

# Persecution, Purity, & Power (Revelation 2:8-26)

by Shane Idleman

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*The sermon explores the themes of persecution, spiritual richness in poverty, and the importance of genuine worship and revival as conveyed in Revelation 2:8-26.*

**Duration:** 49:49

**Scripture:** Revelation 2:8

**Topics:** "Perseverance in Faith", "Spiritual Wealth vs. Material Poverty"

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## Description

Shane Idleman delivers a powerful sermon on 'Persecution, Purity, & Power,' focusing on the message to the church in Smyrna from Revelation 2:8-26. He emphasizes the importance of being open and teachable to God's voice, as well as the distinction between spiritual wealth and material poverty. Idleman discusses the inevitability of persecution for those who are faithful to Christ, highlighting that true spirituality is not measured by wealth but by reliance on God. He warns against false teachings and encourages believers to remain steadfast in their faith, reminding them that overcoming trials leads to spiritual growth and the promise of eternal life. The sermon calls for a deeper relationship with Christ, urging listeners to prepare for both the first and second deaths.

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## Transcript

The title of the message is Persecution, Purity, and Power, and we are doing a survey of the seven churches. And it's ironic here, Jesus would often say, and we'll probably see this again, he says, what the Spirit says to the churches, he who has ears to hear, let him hear. And it's interesting because we all have ears, but not everybody wants to hear.

So he's giving a message to churches, to Christians, this is what the Spirit of God is saying to the churches. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Basically it's this, saying, Lord, I want to hear.

I'm open, I'm teachable, speak to me. Be careful though if you pray that, because he will show you areas, he will speak to you, he will bring out things in your life that possibly he wants you to work on, maybe he wants to encourage, but let's even acknowledge that this morning. Lord, I want to hear you.

I'm open, I'm teachable, speak to me this morning. So Revelation 2.8, and to the angel of the church in Smyrna. Now remember, God sent a messenger to each of these churches in Asia Minor, probably 700

miles above Israel, up in Asia Minor, north of Israel.

This message though is to all the churches then, and we believe that this message still applies to the churches today. And to the messenger, to the angel of the church in Smyrna, I write these things. These things says the first and the last, remember Jesus is speaking, who was dead and came to life.

I know your works, your tribulation, your poverty, but you are rich. And I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but they are of a synagogue of Satan. Boy, Jesus doesn't mince words, does he? He's not this, you know, just comfortable little things, it's right to the heart of the matter.

But it's interesting. Let's just break this apart a little bit. I am, he said, I am the first and the last, I was dead and I came to life.

This is a wonderful reminder of the resurrection. We need to be reminded of that often, because that's actually, if you look at, because Christianity, you know, people think, well, it's do's and don'ts, or it's the Bible, or really the heartbeat of Christianity, if that heart could be, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without that, we have nothing.

Because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, he said he would rise again, he did, the authority of scripture, overcoming hell, death and the grave. So it's the foundation, it's the heartbeat of Christianity. And I just read this week, there's a headline on a news page online, it said, cremated, cremated, yeah, cremated remains, unearthed in China for the Buddha.

For Buddha's, basically, Buddha's remains, they think they found them, they were cremated many, many years ago. And it reminded me that Jesus' body was never found, it was raised again on the third day. And the distinction from Buddha, from all the different religions, the distinction is God reaching down to man, Jesus rising again on the third day, the resurrection, it's the heartbeat of the faith.

So I thought it was interesting that he was saying, I was the one who was dead and I came to life again. Also, another interesting fact, Jesus says, I know your works. What did he say to the church we talked about last week? I know your works.

But this church is a praise report. This church, last week, was a rebuke. What's the difference? I know your works.

He said the same thing. But this church, their heart was right. It was works out of love for Christ.

So let's talk about this for a minute. Impoverished. These people were impoverished financially.

They were poor financially, but not spiritually. He's praising them for this. They were poor financially, but not spiritually.

And this might be a good reminder. Poverty is not a gauge for spirituality. There was a movement in church that the poorer you were, the less you had, the more spiritual you were.

Remember you followed church history, you would know that. And then we came into an age, which I think we're still in to some degree, is the more you have, the more money, the more blessed you are, the more spiritual you are. So we've went from the monks, you ever heard of monasteries? We've got one out on the east side, way out there, Valley Irma, I believe it is.

And there's monasteries where you just got rid of everything and you're so spiritual. But then the more you have, see God is blessing me, God is blessing me, God is blessing me. The problem is both of those have issues.

