

Christians Will Face Persecution

by Zac Poonen

Christians must be careful to avoid deception in the last days by reading the Bible carefully and being prepared for difficult times, and should prioritize salvation from sin as the primary goal of their life.

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Scripture: Matthew 5:6, Matthew 24:24, Mark 10:29, John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 John 2:28, Revelation 7:14

Topics: "Persecution", "Faithfulness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of staying true to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in the face of deception and diluted messages in Christianity. It warns against being misled by false prophets and the need to prioritize reading the Bible over other Christian literature. The speaker highlights the inevitability of persecution for those who desire to live godly lives in Christ, urging believers to persevere and stand firm in faith, even in the midst of tribulations and great trials.

Transcript

One of the sad things that has happened in 2000 years of Christianity is that the original message that Jesus and the apostles preached has been diluted so much that in most places it doesn't even look like the original message. And so, anyone who doesn't read the Bible carefully is going to be deceived in these last days. I'll tell you that right in the beginning.

If it is your habit to read Christian books more than the Bible or Christian books that don't drive you to the Bible, it's okay to read Christian books if they drive you to the scriptures. But if you find your fascination is more to read stories, Christian stories, and a whole lot of Christian books that sound nice but don't show you scripture for everything that they say, then I want to tell you, you are a prime candidate for deception. I mentioned in our first study of the last days that deception would be a very common thing around the world in the last days.

How does Satan succeed in deceiving people? I think primarily by getting them to lose interest in reading the Bible. Are there people here? Once upon a time, you were very regular in reading the Bible. Maybe in the early days.

Can you think back to your early days when you were first converted? You never missed a day reading the Bible. How is it today? You don't have time, right? See how Satan has succeeded. And do you know, he doesn't sort of straight away deceive you, he slowly, slowly, he's You watch Christian television more and

you listen to all these men and women who preach there and they all sound so nice.

I can see through the hollowness of all those preachers in five minutes. But you can watch them for hours and you say, Brother Zach, what's wrong with this preacher? What's wrong with that preacher? You wouldn't need to ask me if you read the Bible. There are very, very few people today who preach the whole counsel of God.

But as a simple test, I will tell you, when you listen to all these preachers and read all these books, just see how many of them speak about the things written in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, because Jesus said the one who hears those words and obeys them is the one who's going to build on a house that will never fall. I want to build on that house. Jesus said at the end of that sermon, that is the narrow way that leads to life.

And he said, beware of false prophets who don't show you that narrow way, but show you the other broad way, which doesn't mention the Sermon on the Mount at all. Do you know some of the things mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount? Poverty of spirit, have a sense of your own need all the time, purity of heart, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and getting rid of all anger completely in your home, in your life, with everybody, getting rid of lusting with the eyes, speaking the truth always, your yes must be yes, your no must be no, never seeking the honor of men in any religious activity you do, whether praying, fasting, giving money, being free from the love of money, and being free from anxiety, loving your enemies, blessing those who persecute you, being perfect as your heavenly father is perfect, in mercy and love towards others, being free from all anxiety, not judging other people, but discerning who is a swine and who is a dog, those are the words of Jesus, don't get upset with me, who is a false prophet, and being careful, very careful of those who do signs and miracles and wonders, because many of them will go to hell.

I have not said a single thing which is not found in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, at the end of it he said, if you listen to these words and obey them, you'll build on the rock, now I tell you, go to a church that preaches all those things regularly, listen to messages and books that preach all those things regularly, I guarantee you won't be deceived, you'll build your house on a rock that will never shake, there, in a few minutes I've told you things which will protect you from deception, but do I think that all of you are going to listen to me?

I doubt very much, I mean I've preached on being free from anger here for thirty years and there are still people who don't bother too much about it, I've preached here for thirty years on being free from the lust of the eyes, there are still people sitting here who go to watch internet pornography, so I don't expect everything I say is going to be heard, even what Jesus said, everybody didn't take seriously, he said he was yours to hear, let him hear, but I'll tell you something as we approach the last days, you'll find some who will stand for the Lord and some who will fall away, and it is those whose house is built on the rock that will stand, and those who have taken seriously, those who have not taken these things seriously, no matter how wonderful a Christian you think you are today, you'll fall away, when we were in the military, we were taught, the more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war, the more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in war, that means in times of peace, if we work hard and prepare ourselves for war, then when the enemy comes, we will overcome, but the great danger is that when there's peace, we can relax and say, oh well, everything is peaceful, and then suddenly the enemy comes and we're not prepared, we're living in times of peace in Bangalore and India, you know what you should be doing?

