

# Understanding the Times

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the radical nature of true Christianity, highlighting the inevitable opposition and sacrifices that come with following Jesus.*

**Duration:** 35:14

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 10:1-4, Matthew 10:16-18, Matthew 10:23, Matthew 10:34, John 14:27, Acts 1:8

**Topics:** "Opposition"

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## Description

In this sermon, Pastor Hammond introduces a pamphlet called 'One Minute Witness' that teaches people how to effectively share their faith with others. He emphasizes the importance of being prepared for opposition and challenges that may arise when sharing the gospel. Pastor Hammond uses examples from history, such as the soldiers landing on the beach during World War II and the Navy SEALs mission to find Osama bin Laden, to illustrate the need for strategic planning and understanding of the risks involved. He also addresses the potential opposition from loved ones and the importance of discerning God's will over the desires of others. Overall, the sermon encourages believers to boldly and lovingly share their faith, trusting in God's guidance and provision.

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## Transcript

In Matthew, this gospel that was written to Jewish people, that was the target audience to prove that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah coming, we have an interesting passage which, let's use the right word, it's challenging. It's very challenging. And it shows that Christianity, the true Christianity, is radical by nature.

That Christianity is not, where do you go on Sunday to church, that has nothing to do with Christianity. Christianity, to put your faith in Christ and to live out your faith, is radical. So let's see what Jesus said at the end of Matthew 10.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. That's strange, I thought he was the prince of peace. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to turn, quote, a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household, end of quote. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life or saves their selfish life will lose it, their life.

But whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. Oh my goodness. No wonder a lot of people didn't follow Jesus after he said things like that.

But he never went after them. He never chased one of them down and went, listen, listen, I'm sorry, that was a little strong, so I wanna change it around for you. He never did that once.

He just spoke the truth in love and then he let it lay there. And those who followed him followed him and those who didn't, didn't. Now, when they were trying to find Osama bin Laden and the country had decided that it was right that he could just be put out of the way, they gave that job to some Navy SEALs along with other intelligence operations.

And the Navy SEALs or the Rangers are these people who are severely trained, go through a great deal of hardship, and then are sent on many times covert missions which are very difficult and filled with danger. And before they go out on these, they have meeting after meeting where their operation is laid out. The helicopter will land here.

You're to go in there. This group is to do that. This group is to cover the front.

This group is to cover the back. You're gonna go up. We have pictures of the house, of what the house looks like.

They knew the doorways. They had planned for this thing with Osama bin Laden. They had the hallways mapped out.

The ones who went in there knew everything about the house. They also were told there's gonna be these many people with weapons that we know about. There's gonna be this kind of operation against you that will be mounted.

Something else could happen. This could happen. That could happen.

But this is not a walk in the park. Some of you might not come back. None of you might come back.

All of you might come back. But this is what it is. This is part of any kind of military operation.

I was just watching a recounting of D-Day when the largest amphibious landing ever in the history of warfare was done. America joined World War II after Pearl Harbor. And now we were fighting in the Pacific against Japan and against Germany and their allies in Europe.

And the war was not going well in Europe. And France had been taken. So Germany controlled France, or most of it.

So now under Dwight D. Eisenhower, who later, General Eisenhower, who later became President of the United States for two terms in the 1950s, they were gonna land hundreds of thousands, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of troops to make a push through France and go toward Germany. Russia, on the other side, withstood Germany's attack and they were coming from the other side. And now Hitler and his minions were gonna be put in a vice.

But Eisenhower, the history books tell us, couldn't sleep for a long time because he knew that this landing, which was tried to be hidden, no one knew what part of France, the coast of France, they would land on. And it was gonna be in Normandy that they would land. And there were all these beaches which became famous.

Why'd they become famous? Because the blood was running like the water. Because no matter where you attack, there were some opposition and they were told when those boats, those small boats, leave the big boats that brought you across the English Channel, and now when those boats open up and you have to try to make it to the beach and there's machine gun nests up there just wiping out people, sometimes they opened up the barrier to let them out into the water and before they could even take three steps, there were 10 people dead just from the machine gun fire. So everyone was told about these things.