Because we know that poverty does not equal spirituality. And we know that wealth is not necessarily a sign of God's blessing, or God would be very happy with Hollywood, or San Francisco, or New York. We know that it's not a blessing to be, I'm sorry, spiritual health is not always contingent upon our wealth.

However, I will say this. Poverty tends to remove, when a person is happy with little, they tend to rely on God a lot more. God becomes their everything, God becomes their provision, not Kaiser.

He becomes their provision, not Chevron, not the charge cards. He's their provision, and we are blessed in this nation. Many things that we have now, they didn't have back then.

Health insurance, that's a pretty new concept. Everything I mentioned, credit cards, new concepts. So there is something to being poor sometimes.

God will use that to draw us closer to Him. Paul said, I know how to be thankful in all things. Paul said, I know how to be thankful when I'm abased, and when I am abound, and when I have much, and when I have little.

And that's why I also believe, personal thought here, that God sometimes will bring people through seasons. Have you ever been there? Seasons of poverty, and seasons of abundance. Seasons of lack, and seasons of almost too much sometimes, to see how we handle those things.

And it's through the difficult times often, especially financially, that God will speak to us. God blesses, and I also believe on the poverty side, but on this side, I believe that God does bless. It's clear throughout Scripture that God will often bless His people with things, and maybe more to give away more.

It's often not to hoard more, is it? God gives a person, in the Old Testament, sheep, cows, goats, to be a blessing to others. And in the New Testament, same thing, to be a blessing to others. So I just see it in the church sometimes, we judge people.

You know, if they're, gosh, they're poor, and they're going through financial struggle, well, they must have sin in their life. Boy, oh boy, I wonder what that is. I'm going to play detective this week, see if I can find out.

You know, they must be, something must be bad in their life to be almost homeless and losing things, or is it a season? Is it a season for that person? Is it a season for us to reach out and to test our own hearts? So you see this area of poverty throughout Scripture, throughout some of our lives. Some of us have been blessed, though, where we haven't had to experience this. However, poverty can be the result of sin and bad choices.

I've got to make that clear, too. That's why you can see it's like a teetering. Have your kids ever made those teeter-totters? And when they hop off, this side springs up, and when they sit down, this side, and this issue of money, it's kind of like a teeter-totter, because you can make statements that a person might say, yeah, you're right, Pastor Shane, you know, I don't have any sin in my life.

I'm just going, the devil is a liar. He's taking everything I've got. No, you just gamble.

You don't give. You don't work hard. You don't work at all, actually.

See, that's wrong, too. The devil's coming after my finances. No, you just spend a lot more than you earn.

That's not the devil. That's in here. So we have to be careful in this area, and I believe I've seen this, too.

The majority of people that are hurting financially, not all of them, of poverty, many times they don't give back to God. They don't give. They're not givers.

They tend to hoard. I can't give to God because I don't have much, but often the reason they don't have much is because they don't have a giving heart. Now, this isn't a church that we press people on offerings, we pass around the plate, but it's a biblical principle that if I ignored it all the time, I think I would be doing people damage and doing harm, that God blesses those who bless others.

Paul says the Lord loves a cheerful heart, those who give back, and one thing about giving, it shows that it's not idolatry. The best way to get rid of the idol of finances and money and looking to that is to give some of it away. You get some, you give some away.

You get some, you don't have me in this area, devil, but when we start to, and I used to, you know, before I became really on fire for God in my, when I was in my 20s, made a lot of money, and I couldn't, it was so hard to give, because I need this. I need that new Dodge truck with the V10 out in the garage, and that I never drive. I'll get a different car so I can keep that in the garage and keep it nice for when I need it.

I can't dare, what about if I need the, and then when God changed my heart, then obviously you realize how foolish these things are. So just keep that in mind. I don't know where a person is, and I know where people are that I know personally that are struggling financially, and it's just a season for the church to come alongside help or others to come alongside help, but I know others who are in this area of financial poverty because of financial irresponsibility.

They are irresponsible in this area. So, Shane, what's the answer then? Take it to the Lord. He will show you.

If you are what we said here earlier, Lord, I want to hear, I'm open, I'm teachable, speak to me, He will show you in this area. And then he talks about a synagogue of Satan. Anybody curious what that is? Well, synagogue is a gathering of people.

It's a group of people. So there was a group of people who were saying that they were Jews, but were not. Now we could take this a little step further and look at Romans 2:29. Paul said, but he who is a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart.

So he probably wasn't talking about what we think the Jewish people, the Jewish nation Israelites, he was saying there's a synagogue, there's an assembly of false believers in your midst, and they are blaspheming the name of God, and I know who they are. So Jesus is telling them, don't worry, I know who they are. Because I don't know if things irritate you, but there's something that irritates me quite a bit, and it's false professors of faith who come in and they mingle in, whether it's here or other churches, and they go unnoticed.