Preparing for difficult days ahead, days of difficulties for Christians, now many people don't think it's going to be like that, but I want to show you a few scriptures, let's turn first of all in Matthew 24 again, where Jesus spoke about the last days, they asked him, Lord what is going to be the sign, when are these things going to take place, what is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age, and we looked at a number of things mentioned there, wars, rumors of wars, etc, nation rising against nation, I just want to mention one or two things about verse 6, you hear wars, rumors of wars, he spoke about war, he first spoke about deception, verse 5, and then he spoke a number of times about deception, we already looked at that, he spoke about war in the last days, many wars, in

relation to the last days, in the scriptures, there are only two places on earth mentioned where there'll be a lot of war in the last days, I'll show you those two places, one is in the book of Zechariah chapter 14, he's talking about the day, verse 4, when Jesus' feet will once again stand on the Mount of Olives, it's the Mount of Olives from which Jesus went up to heaven, that same Mount of Olives, one day his feet will stand when he returns to earth, he is going to return to earth to the exact spot from which he went up nearly 2000 years ago, but before that, just before that, verse 2, I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, the city will be captured and so on, then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, now this is not referring to the time in AD 70

when Jerusalem was destroyed because that time only the Roman Empire came against Jerusalem, now it's a battle of many nations in Jerusalem, and secondly in AD 70, verse 3, the Lord did not go forth to fight against those nations, the nations won and Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were scattered, so this is speaking of another time, speaking of the last days, and the next thing is the Lord will then put his feet on the Mount of Olives, immediately before the Lord's coming, there's going to be a lot of concentration of war around Jerusalem, Jerusalem is going to be one of the cities that's going to be frequently in the newspapers in the last days, that didn't happen 50-60 years ago, it didn't even happen so much as we see now, the second nation which is mentioned in relation to the

last days in relation to war, I want you to turn to Revelation chapter 9, in Revelation chapter 9 it speaks about, Revelation speaks about the last days generally from chapter 6 onwards, first turn to chapter 6, it speaks about a man riding on a white horse, and that's a picture of the Antichrist who pretends to be the Christ, riding on a white horse, the devil comes as an angel of light, not a black horse, a white horse, and he was given a crown, Jesus earned his crown, this Antichrist was given a crown, that means God permitted him to have rule, and then the picture of war, a red horse, verse 4, took peace from the earth, and then the third horse is a picture of famine, verse 6, where things are going to be expensive, but those who live on the luxuries of oil and wine will not be

affected, that means rich people will still carry on, it's the poor people who live on barley and wheat who are going to suffer, and then verse 7, there's going to be a lot of death, verse 8, a lot of martyrs, verse 9, in the last days, and then we read in chapter 9 about this war, in verse 14, to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, God said, release the four angels who are bound to the great river Euphrates, if you've studied geography, you know that the great river Euphrates, it's a huge river, you know which country it flows through?

Iraq, so there's going to be war, it says here about, at a certain time, an hour a day, a month, a year, release, so they might kill one third of mankind, you know the population of the world today is about 7 billion, one third of that is about 2 billion, there's no way to kill so many people except through atomic bombs, and the number of the armies are huge, 200 million soldiers, verse 16, but it's around Iraq that the

last days of great wars are going to be.

You go to chapter 16, and you find in chapter 16 also, you read about verse 12, the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the river Euphrates, the way might be prepared for the kings coming from the east, and that's also going to gather them together, verse 14, for the war of the great day of God Almighty, and at that time there's a warning, I'm coming like a thief, blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, so we're going to be here in those days, that's why it says, keep, stay awake, there are a lot of people who teach that when that happens, all that chapter 16, no, we won't be there, well, we'll be taken just before that, he says, warning you, and just before the outpouring of God's wrath upon the world, which probably is a short period of time, 24 hours, mentioned in verse chapter 16, we're going to be lifted up to meet the Lord in the air and come back with him immediately. So, when you turn to Matthew 24, it speaks about wars, and then in Matthew 24, so I mentioned this, that in the last days there are two areas of the world where there's going to be a lot of war, they're the only two areas mentioned, it's almost as though the Bible was written in the 21st century, I mean, Iraq, whoever thought about war around Iraq, even in the 20th century, it all started this year, this century rather, however, we see, to me that's exciting, because we know that we're approaching the end, those angels are being released, demons who, fallen angels, demons are being released, so there's going to be war, and Jesus said, when you see these things happen, lift up your heads, because your salvation is drawing near. Here is a book that's never had to be rewritten in 2000 years, here is a book which has prophecies which are not like these so-called people who go around giving prophecies today, which don't get fulfilled, and people still believe those prophets.

Here are prophecies that have never changed, when the Lord gives a prophecy, it's going to be fulfilled, heaven and earth will pass away, but his word will not pass away. I've got solid ground to stand on when I believe what's written in this book, and when I see these things happening around me, I know that everything else written in this book is also true, that salvation is through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, that he who does the will of God will remain forever, and everything in the world will pass away, I know that. I know it as sure as Noah believed it, when God told him, Noah, everything in this world is going to be destroyed.

Nobody believed him. Make an ark, that's the only thing that's going to remain. It's something like that, in the last days it will be like the days of Noah, and God tells people who have years to hear, like Noah, everything you see around you is going to be destroyed.

