

The King's People: Favor in the Fire Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] bless your word now we need to hear from you please use your unworthy servant to preach clearly what you are saying in your book may Jesus fill us all with his Holy Spirit may we have ears to hear and hearts to follow in Jesus name we pray amen we are back to our series in Matthew chapter 5 and we are still talking about the kingdom focused church and we have been looking at kingdom character of the people in the kingdom focused church because you can't have a kingdom focused church if you don't have people who are kingdom focused so amen we come to a strange beatitude Matthew chapter 5 verses 9 through 12 hear now the word of the Lord sorry 10 through 12 blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are those who are persecuted when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you that is the word of the Lord please be seated you know some things I really do hate few one of those when someone comes to me and says

I have good news and I have bad news I hate that I mean come on why can't you just have good news I mean really is that really too much to ask just give me some good news well the embassy of the kingdom of God known as the church of Christ is under attack not just spiritually but physically this is the bad news sometimes the attack is subtle and sometimes it's just plain savage but both are very deadly I came across some information this past week our brothers and sisters in Nigeria continue to feel the dragon's wrath organization Genocide Watch reports that 62,000 Nigerian Christians have been murdered since 2000 these murders are being perpetrated by Islamist jihadist groups including Boko Haram the Islamic State West African province

Iswap and the Fulani militias this persecution has been called the silent slaughter it's so in our face that even the March edition of Newsweek magazine ran an article entitled religious persecution in Nigeria is getting worse they wrote this past year has shown a shocking increase in religious persecution particularly against Christians in Nigeria over the over the Christmas season last year at least 200 Christians were massacred in central plateau central plateau state of Nigeria in apparently coordinated attacks over the following week or two the number of the dead climbed past 300 these attacks against Christians have been going on for years but 2023 reached new heights of violence one report released in February this year counted over 7,000 Christians targeted and killed for their faith in Nigeria last year alone we're waking up even our news people are reporting but here's the thing some Christians criticize

American Christians because we complain about Christian persecution in this country but when compared to the Christian suffering in Nigeria some Christians are saying we're a bunch of wimps maybe we are one writer wrote whose name I won't share because you know who it is he says it's disheartening that we often focus inwardly and complain about our relatively minor inconveniences while neglecting the severe persecution faced by Christians around the world in places like Nigeria I think there's some truth to what he's saying maybe but I think it's kind of wrong headed the critique while we must wake up to what our family is suffering in other places we still have to notice that the persecution of our brothers and sisters are facing in other countries may be more savage but what we face in this country is more subtle but both are destructive persecution of all types is the devil's way of silencing the Lord's church and if you're serious about your faith if you're seeking to live kingdom focused if we are seeking to be a kingdom focused church following Jesus will put us in the crosshairs of the empire of darkness but as the king's people good news no matter what type of persecution we endure

God has promised us favor in the fire favor his favor his favor in the fire his presence his blessing when it looks darkest for us his people I said this is kind of a strange passage we'll see how far we get today this is a strange passage doesn't it do you see it do you feel it why would anyone want to persecute people read the the Beatitudes right who are poor in spirit mourn over sin our own sin and the sin of our society people who are meek meaning we don't always demand our rights there's humility people who hunger and thirst for righteousness because we really want to do what is just and right people who are merciful

[8 : 30] I mean we we care about hurting people and we care enough to want to do something to help people who are poor in spirit whose motives who don't just hold to the truth amen but whose motives are right not just our actions and lastly who would want to persecute peacemakers I mean come on peacemakers aren't such people good for our communities for our cities for our politics for our organizations aren't such people who exemplify all of these Beatitudes good for the common good sure there sure such people they're nice and maybe a little weird but still nice harmless why would anyone want to hurt them the Nigerian

Christians are probably asking the same question why would anybody want to hurt us well first point the king's people are persecuted because they don't fit Luke records kind of a parallel Beatitude to this it's not going to be on the screen so I'm going to just tell you well we'll get to that in a minute we'll come back to that give me a second let me just make some things clear what does he mean by persecute the word means to pursue to chase in order to harass and even to systematically oppress we're looking here now at verse 10 blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven verse 10 this seems to speak of more physical violence so what specifically puts the people of the