And they can bring this heretical doctrine. You can tell the fruit's not there. Look at some of these guys on TV, I can't even watch.

I mean, some are legitimate. You get Charles Stanley's on there, Dr. David Jeremiah, I think John MacArthur's still on. I mean, there's some good teachers on TV, don't get me wrong.

But some of these guys, I'm like, oh, did he just say that? Is he really? I mean, is that an \$8,000 suit? And the watch and the rings, and it's just this flamboyancy. You know, you send in that \$100 seed gift, I bet by next week that \$1,000 will be returned. And if you send it today, I'm going to kiss this book, and I'm going to sign this book for you, that abundance just roll in like Malachi.

I will pour out the windows of heaven, and they just sell thousands of things. And so Jesus is saying, I know, I see these types of people. But it's also, I think we need to be careful in this area of blasphemy.

Blasphemy, what is that? To blasphemy God is to speak with contempt about Him, or to be defiantly irreverent toward Him. To disregard Him. He is beneath our consideration.

That's blasphemous. And I'm concerned for our nation right now as well, that God is beneath our consideration. We don't care what He says about morality, unless it lines up with what I want to do, when I want to do it, to who I want to do it to.

Then that's a God I can believe in. But other than that, He's an inconvenience. What about agnostics or atheists who say, there's no God? They don't even consider Him.

Can you imagine living your entire life never considering God? That's just what weak people believe. That's a form of blasphemy. And blasphemy we read about in the New Testament of the Holy Spirit.

I know there's different arguments on this, but I'll just lay out both. The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, number one, is to attribute God's work to the work of Satan. That's blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

For example, if the Holy Spirit were to move in a powerful way, and this church would just be hit with the power of God, and people would be healed. I couldn't even get through a sermon. I couldn't even finish because I'm just broken and weeping.

And God's hitting this group. There would be people who would leave, and they would mock that. That's emotionalism.

I don't know what happened to Pastor Shane. What happened to Pastor Shane is he experienced God at a deep revival type level. But they attribute those works of the Holy Spirit to Satan.

Now we have to be careful, right? We don't just allow crazy things to go on. You use discernment. But if a true, and I've noticed when a true work of God hits, when a true work of God hits a person, a place, or a thing, those who are not close to God, those who don't want to get emotional experience, God often refer to that as Satan.

Satanic. That's the work of the devil. Satanic.

Satanic. Satanic. Now this isn't even in my notes.

I hope this is beneficial because this is going to be a long rabbit trail, maybe. I just thought of this. Every single, every single revival book I read, I can go back to probably the 1700s.

I think it was in Wells. People like Hal Harris, Griffin Jones, Daniel Rolands. Now we just, we love them.

We read their volumes. It's called the Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wells. These two big volumes.

And talk about God moving. I mean just, and not weirdness, just going into a town and people begin to weep before even getting to church. Bars are closed down.

God's moving. But in every single case I read, there were those in established churches that were against these people. That's of Satan.

That's of the devil. Then you go into the first great awakening. George Whitefield was having trouble with what was happening at his services.

These people are, I don't know what to do. I don't remember what this, it was actually a woman who gave him advice and she said, George, five minutes with God, with God like that is going to do more than a year's worth of your sermons. So George Whitefield caught criticism.

John Wesley caught criticism because of God moving powerfully. You get into the second great awakening. Charles Finney, he's called a heretic to many people who don't agree with those types of revival things.

And even Azusa Street. I don't know, I wasn't there. 1904, 1905 in L.A. you have the Welsh revivals of 1950s.

You have Duncan Campbell on some islands. And just huge moves of God. You always had those coming against it that were in biblically sound, strong churches.

And there are some today, it's interesting, that would call what I'm talking about heretical or they would mock it from churches close to here in L.A. They would mock it. But yet they quote George Whitefield in their sermon. They'll quote Jonathan Edwards in their sermon.

But had they lived when that revival broke out in Massachusetts under Jonathan Edwards, they would have called him a heretic. Or they would have said the devil is moving. But see now they quote him.

See there's always, they're always attributing the works. Here's why, because they themselves have not experienced revival of the heart. They are hard, they are rigid, and they are arrogant.

So when God breaks a church, breaks a group of people, you know what revival is. God reviving his people. And when it hits, it's like Christmas times ten.

People are just broken before God. And people do get upset because they're not comfortable with that. So it's interesting, any book I read, people now they say, oh man, man, amen, that was great.

