



Christianity in Real Life-Part 5

When You're Ridiculed for Christ

Pastor Mike Fabarez

So Friday night, I'm having dinner with my wife. And as often happens on a day that I've spent most of my day immersed in the text that I'm preaching on for the weekend, our conversation turned this week to Luke 6:22, where Jesus is speaking these sobering words about people hating you, and excluding you, and reviling your name and spurning you as evil and all these things. And it was at some point in that conversation my wife looked at me and said, "Well, it really is a shame that you have to preach on a topic with which you have no experience."

I sensed the sarcasm and wit. "What do you mean by that? Everyone doesn't love me? What are you talking about?" So I got her point. But what was funny is spending time in the text of the New Testament, it was hard for me to immediately identify with it—though I got the truth of what my wife was implying. That is because when you read the New Testament, you've got people like the disciples and the apostles being dragged into court and being flogged and imprisoned and martyred. And it's hard for us to think, "Well, yeah, I'm going through that." Especially if you read about what's going on in the church and for Christians around the world. All you have to do is be an informed Christian and you say, "Here are people—just because of their faith—talk about being excluded and being tortured and being imprisoned and being killed and beheaded." I mean, it's happening. And it's hard to read those stories and feel like you're suffering as you drive into the driveway of your Orange County tract home, right? I mean, it's just... you don't feel like there's any equation there.

And part of it too, I suppose, is that I was raised, like most of you, with the "sticks and stones" philosophy—sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. And so we like to think, "Well, you know, the real pain is when you get physically beaten or whipped or tortured, or someone throws rocks at you." And yet the reality is that words do hurt. And the focus of this text, when you read it carefully, is that that's what it's talking about. This passage is not about being beaten; it's not about being tortured; it's not about being whipped; it's not about any of those things—not about martyrdom. This particular statement from Christ in Luke 6 is about relational damage, and the words and the activity and the actions that go with that that really do hurt.

And Jesus speaks to that in a way that couldn't be more relevant for us living here in peacetime and at a time when, at least today, they're not throwing us in prison in America, and you're probably not getting beat up for your faith this week. But you are getting beat up for your faith this week, aren't you? It's just not literal. It's the kind of thing Jesus spoke of here.

So take your Bibles this morning, and let's examine these words of Christ that may be so much more relevant than they appear on the surface. If you're just picturing apostles being beheaded in



the New Testament, I mean, this is different. This is the kind of thing that you experience and every real Christian in the room has experienced. So take your Bibles, turn there—Luke 6:22–23 is the blessing and then verse 26 is the corresponding woe. And if you notice here—and we’ve been going through the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6—we’ve really reached the end of this pairing: blessing and woe, blessing and woe. We’ve reached the last combo of blessing and woe. And just look at them—you’ll see Jesus spent more words on this one. This is the one He elaborates on the most. It’s the one that will resonate, I trust, with you in a way that perhaps the others didn’t—at least to a depth I trust that you’ll see the relevance of in your own Christian life this week.

Let’s read it together beginning in verse 22. Follow along as I read it. “Blessed are you when people hate you...” And just like all the others—“Blessed are you when you’re poor; blessed are you when you’re hungry; blessed are you when you cry, when you weep.” I mean, these are bizarre statements. They strike us as paradoxical right out of the gate. I don’t feel blessed when people hate me. I don’t like it. But He said, “No, no—that actually can be a good thing, particularly if you understand the context.” “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and spurn your name as evil”—here’s the qualification—“on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day”—as bizarre as it sounds—“leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.”

Down to verse 26: “But woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

That is a helpful paradigm for us to understand in our lives as we seek to live the Christian life the way God intended for us to live it here in the twenty-first century. The realities of this need to be understood. They also need to be assessed in terms of our own lives. We need to recognize this is a necessary consequence of following Christ. There’s no getting around it. And if this passage doesn’t convince you, there are many others in the New Testament—we just can’t get around the fact: if you want to align yourself with Christ—which is the context, “on account of the Son of Man”—if you’re going to stand with Him, speak for Him, speak His words, live His life out in this generation, these things are going to come, they’re going to happen. And a lot of you can nod at that, because you’ve experienced them maybe as recently as this last week.

