



A Unified Church – Part 4

Suffering & Solidarity

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It may not come as a surprise to you that I growing up did not do much surfing, even though I just lived up the coast. I dabbled in it and mostly because of peer pressure. But I didn't surf much because SoCal is not Hawaii, and that has nothing to do with the size or shape of the waves. That's a commentary on the temperature of the water. I guess I was a lightweight because I did not like trudging out into the cold water every morning like a lot of my friends and going surfing every day. I know it's not NorCal cold, but Southern California water is still pretty, pretty chilly. And you say, Pastor Mike, they make this thing called a wetsuit. I know that. I had two of them, but it still was just a little too much for me to feel like this is something I want to do with my free time is go out there and have my teeth chattering, sitting on a surfboard waiting for the next wave. I wasn't keen on that.

And the good news is, being a kid that grows up here in Southern California, trudging out into the inhospitable, cold, chilly waters of the ocean is optional. No one made me do it and I didn't have to do it, and so I chose not to do it. Sadly, as Christians, and it's sad for most of us because it's a real hard thing for us to accept, but as God's kids, you are not allowed to opt-out of trudging out every Monday morning into the inhospitable environs of our culture. I mean, you have to do it. We don't have an option to build a monastery. We are not going to go out and be a part of the monastic movement of the Desert Fathers. We are people who are supposed to be salt and light in our world and the world, as difficult and inhospitable as it is, we have to get ready for the chilling realities of living the Christian life in a non-Christian world, and that is something you don't have an option to engage in.

There is a wetsuit and there is something that gives us some comfort, but it's not going to exempt us from the rough realities of living for Christ in a world that I just want to make the case this morning is not just indifferent to, but hostile against. And that's not a sky is falling negative, pessimistic pastor just having a bad day preaching about the negativity of his experience this week. This is what the Bible has taught from beginning to end, particularly in the book of Acts. We've learned already that the Church has been opposed chapter after chapter after chapter.

Now we reach in our verse-by-verse study in Acts we reach Acts Chapter 12 this morning. I want to look at the first five verses and say this is nothing new for the Church. But if the repetition teaches us anything in the book of Acts, this is the third time now the pastor of the church of Jerusalem is being arrested, if the repetition teaches anything, it teaches us that this should be the expectation of the reality of what we as a church are going to be up against. And while your pastor wasn't arrested this week, there are plenty of things that I encounter and I trust that you encounter when we are shining brightly for Christ in our culture. You're going to get pushback, a kind of pushback that's not just going to come from coworkers. It's a pushback that the Bible says is going to come from the organized leadership of this world. And that's a reality and it's important for us to grasp it, accept it, understand it, be able to cope with it, to manage it, to get through it the way the early Church did.



Even though these are some sad verses in juxtaposition to our joyful time of introducing babies today, this is a hard thing for us to work through but we got to do it. Five verses this morning. Take a look at it with me from Acts Chapter 12 and see if we can't learn something that will allow us to leave more emboldened, more encouraged, and even maybe the warmth of the kind of neoprene of God's word that will help us stay a little bit warmer than we would have otherwise, as we read the text of Scripture here.

Look at verse 1. I'm reading from the English Standard Version, as it says here, "About that time Herod the king..." Now I put a chart down on the bottom right-hand side of your worksheet, and I only did that, not that we're going to call much attention to it, but that particular chart will help us as we work our way through the book of Acts. There are two Herods in the book of Acts, and one is Herod Agrippa the First, he's going to end up dead by the time this chapter is over. Josephus, the secular historian attests to this in perfect harmony with the text here of Acts Chapter 12. But then there's an Agrippa that Paul ends up in front of, and that Herod is going to play a pivotal role in Paul's arrest and trial later in the book.

But if you think Herod in the Bible, you think, well, wait a minute. I remember meeting Herod back there in Matthew Chapter 2, if you're a Sunday school grad, at least you think I remember Herod tried to kill all the babies in Bethlehem. Remember that? That's his grandfather. So we got to go a generation back. And though the family tree is a little bit complicated because we meet a lot of the Herods in the gospels and in the book of Acts, but I just want us to sort that out. So if you want to put a star by Agrippa the First, that's the one we're dealing with in this passage, who we get some interaction with here in this text, sadly, his violent oppression of the Church and that's a bad thing. And then, of course, we see a very interesting and intriguing encounter of his son with the Apostle Paul later in the book. Just for your edification to keep the Herods sorted out in your mind.

"About that time Herod the king," Herod the First, "laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church." Remember, we had a great picture, that anthropomorphism, of God's hand being upon the church in Antioch. Of course, God's hand was upon the church in Jerusalem. But we see now there's another set of hands coming upon the Church. This little idiom here, this metaphor of the kind of opposition. When you had God's favor upon the church, it doesn't mean that you're not going to have opposition. You can have opposition from the powers that be, and no one represented that better than Herod. Herod was the embodiment of all of the authorities of the ancient world in the first century, in particular, all those who lived here in Judea.

"About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church." He couldn't get at all of them, he was not allowed to get at all of them. But he got a hold of some and he went right to the top. "He killed James the brother of John with the sword." Even that euphemism, right? "With the sword." I mean, that's kind of hiding a little bit of the egregious and morbid picture of his head being cut off. And I don't know if you have that kind of image in your mind or you've ever seen that before. If you tracked down to some websites it's still



happening in the world, Christians being beheaded, it is a horrific scene and I would need you to think about what we're talking about here.

This is Peter, James and John, the top three apostles who are now, we got all the apostles there leading in the church of Jerusalem. But these three, you can picture this is like the senior preaching pastor, Peter, and his right-hand man, he's got James and John, the Sons of Zebedee. This, by the way, is not the James who writes the letter that comes after Hebrews in your Bible. That's the half-brother of Christ. Different James. A lot of people with James names in the Bible, at least five of them.