Use it, but don't live for it, this is not eternal. Your home is somewhere else, and live for the things that are eternal. So in Matthew 24 again, he said, all these things that you see, wars, verse 6, rumors of wars, terrorism, nation rising as nation, all types famines and earthquakes, verse 6, these are the beginnings of birth pangs.

Jesus used the expression of a woman giving birth, and when a woman gives birth to a baby, there's great joy in getting a baby, but before the baby is born, there's tremendous pain. I mean, I've heard mothers who gave birth say, the pain is so great, I wish I could die. I don't think any man can ever understand the type of pain a woman goes through when she gives birth to a baby, but it's a short period, and immediately after the birth, the baby is born, and she forgets all, go and ask any mother who's got a baby now, say, do you remember the birth pangs? Oh no, I remember the birth of my lovely baby.

And so Jesus said, his coming from heaven will be like the birth of a baby. Great excitement. Everybody looks forward.

I mean, think of pregnant mothers who are so excited when there are many others who don't have babies. Man, we're excited, I'm going to have a baby. But you tell them, hey, don't you know that before the baby is born, you're going to have a lot of pain? Yeah, I know I'm going to have a lot of pain, but that's okay.

It's only a short time. I'm looking forward. So people ask me, what are you looking forward to? Wars, rumors of wars, great tribulation? No, no, no, no, no.

That's a short time. I'm looking forward to the coming of Christ. See, John 16, Jesus had told them in verse 17, his disciples, no, 16, a little while and you'll no longer behold me.

That was, you know, they saw him for the last time about six weeks, 40 days. They never saw him again. And then again, a little while, 2,000 years, you'll see me again.

And so what is this thing? The disciples said, what is this thing he's saying, a little while, you won't see me. And so he said to them, Jesus knew that. He said, are you deliberating, verse 19, that I said a little while, you'll not behold me? I'll tell you, I'll explain it.

You will weep and lament. Now a lot of people think weeping and lamenting is a bad thing, but Jesus didn't think so. He told Christians, you will weep.

He said, woe unto you who laugh. Blessed are those who weep. And blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. There's a joy that the Christian has, which is in his heart. Outwardly, like Jesus, very often there may be sorrow, pain, weeping, lamenting on this earth.

But the world was the outward joy, but nothing inward. Their joy is dependent on circumstances and money and prosperity. But Jesus said, as far as my children are concerned, they'll weep and lament.

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy, permanent joy. And then he takes this example again. When a woman is in travail, she has sorrow because her hour to deliver the child has come.

But when she gives birth to the child, she doesn't remember the anguish anymore because the joy that a child has been born into the world. So also now you have sorrow. The church has gone through a lot of sorrow for 2000 years, but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and no one takes your joy away from you.

I love that. I'm looking forward to the coming of my Savior. I want to see him face to face.

I want to put my finger into his nail prints. I want to bow low at his feet and worship him physically. I'm looking forward to that.

And I want to be ready. I don't want to be a traitor to him on this earth by fooling around with a world that crucified him, that rejected him. I'm not interested in the honor of a world that rejects him.

I'm not interested in the honor of a Christian world that has rejected Christ, the true Christ, the true Jesus of the Bible and proclaims another Jesus today, another Jesus who they say will make you rich and make you healthy and make you, but not make you holy. The real Jesus of the scriptures came to the world to save us from our sins, Matthew 121, not to save us from difficulties and troubles and trials and not even

from poverty or sickness, though these things are bad, that he will remove one day when he comes, but to save us from sin. Is that the primary thing in your life? If salvation from sin is the primary thing in your life, it is in mine, then you will know the true Jesus.

And I want to tell every single person here, even if you've been a member of CFC for 25 years or 30, if salvation from sin is not the primary goal of your life, even you will be deceived. If a life of comfort and ease and pleasure and occasional sinful pleasure, which you confess and ask Jesus to forgive you, if those things are what you live for, you will be deceived and you will not live as God wants you to live like Noah did in the last days. The time is short, my brothers and sisters.

Don't be fooled. You know in this church, we have never stopped anybody from going to anybody's public meetings or going to visiting any church or going to any website or reading any Christian book. We're not a cult.

We're not doing this, but I'll tell you this. Be careful, because out there, there's a lot of deception. So I told you a few things today that will protect you.

See whether people are teaching the scriptures. I know of a great man of God who was a leader of many churches and he died some years ago and he had the habit of reading 10 chapters of the New Testament every day. I mean, even after being a believer for 30-40 years, he needed to read the Bible, 10 chapters of the New Testament every day, because he had responsibility for so many people, so that he would read the whole New Testament in one month.

Every month, he read through the whole New Testament. I'm not asking you to do that, but anyone who's got any responsibility for churches as I have, I need to know the New Testament thoroughly, because we live in times of great deception. I don't have cable television in my home, but I did connect it up for one year, mainly to watch Christian television preachers, because so many people were asking me about Christian television preachers that I didn't want second-hand information.

I wanted to hear them all myself. For about a whole year, I very frequently listened to every one of these television preachers. I never saw them preaching the Sermon on the Mount, the thing that'll make your house firm on the rock.