But back then, if they lived in that time, they would attribute often the works of God to the works of Satan. I mean I remember I spoke somewhere and it was about 300 men, 320 men, and 150 I think I mentioned. Like half of the whole thing was at the altar and down the sides.

And it was like an hour. I just spent an hour down here praying with the guys, and a couple of the older gentlemen, you know like, well later, that's just, that's just emotionalism. I mean that's, really? Men all tatted up, out of prison, crying at the altar, wanting to go home and be better fathers, that's better, that's emotionalism? We got to watch that? What are we allowing, Shane? I don't know, but this is called God.

This is called God, because when an earthquake shakes your home, you're going to run outside, right? If you see, there's a fire, kids, there's a fire in the house, let's get outside. So when you experience God, how is that any different? Tell the blind man to be quiet, who cried out, Jesus, oh son of David, would you heal my eyes? Yes, you're healed. Now be quiet.

Don't get carried away. Or the demoniac who was freed of a legion worth of demons, you just sit down, sir, quiet. Jesus is here.

Be quiet. No, no, no, no, no, don't get excited, that's not correct. See, it's okay to get excited about all other things.

The reason often is God has not penetrated their heart to such a degree that they cannot rejoice in that same experience, because they themselves have not or are not experiencing it. So I often say I'm not a fan of just experience, but when you experience the birth of a child, you get excited. When you experience the new birth, you will get excited.

When you experience God, God gave us those emotions. Thank God. Thank God for that.

People get up, that's just emotional worship. Well, what other kind of worship is there? Boring worship? What's the end? What is that? That's just emotional worship, Shane, because people will critique this kind of worship that you're hearing this morning, and groups that play this, that's just emotional worship. Okay, what's the opposite to that? Dead, dying worship, where we just stand and sing a few hymns and sit down.

And I'm all for hymns. To me, it doesn't matter what it is, it's the heart is engaged. So I told you that'd be a long rabbit trail.

But that's one aspect of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is attributing to God's work to the work of Satan. And this is a big passion for me because I see it a lot. Any church that is alive, alive and on fire for God, worship, any time you get somebody who's not feeling that, they might know their Bible, they might have sound doctrine, but they walk in and they're like, oh, that's just too emotional.

That's just, that's not of God. These people are lunatics. They're out of their mind.

Wait a minute, we're fasting, we're praying, we're loving our spouse, we're loving our kids, we're changing, our hearts are changing, we're becoming united, we want more of God. That's not of the devil, sir. You might have the wrong spirit in you yourself.

Or blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is failing to heed his convictions. Remember Jesus said all sins will be forgiven. Every sin will be forgiven except blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

So if the Holy Spirit, because his work is to convict and draw men to Christ, and if we reject that, if a person rejects that, that sin cannot be forgiven. Once you leave this planet, once you die and you've rejected, you blaspheme the Holy Spirit, there's no way that there can be forgiveness for that sin. And I should throw this in here as well.

Synagogue of Satan, how do you know? Well, 2 Corinthians tells us that they are false apostles, false teachers, deceitful workers. They transform themselves into apostles of Christ. So what a false leader, a false teacher, or a false believer will do is they'll tell you all the right things.

They transform themselves. Hey, amen, brother, can I pray with you? You know what, I'm out of cash this week. Can I borrow \$1,000? Oh, you're really out of cash, aren't you? Or they'll come in saying all the right things, but they're deceitful workers.

You ever met somebody like, something just doesn't feel right. It doesn't line up with Scripture. It doesn't line up with the truth.

They're deceitful. They're not telling the truth. And that's how you spot a false prophet in the synagogue of Satan.

Verse 10, do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. How would you like Jesus to tell you that? No, no, no, change that. Let's change that.

Enjoy all the blessings that you are about to receive. That's what we would want to hear. But he says, do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.

Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested. And you will have tribulation 10 days. Now, I don't want to get into a lot of this.

Is that really 10 days? Is it symbolizing something? We just at this point don't know exactly what that 10 days refers to, but there will be a period. I believe that the readers knew at this time there will be a period of tribulation to come upon these believers. And they will be thrown into prison and they will be tested.

Be faithful until the end, Jesus says, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

Now, there's a lot here. We could talk about the crown of life for a while, or we could talk about different things. But let me just pull a few things from here.

Verse 10, do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. And he tells them what is going to happen. And Jesus actually offers a prophetic word as a word of comfort.