So I’d like to put it this way in your outline: just as we consider that—number one—we need to count the cost. And Jesus is always asking us to do that. We’ll read a great text on that and study it, Lord willing, as we get to it in Luke chapter 14, where He really says you need to sit down like a builder and say, “Now, before I do this, do I understand all the associated costs? Is the budget where it needs to be for this?” And when it comes to you saying, “I’m going to follow Christ in this generation,” the price tag—part of it hanging off of that purchase, if you will—is the fact that you and I are going to have relational damage in our lives. No getting around it.

Jesus taught this from the beginning of His ministry to the end of His ministry, and you and I need to say, “Are we ready for that?” Now again, as we’ve tried to do with all of these, if you glance back up from verse 20 and following—poor, hungry, weeping—when you are poor, when you don’t have things that you want, and when you are hungry or dissatisfied, and when you are crying—we had to qualify all of those when we taught on them each week and say, “Well, it doesn’t mean all poverty, and it doesn’t mean all dissatisfaction, it doesn’t mean all crying,” because there are things that you shouldn’t be poor over, you shouldn’t be hungry, you shouldn’t be crying. There’s certain qualifications. Now, none of those statements had qualifications in them, but this one does. Verse 22 makes it clear we’re not talking about any time you’re hated, excluded, reviled, or spurned no matter what. You can be those things and you earned it, and you deserve it, and they treat you that way because you’ve been an irritating person, and you’ve done something that courted that response.

Jot this down—we don’t have time to look at it—but there’s a passage that says it just outright: 1 Peter chapter 4, verses 13–16. He makes the clarification: you are blessed, and there’s good that comes, and God values it when you suffer for being a Christian. But you can suffer as a Christian for things that you shouldn’t be suffering for. And he lists a bunch of them. I mean, if you’re just an irritating, annoying person, and people hate you, don’t say, “Oh hey, I’m going to skip for joy today—people don’t like me in my office,” and God’s saying, “No, you’re an irritating person. They don’t like you because you’re unlikable.” That’s not what God asks us to do. We need to recognize the qualification on this is not because we’re doing bad things. Even in that list in 1 Peter 4 he uses the word “meddler.” Don’t be a meddler. Don’t be an irritating person. Don’t be a wrongdoer. Now, if you’re suffering for that, well, you earned it. But if you’re suffering as a Christian because you really stand in solidarity with Christ and you’re speaking up for Him and people know you’re a Christian—if you get heat for that—now, there’s a blessing associated with that. And God says that’s a good thing. As counterintuitive as that may be, that’s a good place for us to start.

Do we see that to follow Christ is to have a negative reaction from a lot of the people in this world? Jesus uses four words—look at them again; maybe worth highlighting or underlining in your Bible: hate, exclude, revile, and spurn. Hate, exclude, revile, and spurn. As we count the cost, let’s think of each of those and their associated reasons. Why would I be, as a Christian, hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned? I would think to myself, “Becoming a Christian, if I understand it, means I’ve got heaven secured. I’m now living according to the standards of Christ—that should make my marriage better and I’d be a better worker, more honest—people should like me more as a Christian. Why in the world would I be liked less? Why would it be that people hate me? That doesn’t make any sense.” Matter of fact, a lot of pulpits this morning all over the Western world in particular are getting up and saying, “Hey, if you become a Christian, your relationships will all improve,” and here’s Christ saying, “No, no, wait—that’s not true.” It’s not universal that your relationships will improve. Many of your relationships will in some way be damaged by you standing with Christ.

And let’s start with the first one: hate. What does the Bible say about why we might be hated? Turn with me to John 15. Jesus makes it very clear. Now there are some practical reasons, as we’ll see in

this list, why you might be excluded and reviled and even spurned. But there are some spiritual reasons that go beyond what you do and what you say as to why you will be hated. Hate is a strong word, I get that. But let's think about it: it's an aversion, it's a negative feeling toward, it's a dislike. Now, why would people who I got along with before I became a Christian have this dislike and aversion toward me? Now, we can get into the practicals—and we will—but let's start with this one from John chapter 15, which has nothing to do with practical issues in your life. This has to do with something that happened to you internally, which—even if you never did anything that seemed annoying in terms of your Christianity—this would still be true. Something you can't avoid. Nothing you can do to change this if you're a real Christian.