This is what you're to expect so that nobody goes into the battle and goes, what, what are those people firing their guns at? What is this about? In other words, to be ready for battle means you have to know what's gonna go down. Matthew 10 is the chapter where Jesus picks his 12 disciples and he calls them by name, he chooses them. They were ordinary people like you and me.

Fishermen, tax collectors, very ordinary people but the thing about Jesus is he picks ordinary people so they can do extraordinary things through his power and his grace working in their lives. They weren't strong supermen, they were just regular people like us and he chooses them and in that chapter, he begins to tell them what's involved in following him and some of the things that are gonna happen to them, they're gonna be persecuted, they're gonna be brought before judges and before councils, they're gonna be flogged, they're gonna face great opposition, so on and so forth and he tells them that whoever confesses him before people, he will confess before the father and he'll own them as his own and whoever denies him in front of people, he'll deny them before the father. I mean, it is right out of somebody going into battle and this is what it's gonna be like and this is a part of Christianity that is hard for us to understand because we have watered down Christianity, especially in our country, into something mundane, harmless, just go to church on a Sunday but the aggressive, radical nature of it has often been lost.

Where we pick it up at the end of the chapter, what we read is Jesus is telling the disciples, not gonna hold anything back, he wants them to know exactly what's gonna go down there and the first thing he tells them so they're prepared is this odd sentence, don't think I've come to bring peace, I've come to bring a sword. Now, this is so strange because God is the God of peace, Jesus is called the Prince of peace. Peace I give you, he told the disciples, not like the world gives you, I give you supernatural peace, peace that passes all what, understanding and now, in another context, he's saying, but I haven't come to bring peace.

If you will put your trust in me and you will become Christians and followers of me, I just want you to know before you go out into the world, you are going out into a battle. If you bear my name, you're part of an invisible spiritual battle that is going on right now in this world and I would like to suggest to you that there's something in the atmosphere over the last four or five years that has been unleashed in this country that is you can feel it. In opposition to Christianity, from the highest people in the government to the public schools, to the media, there is an anti-Christian, anti-Bible feeling that I have never experienced in my life.

On September 10th, 2001, God kept me up the entire night. I never slept, I hadn't had coffee or caffeine but I was not allowed to sleep through the entire night. I went to bed at 11 or something like that and I was still up at six something in the morning and I was driven to just pray, read the word.

God made one verse especially alive to me but I was walking around my house, not to disturb my wife, and asking God, why can't I sleep, what is going on? Why do you have me up? There are a number of things that happen in my heart to prepare me for what would happen the next day which was 9-11, September the 11th. Four of our members went to be with the Lord and we know about the infamy of that day. I am feeling something in my bones for the last few years and now lately more and I hear it from pastors around the country.

As someone recently said, it's almost like there's a movement to make Christianity criminal behavior. Oh yes there is. And to stand up for parts of the word of God is hate speech.

To believe in God, to have the doctrines that have held for 2,000 years are mocked by politicians from the highest to the lowest level. It's not just I don't want your Christianity, it's I hate your Christianity. I'm against that you believe in any absolutes and you believe in this savior from sin.

Jesus here is warning his disciples that to follow him means you're in a conflict. There will be trouble. There will be pressure.

There will be enemies. There will be opposition. There will be people who just don't disagree but they're gonna come after you because remember as Jesus taught elsewhere, no student is greater than their teacher and if they hated their teacher, they will hate the student.

The disciple. How many say amen to that? And if they oppose your leader, they're obviously gonna oppose you. This is natural brothers and sisters.

For example, let's just take this example. If you were, prior to you becoming a Christian, if you cursed and used every four letter word and used God's name in vain and Christ's name in vain and then you became a Christian and you stopped talking like that, well, the people closest to you are gonna notice that and then you're gonna say, no, I don't talk like that anymore. I'm a Christian.

Well, that creates opposition because what you're silently saying, you're wrong in what you're doing because I was wrong in what I was doing but now I'm not doing that anymore and people don't want to hear that. I used to live that way. I used to carouse.

I used to lie. I used to hate. I used to do that.