But James here is the key guy that when Jesus went to the Garden Gethsemane, if he was going to pick three from his 12, he picked Peter, James and John. And so we get one verse, "He killed James the brother of John with the sword." Done. He got beheaded. Do you think that's a setback? If I said to you, "Hey, we had a pastor here on staff who you see, who ministers to you, who works in our church, who teaches in our church. And oh, by the way, the government just cut his head off this week." I don't know. Would that kind of make you not sit back as comfortably in your padded chair this morning? I think it would. I think it'd be a horrific thing. You'd be like, what? We just lost one of our main pastors in the church, this apostle. That's huge. That's huge.

Well, it doesn't get more than a verse in this passage. I'm sure we could have heard all kinds of things about it. I just wonder how the church grieved his loss. I wonder what kinds of things they said at his funeral. I wonder what kinds of things he was doing and what kind of gap and gaping hole and loss there was in the church. I mean, this is huge, but I don't want you just to rush over verse 2 of Acts 12 without seeing what a gigantic thing that is. If I said the state of California just executed one of your pastors, you would be like, OK, this, this is a big deal. Are we doing the right thing? Are we sure we should be doing this? Is there any way for us to make peace with our government? I mean, there'd be a lot of things to be asking if that were the case.

Especially then, if someone had to get up here and say, "Oh, and you're senior preaching pastor has been arrested." Well, that's what happens next, in verse 3, when he saw Herod Agrippa the First saw that it pleased the Jews, which of course were another tier of leadership. You had the leadership of the Sanhedrin and the Jews over all that was going on in Jerusalem and Judea, really all throughout Israel. And they saw what Herod this Roman official did to the pastor of this church.

Of course, the Jews hated the Church. Well, they were happy. They loved it. They applauded it. I mean, sure, they got, you know, I don't know, gifts given to Herod. "That's a good thing. You should be stamping this weird sect out." Well, he said, "Well, I'm going to get the senior pastor too." "And he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of the Unleavened Bread," of unleavened bread. That's a feast in the Old Testament. It's associated for eight days after the Passover. Right? You had unleavened bread. You had no leaven in the house for a week. This was the feast of unleavened bread. It was a very important religious festival.



It was the same festival about 10 or 11 years earlier when Jesus was crucified. And during this particular time, the Jews, I mean, they were trying to celebrate. They were trying to think about the exodus. They were thinking about Moses. They were thinking about the law. They didn't want to have people executed. It was not the time for the Sanhedrin to be bloodthirsty and cheering on the execution of another of these Christians. But he's in prison and he can wait. They're going to execute him. That's the whole plan here. That's what's implied in the text. They just got James. He's killed. Now we got the pastor. He's going to sit in jail for a while. But because it's the Feast of Unleavened Bread, let's not execute him now.

Verse 4, "And when he had seized him, he put him in prison." Now he'd been in prison, I said, this is the third time. One time they released him and one time God got him out. So this is a big deal. "Delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him." Now one fisherman from Galilee who happens to be now a seminary grad who's teaching biblical truths about Jesus Christ. Now, I don't know. This seems like overkill, doesn't it? Four squads of soldiers to guard him. There were four watches of the night. This seemed like they were really working to make sure that all through the night, every night that he was in this prison, he got arrested sometime during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So at least for, I'm assuming four, five, six, seven, maybe as many as eight days he was going to be in this prison and they said, we're going to make sure that he stays there, "intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people."

Now why did the Jews cheer when one of the pastors gets killed, the Christian gets killed, because they saw it. It was all out in the open and Herod did it. He did it openly and everyone applauded it. Now I'm going to bring him out, next I'm going to get the senior guy and bring him out and kill him. Now, if you had two of your pastors arrested, one of them executed and one of them sitting in prison for a week, you'd start to wonder, "What are we doing? Is this really worth it? Is this the right thing to do? Is there any way we can shift and adjust and kind of morph into something the government will like and the leaders of this world will like?"

I don't think that's what they were praying about, but as "Peter was kept in prison" that week, verse 5, it says, "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." So Peter was kept in prison, but "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church." There's no need to pray for James, right? He's gone. He's in the presence of Christ. But now I got the senior pastor sitting in jail. This is the guy who preaches to thousands of people. This is a megachurch, right? They're meeting on the Temple Mount, and it's been paired down because of persecution, but I'm sure there are hundreds and hundreds of people still relying on Peter's exposition of the life of Christ as he stands up and speaks about what Jesus taught. And now he's sitting in prison and the church is gathering and they're praying. They're not just praying they're, look at the word, earnestly praying. They're fervently praying. They're ardently praying. They're praying intensely.

Now we get more of this next time, but there's enough here for us just to stop and pause and think about. Let's start again at verse 1. "Herod laid violent hands on those who belong to the church." Think about that. James killed, Peter arrested. I just don't want us to think "Well



those were really bad days when the culture was really bad. And I'm sure that will never happen in the modern era. And it's certainly not going to happen in the 21st century and it would never happen in our country." I just want us to stop and say no, no, no, wait, that's not the case. As a matter of fact, if there's a break in the violent hands being laid upon people who belong to the church, if there's a break in that, it's like a boxing match. It's only because the, you know, we're sitting in the corners and they're retooling.

And I know there are nice summer days where you think the water temperature is not all that frosty in this particular season. And maybe for my grandpa's time, today, the church, I don't know, it hasn't been all that bad. Well, it's bad. As a matter of fact, it's bad and increasingly worse, and it's going to get worse. You cannot say... I cannot be a part of the ruling elite of our country. I don't care what your conservative political stance is. If you stand up and articulate the truth of biblical Christianity, you can't. You can't take the biblical structures of morality. You can't take the biblical exclusivity of salvation. You can't take the reality of a judge who's just who's going to judge the world and that there are eternal consequences. You can't platform on that and think you're ever going to make it into the halls of legal authority today. They're opposed.