So I found, you know, even though I'm so rooted in scriptures, I found that as I listened to them, listened to them, listened to them, they sounded so convincing. Imagine me. They sounded so convincing to me.

And so much of it, I say, yeah, what's bad with that? That's so true. That's so true. That's so true.

And I said, Lord, I want to go and read the New Testament again. And then I saw, you know, I could see what Jesus preached and what they preached. The devil comes as an angel of light.

I only want to tell you, be careful. I'm not here to name any names. I don't need to name any names.

I don't need to tell you this is gray, brother. This is not white. This is off-white.

This is yellow. This is not white. I don't need to tell you that.

I don't need to tell you this is off-white. This is cream color. This is yellow.

I don't need to tell you anything like that. I say, look at the Bible. You will see what pure white is.

And you'll immediately recognize other colors which are not pure white. If you are too lazy to read the Bible, listen to me carefully. If you are too lazy to read the Bible, which you have in your own language, I say this hesitatingly, but it's the truth.

You deserve to be deceived. You deserve to be deceived because God's given you his word in his own language and you don't read it. You listen to all the other people and you don't compare it with true white.

You know, there are currency notes that counterfeit currency notes in circulation today that looks so much. I was in a bank one time and a manager I was sitting talking to him and he said, Mr. Poonen, look at this currency note. And I looked at it.

It was only a 20 rupee note. What do you think of it? Ah, it looks genuine to me, I said. He said, it isn't.

The feel of it is different. I felt it didn't sort of, I couldn't make out. But he'd been dealing with it for years.

There's tremendous deception in every area. Our only salvation is if they don't speak according to God's word. It's not the truth.

I don't care how wonderful it is. When I see people, you know, pushing people down and saying this is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, I ask myself, well, four questions. I have a four-fold test.

Did Jesus do it? No. I always see Jesus lifting people up, not pushing them down. He never pushed one person down in his whole life.

He lifted many people up. Did Jesus teach it? That's second test. No, I never see Jesus teaching.

Lift up the fallen. That's how Jesus taught. Third test, did the apostles do it? Do I see any of the apostles pushing people down? No.

Fourth test, did the apostles teach it? It's very simple. Did Jesus do it? Teach it. Apostles do it? Teach it.

It fails on all four counts. I say, brother, millions of you Christians can keep it. I want to have nothing to do with it because I know what pure white is in the scriptures.

I'm not going to be fooled by off-white and cream and yellow. It looks the same. It looks a nice color, brother Zach.

Fine, but it's not white. That's all I see. And I want pure white.

My eternal soul depends on that. I have only one life to live and I can't afford to waste part of it in fooling around with fantasies and imaginary things and the opinions of men and what Bible teachers who studied psychology and teach psychology preach. I'm not interested in that.

I have no time for it. I have no time even to listen to music. I'll tell you why, because I know so little of the Bible.

I have no time to spend gossiping with people. Time is so short. Life is serious.

I don't have time to play the fool with other things. Occasionally a little relaxation we all need so that we unwind our mind. I'm not saying we should be reading the Bible all the time.

I don't read it myself all the time. I don't think I could do it. And I don't think we should be always reading Christian books.

We can't do that. There's secular forms of clean relaxation which I encourage people to have, but don't let it go overboard. We need to relax body, mind, everything, but know the scriptures.

The only thing that will protect you in the last days is God's Word. So Jesus spoke about another thing here in verse 9. They will deliver you, Matthew 24 9, in tribulation. This is in relation to the last days.

And they will kill you. You'll be hated by all nations on account of my name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another.

And many false prophets will arise and mislead many. And because sin is increased, most people's love will grow cold. Most Christians, their love will grow cold.

So in the last days we can expect a lot of tribulation and persecution for Christians. Now that's not a very popular subject to talk about. People who don't understand the difference between the new covenant and the old covenant think that all the promises in the old covenant are for Christians.

Sorry, that's wrong. All these people who preach the health, wealth gospel, they always go to the Old Testament for their verses because they can't find it in the teachings of Jesus. That's the thing.

But in the Old Testament there's plenty of teaching of material wealth, physical health, many promises like that. I could show you them myself. But there's not only that.

There's even promise in the Old Testament that God would give Israel a land on this earth. Jesus said no. He didn't promise us land on this earth.

But it was promised to Israel. But do you know that in the Old Testament there was not a single promise about heaven? Search it. Three quarters of your Bible is the Old Testament.

See if there's a single promise that God gave Abraham or his children about becoming spiritual or going to heaven or the kingdom of God. No. It was a kingdom of earth.

Canaan's land, material prosperity, many children. That's the part people don't want by the way. And health.

It's all there in the Old Testament. Your business will prosper. Your cattle will multiply.

Everything. It's all there. You read Deuteronomy 28.

First 15 verses or so. It's all about you'll be blessed materially, materially, materially, physically, materially, physically. Your wives won't even have a miscarriage it says.

That's amazing. A lot of people like to live there. Then came Jesus.