Uh-oh, there's a controversial topic again. Did he just say what I thought he said? A prophetic word? Well, the Bible Paul says some he's given the gift to speak into people's lives and tell them something that will edify and encourage or maybe rebuke. See, I don't have a problem with that when people are filled with the Spirit of God and God puts something on somebody's heart and they go and they tell them something that helps them or rebukes them in love because it's a genuine word from the Lord.

There's nothing wrong with that. It's in the Bible. It's in the New Testament.

You have to actually, let's see if I have some scissors. You have to go, if you don't believe that anymore, you have to go to Corinthians and cut out a whole chapter. It doesn't apply anymore.

Now, we have to be careful. But there are people that will speak into your life something that God has put on their heart that you're not going to find in John or Matthew. You'll find the truth there.

And it doesn't go against the truth. It actually helps in a certain area. I'll just give you an example.

I've given many times before, but many years ago, I think 14, 15 years ago, me and Morgan were at an event and this guy called me out of 300 people or 250, I don't remember what it was. Nope, he didn't say

anything else. And he began to tell me things that me and Morgan prayed about that week.

That God's calling you. It's not arrogance. It's boldness.

God is giving you boldness. And like, wow. So that helped.

Okay, I can read the Bible. I know boldness is good, but is it me? Lord, what's going on here? Help me process this. I'm reading another book by Leonard Ravenhill's son, David Ravenhill.

I've got some copies out there. He talks about another guy who was given a word from the Lord. And I'm careful on this, right? Because I know this side.

A word from the Lord every week. And you can get really weird with this. And people go to church to hear from, can I get a word from the Lord every week? No, just read the Bible.

Hear what Jesus is saying to you. If God needs to speak to you a year, he gave Abraham one word that lasted 10 years. Go to a land that I will show you.

So you don't have to get these things every week. But I'm open, but cautious. If God wants to, you know, I've had a couple people now confirm, a half dozen can confirm the Wednesday night study.

Because I've been praying for that a lot longer than you think. Probably for six months. Lord, you've got to show me this.

And people are just out of the blue. And I run into people. Are you going to start a Wednesday? So you can call it coincidence.

I maybe call God helping me because I see in scripture a Wednesday night service would be good. I am convinced in scripture it's good. I know it's your heart.

But is it your will? Show me. Do you ever fight against the flesh? Is that the God voice? Or is that just a good thing? Because I don't want to do a good thing if it's not a God thing. So anyway, I'm reading this book, and I've heard things like this many times before.

But this guy who David Ravenhill knew, man of character, never weird or anything. They were actually having a dinner for a missionary, a girl who was a missionary. And she's about ready to go out into the mission field, and this guy was praying for the dinner.

And God put something in his heart, and he's like, there's no way I'm saying this. Nope, nope, this isn't you. This isn't you.

Because the Lord was impressing on him to say, I also hate mommies and daddies. See, that doesn't line up with scripture, right? It's just we're not going to go there. It's the wrong voice.

So he's ignoring it, ignoring it, and he said, you know what, for what it's ever worth, he said that, he said, the Lord wants it to stay with you. He also hates mommies and daddies. And the girl lost it.

Because she was abused by her uncles, and they would say, let's play mommies and daddies. She was set free. She was completely set free from an abuse that she's been carrying for 20 years.

See, that's how God works. When a church is open and teachable, when they're open to the things of God. Not weird.

Lord, would you want to speak to, can you imagine that type of gifting on a person who is solid? They could speak life into people. And actually, a form of preaching, some preaching is prophetic in that element. There are teachers, and there are preachers, where God will go deeper into the heart, and he will convict, and draw, and speak these kinds of things.

I can give you a list of many other examples of this, where God would speak through others. Can you imagine hearing that? But we, at first, that's what this guy did. He didn't initially say something.

And I've noticed with God, if it's on your heart, if it's on your heart, and you just keep, nope, nope, nope, God will keep just lovingly knocking. Answer the door. Nope.

Answer the door. No, okay. So, you know, I don't know if this is of God, but, and here you go.

Now, in this church, I've been in churches where this is more common, but in this church, sad to say, this isn't very common. We don't have this happening very often that I'm aware of. But we don't also disrupt services.

We'd have, it usually would probably look like somebody in the prayer room over there praying with people, or I've been seeing this person for the last couple of weeks, and I just, I feel God wants me to talk to them. And I remember one lady, she doesn't attend here anymore. It was in Lancaster.

This person used to play for the Dallas Cowboys, didn't play very long there. He's a friend of mine, and got injured, I believe. And he was going through some marriages, marriage trials, tough guy, like 6'3", tough guy.

And she went, and God was speaking to her all service. I don't remember what, maybe you can tell me later, for the second service. But she went and said something to him.