Matter of fact, they are, given the opportunity, violently opposed to it and you ought to expect that. Number one, if you're taking notes, "Expect the Church to be Violently Opposed." Expect the Church to be violently opposed. Now I know that's a hard truth for us to write down and to think about, but you need to think about it because it's happening right now all over the world. It has happened throughout Church history. Have there been respites? Yeah, there's been respites. Has America been a nice little shady spot for the Church for a number of years? Yes, it has and praise God for the times when we can sit in the corner and have someone squirt water in our face and put a towel around our neck and we can get kind of refreshed.

But here's the deal, the bell is going to ring. We're going to get back into the ring and this is going to be another round for the Church where we are going to experience the kinds of things that have happened throughout the Church, and I think that's why we have the repetition of the story of the Church, the early Church getting persecuted, persecuted, persecuted, persecuted.

Now, if I asked you, why does God let the Church be persecuted? Why is the Church being persecuted? Here's the easy answer, because Jesus said it would happen, right? Here's what he said. He said things like this in John Chapter 16:33, "In this world you will have tribulation," right? So we know that. "All men will hate you because of me," right? Think of so many passages in Scripture. "If they hated me, they're going to hate you." I mean, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own;" but as it is, "I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." I mean, there's just no way. You should expect, he says, people to "drag you out of the synagogues and to persecute you and torment you." He said things like this, "When they're killing you, they'll be thinking they're doing service to God."

So I mean, this is the kind of thing when people reshape their theology not to be anchored in revelatory truth. They are going to do things that they think, "Well, I think God is like this, and



he certainly doesn't like your narrow-minded brand of Bible-thumping Christianity," and they will oppose us. Just go and talk about sexual ethics. We can't even talk about it. I jokingly talk about the difference being boys and girls during child dedications, and some of you laughed and snickered and some of you tensed up because you can't even work your way through a statement like that anymore. Why? Because we are opposed for making the most simple, logical, natural revelation kinds of assertions, let alone the details of what God has said regarding heaven and hell and salvation. But that's just... we've got to realize that this is something Jesus said is going to happen. So that's the easy answer. And the easy answer is why is this happening? Because Jesus said it was going to happen.

Here's the harder answer. Romans Chapter 9. Jesus says there's going to be something that happens in the conflict between people and my people. The people of the earth and my people. The authorities of the world and he uses Pharaoh as an example. And he says what's going to happen in this conflict is I am just, here's the simple answer, but it's the hard answer, "I will be glorified in it. I'm going to do this for my own glory. I'm going to do it so that I end up looking good." Now, no one likes that it seems in our day. Even people who go to church and sing songs. They want to talk about Jesus loves me and have kittens on their Facebook page. They don't like to say that the bad and the conflict and the suffering and the beheading of pastors is ultimately going to glorify God. They have a hard time with that.

I just got to say if you struggle with that then maybe it's time to graduate from drinking the "milk of the word" to start understanding the "meat of the word," which is going to get you around to say God, the God who made us, the potter who shapes the pots, does so and does so in a way, even including conflict and authorities rebelling against his people, so he might glorify himself. And that's a harder truth but there it is. Now, if you want to understand the big picture, let me give you five words. Here's the big picture as to why this happens. OK? So let's sketch this out with five words.

OK, let's start with this, number one, "rebellion." If you're taking notes, this is just kind of unpacking of the first one. Why is authority in this world so hostile against the Church? Why in God's glorifying, self-glorifying plan does he do this? OK, well, here's the first word: "rebellion." God creates reality in such a way as beings made in reflecting his image, made in his image, and I'm including the angelic band in this, right? They are able and can, and even you could look at, decreed to rebel. Ultimately, there's going to be a rebellion. And in the angelic class there was a rebellion. And the Bible says they become opponents of God. They rebel against God's authority.

You can read about it in Isaiah Chapter 14, Ezekiel Chapter 28. There are plenty of passages that speak of the fact that one angel in particular led a rebellion who said, "I kind of don't like the fact that you get all the glory God. I'd like to get the glory. I would like to ascend in my own mind to a place of kind of making my own decisions. I want to be the boss. I don't like being a manager. I don't even like being the vice president. I want to be the president of my own life. I want to be the president of my own reality and I want to be in charge. I want exclusivity and autonomy. I want to do my thing." And according to the Bible, because of that, there were consequences. But first, there's rebellion.



Then in Genesis Chapter 3, we see human beings made in the image of God doing the same thing, starting with Eve, who says, "I see that tree. I know God said, 'Don't do it.' I know he's the boss, but I don't really think his rules should apply to me. I'm going to rebel against proper authority, and I'm going to take the fruit because it's good for food, it's pleasing to the eye, I think it's going to make me wise, so I'm going to do it. I know God said, 'Don't do it.' But I'm going to rebel against that authority and do it my own way."

OK, angelic class rebels, human beings rebel. The angelic class, the sinning angels, God says, "I'm done with the sinning angels, I'm just done with them." OK? And with the sinning humans, he says, "I'm going to do something with them." But before he does something with them for good, he does something with them for bad. And what he does is he takes the angelic class who has rebelled against him and he takes the sinning human beings and he says, "You've just sinned against me. You've cast off my authority. I am going to now make the environment in which you live, I'm going to consign it to the rebellion that you have just displayed in your moral decision making."

So the second word is "consignment." The consignment of God. He takes the environment of human beings, and he says, I am going to consign it to the authority of rebellion. You're going to have kids and your kids are going to have kids and your kids' kids are going to have kids who are going to populate the world. But here's the thing the world is going to be consigned, here it is, First John Chapter 5, "to the power of the evil one." I'm going to take the angelic class who's rebelled and guess what? I'm going to consign that they have authority over the earth.