Lord's kingdom on the outs with the surrounding culture the Lord says it it's righteousness that is keeping God's law not just our positional righteousness we talked about this before but we got to rehearse it one more time not just a positional righteousness before God which Jesus won for us by himself keeping the law on our behalf because we broke it we can't keep it he kept it on our behalf and as we trust in him his righteousness is given to us we get his record he takes our sin we get his record before God whoo hallelujah that's all that's the gospel y'all but that righteousness as we saw then leads to obeying God by faith not perfect obedience but a life of obedience it's a lifestyle of righteousness and that includes remember the word righteousness in the

Hebrew and the Greek Old Testament New Testament the word righteousness can also be translated justice it's the same thing they go together justice treating people right and when necessary advocating for people to be treated right by God's standards now by God's standards not what we believe is right he says is right people like those who are the poor among us who are less economically fluid prison reform in so many cases that's needed in our country just sentencing for people who are not just wealthy but people who are poor who can't afford the best lawyers they get railroaded okay y'all don't watch TV

I guess you don't know immigration reform immigrants come to our country sometimes they have a hard road to hoe now there's illegal immigration and then there's legal immigration but God didn't say which one was which he just said immigrants that doesn't mean that we don't have laws but it means that hey y'all we care for immigrants we care about them trafficking you know how much human trafficking goes through our city Atlanta is a hotbed for human trafficking and all those trucks that roll through Chattanooga for points unknown they roll right through us and we have issues in our own city see we care these are kind of things that yes the people of

[14:10] God actually care about and get involved in as we are able because we care about justice right I think remember so much of the civil rights movement was calling upon this nation to uphold its own laws treating all citizens equally as well as upholding the law of God this is righteousness this is justice yes we care we are involved in various aspects of righteousness that should be good for our country it's kingdom character and we saw before we hunger and thirst to be involved we hunger and thirst for righteousness not just personal righteousness sometimes we get focused on that and we forget about social righteousness this it's the beatitudes aren't these kind of people good citizens good workers good friends good neighbors good relatives we care about people and seek human flourishing walking in righteousness here's the problem

I understand Columbo I understand I got it something I just don't understand but no I understand I got it here's the problem these people will do what is right before God no matter what because they want to honor Jesus our standard for doing what is right is not determined by what is popular or what other people say works our standard doesn't change it it doesn't need upgrading and we cannot compromise on it come on y'all we cannot compromise on the divine standard God gave it we don't get to modify it because of the righteousness of Christ given to us we can be too good everyone wants good people but that goodness has to be relative and willing to be flexible perfect righteousness which is

Christ's righteousness perfect righteousness scares us because we are all unrighteous perfect righteousness shows us up makes us feel bad about ourselves and for some that's just unbearable so you got to go Lenard you got to go and here's the other thing none of us as Christians lives perfect righteousness but even the little bit we got is too much because it's not our righteousness come on come on it's not our righteousness you didn't just wake up one morning and decide to be good even before we got saved we could even keep our own rules of righteousness we failed always and now that we know the truth that God's perfect law exemplified of course in the

Ten Commandments but God's perfect law does not grade on a curve serve it's Christ's righteousness one for us that is being leaked out of us imperfectly but still it's his righteousness and any likeness to Jesus is dangerous to the forces of darkness around us he is perfect in love in goodness in compassion in truthfulness he is perfect and yet he himself was hounded judged unjustly and finally executed that righteousness lives in us

John talks about this I think this situation in John chapter 15 verses 18 to 27 he's going to read it Jesus is speaking he says 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 you didn't choose yourself 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 also keep yours but all these things they will do to you on account of my name because they do not know him who sent me if I had not come and spoken to them watch this they would not have been guilty of sin that is guilty of unrighteousness but now they have no excuse for their sin whoever hates me hates my father also if I had not done among them works that no one else did works of righteousness by the way they would not be guilty of sin but now they have both hated they have seen and both hated me and my father we'll stop there

