in Northern Ireland. She's a school teacher. And she grew up in, if you don't know about Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland is still under Great Britain.

It's a part of the UK. It's not a part of the Republic of Ireland. Very strange, I know. Read the history. But, but there's a huge battle in the North over centuries of Protestant versus Catholic.

Irish Catholic versus Brits and Scots who were there who are Protestant. And most of us, it's not about the gospel at all. It's just about nationalism, politics.

But Kara grew up in a very devout Irish Catholic home. Her father, I'm pretty sure, was a part of a militia group in Northern Ireland.

And she, she had a friend that was a part of one of the, the Baptist youth associations and was a believer.

[21 : 48] And she kind of, she says now, like I was tricked into going to this, you know, this summer camp. I thought it was just going to be like games and outdoor adventures, but they did do that. They talked about the gospel while they were there.

And so in the process, Kira heard for the first time, like the gospel and believed and was completely just devastated by like the love of Christ for her and the forgiveness of sins.

And as soon as she gave her life to Christ though, she had to think, wait, stop. If I do this, my family is probably going to hate me, especially my father, because I'll be saying like, I'm not going this way anymore.

I'm going this way. I'm not for what the Roman church is doing here in Northern Ireland. And she was terrified. She was in tears. She just couldn't sleep for nights.

She finally went back, back home, and was praying and working up the courage to at least tell her mom, finally told her mom what Christ has done.

[22 : 54] And her mom just broke down in tears and said, praise God. I only came to know Jesus two weeks ago. Like there's two of us in this family now.

So they just began encouraging one another, praying. And they finally worked up the boldness to tell the father, the husband, and he was furious, furious.

Lost, lost control, threw things around, just angry, saying like, you're betraying me, you're betraying your country, you're betraying like the cause here.

And for a long time, just a lot of fighting between her mom and her father. And eventually her dad called her and the rest of the family to a meeting.

And they were, she was pretty sure that her dad was going to say, we're getting a divorce and this family is done. So finally, they sat down together in the living room there in Belfast.

[23 : 54] And finally, she, he said, as much as it's killing me to say this, I see like the love of Christ in your life. And I want that for my life.

And he gave his life to Christ. And that's a transformed family. But Kira had to weigh the costs of, of such a relationship with Jesus.

And that's just an example in the West. But around the world, this is a true thing. This can happen. Your family can leave you. Your family could kill you, throw you out.

And so, it is a, you know, we need to not just say, well, I'm glad that wouldn't happen to me. We have to weigh the costs as well. So, first we see that Christ demands a superior love to family.

But secondly, in this text, we see that he desires a superior love to your family. Yourself. Even your own life, he says. You must love me more than your own life. He says that you must take up your cross.

[24 : 56] And later on, or earlier in Luke, so a few places I want you to turn, but, just flip earlier to Luke chapter 9. We're going to look at some things in Luke 9 together.

Trying to keep you in the same book. But, Luke 9 verse 23, similarly, Christ said this, And he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?

So, this phrase, take up your cross, it is an invitation to come and die and suffer. In this context, it meant only death.

It didn't mean jewelry. It didn't mean anything cool or culturally acceptable. It was a mockery, and it meant to come and die. So, if you're going to come with me, you must take up your cross.

[26 : 07] It's an invitation. And he also said, like, to deny yourself. And like, the phrasing of this word in the original language means to refuse to associate with.

And like, you're refusing to associate with the things that you used to associate with before you knew Christ. To relinquish absolute control of your life.

A willingness to follow Jesus, to serve him, to keep his commandments. And if need be, yeah, like to die for him. And so, I think, if I could paraphrase, saying this to us now, if Jesus would say something along this line, if you knew that coming after me to be my disciple would cost you your life, would you come anyway?

It might not cost you your life, but if it did, would you still come? Are you that desperate for Jesus? Do you see how much you need him and how precious he is that you would be willing to lose your life?

Are you willing to give up your life now for eternal life later? That's just what he's saying. It's not a, it's not cool theology. It's not to help you live a better life.

[27 : 22] It's a call to come and die. Like, to give your whole life, to surrender everything for Christ. And back in our text, you can stay in Luke 9, but back in Luke 14, he gives you an example.

He said, two examples, one of building a tower and the other one of going to war to show like how you need to stop and think about what you're doing.