Some say, "Well, I don't believe that." You do believe that. You have to believe that. It's what the Bible clearly... Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 4, God himself in the Scripture calls Satan "the god of this world." Now you'll notice if you read that passage it's got a small "g" on it. But guess what? That's means, this is the "one in charge." Jesus said it twice. John Chapter 12, John 16. He says Satan is the "ruler of this world," the ruler of this world. Now Jesus is in the world. He says, "You know who's in charge of the world? Satan, the ruler of this world."

Ephesians Chapter 2 talks about our lives before coming into faith and repentance in Christ, he says you used to walk according to the power of the "prince of the air," the prince of the air, and he's talking about Satan. Just like everyone else we were influenced and carried along by these principalities and powers, by the spiritual darkness and forces of evil, and that, he says, is the prince of the power of the air. He's in charge. He's like the atmosphere that envelops the world. So we have rebellion, and the angelic class that rebelled gets now to be in charge of this world. Now, do they have a leash? They got a leash. Is God still sovereign? God is still sovereign. We'll end with that word. But let's just continue on with now what God does with individuals who are humanly sinning under the consignment of evil, rebellious authority.



What he does, here's our third word, he "redeems" some of them. OK, so I got rebellion, I got consignment, I got redemption. God says, I'm going to buy them back. I'm going to purchase sinners and I'm going to bring them to myself. I'm going to snatch a band of these people. I'm going to pull them out from the rest and they're going to be different. And I know I'm saying a lot of stuff. I'm not showing you much Scripture. So let's look at some Scripture before I go on, because a lot of passages are floating around in my head and I've said a bunch of things. But let's go to First John Chapter 5, because I quoted part of it, but you got to read the next few verses. Just go to the book of First John and scroll all the way down to the end of the book. OK. This is the last paragraph and sentence of the book, First John Chapter 5. Take a look at it with me so you know that I'm not making any of this up.

First John Chapter 5, start in verse 19. "We know that we are from God." OK? In other words, we have been redeemed, we're on God's side, we're in God's family, we're adopted. He keeps calling us throughout First John "children of God." So we're in this group. OK? What about everyone else? Well, "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." That's the consignment that God gave to a fallen world filled with fallen individuals. And yet he's pulled some people out like John and the people he's writing to. They are now redeemed. There's this group that doesn't fit in anymore.

Verse 20, and "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding." Now that's in contradistinction to other people in the world who don't have this understanding, right? "So that we may know," who may know? "We may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." OK? So do you catch all that before I read verse 21? We are now pulled out if you're part of this redeemed band of people who don't fit anymore, under this consigned evil world, you're now pulled out as a group, a pocket of people and the Bible says it's always going to be a small band, that's always going to be a remnant as the Bible uses that word. It's always going to be a narrow road and a small gate that leads to life and few who are on it and find it.

So it's a small group of people but they are redeemed because now they are in Christ. They are understanding the truth. They know the truth and they recognize this world is not my home, as Paul put it to the Philippians, he says, "our citizenship is in heaven." So our citizenship is in heaven and yet we live in this world. And therefore, guess what, the whole world is attuned, as it said in verse 19, to the evil one. And guess what the evil one wants? The evil one wants what happened in the Garden, more rebellion against God. "He just wants people to do their own thing. You want your own pronouns. Great. You want to call yourself whatever you want. Call yourself whatever you want. You want to love whoever you want, love whoever you want. Just do whatever you want, right? That's what we ought to do. Do you want to kill a baby inside your body? Great. Just call it a mass of cells. Just do whatever you want. Do whatever's convenient, whatever you want. Just do that." That's what Satan wants.

And when people on the planet start to prioritize those things, the biblical word for that is idolatry. That becomes their governing-focused priority. "I want to do what I want." Whether it's money, materialism, pleasure, immorality, whatever it is, that's idols. And so he says this: you're living in the world as little children, little children of God and you're very impressionable



and you can be persuaded. But here's the thing, man, you've got to realize you're in Christ. You're in his Son. You're in the one who's true. You've got to "little children keep yourself from idols." Why? Because the whole world is designed for idolatry. Verse 19, "We're from God, but the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

Rebellion, consignment, redemption. Right? As long as we're going "R-C-R," let's do another "C," "conflict" that just leaves us in conflict. We're in constant conflict. With who? With the powers that have been consigned to lead the world that we're in. Do they put leaders they want in charge of things? Absolutely, they do. Sometimes they're egregiously clearly just like Satan, right? A murderer, a liar. And sometimes it seems more subtle. Like, I don't know, the good guys in America because all our leaders are always, you know, Bible-quoting, completely faithful. You know, so they could be our preachers, right? No! Why? Because Satan does not want that. He does not allow that. He's the god of the world, the prince of the power of the air. He's in charge, the ruler of this world. He does not want you guys in charge. And he's doing the best he can to keep you from being in charge. Matter of fact, you're the little children they've got to walk through the idolatry of this world.

Matter of fact, go back in the book to Chapter 3 in First John. As long as we're kind of painting a picture here of how this works. I quoted last week in verse 11 about loving each other, and I quoted verse 14, verse 15, verse 16 about love. He laid down his life, and I hope that was a helpful thing, and it would have been much better to schedule our child dedications on that day because that was a feel-good message. This was a not feel-good message. Sorry about that.

But look right in the middle of this. In this passage here in First John Chapter 3, he speaks of the difference between us and the world and he gives us the reason there's that conflict. Verse 12. "We should not be like Cain," and again, this is an overriding clear theme, not just in First John, but all throughout the Bible, "he was of the evil one," right? In other words, everyone in the world lies under the power of the evil one, except for this group that has understood and known the truth and believes him as true and is in Christ, who is true. That's the only group. It doesn't matter how religious you are, it doesn't matter how moral you are, it doesn't matter what you do in the world. If you are not in Christ, you have this just simple bifurcation of the world into those who are not Christians and the small band of people who are.