Before Jesus came, John the Baptist saying, fellas, turn around from this facing this kingdom of earth because the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven is near. Those who want to turn around from this earthly gospel to a heavenly gospel, he was yours to hear, let him hear. You know that's what John the Baptist preached.

Repent means turn around. Turn around from what? From this kingdom of earth that Israel was promised for 1,500 years. From this health, wealth gospel that they heard for 1,500 years.

John the Baptist said, turn around from that. The kingdom of heaven is coming. What you need now is heavenly wealth and heavenly health, which is holiness, heavenly children, many heavenly children, which is bringing more people to Christ.

That is the message of Jesus Christ, which John the Baptist prepared for. And when John the Baptist was killed, Jesus continued, turn around, he said in Matthew 4. The kingdom of heaven is near. And that kingdom of heaven came on the day of Pentecost.

We've studied that earlier. Prosperity was the blessing in the New Testament, in the Old Testament, sorry, under the old covenant, prosperity and healing, physical healing were the blessings of the old covenant. He did not promise them holiness.

Nobody in the Old Testament was promised holiness of heart, but they were promised physical health and material blessing. But in the new covenant, the Lord promises to give us a pure heart. Who will seek it? Those who want it.

When you go to a shop to buy something, why do you go to that shop? Because there's something that shop is selling which you want. Whether it's milk or spare parts for your scooter or car or whatever it is, you go to a shop because that shop is selling something you want. Or if you go to a medicine shop, that medicine shop is something you desperately need for your sick child.

That's why you go. Here's the health wealth shop. And here is the holiness and inward life shop.

You go to the shop you want because that's what you want in your life. The shops are open. You go where you want.

And that, you say, why is God allowed this? I've often thought, why is God allowed deception? In the New Testament, it's holiness that God has promised his people. And very often, that holiness comes through persecution. And persecution sifts Christians into those who want to avoid it and those who say, well, if that's the price I have to pay to be holy, I'll accept it.

If that's the price I have to pay to be true to Christ, I'll accept it. Coming to question, why does God permit deception? I want you to turn to, in the Old Testament, there was Deuteronomy chapter 13. Now, this is concerning Old Testament false prophets.

Apply it to the New Testament. Deuteronomy 13, if a prophet or a dreamer rises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, aren't there many people today? Now, do you think if that prophet in the Old Testament came to Israel and prophesied in the name of Baal or Molech or one of the heathen idols, do you think Israel would even listen to him? No. This man doesn't come in the name of Baal or Molech.

He comes in the name of Jehovah. Aha. That's the way to get everybody in Israel to listen to me.

And does a sign and a wonder in the name of Jehovah. Just like Jesus said, many will come and say, I did signs and wonders in your name, Jesus. He'll say, get away from me, I never knew you.

So this is application for us in our time because we are living in the days of signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. Okay. A man arises among you, gives you a sign and wonder, and the sign and wonder comes

true concerning which he spoke to you.

And he says, let us go after other gods. After getting people's attention, he turns them away from Jehovah to Baal or something else. Do you know what is the equivalent of Baal today? Money.

Elijah stood on Mount Carmel and said, if Jehovah is God, worship him. If Baal is God, worship him. And today the prophets of God stand and say, if Jesus Christ is God, live for him.

If money is God, live for it. Make your choice, but you cannot serve Jehovah and Baal. Elijah said, and today say, you cannot serve God and money.

Those are the words of Jesus, by the way. Luke 16, 13. So if somebody tells you all this and does a sign and a wonder and says, come on, let's live to make more money so that you become millionaires.

Verse 3, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams who tells you about the angels he saw in the dreams he dreamt. For the Lord, your God is testing you. Now you know the purpose of deception.

It's a test for Christians. All these preachers preaching this, this, this, this. Which one will this first Christian listen to? Which of these preachers will this Christian listen to? The Lord, your God is testing you.

We're living in those days. Do you know that when you listen to a preacher, you're being tested by God to see whether your heart responds to what that preacher is preaching? And thereby, God tests what your heart is desiring. That's why many in CFC also are fooled by many of the Christian television preachers.

God is fine finding out what you want. He knows what you want. He knows you want a little bit of holiness, but you want a few other things also.

And God sees that. How to expose it? Send along preachers who will offer you those other things as well. And you get fascinated by them because you don't know the scriptures and you're not filled with the spirit enough to discern what is the spirit of this person.

Whenever I listen to a preacher, I say, do I sense a humble spirit in him? Or do I sense an arrogant spirit? A man or woman? I've seen women preachers. Everything they say is right, but there's a spirit about them, which is not a meek and a quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's eyes. I listen to these women preachers and I say, does this lady have a meek and a quiet spirit, which is precious in God's eyes? No.

And most Christians don't even know what a meek and a quiet spirit is because they don't have it themselves. And they don't value what is precious in God's eyes. Ah, the words are so good.

It's psychology. Fooling people. The Lord your God is testing you.