No, I won't be part of that thing on the office anymore. No, I don't want to hear that joke. Well, people just don't say, fine, whatever you want.

No, they do not say that. They come after you for that. How many know what I'm talking about? Just lift your hand.

Lift your hand high if you know what I'm talking about. Now, if you compromise to fit in with the people, well, that's what this whole little passage is about. Will you accept the radical nature of Christianity? Are we gonna be just confessing Him with our mouths and our hearts are far from Him or are we gonna be Christians who live out their faith in this radical way that Jesus said? So let's just close this up and put this

together so that it can help us to pray.

I don't have a lot of things to say to you today but the few that I do are very important. So Jesus said in the text here in Matthew 10, I have my NIV Bible here. I've come not to bring peace but to bring a sword.

You're gonna have pressure, animosity, there'll be division and then to make it worse, something that nobody wants to hear, this pressure is often gonna come from the people closest to you, from your own family. I mean, if you wanna think of a way to get people not to follow you, Jesus is taking that course. No one wants to hear that but Jesus is telling them the truth, not what they wanna hear.

He's telling them the battle, if you follow me, the invisible battle that you get drawn into is a battle where some of the opposition will come from those closest to you and the people that will fight your faith, resent your faith, disagree with your faith, be vocal about their disagreement will be people in your own family. You'll have enemies, not just in the world, you'll have enemies many times in your own family. So I'm warning you now, disciples, before you go out into the battle, there's gonna be opposition and a lot of it's, the heat is gonna come from very close to you.

And then there's the whole question of peer pressure. Jesus is saying there will be peer pressure from those around you and often closest to you and that peer pressure will be, don't follow the will of God, don't put your trust in Jesus, don't live out your Christian life. There's gonna be enemies and the enemies will be many times close to you.

I've seen that lived out many, many times. He's not here right now, he'll come later on in the day, but we have our friend Samer Mohammed, whose testimony I won't give him again in its entirety so that you'll understand. He grew up in a Palestinian refugee camp.

He was studying to be an imam and he just hated Israelis and he hated the West and he hated Christians and he thought he knew what Jesus is about because Isa is mentioned in the Quran and that's what it was about. And his father was a famous fighter who went into Israel to kill Israelis and his father was famous in that camp and he was just full of hatred and violence. So somebody gave him a New Testament, he began to read it.

Long story short, he has this wonderful experience where he asked Jesus to come into his life and save him. Immediately when they find out he's carrying a Bible, his brothers drag him to the roof and threaten to throw him off the roof and kill him. They tell him to their face, you keep reading this, we will kill you.

It'll be an honor to kill you. It will be an honor to kill you because we'll be carrying out our religious duties to kill an infidel like you. You're bringing shame.

His own mother who he loves so much, her heart was broken. Why must you shame me? Why must you do that? See, we're not used to that but this is happening all over the world. This is happening all over the world where serving Jesus, putting your trust in Jesus really costs you something.

And then he can't go in the house anymore. He follows Jesus and when his mother dies, they let him know, you come near that funeral and we will kill you. We will kill you.

So he cannot go to his mother's funeral which breaks his heart. And then he gets so bold in his witness. We have trouble speaking in America about the Lord.

He's up in people's faces over there saying, no, Jesus means love. What I used to be in meant hate and emptiness. And he went too far on television.

They issued a fatwa on him which means that he can be done away with himself with no recrimination and he had to flee that part of the world. So this is happening to people. To serve Jesus, it costs you something.

I had the pleasure, pleasure, the brokenness and timidity that came over me to talk to hundreds of mainland Chinese pastors in one meeting, half of whom I was told had been in prison for the cause of Christ. Prison. Not someone looking at them nasty, prison.

They served time just for following Jesus. So this is what Jesus was preparing the disciples for. And then as he tells them, there will be opposition, there will be pressure, there will be difficulty.

A lot of it's gonna come from people close to you. Maybe some of you here have faced that pressure and did you know what? I believe that the peer pressure and the family pressure is sometimes more subtle and more powerful than even what they face in mainland China. Because it's subtle, it's robed in if you love me, if you love your family, why would you do this? Or your friends, why do you have to stick out now and be so straight-laced and narrow? Why are you judgmental? Are you trying to say I'm living wrong and you're living right? There's many ways that they can cook it up.