Verse 18—let's start there, 18 through 21. John 15:18: "If the world hates you"—same word—there it is: has that aversion, that distaste, this negative feeling toward you—"know that it has hated me before it hated you." That's a helpful place to start. Okay, you're right—following Christ, I'm standing with Christ. They weren't real kindly toward Him. Now, He explains it, verse 19: "If you were"—it gets a bit philosophical here—"of the world," that speaks to a spiritual reality. I am really like they are; I have the same connection to reality that they do; I'm not reconciled to God; I'm like the rest, alienated from God, outside of the promises and benefits of a relationship with God. "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own." There's some kind of fraternity there, and you're not in that anymore. Keep reading: "But because you are not of the world"—there's the corresponding negation—I now am not; I'm no longer in that fraternity. "I've been called out of that fraternity. I'm not of the world, but Christ chose me out of the world. Therefore the world hates you."

Now, there's something about that, as I said, that's spiritual, and it may be hard for us to process. But it's kind of like a magnet that works just fine connecting with the other magnets until you flip it around, and the polarity is flipped around. And now there's this aversion, this kind of repulsion. What's that all about? Well, we can talk about the practicals in terms of lifestyle and why they might hate us. But let's just start with the fact that I'm not of them anymore. I'm really not in their group anymore. That, the Bible says, creates a kind of hostility and enmity that you didn't have before.

He says this, verse 20: "Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." Now, this is not universal— not everyone will hate you, because He says this: "If they kept my word"—and many of them did, including the people He's talking to, the disciples—"they will also keep yours." Some people are going to think you're the greatest person in the office. Why? Because you'll be the means through which they become Christians. And so now they're going to love you. But just like Christ was hated, if you think you can stand with Christ and get out of that kind of hostility and negativity and aversion, you're kidding yourself, because the servant is not greater than the master.



Now, this helps, by the way, those that say, “Well, won’t becoming a Christian make your life better, and won’t you be a more likable employee, a better neighbor,” all those things? Well, it doesn’t work that way, because what we’re trying to be is, in Christ, a Christlike person—and He was the perfect person. Could you have a better neighbor than Jesus? I’m thinking no. Could you have a better employee than Jesus? I think He’d be the perfect employee. You couldn’t have a better sibling than Jesus. And yet what happened? Just because of that ontological difference, that organic relationship with God, there was an aversion. So, yes, Christianity will improve your life, but it doesn’t mean it’s going to improve all your relationships. Christ was the perfect person, and they crucified Him. They mocked Him. They opposed Him. They reviled Him. They excluded Him. They spurned Him.

Verse 21: “All these things they will do to you”—same phrase now—“on account of my name,” because you’re with Me, the Son of Man. Here’s the reason again: because “they do not know him who sent me.”

Now you want to go further than just Christ—we’ve got to look at the focus of this. People born of God create a spiritual community that’s new, that now is at a hostile polarity with the old fraternity of the world. Now, if you’re a real Christian, you can’t avoid that. Some of it seems mysterious: “Why is it that they don’t seem to like me like they did before? I haven’t said anything to offend them. I haven’t done anything wrong to them. I haven’t even yet shared the gospel with them. What’s the problem?” Spiritual—the magnet has flipped over. We’ve got to count the cost of that. That aversion, distaste, negativity—that hatred—is something I can’t change if I’m truly born of God.

“Exclude.” I want to take the next one on this list in verse 22 of Luke 6 with the following one. Let’s take two and three together: exclude and revile. And the reason I want to take those two together is because when I look for reasons that I might be excluded and reviled in the Bible, they often come under the same heading—they often are for the same reason. Let me turn you over to a text to prove this to you: 1 Peter chapter 4.

In 1 Peter chapter 4 we’re going to see a principle that may be best illustrated by a playground. Let’s picture a playground. If you’re like me, I grew up in a school that had a huge playground. And you know the fence—like in every playground—you’ve got a fence there so kids don’t run out into the street and the balls don’t go into the street. Let’s imagine that playground and all those students—that’s the people you live with, people you know, the people in your neighborhood. You become a Christian, and God now takes a line, if you will, like a painted line on the playground, and paints a circle for you and says, “You know what? Here’s real living. Here’s real life. Here’s what it means to have a godly, righteous, Christlike life. It looks like this. Live in here.”



Now, you've got problems, because your flesh wants to keep going outside of that line. But God says, "No, no, you live here. Here are your standards. Here's what you would and would not laugh at. Here's what you would value and what you wouldn't value. Here's what you would prioritize and what you wouldn't. It's all right here—here's godly living." Problem is, the fence is way out there. And all your fellow students at recess are looking at you standing in your circle going, "I don't get it. The border's not here; the border's way out there." And we seem to group ourselves together—whether it's in a culture, or a society, or in a workplace—with people that share generally the same mores, the same ethics and morality. They build a fence and say, "If you cross that line, that's when we think you've done wrong; that's when you do bad." And you're going, "I know that, but I'm living now by a constitution of Scripture, and the lines are here. I live here."