And so Cain, as an example was of the evil one and he murdered his brother. Wow, that's kind of violent. Yeah. Just like Herod had Pastor James murdered, the Apostle James murdered. And why did he murder him? Rhetorical question, verse 12, "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous." Wow! Read that again, "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous." So there's an immediate animosity. There's an immediate conviction. There's an immediate sense of hostility and antagonism between those who are doing the right things that the God of the universe asks us to do, because we're redeemed, we have the mind of Christ, we've been forgiven, our heart no longer is a heart of stone following after its own lusts and desires. But now we want to serve God. That's going to put us at immediate odds with a world that doesn't want to hear that.



As Jesus said in John 3 in the famous verse about, "God so loved the world he gave us only Son." He goes on to say, "Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." We don't want you standing up and lighting a flashlight. This hurts our eyes, like he says to the Ephesians, it's like we're calling sinners to wake up from their sleep. We're saying "Awake, O sleeper, and let Christ shine on you." Don't wake up your friend that way. That's not a pleasant... That's hard. That's going to create conflict. So here's the bright, shining light of Abel doing what's right and Cain doing what's wrong, and that creates a natural hostility.

And therefore there's "conflict." That's our fourth word. Look at the next verse, verse 13. "Do not be surprised, brothers," little children, people living in the world under the power of the evil one in the world that we are under the power of Christ "that the world hates you." Just don't be surprised because that's how it works. You have a rebellious team of angels who now are called demons, headed by the head honcho, Satan, who now rules the world, Jesus said. You got to believe that or you don't. Jesus, the one who rose from the taught it. I'm going to believe it because that's what he said, and he proved it by rising from the dead. I'm going to trust what he said.

He said the world's under the authority of the evil one. He runs this place down here, but God's going to inject himself into time and space and redeem a group of people out of that who now we're going to know the truth, understand the truth and say, I'm going to live for the God who really is the God of the universe, even though he's not the God of the world. And what that's going to create is conflict. Now, is that ever going to end? It's never going to end until, "The kingdom of our world," Revelations 11:15, "becomes the kingdom of our Lord God and of his Christ," of Jesus, "and then he will reign forever and ever." And as he said earlier in the book of Revelation, and you who have trusted in me will sit on my throne and rule with me in this kingdom.

So God is going to give authority, and he's going to give all this blessing to a group of people who have been called out from the rest. And the illustration I give all the time is that band of people that hid with David in the cave of the Aldullam. It says they were the malcontents of society and they were rejected. Why? Because who was on the throne? Saul was on the throne. But who was really the king? Well, Samuel had already poured the flask of oil on David's head. David was the king in God's eyes. Who was the king now? We sit here and sing songs about the king Jesus. Is Jesus Lord? Well we'd say he's Lord.

Well, I don't think that's what our administration thinks. I don't think that's what the last administration thinks. I don't think that's what any administration really thinks all the way back to the deists and the founders of our country. I mean, not really, not to the way that we would say, I want that guy to be our pastor. The reality is we need fidelity to that truth, and the only place we're going to find that is in the Church. And I know that for some of you that's such a negative mindset. It's the reality. And it's always going to be the reality because we in this world are going to be in conflict with the authorities who exist. It's important for us to expect that kind of violent opposition.



You're in First John 3? Go to First John 4 real quick. As long as we're just making us work this morning. Verse 3. "Every spirit that has not confess..." This is First John 4:3, are you with me some of you? "Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of," here's an interesting word. What's the word? Antichrist, Antichrist, Iron Maiden, right? Ozzie Osborne. What are you talking about? This is so weird, right? Chick tracks, Antichrist. There is an ultimate world leader. I know that many years ago people thought, "Well, we'd never have one-world government. We'd never have a world leader on top of that government." Well, I don't know. I think it's a little more believable at this point. Should have believed it from the beginning, there is someone who's coming. Daniel talked about him as the beast. The New Testament talks about him as the Antichrist.

Some think, "So at the end of time there's going to be a terrible anti-Christian movement." No, it's always been. "You've heard it was coming and now is in the world already." Jesus taught that, "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one," First John Chapter 5. John 12. Jesus says, "Satan is the ruler of this world." Second Corinthians 4:4. He is the "god of this age." This Satan is in charge and we've got to understand that the anti-Christian movement is already there. It's already afoot. It's already in the world.

Now, "Little children," here's the hope of the Christian life, "you're from God, you've overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he is in the world," but it's conflict. "They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them." And "We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us," right? Go to the next political rally and talk about, I don't know, gender roles. Talk about sexual ethics. Talk about the coming judgment. See if any of that flies. It's not going to fly. Never really has flown. I mean, there've been references to it and scant deference to it and thankfully, it's created some shade for the church in America for a while. But it ain't happening in most countries around the world today, and the violence is really ticking up around the world and has.

We have more martyrs dying for the faith today like James died in Acts 12 than we've ever had happening in our generation right now with Christians being killed. Just go look it up. Go to persecution.com if you want some decent stats on it. The Voice of the Martyrs, I've got some friends over there running this great ministry. The Voice of the Martyrs. Remember what's going on around the world right now, persecution, because this is how it works. "The world listens to the world," but we speak from God. "Whoever knows," verse 6, "God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." You can get up, open your Bible, teach the Bible, teach accurately, clearly with proper hermeneutics, and just state it clearly. If people buy that, well OK, then we know we got a rebel group. I say rebel in a secondary sense because we're not the rebels, we're finally the ones reconciled to God.