Do you know how many people have been fooled? I find many in our churches, so many people are fooled in many places. Even some elders have been fooled. Even the elect may be deceived in the last days.

It's a very simple test. Just read Matthew 5, 6, and 7 about 20 times and see whether a preacher is preaching those things. And you'll discover immediately whether you're building your house on the rock or building your house on the sand.

The Lord your God is testing you to see. What is he trying to find out? Not whether you desire holiness. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul? That's what he's finding out.

Or do you love the Lord plus something else also? Maybe a little money, maybe a little comfort, maybe a little this, maybe a little that. That's all he's testing you about. You must follow the Lord.

Keep his commandments. Listen to his voice and serve him and cling to him. Verse 4, I tell you these are days where we really need to cling to him because even the elect may be deceived.

Matthew 24, false Christ, verse 24, false Christ, false prophets will arise and they will show great signs and great wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24, verse 24. If possible, even the elect.

That means that deception is going to be so thorough that even those who are the elect could almost be deceived. And I told you, I told you, I heard some of these television preachers and I almost got deceived. I mean, I had to shake myself and say, God, help me to go to Jesus and read the, see what Jesus taught, to see what pure white is.

Because what they said looked like pure white because I had nothing to compare it with. Now he's comparing it with all the gray and black of some others. And this person looked better.

But I compared it with what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. And I said, boy, this is not white at all. I want to read the scriptures.

Heaven and earth will pass away. The words of those people will pass away. The words of Jesus will never pass away.

So what did Jesus say? You will be delivered into tribulation. And he also said after that, there's going to be a time of great tribulation. And verse 29, immediately after the tribulation of those days, then, verse 30, then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky.

He'll come in the clouds and there'll be a great trumpet, verse 31. He sent forth his angels and gathered together his elect. When is that going to happen? Immediately after verse 29, the great tribulation and immediately after the revelation of the Antichrist.

So there's going to be a time of tremendous persecution before Christ comes again. Those are the birth pangs Jesus spoke about before the baby is born. Now I'll tell you, I don't like persecution.

I'm not saying, oh God, I'm looking forward to persecution. I'm not looking forward to persecution. Nobody likes persecution.

Nobody likes to be tortured, have their nails pulled out if you read about it. But you know, we've got to face reality. The God who made Abraham rich and Job rich and David rich never made any of his apostles rich.

Why was that? Never made Jesus rich. If people say it's faith, brother, it's faith and obedience, then Jesus didn't have much faith. None of the apostles had much faith because they didn't get rich.

And Paul was so sick with a thorn in the flesh that he pleaded with God to heal him of that sickness and he never got healed. Paul was one of the greatest men. Timothy had a stomach infirmity, stomach sickness.

Can you imagine that? What do you think? Do you think Timothy ever asked Paul to pray for his stomach sickness? Probably numerous times. Paul laid hands on Timothy, prayed for him. He didn't get healed.

Imagine the apostle Paul laying hands on Timothy for a small thing like a stomach problem. He doesn't get healed. You read the last few verses of 1 Timothy 5, it's written there.

And Paul finally says, listen, Timothy, you better take some medicine. I prayed for you enough. Nothing has happened.

Take some medicine for your stomach's frequent infirmities. He wasn't just getting a stomachache once in a while, frequently. These godly men, God sometimes gave them a sickness, an ailment to keep them humble and dependent on God.

A thorn in the flesh that they never took away. But there was never a sin which he wouldn't take away. Can you imagine any of them having a sin and say, Lord, let me get rid of this anger? God said, no, you've got to keep that anger or you've got to keep that lusting in the eyes.

That he never said. He came to save us from sin. But sometimes he doesn't take us away from sickness, but he gives us something better.

His grace is sufficient for us. Whenever I'm sick, small sickness, big sickness, I've always prayed, Lord, I first ask for healing. And if you don't give me healing, give me something better than healing.

Grace. But I must have one of the two. I'm not going to be satisfied without one of the two, because that's what I see in scripture.

A father gives only good gifts to his children. So persecution may come. And I want you to see a great multitude, verse 9 in chapter 7, Revelation 7, 9. We saw that the other day.

A great multitude of people who are clothed in white robes, who stand before the Lamb. And one of the elders, verse 13, this is Revelation 7, 13, came to me and said, these people clothed in white robes, do you know who they are? And do you know from where they have come? Listen to two questions. Elder in heaven is asking John, do you know who these people are? Do you know from where they have come? Two questions.

He said, I don't know. You know, Lord. He said, I'll tell you.

These are, I'll tell you first who they are, verse 14, last part. They are people who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They are Christians cleansed in the blood of Christ.

Where did they come from? They came out of the great tribulation. Do Christians go through the great tribulation? Supposing I, some people say that means you never went into the great tribulation. Supposing I say, I came out of Africa to India.

Does it mean I never went to Africa? What English is that? I can't understand that. It's plain English. If I say I came out of Africa, I came out of Africa.

I was there. Not that I bypassed it. It doesn't say they bypassed the great tribulation.