[20 : 40] Jesus didn't fit this world and neither will you if by his spirit you display his character okay I gotta read the rest of that just one verse 20 put it back on screen verse 26 you gotta see this when the helper comes whom I will send to you from the father the spirit of truth who proceeds from the father he will bear witness about me and you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning the spirit Jesus promised the spirit would come and the spirit would exalt Jesus he would bear witness to Jesus he would do that in us so that in us now we might bear witness to Jesus here's the thing he is saying he is giving us his spirit to bear witness and yet he says the world hates him he is tough he's setting us up he's setting us up if the world hates him because of his righteousness and he gives us his spirit to bear witness to him and that spirit lives in us and as we bear witness to him because his spirit because he gave us his spirit and we were going to get hated like him was that in your contract when you became a disciple of

Jesus did you see that in a fine print did someone tell you that no because that's not how we witness we tell people come to Jesus and your life will be perfect and God will heal your marriage and God will do all these great things and I'm not saying he won't I'm just saying that ain't the good news good good good good news means we're gonna be like him and his righteousness is scary he was on the outs he didn't fit neither were you what do you think about that what do you think I'm just perk around that bunker mouse around your heart what do you think about that you okay with that second and we're gonna stop as

I enter into this point the king's people are lied upon and attacked for his name righteousness but also his name related now this is where you see Luke's account coming in Luke 6 22 just listen Luke 6 22 blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the son of man here in Matthew's account which are not contradictory Jesus may have given these on different occasions blessed are you when others revile you verse 11 and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely or my account they go right together now listen I'll start here for a minute keep being treated badly is not always a sign of persecution for

Christ Christians sometimes someone someone just doesn't like you or where you are from sometimes people attack us because we did or said something wrong or insensitive sometimes people come here we go I'm going in pray for me sometimes people don't like you not because you are Christian but because you voted for the other party because neither of those parties represent the kingdom of God I'm not saying there are things in each party that we can say represent things we would cherish as Christians it's called the image of

God in all people I'm not saying there are not good Christians in each one of these parties and some of them I'm not saying that at all all I'm saying is to you if you vote for the other party no they don't care that you are Christian you voted for the other party and you might get in trouble don't equate the parties with the kingdom we can be insensitive sometimes and this happens more than we want to admit social media and even some protests are hot bits for Christians being insensitive and self righteous in our words of critique Peter would agree with me this is what he says first Peter four fifteen let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler now you we murderer we get thief we get evildoer and just a general statement yeah we get that meddler meddler a meddler is a busy body one who doesn't know how to mind his or her own business when appropriate we can't claim persecution for

[27 : 29] Christ if we're suffering for doing wrong can I give you a crazy example that took place a few years ago I hope they're still not doing this there was this church in Kansas they would make anti-gay protests at military funerals y'all remember that I got put my glasses so I can see you y'all remember that really really you the people of God the saints those who claim to love Jesus show up at a military funeral where a man or a woman has given his or her life paid the ultimate sacrifice for the safety of our country we show up this is our family now we show up and make a protest against gay people cut me a break if they're persecuted you can't say

Jesus we're being persecuted for Jesus that's what something what Peter probably means something like that this is what the Lord meant by persecution for righteousness or his name in this section of the BF in verse 11 we recognize something else is happening in persecution it's not just physical but sometimes persecution includes other things that are more verbal maybe the word the word when he when he talks about reviling here in verse 11 revile you he's talking about verbal insults denouncing you rebuking finding fault as a way of shaming you and includes therefore as he says uttering all kinds of evil falsely against you telling others that you are evil

I'm bringing in Luke Luke talked about exclusion exclusion from what from groups from jobs from opportunities another form of a way that persecution can take place in the life of God's people people will make false statements about your character and actions your actions will be written off in the worst possible light no benefit of the doubt just lying and slander and it's intentional and it's very easy to do these things today all I gotta do let's see where's my X there all I gotta do is pull up X okay yeah I got it I got X I was talking to