We got rebellion, we got consignment of the world. We got redemption that takes place and we got conflict. We've got the conflict that takes place because of that. One last thing. Can I turn you real quickly to the end of the story? Revelation Chapter 13, speaking of the Antichrist. I'll give you the last word. I already telegraphed it. It's the word "sovereignty." Jot that down. Rebellion, consignment, redemption, conflict, sovereignty. There are five words



that explain the big picture of the problem that they faced in Acts 12 and that we face right now and we will face and is being faced in China. It's being faced in North Korea. It's being faced in the Middle East and Iran, Iraq all over the place.

This is the reality that we're always going to have, but you need not forget that God is sovereign in all of this. God did not go, "Oh man, look what's happened to James? Oh!" Right? Take a look at this text, start in verse 5. It's the picture in the paradigm of the ultimate antichrist that's coming. He's called the beast here in this passage, echoing the words of Daniel in the Old Testament. Are you with me? Revelation 13:5, "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words," and it will ramp up to a place where it's just clear we're just attacking Christianity and we're not even afraid to tell you that. I mean, we're not even playing games anymore. We're just telling you we hate Christianity.

"And it was allowed," this world leader, "to exercise authority for 42 months." OK? More on that when we teach the book of Revelation or I've done it in the past, you can look it up. "It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God," it's just full-on directly against the real God, the true God of the Bible. "Blaspheming his name and his dwelling," what are we talking about? "That is, those who dwell in heaven." By the way God says his dwelling here, we are the house. The Church is the house of God. He dwells in us. We're bricks in this thing called the household of God. So for now, the Church is taken out at this particular point in the book of Revelation. But we are the household of God. The world is against us. Satan is against us. All the antichrists who are coming before the Antichrist are all against the dwelling of God, which is the people, that is those who dwell there, right in us, in heaven. And we have a little piece of heaven on earth. That's why the earthly authorities are always against the heavenly citizens.

Verse 7, "Also it is allowed," look at that, there's a word that reminds me of sovereignty, "to make war on the saints and to conquer them." Now, ultimately, in the Great Tribulation, it's going to be massively so. I mean, just like almost without exception. But today it's happening because it's allowed. It was allowed in Acts Chapter 12. Well, how much authority... "And authority was given it over every tribe, every people, every language and every nation." So it's already happening. There have been certain shady spots in the world where the Church has done well without being harassed or molested or in any way violently attacked, at least for periods of time.

But it's the rest in the corner when the bell rings the world gets back to doing what it's called to do and what the earthly authorities are doing because the spirit that's now at work in the sons of disobedience and that's what the Bible promises, that's what the Bible says, and that's what the Bible tells us in the book of Acts, and that's the Bible forecasts for the future. "Every tribe, every people, every language, every nation and all who dwell on the earth they worship it," this beast, "everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear." What are we supposed to hear? Note this little poetic section. "If anyone is to be taken captive," oh, you mean like Peter was scheduled, sovereignly allowed and planned and decreed to go to prison? Yeah. "Whoever is to be taken to captivity, he goes."



Was this an oops moment for God that Peter was in jail, the senior pastor? No, not a new pope. "And if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword he must be slain." James was slain by the sword, all a part of God's sovereignty. Now what are we to make of that? Well, here, I'm glad you asked. "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints." OK? I got no time to teach this point, but jot it down, number two, when it comes to Peter being arrested and James being executed and the sovereignty of God in all of it, even encroaching onto the premier church of the first century. I know it's shifting to Antioch, but the premier church was the church in Jerusalem. And if God is saying, "Hey, your guys aren't exempt," then I'm going to say you shouldn't think you're exempt.

Number two, "Don't Expect an Exemption from Loss." It may not be you directly, but it's going to be you in some way. The authorities of this earthly world are going to go against heaven's citizens. They often go after the community of heaven's saints and their leaders. You're going to incur loss. It's going to happen. They're going to get at our resources, right? They're going to change rules. We had, talk about shade, we've had a respite here, even in America, on things like the tax-exempt status of churches, right? That's not going to continue to happen. You watch, there are people out there actively working right now through the courts to make sure that we have no exemptions. There's no shade for the Church. There's no respect for the free exercise of our religion, which we can say, "Hey, we understand that has been a great opportunity for the Church to thrive and be strong." And it has.

It's also led some people to think, "Oh, that's just how normal Christianity works." That's not how normal Christianity works. American church history is not the way normal Christianity works. Just go anywhere else in the world. You'll pass out Bibles, which, by the way, is a capital offense in many nations right now. Go take a Muslim who's a follower of Muhammad in Islam and Allah and say, "Now I want you to be, considering the claims of Christ, become a Christian" and see how that goes over in most countries around the world right now. I'm just telling you, this has been the exception, not the rule. This is a call for endurance and the faith of the saints. Why? Because we are not going to have an exemption. There was no exemption here from beheadings to simply, Luke 6:22, beratings, being excluded, being reviled for the namesake of Christ, it's going to happen. That's the reality.

Let me make one quick, illustrative clarification here in this didactic section of the message. If you're starting to think about, "OK, you're imagining like the ramping up of hostilities against Christians." I'm not talking about criminals. I'm talking about earthly authorities. You understand there's a difference there. You go to get a taco after church at the town center and some gun-wielding crazed, bloodthirsty psychotic walks in with a gun and says, "Hey, who are the Christians here? I'm going to kill the Christians," right? I'm not saying you, ahh, I got to apply the Scripture. OK. "I'm over here. I'm a Christian. Yeah, I love Christ. I'm not ashamed of the gospel. I guess you are going to have to shoot me." That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about criminals. I'm not talking about this kind of lateral horizontal kind of crime, right?