But how many know that is very strong pressure? Very strong. They'll use, people will use culture on you. You used to go and party, why don't you party now? You know, we're from Trinidad, we party.

Why aren't you partying with us? What's they call that thing that they do in their carnival? Yeah, why don't you go now? Why, you're holier than us and all the rest? How many know what I'm talking about? Just lift your hand, right? So it comes in different strokes for different folks. But it's very real and Jesus warned against it and then let me close. He said anyone who loves their mother more than me or their father or their sister or their brother more than me is not worthy of me.

This is the radical nature of Christianity. And let this word search all of us. No, but I go to church and I believe mentally in the doctrine of Jesus Christ is the son of God and he died, I'm right, I'm happy.

That is the gospel. But now living out the faith, let me ask you. Jesus requires that love to him is paramount in our lives.

You can't, you're not allowed to love anything more than Jesus. I have a new little granddaughter that I held in my arms yesterday. She's like 10 days old.

I love her but I can't love her more than Jesus. He loved me longer. My mom's here, she's 106 months old.

She told me the other day, she said, oh, Jim, my back, I'm getting old. I said, mom, you're not getting old, you're old, you're 100. I love my mother.

My mother stuck with me and stuck and held our family together. I don't know what would happen. She would have left my dad when he started drinking.

I can't love my mother more than Jesus. If she goes against God's plan for my life, even though it'll cost me tears, I gotta follow Jesus. She gave birth to me but he died for me.

He's, listen, he's loved you before you ever even thought about it. He's loved you before you even thought about him. How many can say amen to that? His love is longer, his love is deeper.

His love is more intense. And his love will go on forever. In heaven, we don't have family relationships, it seems.

There'll be no marrying and giving and marriage and all of that. We'll know each other but our relationship with Jesus has no end. Some of our family members might not be in heaven so that'll sever us, we won't see them again.

But we're gonna see his face forever and ever and ever. Sometimes, love for family fights against what Jesus wants for your life. And that's hard.

When love for him is fought against by love for another person, who you love. Notice the danger of this. Jesus is not talking about evil people coming against you.

He's talking sometimes what he wants you to do is gonna go against everything that seems just so natural. With all due respect to my mom who's here, she was not happy when I went in the ministry. I had a college degree, I was not trained for the ministry.

I say this not in any disrespect for her. No one has a better mother than me. She's been so supportive.

But when I went in the ministry, she got quiet on the phone when I told her what I was gonna do. And she said, you already have a child. And she was very practical.

How are you gonna support your child? That little rundown building on Atlantic Avenue, there's no people, there's no money. I said, Mom, I'm gonna have to live by faith. And she said to me, which caused tears, which she didn't see, and Jim, what does faith pay? Because she wanted to know, you gotta take care, you gotta be practical.

My mom's very stable, and it adds up or it doesn't add up. But a lot of times what God calls you to do doesn't add up, but it adds up. Come on, does it add up? It adds up.

So sometimes what your closest loved ones want will fight against what Jesus wants for you. And you have to discern that, oh, and say, Jesus, I say yes to you because you love me. One last enemy before I close, this is the closest one of all, you, me.

You know what Jesus said? You can have desires or dreams, you can want a certain kind of lifestyle, you wanna live in a certain place, and it goes against his plan for your life. So Jesus said, if anyone comes after me, he's gotta take up his cross. Now to the Jewish person who he said that to, they knew what a cross meant.

One of the Roman emperors crucified 2,000 Jews at once and lined them up alongside a road so everybody could see 2,000 Jews killed on a cross. What a cross meant was death. So what Jesus is teaching now, to really enter into the full life that I have for you, you have to die to the life that is selfish and fleshly in you.

Because if you hold on to that life, you lose the potential life. But if you die to that life, then you'll have the life that I'll give you plus for all eternity. To be a follower of Jesus who got crucified was right away, you're in the crosshairs of somebody's gun back then.