They don't like that. As a matter of fact, that distinction that you make just by living by a different set of rules becomes a rebuke to them. They don't like it. And they don't want you to be in their circles anymore—pardon the pun. They don't want you to be in their group anymore. And they will revile you for that because your life becomes a rebuke to them, and they want to return the favor: "We're going to revile you." That's how the Christian life works.

I've explained the principle, tried to illustrate it. Let's read about it in 1 Peter chapter 4. Just to get some context, let's start in verse 1: "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh"—let's just think about it again. Christ—perfect humanity. Here He is, and man: hostility, anger, suffered. People didn't like Him; they tried to betray Him; they tried to trip Him up; they tried to find reasons to accuse Him. "He suffered in the flesh; arm yourselves with the same way of thinking." Again, that's not being preached in a lot of pulpits. But the Christian life—part of the preaching—needs to be: I need to prepare you for suffering. I need to prepare you for opposition. Just like Christ suffered, you need to be ready. Your mindset needs to be: this is going to happen.

Now, this gets very interesting. Look at this—middle of verse 1: "For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Think this through. Many levels on which we could analyze this, but let's go back to the playground and the painted circle. Here's the Christian life. Here's where I'm supposed to live. Here are the priorities, the values, the things I should and shouldn't do—it's all spelled out here. The teaching of Christ explains it to me. Now, they're living out there. I am going to choose to live here, while everything wants to pull me outside of this circle—my friends do, my non-Christian friends, the society, everything the world's about, even my own flesh wants to pull me out of that. But I'm willing to suffer and stand here and live here and live this way. That decision to say, "I will choose to suffer," means I'm going to say no to sin. And that's a reality of choice that we make.

Verse 2: so that's the paradigm—that I'm going to choose to live "so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God," which is defined—it's right here. This is how I'm to live. "For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do." You've had plenty of opportunity to step outside of the circle, to live with them, to do the things

that they do. Well, what do they do? “They live in sensuality”—whatever feels good—and, you know, “it’s fine while you don’t cross that fence way out there,” because that’s the culturally defined norm. “Passions... drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry.” And I don’t know which group you’re hanging out with—that may seem beyond the fences of your office ethic—but nevertheless it’s beyond what the Christian ethic is.

“And with respect to this they are surprised”—verse 4—“when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery.” Now there’s the first thing: they are shocked that you won’t do it with them. And here’s the thing: when you don’t play by their rules, eventually they stop inviting you, right? They’re not interested in having you there. You’re the stick in the mud. Your life becomes the rebuke to them. And when they feel that way—that you’re holier-than-thou and you won’t play by their rules—then next phrase: “they malign you.” The exclusion and the derision—they go hand in hand. They will say you’re... Think about how many parties I’m not invited to. Oh, just imagine. I mean, when it comes to when non-Christians say, “Let’s get together; this will be great,” they don’t go, “Hey, yeah, Pastor Mike lives next door—let’s invite him.” That’s not on their mind. They will exclude. And to the extent that my life becomes a rebuke to somebody, they’ll malign. And when you become a Christian, what you’re saying is, “I recognize, standing with Christ—‘on account of the Son of Man’—I’m going to have that polarity shifted where there’s going to be some kind of natural spiritual aversion.” And then not only that—when I live the life that God has called me to live, they’re going to start excluding me from things. I won’t be the life of the party; they won’t want me there. And they’re going to start maligning me—or, as the word says in Luke 6:22, they will revile me. They will say negative things about me.

Verse 5—I guess just to complete the sentence here, we should read this. This gives us a little preview of the hope that we’re going to look at: “But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” Now, the dichotomy is already in our text between living and dead. We’re alive in Christ; they’re dead in their trespasses and sins. They want to pull me beyond this circle to the extent that they have freedom to do all the stuff they want to do—and we know it’s not biblical—that kind of living is death. He says, “Just remember this: God is going to judge the living”—it’s called the bema seat of Christ—“we’ll give an account for how we live within the circle.” And He’s going to judge the dead as well. A big part of how the Bible describes that is how they treated us. And the Bible says this—just remember this—it’s all going to be something that will be all worked out, panned out. God is going to settle the score. But right now you’re going to live with that tension, which is going to result in people surprised that you don’t hang with them, and therefore they’re not going to hang with you anymore, and they’re going to malign you.