I mean, you're all the time trying to dupe the criminals, aren't you? By having lights come on in your house when you're really not there and you do all kinds of things to make sure that criminals don't take advantage of you. I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about you, because we see it in the news, people doing it all the time. They did it in Colorado. They did it in Northern California. They've done it in places where people are crazed criminals, saying, "Hey, where are the Christians here because I hate Christians." I'm not talking about that, right? You have every right, as I think biblically was reflected by the grace of God in the original founding documents of this country, for you to do what the Bible has always said to defend yourself against criminal behavior. That is what the Bible endows you with and that's why it was at least ensconced and codified within our rights, right? The Second Amendment, that was all a part of what God expects us to do. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about when the authorities of this world come to people like they did in the church in the first century and say, "Hey, Peter, are you a follower of Christ?" Right? "We are now going to harass you. We're going to arrest you. We're going to try to silence you. We're going to kill you." How did they respond to that? They responded differently than they would respond on the road to Jericho if they were jumped, right? They didn't respond by saying, "Now we're going to take up arms and fight you." What they said is, "Listen, for Christ I'm willing before the authorities of this world to testify."

Let me prove this to you. Let me show you a couple of passages. I'll just show you one, I only have time for one. Let's go to John Chapter 16. John Chapter 16. Well, I don't really want to take them there when we've only got time for one. No. Let's go to Luke 21. I wanted to take you to John 16:1 through 4. You can write it down and go to it later. Let's go to John 21. I'm starting to talk faster because I'm running out of time. John 21. Let's go to that. If I only got time for one passage in this point. I'm sorry, Luke 21. Thank you. I was just seeing if you were awake. Luke 21. OK. Verse 12, let's start there, Luke 21:12. Go to the end of this paragraph. "But before all this they will lay their hands on you," talking about eschatological things that are happening, but before all that, "they're going to lay their hands on you." What kind of hands? Well, we saw here in this idiom, violent hands in Acts 12, "and they're going to persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and the prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake."

So get ready to get your posse together to fight them and overthrow the government. No, that's not what they said. What is this an opportunity for? Revolution? No. This is an opportunity for you to bear witness. Right? Now, I'm not speaking to the larger issues, the socio-political issues of the American Revolution or any other, you know... There are issues that I think can be rightly understood within the context of seeing the whole picture of that. But I'm speaking generally about the picture that we have in Scripture of you being called out by legitimate authorities in this culture. They're legitimate only insofar as they're authorities here. They're all under the power of the evil one. But in that system, when they call me out or they persecute me, I have now a chance to do what the Bible says I'm supposed to do, and that is to preach the gospel, "to bear witness to Christ."



"Therefore, settle in your mind not to meditate beforehand how you are to answer." I'm not even supposed to lay the shotgun of the verbal responses across my lap and wait for the persecution. I'm supposed to go about my business of bearing witness, which should be my primary responsibility to make disciples of all the nations. But I'm not even going to worry about that. If it comes, it comes, and when it comes, I'll be ready because God promises, verse 15, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, none of which your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." Much like with Stephen, they could not contradict it. But those Sanhedrin leaders, the Supreme Court of Israel, went ahead and had him stoned anyway. It doesn't mean he's going to win the battle. Matter of fact, he was the first martyr.

Martyr means witness. He was bearing witness by being faithful. This is where we get the word right here in this passage. Jesus said "You're going to be my witnesses." It will be an opportunity for you to stand strong against the authorities of the world by not trying to put together some revolutionary contingent, but for you to testify to the truth of Christianity. I'm not talking about criminals. I'm talking about governments, talking about leaders, about officials, talking about earthly authorities. "I'll give you a mouth, none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict." They couldn't contradict it, but they sure could kill them and they did. "You will be delivered up even by your parents and your brothers and your relatives and your friends, and some of you they were put to death," right? Like James. James was listening to this when it was being said, and James had his head chopped off in time in about 44 A.D. in this chapter, in Acts Chapter 12.

"You'll be hated by all for my name's sake." What? Verse 18, "But not a hair of your head will perish." Well, wait a minute. I think all of James' hair follicles died the day he got his head chopped off. What do you think? What are you talking about? "Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives." What kind of life are we talking about? The follicles of my head as it rolls off the chopping block in Jerusalem. I'm not talking about that head, not talking about those hairs. I'm talking about the hairs that God has provided for you in the resurrected body when he put you in a kingdom that life that we call eternal life. Guess what? "This calls for the faithful endurance of the saints." This calls for faith and endurance. This calls for patience and endurance. This calls for you being an enduring Christian, and that's what real Christianity looks like.

Those people don't love their life even unto death, and God marches them into the kingdom as overcomers, as conquerors. Like Paul said just before he got executed in Second Timothy Chapter 4, the last chapter we have, extant chapter of his writings, he says "God's going to bring me safely into his kingdom." Well, wait a minute. Via what? Execution. That's a strange thing but that's the promise. And that's what we're looking for. This world is not our home. We're waiting for the "kingdom of the world to become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ."

What was the church doing? You hardly need to turn back there, even though I guess you could. It says in verse 5, you remember "Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was being made to God." But how do we get this endurance? How do we get this patience? How do we get the sense of like, "I need to hang in there and I need to not freak out even



though my teeth are chattering, not from the inhospitable waters of the Pacific Ocean, but the inhospitable reaction?" Matter of fact, that's a mild way to put it, the violent reaction that is happening to the church all over the world and is increasing in our day in our culture. Well, I guess the best thing you got is to cling to God by faith, which is, I understand, this long-distance relationship. The eyelashes and elbows and toenails of Christ are not here. They're there.

He left us, but he "didn't leave us orphans." We have the Spirit and the Spirit, as the Bible says, is going to invoke us to pray. We're supposed to pray at all times in the Spirit. The Spirit is here. He wants us to pray. That's not some wacky, weird, charismatic experience. That means that I am in sync with God. I'm drawing near to God in my prayer life. I'm pouring out my heart to God. I'm asking him to do things like a child would ask a father through the medium of the Spirit of God who sees me because of the work of the Spirit as God's holy child. And I have the opportunity to ask a king to help me. In this passage it doesn't tell us what they're asking for, it just said they were praying, they were asking him. For what? They don't say. But let's just boil it down to the lowest common denominator.