They came out of the great tribulation. They were there and they came out and are in heaven now. Every verse in scripture teaches that Christians will go through the great tribulation before Christ comes.

We saw that in Jesus' words in Matthew 24. We see it here. See chapter 13 where it speaks about the Antichrist who is called a beast.

The beast, verse 2, was like a leopard. And they worshiped, verse 4, the dragon who gave power to the beast. And the beast spoke arrogant words and authority was given to him to act for three and a half years.

You know, imitating the ministry of Jesus of three and a half years, the Antichrist will also rule for three and a half years, 42 months. Jesus had a ministry of 42 months on earth. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God.

And listen, verse 7, it was given to him to make war with the saints. How can he make war with the saints if the saints are already in heaven? It's amazing how much people have to twist scripture to believe that Christians will escape all the tribulation and be raptured before Christ comes again. A theory that started only 150 years ago in England, which never had persecution for centuries.

Such doctrines will never come out of China or communist Russia or any side of the world where people face persecution. It comes out of people who live in comfort, who love comfort. And he made war with the saints and he overcame them, overcame them physically.

You can't overcome a saint of God spiritually. That's impossible. But physically he was allowed to kill them.

That's what it means. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, except those whose names are written in the book of life. Again, it's repeated.

There are Christians on earth who will not worship the Antichrist. If anyone has a ear to hear, let him hear. And again it goes on to say, the person who's got a religious, there's going to be a false prophet who's going to support this Antichrist.

And that man will perform great signs, verse 13, and make fire to come down from heaven. And people really believe that. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given to him to perform.

There are going to be a lot of miracles in the last days. And a lot of people are going to be deceived by those miracles. Because a lot of people today, I find this everywhere even among Christians.

If something is supernatural, it must be from God. And especially if it is done in the name of Jesus. They say, yeah, all supernatural is not from God, but if it is done in the name of Jesus, it is from God.

What about Jesus' words? Many will come in my name and say, I did miracles in your name. Many will come to me and say, I did miracles in your name. And I will say, depart from me, I never knew you.

In whose name did those people do those miracles? That's in the Sermon on the Mount, the chapter which most Christians don't read, Matthew chapter 7. Every warning that I'm telling you is in scripture. Some of the things which I'm telling you today shock you and say, I never knew that was in scripture. Don't you think you should read the New Testament a little more carefully from today? Yeah.

As I said, if you don't read the scriptures, you deserve to be deceived. So, and it says here that there's a perseverance of the saints that is found in the last days. It says about verse 12 of chapter 14, here is the perseverance of the saints, 14, 12, who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Why? Because there are a lot of people who are worshiping the beast, verse 11, and those who receive the mark of his name, and in the midst of that, there are some people who persevere and who don't yield to them. Blessed are those people who die in the Lord like that. They will rest from their labors.

So, Jesus often speaks about, for the chapter 16, verse 15, I'm coming like a thief, blessed is the one who stays awake, lest he walk naked and men see his shame. Is it possible for a believer to be ashamed when Christ comes? Please turn to 1 John 2, 1 John 2, talking to believers, 1 John 2, verse 28, little children, abide in him, believers, he's writing to little children, born again believers, abide in Christ, so that when he appears, we may have confidence, boldness, to run up and meet the Lord, and not shrink away from him in shame at his coming. So, there are going to be two categories of believers in the last days, according to this verse.

Suddenly, the sound goes, Christ is coming, and some people say, hey, this is great, this is what I've been waiting for, Lord, here I am, and some people say, hey, I'm not ready. I didn't apologize to my wife, whom I yelled at this morning. Lord, hang on, I've got to go and settle that.

Jesus said, if he comes and you're there on the roof of your house, you shouldn't even have to go down. If you're in the office, you shouldn't have to go back. Dear brothers and sisters, we're going to face difficult times.

John chapter 16, Jesus said, verse 33, these things I've spoken to you, in me you will have peace, John 16, 33. In me you will have peace, but in the world, you will have prosperity? No, you will have tribulation. But take courage, because I have overcome this world that persecutes you.

Turn to Mark chapter 10. Mark chapter 10, Peter said in verse 28, Mark 10, 28, Lord, we have left everything to follow you, what are we going to have? And he said, verse 29, I say to you, there's no one who has left father, mother, brothers, sisters, father, mother, or children or palms for my sake, for the gospel's sake. He shall receive a hundred times as much.

In this present age, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and palms, along with persecutions, that's also in the same packet, you can't remove that. And in the age to come eternal life. There are people sitting here, who because of their stand for the Lord, have lost contact with their mother, father, brothers, sister, my wife faced that for many years.

Houses, lost property, because you stood for Christ. You know what God's given us? Hundreds of brothers around the world, who treat us better than any blood brother would. Hundreds of sisters, hundreds of homes that are open to us in so many countries, along with opposition, persecution, court cases, all that.

Yeah, that comes in the same packet. It's exactly like Jesus said. You're not going to lose out by following the Lord.