And he just, he just was on his knees, or got in a seat, and just began weeping. Because God used her to go and speak to him. But see, you can get, you can have this get carried away though, right? I mean, you could just, oh, Lord's saying, you know to sell your car, give it to me.

You know, I think God wants you to move. No, no, if it's not already, so you, but when God's really moving in a person or a people, that's why I'm not worried about these types of things that are biblical. Paul said that God has given these gifts to what? To edify the church.

To build the church up. So when somebody, and I remember she walked right over during worship, and that guy just lost it. And it was exactly, I think it had to do with, I don't want to get into details, but his marriage was not going in a good direction.

He was about ready to make a huge mistake. And God used her to go over and warn him. And speak.

She didn't even know who he was. I think she asked me too. She goes, do you mind if I go over and tell him? I go, what are you going to tell him? Please.

Because I knew, I knew who him, and I knew where it was going. And for God to tell her who doesn't know him to go and tell him. But you see, you see things like that in a healthy, vibrant church that's growing for

the Lord.

You see things that where God will work in this area. You know it's interesting too, I thought of this church Smyrna. Last week we talked about Ephesus.

This church Smyrna is only 35 miles above it. Why is there going to be tremendous persecution here, but not here? That's like saying, these churches are fine here, but 30 miles from here, in Santa Clarita, Valencia, you're going to experience extreme persecution. The devil is going to throw you into prison, and he's going to test you.

Well here's why I believe. Dead orthodox, dead teaching, dead services, and dead worship lacks spiritual life. So this church we talked about in Ephesus that was dead, right? I know your works, but you're dead.

You're going through the motions. Dead churches do not stir up spiritual conflicts. They're dead spiritually.

I want to be careful here, but let me hear my heart. For example, a church close to us, I'll just leave it like that, there's little persecution. There's little emails going out, there's little calling them heretical.

There's no persecution, because the enemy likes churches that are not fighting his kingdom. So if a church is dead, Ephesus, you're dead. You're just going through the motions.

But 30 miles away, here's a church that's on fire for the Lord, loves God, doing things for him. He said, watch out, persecution's coming to you. I believe that's why.

It doesn't say that in the Bible, but we can speculate why there's persecution. I mean, we're not talking 300 miles away. We're talking one church is being persecuted, one will not, and that's why.

There was not much persecution in Ephesus, because dead orthodox, dead teaching, dead preaching, dead services, dead worship, lack spiritual life. You get that, right? If there's just death in the sermon, if there's just death in the worship, if there's just death with the people, there's no spiritual life. Because you're not leaving here going, like John Wesley said, give me a hundred men.

I don't care if they're laity or clergy, but as long as they hate sin and love God, we will storm the gates of hell. See, that's going to cause a little upheaval. The devil knows the name of those people.

That's going to cause warfare. That's going to cause testing. That's going to cause persecution.

But if we just leave here in a dead church, in a dead service, what's for lunch? We're not going to witness to the waitress. We're not going to witness to anybody. Actually, I won't even talk about Jesus Christ until next Sunday.

The devil doesn't care. There's no persecution. You're on his side, being lulled to sleep.

So those, be careful, because those who are the most passionate for God are often on the devil's hit list. There's a target. And I don't like getting the emails.

People say, brother, we're in the Netherlands. Listen to you. You've got a big target on your head.

Thank you very much. I know. But same with you.

When you go out, but that doesn't really worry me because greater is he that's in me than he that's in the world. Now, we're cautious, right? We're not, take heed lest you fall. We're not prideful in that, but we're like, I know who's got my back.

As long as I stay abiding in him, anchored to the vine, he's my front guard. He's my rear guard. He puts that hedge of protection that we all pray about, right? Don't put a hedge.

Put a concrete barrier that can withstand a nuclear blast. That's who's got us if we stay within that protection. But you walk outside that protection, and you become an easy target for the enemy.

That's how it works. So that's why I believe there's persecution just 30 minutes away. Well, they walked, right? So it wasn't 30 minutes away.

Horseback, 35 miles away. The calling of God and his anointing are a magnet for spiritual trouble. Okay? The calling of God on your life and his anointing.

I should clarify what these, because these terms can get a little weird too, I guess. Anointing, again, a biblical term, but you watch the guys on TV, they may mess up the term, right? It's like 100 years ago, a gay party was a good thing. Now, and I remember when I could put a rainbow in my car, it was no big deal.

But now, that's been changed, right? So these things we have, the anointing of God is when God anoints something. Saul, I've called you. I've anointed you to be king.