So it didn't just, come on, Jesus wants you on his team and I'm not going to tell you how much that costs. He says, you need to stop and think about what it's going to cost you to follow me.

Don't rush into this, in other words. Slow down. Which is so anti what most churches are doing today. Is that not true? It's quick, easy, believism that costs nothing.

And he's saying, stop and consider. Some of you may remember me sharing about another friend of mine who's from Kyrgyzstan, which is over near China.

[28 : 24] His picture was out on the board out there. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but his name's Ossal. And he does ministry with the Underground Church in Central Asia.

And he came up here. There's probably only a handful of you that were probably here back then, but probably, probably eight or nine years ago, he stood on this stage. He came here and shared with like probably 80 to 100 college students.

and he said, you know, in America it's fairly easy to come to be a Christian. But he said, in Central Asia, first you have to stop and consider if you're going to be a Christian, you have to be willing to be kicked out of your family.

And then he said, after that, your community will ostracize you and ridicule you. then he said, the state will either not allow you to work, imprison you, or kill you.

And he said, if someone that we've been sharing Christ with goes through all of that, still trusting Christ, we know that they're a true Christian. That's like what he said.

[29 : 36] And I was just so challenged by that. So some of you, like, don't take these stories as like, that just makes me feel shameful. That just makes me feel guilty.

You can either allow it to be that or you can allow it to be a conviction that God is hitting you with and then just repent and strive to live as they live and have the faith that they have in the Savior. So use it as encouragement and not just, I'm terrible and I don't measure up. Use it as fuel to follow Christ. Then in case he missed anything, in our text back in Luke 14, he says, you know, relinquish all you have, everything.

In case I left the stone unturned, if losing your life wasn't enough, like, relinquish all you have, everything, to follow Christ. So stop and weigh the cost.

Weigh the cost of following Jesus. The same baseball player, after I kind of challenged him with this, these texts, a week later, he came back and says, you know, I want you to know that I really believe this, like, I really believe that, you know, Jesus is real and that I need him and all of this, but, you know, I mentioned this to my girlfriend that I'm living with right now and she doesn't think it's a great idea.

[30 : 57] It means we'd have to break up and I, you know, maybe one day, like, I'll come back around to this. It was heartbreaking, but what would I have done if I had just said, well, you can still be a Christian.

You know, you can still, it's okay, Jesus is all right with your adultery. You know, he exposed the one thing that he cared more about than Christ. He didn't really see his need, just pretended that he did.

And so, this goes to number two. Number two, we must weigh the urgency of following Christ. So weigh the cost, but weigh the urgency too.

So it isn't like when we're sharing with people, it isn't, you know what, you've got the rest of your life to think about this. The Bible stresses urgency as well as weighing the cost.

While you're in Luke 9, look down to verse 57. And these are another time when people were following around Jesus and this is something that he said to three different men.

[31 : 59] verse 57, chapter 9. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, I will follow you wherever you go.

Bold statement. Verse 58. And Jesus said to him, foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

To another he said, follow me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. And Jesus said to him, leave the dead to bury their own dead.

But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Yet another said, I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those who are at home.

Jesus said to him, no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Again, hard words.

[33 : 04] True for us as it was true for them and true for anyone else in the world. So, you may be like, man, Jesus is really strict here. He's being a little unreasonable.

He could have all these extra followers, but he's, you know, being overboard. But a really close glance at context here will help you realize all he's really doing is just exposing that they don't really believe who he says he is.

So, the first man, this same account is in Matthew. And Matthew calls this man a scribe. So this man, the first man here was a scribe.

A man who apparently was used to a pretty comfortable lifestyle and making some decent money probably. And back then, as today, if you were low on the totem pole of social life, you would attach yourself to someone who was powerful, influential, and as they rose, you went with them.

Same kind of thinking even today. So, he wanted to advance his position in society. And Jesus, you know, again, cut straight to the point and informed this man, if you're looking for comfort, if you're looking for riches, for great influence in an early way, worldly way, I'm the wrong guy.

[34 : 27] I'm not your guy. I don't even have anywhere to lay my head. I don't have a mansion and tons of cars and all those other comforts of life. So the path of true discipleship is not found in comfort or ease, but rather in a hard life that brings suffering and persecution.

And he knew this man was not in it for him. He wanted something else out of him. So this man considered those things more important than following the king of kings.