Hatred. Exclusion. Reviling. Look at the last one here—verse 22, Luke 6, printed on your worksheet—and “spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.” Spurn your name as evil.

Now I know the grammar thing sometimes comes into play when we’re trying to preach from a Greek text to an English audience. We often point out—whenever it’s important to point out and



has an impact on the interpretation—that our second-person pronouns are not distinguished in English between singular and plural. You know that. I mean, unless you’re in the South, which we often say “you” as singular, “y’all” as plural. In English—in formal English, proper English—we don’t make that distinction. But in Greek, of course, we do. And sometimes when we do, it helps us understand what’s being said—especially when you combine it in this sentence with a singular noun. Well, that’s a lot of grammar talk, but let’s read and I’ll explain what I’m talking about.

“On account of the Son of Man,” what’s going to happen? “Well, your name is going to be spurned as evil.” “Spurn your”—singular or plural? Well, we can’t tell in English. “Tell us, Pastor Mike—what does the Greek text say?” It’s plural. “When they spurn y’all”—I didn’t say it right; I’m not from the South—“y’all name”—singular. We share a name. This is our corporate identity. Now think this through: I now am going to put up not only with some spiritual polarity that’s been flipped and there’s an aversion out of my life because I’m reconciled to God and the world is not, and not only because I live by a different set of standards are they going to go, “You weirdo, we’re not going to invite you to our parties, and you’re whatever you are—X, Y, Z,” but now they’re going to look at me as soon as they discover I’m a part of this thing—our corporate name. They’re going to prejudge my life by looking at the group that I’m a part of, and that’s going to become a negative for me in my relationships.

The best way I know to illustrate this is to talk about my high school reunion which took place some time back, where my wife and I—old high school—we went to the high school reunion. And one of the things that happened at my high school reunion—big class; I don’t know, 800 seniors in my graduating class; not that many at the reunion—but one thing they were doing, kind of recognizing where everyone turned out in their lives. And it was at the point of how many years since we’d been graduated that people, you know, accomplished various things. And one of the things they wanted to honor that night was people that had received doctorates—had earned doctorate degrees. Well, yours truly earned a doctorate degree, but it’s a weird doctorate degree because it’s about religion. So they didn’t know what to do with that.

Now the other doctorate degrees that they were going to honor they understood—like, you know, the big cheese at the reunion. “This guy”—I get befuddled whenever I think about it—“he’s some big doctor, chief of staff at the hospital there in Long Beach.” And when they got him up there, they’re going, “Let’s say ‘Hey, Doctor...’” and off they went. “Oh, he’s great.” He’s the guy, by the way, who was always chasing my wife. I dated her in high school—wanted to go out with her. I was in love with my wife. So the big cheese doctor—everyone thought he was great. So they announce him and everything. “Oh, he’s so wonderful!”

And then they said, “Oh yeah—Mike Fabarez. He’s got a doctorate, but some religious doctorate of some kind.” Everybody: “Oh. Okay.” Well, then we have to mill about. One of the graduates that was at my reunion lives here in South County. And I don’t know if you know it or not—I mean, most people don’t even seem to know it—but our services are broadcast here on Cox Cable. So, you



know, it's been running for 20 years or so. And I've been on TV every Thursday night or whatever night it plays—I never watch it. But this graduate had seen me on TV. And then, of course, I'm announced as the one with the religious doctorate. Well, I get introduced by this person in this big group as, "Oh, here's Mike—he's the televangelist."

So I'm thinking this through: the religious doctor guy is now associated with Benny Hinn and Robert Tilton and Jim Bakker. And Mr. Hot-Shot chief of staff at the hospital—oh, no one's thinking of, I don't know, Dr. Kevorkian, Dr. Gosnell, you know, Josef Mengele, Dr. Jekyll, Frankenstein—no one thinks about that. No one introduced him as... They just, "He's wonderful." I'm thinking, "How does that work?" Everybody was flocking to his table after all of that. No one wants to come to my table. I'm the televangelist.

Now, do you see what I'm saying? There are plenty of bad doctors that we could look at. But we never associate that guy with those things. But they'll associate the worst of Christianity with me, right? "I'm a charlatan, money-grubbing whatever," because I'm a Christian and a doctor and on TV. You see the problem here?