Cornell White the other day and Cornell told me that he hates all gay people send post and all people around this city and country and even the world will read that post Cornell never said such things but I want to get Cornell he bugs me loves me the wrong way he's one of those Christians I got church hurt so that means all churches are mean and bad and all Christians are mean and I've been hurt by the church and he talks about going to church and Jesus and people being loving but I got her I'm gonna show him am I making this up that's persecution

Jesus said it would happen and it's happening I know what you're thinking it's time to end that sermon but before I do that what's the heart of the problem what's the heart of the problem here righteousness and his name his name his name his name why what was our allegiance to Jesus is a threat to the kingdoms of this world his name Sharia law communist law caste law democratic law family ethnic identities etc all want your allegiance all of those things and more I'm sorry your political party they all want us to make them our first and greatest commitment that's why

[33 : 01] Chinese Christians are being persecuted so much they want their first allegiance is not to the state that's why Christians and Islamic countries are being persecuted their first allegiance is not the Sharia law Jesus because he has died paying our sin debt to make us his own demands our first loyalty seek he says in 633 of Matthew seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness not the kingdoms of this world in whatever form they may take the Lord calls us to love him before family and even before our own lives I don't know if I put this on the screen Luke 14 26 to 27

Jesus says if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters did you catch that hate yes and even his own life hate he cannot be my disciple whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple have you read that before does it make you shudder are you bothered by it are you ticked what how can he say that I love my mama and I do Jeanette Smith is that's my girl how can he demand such loyalty listen he has saved our souls from death because of his love which we did not deserve we are born we are born on death row we are born enemies of

God because we are sinners we are rebels against him haters of God Jesus saves us from the righteous judgment of God he takes murderers and by the way in Matthew Jesus says if you hate your brother you're a murderer how many murderers are in this room right now he takes murderers gossips prideful people selfish people and forgives us he gives us the kingdom of light why shouldn't we and this is what he means why shouldn't we love him above all others that's what he means when he talks about hating Jesus never he's not a preacher of hate he's making a contrast he's saying basically I want to be your first love and based upon how you love me so much and so completely it looks like you hate everybody else because your love for me is so supreme but that's only because of what he's done what he's done for us he demands our first allegiance and the forces of darkness cannot tolerate that if

Jesus is really your Lord if his if your heart truly belongs to him if his word is your life if he himself is who gets you up in the morning and gives you strength for the day it's in his name you look toward the day when you will close your eyes and appear in his presence if that's where you are you are the most deadly person on the face of the earth you are dangerous you are lethal to the forces of darkness and you will not be tolerated we have a lot of freedom in this country but things are happening things are happening will we ever be Nigeria or China I don't know

I hope not hope it won't come to that but even if it doesn't it's still there the subtle attack of the darkness excluded from promotions maybe excluded from tenure in certain schools as professors things are happening so I ask you is Jesus worth it is he worth it you can't decide that when the attack comes you got to settle that now before the Lord asking his mercy because you know if left to ourselves we all prefer convenience and easy we all prefer comfort we want to get along and go along and some of us we even compromise the truth to see that happen we're not the first

[38 : 27] Christians to do that it's been the history of the church since the beginning there have always been Christians who would sacrifice a little incense to Caesar just a little incense that's what the Romans did you know this right the Romans told them listen just pinch a little incense to Caesar say Caesar is Lord and you Christians can live because you're not saying Caesar is the only God you're just saying Caesar is one of the gods and you just pinch a little incense to Caesar and some Christians did because they didn't want to die I don't want to die either but some Christians did and they lived and it was a big controversy because the church didn't know what to do with them some pastors did big controversy do we allow them back in that's what they went through because the pressure is always there things would be easier if you just compromised a little bit

Freeman just a little bit man be a little flexible we're not asking for your whole life a little flexibility here man understanding David come on man stop being so bigoted and narrow minded is Jesus worth it father help us we in our right now Lord we all say Jesus is worth it we do we believe it we believe it help us Lord to truly know what that means give us Lord so so pour out your spirit on us that we really see Jesus and we really love him and we want him oh God open our eyes to see the glory and the majesty of him who has loved us and washed us from our sins with his own blood so that

Lord we will follow him wherever he leads and if he leads to the fire we know we have his favor even in the fire in Jesus name amen