David, Samuel, go and anoint David to be king. I'm anointing Elisha. I'm putting my, it's almost like the Holy Spirit comes upon a person in a mighty way.

Now you say the same thing, but it has power, it has weight, it has authority, because there's anointing of God on it. So anytime you have that, that's a magnet for the enemy. That's a magnet for persecution.

And he comes in, I'm going to tell you three ways, he comes in. There's many more. How he'll test you, often, sometimes with sickness, with health problems and issues.

Anybody say amen to that? He can come, and it's interesting, because Jesus said that woman that was bound, she was bound like this, and Jesus healed her. It's interesting, he cast out a spirit, and he said, why should this daughter of Abraham be bound by Satan? So her ailment was actually directly related to spiritual, demonic activity. So sometimes sickness can occur.

What about discord in your family? Or in a church? Right, anytime, anytime. Here comes discord, because the enemy will plant those thoughts of, even in your children. Did you ever go through seasons like what is going on? What is going on? Something happened, there's a devil in my home.

Right, he's something, but that discord, he's sowing discord and testing in this area. Financial collapse, financial issues, things always going. He'll use these things often, or planting thoughts in your own minds about death, destruction, fear.

And he'll come in and he'll assault those areas. But I just want to mention three other things, too, about persecution. If we stay centered on Christ, it will bring out the best in us, or the worst.

See, when persecution comes, what's already inside spills out. You've heard me talk about that before. When a vessel struck, what's inside spills out.

That's where that comes from. So when adversity comes, when persecution comes, what spills out? Because it's interesting, you can have a believer, they're going to church, they've got their Bible, everything's going good, but you take that job from them. I haven't said that cuss word in many years.

I haven't been this angry in many, where did that come from? Because that persecution will drive out those things, those impurities often. And one good thing about persecution, God becomes the only solution. The only solution.

You ever get to a point where, God, you're the only hope, you're the only solution. Doctors, lawyers, nothing. You are the only solution.

So it gets us to that point of looking to Him. And also, persecution is a purifying agent. Of course, we know that.

You know what, let me just, I don't know why, but I wrote this down early this morning. On this issue of sickness, many people are like, well, is it my body doing something? Is it sin? Is it the devil attacking? And I've come to the conclusion of this. I don't know the cause, but I know the answer.

I don't know the cause. You could speculate, you know, gosh, I haven't been taking care of my body. Is it my own body falling apart, the result of living in this sinful condition, in this sinful world? Is it the attack of the enemy? Is it sin in my life? Because this is something the church doesn't talk too much about, but James, we know, and Paul talking about communion, that actually there is some sin, disease, sickness related to sin in our life.

God will use that agent, or He'll use that, or loss of a job, or different things to get our attention. No discipline feels good initially, right? But it has the wonderful rewards after that. So don't try to always, okay, is it this? Is it this? Is this? Look to the answer.

Look to the answer, God, and let Him show you. Here's what we do know when it says, he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. Now this could be a whole sermon.

Anybody want to stay an hour? Okay, well, he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. What's the first death? It's when you die. What's the second death? It's when there's judgment.

So we all experience, it's given to a man once to die, and then the judgment. So the first death is physical death. The second death is where there's judgment and spiritual death.

So he who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. Well, here's what we do know. There is a battle.

A real soldier fights. Because I could talk about this, who overcomes, for another 30 minutes. It's, okay, do I overcome, or does God overcome for me, and I just rest in Him, or do I have to do some things? Do I have to abide in Christ, like the Bible says, or is God my strength and my comfort? And you can go back and forth on the different theological persuasions on that, but the bottom line is this.

There is a battle. A real soldier fights. We don't win every battle, but you will get up and fight.

For example, if this is the end result, and we're walking, but we get knocked off course, a real soldier gets back on track and gets knocked off. I lost that battle. You got me good, but now I'm taking you down now, and the soldier keeps fighting.

He overcomes, perseveres, keeps going in the right direction. And just a side note, one of the signs of a false convert is when persecution comes, they will not conquer. When Jesus gets difficult, they say, bye-bye, Jesus.

When he gets, this isn't what I signed up for, what happened to my best life now? What happened to wealth and health and prosperity, and I would meet Mr. Right or for some of you, what happened to this Jesus isn't the Jesus I was told about. See, when that comes, then the true followers of Christ understand that he died for them, understand that we're in spiritual, so we're going to conquer. We're going to keep moving forward.

Though he slay me, Job said, yes, will I trust him? Paul said, what can separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus? Nothing, neither height, nor death, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any creative thing will ever be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. I will fall forward because I am a conqueror. That's what it is.