So Jesus said, sometimes your own Jim Cymbala, forget anybody else, Jim Cymbala, my desires, my comfort zone, what I'd like, what I'm used to, how I saw my parents live in front of me, that will fight against what Jesus wants me to do, and the only way out of it, that dream, those emotions that are gonna fight against what the Lord wants, they have to be crucified. I have to die to that. God has to put it to death.

You're saying, wow, I never heard Christianity described this way, I'm not making this up. This is what Jesus said. If anyone comes after me, let him take up his cross.

And anyone who saves his life will lose it. But anyone who loses his life and says, no, I won't go the way I wanna go. I'm gonna follow Jesus no matter what.

I'm not gonna worry what this one's gonna say or that one's gonna say. And brothers and sisters, as I close, haven't we found out that even when you try to please people, you can't please them anyway? You can't please them anyway. They're gonna get upset with you anyway.

This is not, I'm not talking now, everyone hold still, this, I'm not talking about rancor now, I'm not talking about being hostile to anyone, I'm talking about being sweet and lovely like Jesus. But nobody could turn him away from what the Father wanted him to do. And what the Father wanted him to do was die on a cross.

You think his natural body wanted to do that? Didn't he cry in the garden? Didn't he sweat drops, like drops of blood? And didn't he say, Father, if there's any way out of this, if there's any way that this cup could pass from me, please take it from me. But nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done. There's a searching, a shaking going on in the world and in the churches today.

Cultural Christianity is showing its total weakness. White culture, black culture, political culture, religion, it's showing that it's impotent. It doesn't make strong followers of Jesus.

Right now, there is a call from heaven going out, who's really gonna follow me, who's gonna serve me? I'm sending a letter to all of you for this, it's gonna go out next week, pleading with you because I feel the need in my own life that on these Tuesday nights, all the deacons, all the pastors, all the workers, ministry workers, ushers, everyone's gonna get it, choir members, that every Tuesday here in June that we meet together and we pray because we need something new from God. When the world changes and the devil gets stronger and the atmosphere is more aggressive against us, we can't just stay the way we are. How many believe we need something fresh from God? We need something more from God.

But Pastor Cymbal, you've been doing this for a while and look how God has blessed the Brooklyn Tabernacle. I'm down for that, thank you Jesus, but I need more. We need something more.

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me. You know why? You know why? Because you can't do this without God's help. You can't fight off the love of family, peer pressure, all the considerations that come against us sometimes, mocking, laughing.

We're gonna be giving you later on, it'll start next week if I can get it, we have come across this wonderful, Pastor Hammond, best thing I ever saw, we're gonna give you by the thousands a little pamphlet like this. And it's called One Minute Witness. And we shared it with just the staff.

Staff members came up to me, said, I can't believe how good this is. And you're gonna learn how to just, in this pamphlet, I'll tell you the principles right now, but this pamphlet just explains them, how you can start

to witness to anyone. And someone came to me and said, you know, I know about the Lord, I just don't know how to start.

I don't know how to start to witness. How many would love a good way to start to witness to somebody? Lift your hand up high. In other words, you want to witness to them.

But how? So this is ingenious. It's done by an evangelist who we happen to meet, and it starts like this. You ask permission from a person, and you say, excuse me, may I ask you a question? So they know you're polite.

Yeah, you can ask me a question. Tell me, what's the greatest day in the history of your life? Tell me the happiest moment in your whole life. They're gonna think back, oh, I graduated from college, I got married, I had my first baby, whatever it might be, right? That's so interesting, that's good.

Can I tell you the greatest day of my life? And then you start telling them, BC, before Christ. However you lived before you found Jesus. I was afraid to die.

I was on drugs. I was nasty, full of hate. I was this, I was that.

And then the greatest day was when someone introduced me to Jesus Christ. And now you know what's in my life now? And they're gonna have to listen, because you listened to their greatest day, so they gotta listen to your greatest day, right? And then you tell them all the changes that have come in your life. And from there, you end up saying, I sometimes wonder what my life would be if I hadn't have found Jesus.