The second man said, let me go and bury my father first. So again, sounds honorable, right? So, but just again, a studying of the context here.

It didn't necessarily mean that his father was dead. this was a cultural way of saying, let me wait for my inheritance first. Let me wait until my father dies and then let me get my inheritance and then I'll come follow you.

And so, that's why Jesus' phrase, let the dead bury their own. Like, look, what I'm telling you to do overrides that importance of waiting for your father to die.

[35 : 38] I'm telling you the most important thing for you to do is to go and proclaim the kingdom of God. So, again, this man desired money and title and inheritance more than following the Messiah.

And then thirdly, this is the most puzzling one to me, at least. The man says, simply, let me say goodbye to my family and then I'll come follow you. Do you think that is a undesirable, like a unrealistic request?

I don't. But, again, Jesus sees something that we don't see here. And I want you to, again, hold your hand on Luke, don't move it, but turn to 1 Kings.

I'll get some Old Testament action today. 1 Kings chapter 19. This is the story of Elisha and Elijah, the two prophets of ancient Israel in the early days of the nation.

And this is when Elijah is getting ready to pass on being the prophet to Elisha. And it's an interaction that takes place.

[36 : 57] And just think about the similarities between this third man that Jesus is talking to and what happens right here. verse 19. So, talking about Elijah.

So he departed from there and found Elisha, the son of Japhat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him. And he was with the twelve.

And Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. Kind of a symbolic act of passing it on. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah.

And listen to this. Let me kiss my father and my mother and then I'll follow you. Sound familiar? And he said to him, Go back again, for what have I done to you?

And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of oxen and gave it to the people and they ate.

[37 : 56] Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him. All right. Now, what's different about Elisha and this third man that Jesus is talking to?

A big difference. Elijah did go home. He says farewell to his family. But then, listen to this, he sacrifices the yoke of oxen to the Lord.

And these are all symbolic acts of severing himself from an old way of life to start a new one. He ended his livelihood in order to say, like, I'm leaving this and I'm moving to this.

He had nothing to go back to. So he just momentarily went back to cut old ties. However, Jesus clearly sees that this man loves his family so much that though he may follow him for a time, he's always going to be looking back over his shoulder saying, like, I've got to go back.

I can't follow you anymore. I've got to go and be with my family. And, again, a superior love to family is what Christ calls us for. He makes that analogy that, you know, most of us are not familiar with plowing at all, but if you're not looking forward, you can't plow a straight line.

[39 : 13] And so he's saying, if you're always looking back, you're just going to go all over the place. And so he turns this man away. And Luke, always looking over his shoulder, and eventually, where he would walk away from Jesus, Jesus.

So, there is urgency in following Jesus. I've used this analogy before, but years ago, when I was waiting for my lung transplant, I was getting sick and sicker and sicker, and the surgeons told me basically this, look, you're very sick.

You have 20% of your lung function going this way. You're not going to make it much longer. You really need to get a transplant. There's urgency here. You need to get this procedure done.

And then he said, but this is a huge decision. A lot goes into this. There's no guarantee that you'll even survive the surgery or the recovery. You have to think about this, though.

You have to weigh the cost of what you're about to do. So there was urgency, but there was also weigh the cost, like in that same decision. And that's what it is. Like, are we willing to say, whatever it is, like it's urgent, I'm going to deal with this in my life.

[40 : 32] I'm going to follow Christ, whatever it costs. Thirdly, this is the final point. We must weigh the worthiness of Christ.

Christ. And last thing I want you to turn to, but look at Mark chapter 10. Mark chapter 10. So, the reality is we feel like we're losing and sacrificing so much for Jesus, but in reality we are not.

Sins forgiven, rebellion against God, pardoned, reconciled to God, spared His judgment, given His fellowship, given a relationship with the Creator, an eternal life to come, eternal joy in Christ to come.

If we really understood what we've gained in Christ, we would never be able to say we sacrificed anything, because it would be that much greater. It would be infinitely greater than anything we feel that we've lost here.

only Christ is worthy of that. So, listen to this. This is one of those moments when the disciples are being very, you know, self-pity, like, well, we've done so much for you.

[41 : 55] And Luke, or excuse me, Mark 10, verse 26, says, they were exceedingly astonished and said to Jesus, who then can be saved?