That got me fired up on another topic. He actually says, we are more than conquerors. I thought about that this week.

We are more than conquerors because we conquer, right? You think that would be enough. Okay, I got through that. I conquered it.

No, but now, like I said last week, right, or was it two weeks ago? I don't remember. The enemy can run from you. See, okay, I've conquered this battle.

Now, guess what? Let me just sharpen my knife because now I'm coming after you. I'm not just conquer this. I'm more than a conqueror.

I'm now on your tail, devil. I'm now doing harm to your kingdom after I sharpen my sword and put on my helmet. Now, I'm more than a conqueror.

Now, I'm going to go in and go against his kingdom. Isn't that what we're doing? Think about not only do I try to get through life and conquer this and conquer that. Now, I can come up with the authority of God's Word and preach it to a lost and dying nation and preach the Word of God.

The enemy got that family, but we're coming back. He's got that one hooked on this or that, but now we're coming back. We're coming back and we're more than conquerors because we're coming at the kingdom of darkness.

I believe that's what we're called to do, not just conquer, not just sit at home. Oh, I got over that. It wasn't that good.

Oh, what's next? And we just stay in an offensive. We're defending. We're always defending.

We're always defending. Those who are not ready for the first death are often not ready for the second death. Let that sink in.

Are you ready to die? I'll just tell you up front, I'm not in the sense that I have a church to lead for a while, I think. I've got kids to raise. I've got a wife and I think God's called us to do some things, but not afraid knowing.

I mean, there's a part of our human nature, what's beyond. But when you draw close to Christ and He draws close to you, you're not afraid of that first death. But those who are are often afraid of the second death as well.

They're afraid of the judgment. So I would encourage you, do you have peace? Do you have hope? Are you trusting in the right things? Are you truly trusting in the right things? If you say, if I don't die, if I die, I don't know where I'll go, be careful. Because anybody I've ever talked to that says that, who I talked to, they did not have a relationship with Christ.

Now there might be people who are young in the faith and they're uncertain and the enemy's bringing in doubt and confusion. I got that. But if you're saying, if I die, I don't know where I'll go, I'm scared of the first death, then you don't want to experience the second death, the judgment.

That's what Jesus would say. You think I'm hardcore? Sir, could you take over the pulpit? What would He tell us? With tears in His eyes. I mean, you can just turn to what He said to Jerusalem and it wasn't, oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

It's just, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. I can picture tears. I can picture, oh Jerusalem, He's crying out to the people, He's right there.

Jerusalem, if you would have just come to me, if you would have just come to me in the day of your visitation, I want to gather you as a mother gathers her children. I want to but I can't fight against your will. Oh Jerusalem, if you would just come to me.

How would Christ preach to the church? It wouldn't be this mild, meek, little, quiet stuff that upsets no one. Where the devil himself goes to sleep. It's warfare and warfare is loud.

It is brutal. It is difficult. So be careful.

Are you ready for the second death? Because if you're not, you're not ready for the first. Get ready this morning. It's not a big checklist.

You don't have to go, I have to quit this, I have to quit, I mean I get people email but I have to quit drinking, I have to quit this, I have to quit, that'll come later. Just run to Christ. Come as you are, it's a wonderful song.

Right, remember the Billy Graham crusades? Remember the Billy Graham crusades? I'm going to go on another topic. Because it goes back to what I said 30 minutes ago. There's negative people all throughout Greg Laurie's crusades, Billy Graham's crusades, Charles Finney's crusades, Moody's crusades.

Oh they're just emotional. They're just walking forward, they're just saying a little prayer. Now there's danger there, I know that.

But God forbid when we start to see thousands come forward and accept Christ. Sure they're not all saved. Maybe 25%.

How do you know that? Because Jesus gave a parable. Or 50% depending on how you view that parable of the seed thrown on stone, three seed thrown into thorns and rocks and good soil and different things. But the bottom line is this, if you do not have hope and peace, it could be that you're trusting in the wrong thing.

I read a story, I'm sure many of you have, that I still can't quite comprehend. There was a man in Texas. Did I read this right? He lost? Eight? He lost eight? Eight of his family members? He's burying his wife, his unborn child, three kids? I'm done right there.

You just took Shane Idleman out. Right? That's what most would say. No, not if the strength and hope is in who? Christ.

And then he lost a few other. How do you even go to that funeral? How do you speak? And we're worried if we can't get our Xanax prescription or this doesn't pan out. Where does that real hope come from? It comes from Christ and Christ alone.

Do you have that hope? That church did. This church did. Although they're about ready to go to hell and back, they have that hope in Christ.

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