Number three, we need to "Pray Earnestly for God's Help," just like they did. I'm not sure exactly what they were praying. I'm assuming they were praying, it seems like a no-brainer, "Hey, God, please get our pastor out of prison. Can you get the Apostle Peter out of prison? We've already lost James. Nothing we can do about that. But if you could save Peter, that would be great for us." I'm assuming they were praying that. I'm assuming they were praying for what Jesus said they're going to need: endurance, strength, patience, courage, the ability to stand strong in the midst of people being arrested and drawn off to their own death. I think they were praying for a lot of things.

They were praying earnestly, though. A kind of prayer that I think most of us don't engage in when we say, "Oh, God bless the missionaries and I hope you help the Church around the world and it would be good, God, if you did good for our pastors this week and help my small group members, and God, you know, it would just be really good if you just gave us more stuff." I mean, that's how most people pray. I mean, that's a summation of it all. That's not earnest prayer. That's not looking at the fact that there are people suffering, probably within this church because they're trying to stand up for the truth of God's word. People losing jobs, people being ostracized, people being excluded, people being reviled for his namesake. People being hated and that hurts.

We're not quite at the place, at least in South Orange County, having our heads cut off for our theology, but I'm not going to exclude that as a possibility of what may be coming because it's happening all over the world. All over the world. I talk about the guys over there at The Voice of the Martyrs. They have a little website called ICommitToPray.com. They always have books on the back for you to read, and there are some books there that'll be helpful. Nettleton, who I know wrote a book on the persecution of the Church around the world, 40 days, about that. That's a good book to pick up. But if you just want free stuff to look at to kind of get attuned to what's going on around the world, you can just look at that, ICommitToPray.com.



Think about the Church being persecuted around the world because it says in First Peter Chapter 5, we need to not only think about our struggle, humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, knowing he can lift us up and exalt us at any time. But we need to remember that our brotherhood around the world is incurring the same kinds of suffering as we are. Only in our case it's amplified a lot more in other places. And by the way, it's interesting in God's providence, it may have not been a great day to preach this sermon with all of our baby dedications, it's such a feel-good moment. But I'll tell you what, do you know that today on the calendar, you know about, you hear in the media all the time about the stuff that they want you to get excited about this month, that month, this weekend, this day, National Pride Day, whatever. Do you know what today is? Today is on a calendar and has been celebrated for a while, International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

Matter of fact, The Voice of the Martyrs and a lot of different organizations and churches around the world are praying for churches that are suffering more than themselves. Not a bad day. I just think that's a poetic, interesting thing in God's providence that we're preaching on this passage on a day like that. I'm usually not about the days on the calendar. I don't care much about, you know, a day for this, a day for that. I certainly don't like the days promoting immorality in our culture. But I'll tell you what, it's not a bad day for us to remember the persecuted Church, preaching on a passage about the persecuted Church on a day that a lot of people set aside to pray for the persecuted Church.

There are probably people in our church who are persecuted at some level. Beheading? Yes, it's happening. Berated, happening all over in our church in South County. It's important for us to stand in solidarity with those people and pray earnestly, which means more than just saying a few words in prayer. I love the way John Bunyan, who wrote on prayer put it, "When you pray it's better to have your heart without words than your words without heart." It's a good way to put it, right? When you pray it's better to have your heart without words. You don't even know what to say. I just need you to feel, first of all, for the Church around the world and even people in our church who are being persecuted for Christ. Better than you just throwing out words without heart.

God hears us, which is a great thing. He knows how to give good gifts to his children and that's what we are. We need to be praying for strength, we need to be praying for endurance, we need to be praying for fortitude and we need to be praying for relief, even though we know that the war itself in this particular world will not end against the Church until Christ himself comes back to get his Church.

Speaking of child dedications, we talk about parenting, you might think about little league games and music lessons and all of that. But what a disservice we would do to our kids if when we teach them about Christianity, we teach them to expect it to be easy. How dare we teach them something about Christianity that's not true, like it will be an advantage to you in this world. It will not. There are passages that I quoted today wouldn't be a bad thing for our kids, at least to be prepared. They don't need us to lie to them, they need to be prepared. All



the forecasts of Christ about the future are not to scare us, they are to prepare us, even though they're scary forecasts. I want us to be ready.

Even secular parents sometimes realize this. If I can get my kid be committed to a cause that they're willing to die for well then they'll start to really live for it. And I'm thinking, yeah, there's nothing more fundamental to the Christian life than that. Christ gave his life for us. I ought to be willing to lay down my life. Well, I have no opportunity to lay down my life for any benefit of God other than to say I will be his witness even unto death, if that's what it takes. Not against criminals, against the authorities of this world, and we have lots of layers of authority that are in place, and I know that they're under the power of God's rebel band of angelic beings. But I want you and I to be committed to stand strong. And the strength that we need, even the comfort that we need in the process takes place when we pray.

Let's pray right now. Matter of fact, stand with me, we're out of time, over time. I apologize. I'll dismiss you with a prayer. God, we're in a world that can be scary, increasingly so, if our church were to be disrupted by the government, the place of persecuting people. We think of those words in Revelation Chapter 12, when John said, "I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God in the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of the brothers has been thrown down, the one who accuses them day and night before our God, and they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they love, not their lives, even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you.'" God, please help us to be that group of people who can rejoice. And people who are willing to overcome even the most ardent persecution by their trust and confidence in the blood of the lamb, and the word of their consistent faithful testimony because they really love the truth more than they love their own lives. Make that true of all of us in this room.

In Jesus name. Amen.