And Jesus looked at them and said, with man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God. This is after he turned that man away.

Peter, of course it would be Peter, right? Peter began to say to him, see, we have left everything and followed you. Like, we've sacrificed everything, Lord.

And Jesus said to him, truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house, our brothers, our sisters, our mother, our father, our children, our lands, for the sake, for my sake, and for the gospel. Who will not receive a hundred fold now in this life, houses, brothers and sisters, mothers, children and lands, with persecutions in the age to come, eternal life.

[42 : 59] So, his response seems to indicate, this is how I'm going to rule out this idea that you're losing something, that you've sacrificed something. He's saying you're denying yourself like little finite things here in order to gain something that is far greater.

And the fact that you know me and that you have eternal life is going to be so great, so glorious, that you would not even begin to ever say, I sacrifice to follow Jesus.

Surely what he means is that he himself makes up infinite times over for every sacrifice. sacrifice. Jesus wants us to think about sacrifice in a way that rules out self-pity.

Deny yourself garbage here so you could have gold later. That's like what he's almost saying. Don't throw away your life over things that don't matter and perish. So, I wanted to read this in closing, but this is an Iranian pastor who converted to Christianity from Islam and he has a church in

Amsterdam now and predominantly made up of people from Africa and Asia and Amsterdam. And listen to this, his main goal is to train missionaries to reach the West, to come to America and to come to the places where supposedly there's a lot of Christians and really to say, look, we're bringing the gospel to you guys.

[44 : 33] So, this is what he was asked the question, why are so many American churches not really doing well? Why are we failing?

Why are we not really growing? Why are we stagnant? And he said a few things. This is what he said. Number one, we must embrace the miraculous.

Because America has so many comforts, people don't see the need for God to act in the miraculous way. In Africa and other places where there are few hospitals and churches for healing, but the truth is that we need the Holy Spirit like never before.

We can't just have great buildings and wonderful social gatherings and miss the Holy Spirit. A church without the Spirit's power will not save the world.

number two, this is convicting. We must reject Hollywood tendencies. Some churches in the United States look more like they're sponsoring fashion shows or TV programs.

[45 : 44] This is a bad example to churches in other nations. And I know that some foreign churches are now copying this flashy American style. For example, in some African countries, some pastors have started imitating this Hollywood style by manipulating people to get money.

I was shocked to hear that one pastor in a developing country recently began dealing in a stolen luxury car so he can make money for himself and appear successful.

Number three, we must forsake our pride. Outsiders do not read our doctrines or our bulletin boards. They read our character and our lives.

When people see that we live a dual life, why would they bother to be a part of the church? And this is how he sums it up. I wish that my American brothers and sisters realized how hurtful it is to the cause of Christ when they focus so much on material things.

I am not against beauty of things and having things, but why does a preacher need a limousine instead of a normal car? must preachers have a huge entourage in order to enter conferences and churches?

[47 : 01] God is fed up with all these things. We cannot transform others if we ourselves are not transformed. So, for those of you here who are without Christ, know that the offer of salvation is completely a gift of God's grace in Christ.

So come to him, surrender your life to him, but know it's going to cost you. If you really are following him, as we read, all those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

And for believers, this was something that I've thought about over the years. A long time ago, an abbot, or kind of like a monk, was asked, you know, after your life's over, like, what if you realized that there really was no God?

Like, you surrendered your whole life to being in a monastery to have a quiet life? What if you realized at the very end there was no God? Would you consider it to be like a wasted life?

And the abbot replied this, holiness and silence are beautiful in themselves, even without the promise of reward. I still would have used my life the same way.

[48 : 17] Like, meaning, I've lived a life of peace and solitude and beauty and even if this turned out to be a hoax, I would say it was a good life.

How many of you could say that? But here's the staggering difference, very different from what the apostle Paul said. He's basically talking about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

This is what he said. This is how different it is from what the abbot said. If in Christ we have only hoped in this life, we above all people are to be most pitied.

Like, we have thrown ourselves to slaughter and torture for Christ. Pity us if this wasn't true. Not, well, it was a good life anyway.

And I hope that all of us, you and me, can say, like, I really sacrificed to follow Christ. And then in doing so, you're enlightened and you see, like, I really didn't sacrifice anything because of how much I've gained in Christ.

[49 : 27] Join me in prayer.