If you have found your home, even in this church, really, I don't mean being a visitor, or an occasional attender, or one of those so-called members who just comes on Sundays, or not integrated with the body. But if you're integrated with the body of Christ here, as I have been, you'll see it's family. It's a family.

I can say this is my family. It is. I don't know whether you can say that, but that's what Jesus said.

But along with persecutions, in the world you shall have tribulation. Let me show you another verse, 2 Timothy chapter 3. Again, it's speaking about the last days in verse 1. In the last days, difficult times will come. We looked at that before.

There will be a lot of deceivers, like the false prophets in the time of Moses, verse 8, who opposed Moses, and men rejected as far as the faith is concerned. They'll always learn the truth and never come to the knowledge of the truth, verse 7. There'll be people like that in the last days, who hear, and hear, and hear. No matter what they hear, they don't understand the truth.

But they will not make further progress. That's one mark of deceived Christians. They don't make progress.

They were in the kindergarten. Twenty years later, they are still in the kindergarten. They were defeated by anger 30 years ago.

They are defeated by anger today. They make no progress. They were defeated by lust of the eyes 30 years ago.

They are defeated today. No progress. It's a mark of those who are deceived.

They will not make any progress, verse 9. But, Timothy, verse 10, you followed my teaching. You saw my life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my perseverance, and persecutions, and sufferings, all of which comes in the same packet. What persecutions I endured, and the Lord delivered me.

Indeed, verse 12. Are you in this verse? All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus. Look at that phrase.

All those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus. Do you come in that category or not? Do you want to come in that category? All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. In every generation, in every country, the persecution may not always be physical.

It may be just that you are prejudiced against you in your office because you are a Christian, because you are a true Christian. I found that numerous times. I would have to stand up to senior naval officers and stand at attention and say, sir, I'm a Christian.

I can't do that. It's against my conscience. Once I was transferred from my job in half an hour, that's fine.

It's not comfortable to be moved out of one place to the other. They wouldn't write good reports about me. What does it matter? I was not bothered about that report.

I was wondering what report Jesus was writing about me in heaven. I never wanted promotion. I did want it before I was converted.

Promotion and growing up in the world was big for me. The day I got converted, I said, I'm finished with that. Promotion is in God's hand.

He'll give me whatever I want. He gave me the greatest promotion of all when he called me to serve him. He'll test you first.

He tested me for five years after I was born again. Then he said, quit your job. Serve me.

He will test you. I pray God will give me grace to be faithful till the end. It's a battle.

Pray for me. It's not easy, but you and I have got to pray for one another. We've got to be true in these last days because there are not many preaching the whole counsel of God.

We must be ready. We must proclaim that whole counsel of God. It's so important.

We're not afraid of the great tribulation because God will give us grace. When he says my grace is sufficient for you, it's sufficient for me. If I sent my son to buy something when he was a little boy into the store to buy 10 rupees, I'd give him 10 rupees worth of stuff.

If I wanted him to buy something worth 100 rupees, I'd give him 100 rupees. If he had to go and pay his school fees 300 rupees, I'd give 300 rupees. According to his need.

I wouldn't give him more than he needed. He may lose it. Small boy.

God gives me grace according to my need. He'll give it to you too. Today, according to my need.

In a day of persecution, according to my need then. How is it a man like Watchman Nee could be imprisoned and the communists, they imprisoned him for 20 years hoping that he would deny his faith. He never denied his faith.

There were other Christian leaders who denied their faith in China. And at the end of 20 years, they found he still couldn't deny his faith. They put him another, locked him up for another couple of years.

He still didn't deny his faith. He said, I'm rejoicing in the Lord. How is that? Because grace according to his need.

When he was outside prison, he was faithful. Dear brothers and sisters, God's greatest saints have been persecuted. Peter was crucified.

He said, crucify me upside down. He said, I don't deserve to be crucified upright like Jesus. Thomas was speared to death in Chennai.

Andrew was crucified on a angular type of cross. All the apostles except John faced violent deaths. These are God's greatest saints for the first 300 years of Christianity.

They were thrown to the lions. They were burnt. They were killed.

And so many true Christians, even in the 15th century, other Christians of other denominations, I don't want to mention the names of those denominations, persecuted Christians because they preached the new birth. Those who preached the new birth preached those who preached water baptism, persecuted them. This is what Christianity is faith.

You stand true to the Lord. You read the story of men like John Huss burning at the stake for his faith, persecuted by other Christians who didn't believe in his preaching salvation by faith. We must read.

There's a book called Fox's Christian Book of Martyrs. You should all read that book. We need it for the last days.

I recommend you spend a little money, deny a little bit of your ice cream and cakes and all that, and buy that book and read it. It'll do you a lot more good than, in fact, it'll save you from getting fat unnecessarily and losing your health and be ready for the last days. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, deliver us from false Christianity. Deliver us from the deception that is rampant in these days. And prepare us, Lord, for that which you have taught in your word.

We're not afraid. Basically, we are cowards, but we know, we believe you. Your grace will be sufficient for everything we face in the future.

Thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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