Then you go and seal the deal. Wouldn't that be great if all of us, every day we could just walk up to someone, Sylvia, one of her people that work for her in the post office, and say, may I ask you a question? Sure, permission granted. Just tell me the greatest day you had in your life, and they'll tell her.

I wanna tell you about the greatest day of my life. You mind? No, I just told you mine. Boom, the door is open.

Oh, how many wanna share Jesus with more and more people? We're gonna give you that help. But you know what, brothers and sisters? Whether it's serving here, or whether it's, we gotta pray. Because Jesus never intended us to be this strong on our own.

He wasn't saying, now guys, suck it up, and get going, and let's see you do this. No, he wasn't. We know that he said, no, you'll receive power from on high, so that you'll be ready for that warfare, that you'll be strong but tender, not mean.

There's a lot of mean Christians giving Christianity a bad name. They're hostile. If someone disagrees with them on anything, you could feel the edge come in them, politically, racially, whatever.

I see that all the time. Just, ooh, you feel that little body language. Jesus never had any of that.

He loved. He loves me so much. He loves you so much.

How many, looking back, can say with me, Pastor, Jesus has shown his love to me in ways nobody knows. Could you just lift your hand gently? I was just up there, we were praying and singing, and I said to God, God, you might love all of them, but me, you love. What you've put up with, all the mistakes I've made, and you keep loving me.

Don't you wanna love him back? Why do we love him? Because he, let's pray. Jesus, we hear your warnings, we hear your words. We're not called to a parade, we're called to warfare.

The parade will come later. Yes, we're gonna go to heaven and be with you, but between now and then, there's work to be done, ministries to be carried out, battles to be fought. Help us when those closest to us are being used to try to pull us away from your plan for our life.

Help us when our dreams and our comfort zone and what we're used to, just so selfish, I'm so selfish, Lord, given, left to myself, I'm the most selfish person in the country. That's how I feel today. But your spirit can help us pick up our cross and be more than just go-to-church-on-Sunday Christians.

Be transformative in our life, Jesus. Whatever that current and that invisible something, I know it's as real as this pulpit I'm touching. Whatever that thing is that's out there pulling people away and families away, ruining children, ruining marriages, destroying everywhere it goes.

Whatever that dark cloud is about, help us to rise up and shine for you, brighter than ever, Lord. You said that if anyone loves anyone else more than you, then we're not worthy of you. We receive that.

You deserve our best love, our deepest love. I love my mom, I love my wife, I love my children, my grandchildren, I love them all. I love this congregation, I love the deacons, I love everyone, God, you know that's true, but I love you more than anyone.

Help us all to love you more than anyone or anything. Now, Lord, you know we can't do this by ourselves. We're too selfish, we're too weak, but you have begun a good work in us.

Complete it now. Make us soldiers. Make us strong.

Make us strong where we've been weak. Make us straight where we've been crooked. Help us to put away every secret thing that's not of you, Lord, so that we can be clean and happy and whole for the person who saves their life will lose it.

They're gonna lose their life. You said that, you warned us. The one who clings and holds on to their way is gonna lose everything, but the one who loses their life will find their real life in following you, serving you.

There's something strange going on out there, Lord. It's in the churches, too. Things that were once known to be wrong are now suddenly right.

Your word never changes. That cannot be, but it's the pressure, Lord. It's the pressure.

It's this subtle, damnable pressure to fit in, be accepted, not be laughed at, but today we wanna say to you we have decided to follow Jesus. We're not turning back, Lord. By your grace, we're not gonna turn back.

We thank you for your word today to us. We are happy to follow you. We are happy to trust you.

We are the most blessed people on the face of the earth because we have Jesus. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but Jesus and his word will never pass away. Make us strong now, Lord, to serve you and to be used by you in this critical hour that we're living in.

It's, God, God, it's a critical hour. You gotta answer our prayers. You gotta do something new in us.

It's no joke out there. There's a current that's sucking people off left and right, Lord. Keep us strong.  
Keep us close to you. We pray it in Jesus' name. And everyone said aloud.  
Amen. Stand up and hug each other gently. Greet one another.

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