I just, by the way, wanted to make sure all night long that he understood who I was sitting next to and married to. I made it very clear. Even with that, though, they spurned my name as evil. I'm a Christian.

So we need to understand this. You join the ranks of the Christian, and even in your workplace you say, "Oh, I'm a Christian," and they start to know you as a Christian. What happens? They think of you now as associated with the worst of Christianity, with the worst of what they envision under this umbrella. And you know that takes place. And that's why you cringe when you see those things, are you? Because you know the whole block of us is going to be spurned as evil.

"Blessed are you," though—this is a weird thing—"when people hate you, exclude you, revile you, and spurn your corporate name as evil." That's a blessing thing. How's that? Before we get to the specific reason in verse 23, let's flip it over and look at verse 26 when He says, because the other thing would be bad, "Woe to you when all people speak well of you." That would be a bad thing. "Woe to you, for so their fathers did..." What did they do? They spoke well of the false prophets.

Now, that's a big statement. The problem would be for me if everyone did speak well of me. Why is that? Well, let's start with the desire. First of all, I desire that people talk to me at my table at my reunion. I want people to like me. I'd like to be liked. And so would you. You can't avoid that unless you're weird, and that's some twisted mind. You want people to like you. Matter of fact, I



could go so far as to say I'd like everyone to like me. That would be nice. I don't like going to bed at night thinking that people hate me. I don't care for that. But if I achieve that natural desire—if I had any success at getting everybody to speak well of me—the Bible says that would earn a “woe” from Christ. Christ would say, “Not good.” Because the only people that had that when it comes to Christianity were not the real Christians toeing the line on what God asks; it was the compromised false prophets of the Old Testament.

It is not good. The only way to have everyone speak well of you—let me put it real tersely—is for you to compromise some aspect of the Christian life. You cannot earn what you naturally desire, which for now has to be sacrificed on the altar of the cost I have to pay for following Christ. I cannot achieve everyone liking me unless I compromise.

So let's flip it over as a warning—number two on your outline: beware the compromise. You need to beware the fact that there are many ways in which you will try to mitigate the harsh reality of people hating you, excluding you, reviling you, and spurning you. You want that to stop, and the ways to stop it are all sinful compromises.

Let's walk through a couple of them. Number one—probably true for some of you in this room—when you are dealing with non-Christians, make sure no one finds out you're a Christian. Just shut up about it. Matter of fact, some of you—I could go to your offices, your workplace, and I could say, “Hey, do you know this person goes to the church that I pastor? They're followers of Christ. They read the Bible; they pray; they're committed to Jesus,” and if that would surprise a lot of people—some of you, I would think it might even surprise everyone you work with—not because you're living a contrary life, because you never mention it. You've gone dark on it. You're undercover when you deal with the non-Christian world.

To not talk about Christ—to just go silent on the matter—is a temptation. And all I want to point out is it's the most absurd temptation you could ever be lured in by, because it doesn't make any sense. You are—in the Bible, especially as New Testament Christians from beginning to end of the New Testament—called to represent Christ. Every aspect of the New Testament, when it speaks of your identity, will eventually get around to the fact that you are fishers of men; “my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” You are salt and light, which is more than just my behavior, but I'm representing God to the world. I am—2 Corinthians 5—an ambassador of Christ. I am called, Peter says, to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called me out of darkness into His marvelous light. I'm to talk. I have to tell people.

You cannot be a faithful Christian—because your identity is ambassador, witness, disciple-maker, fisher of men, proclaimer of God's excellencies—you cannot be a faithful Christian and have everybody like you by the strategy of not letting people know you're a Christian. You have to. It's



required. It's compromise for you to go underground. People at work need to know you're a Christian; people in your neighborhood need to know you're a Christian. You can't go underground on your Christian identity.

Now, study this on your own sometime—and I know it's a very familiar passage—but 2 Corinthians 5: I'll just quote a couple of highlights. That's the text that speaks about us being ambassadors. Here are some things that lead up to that. Verse 11: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." We can't shut up—in part because we fear the Lord on two levels. On the level for myself—knowing that I'll stand before the judgment seat of Christ; as Peter put it, He's going to judge the living and the dead—He's going to judge us. And that, by the way, is the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 5. "I'm going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Therefore I want to be a good ambassador." Not a silent one—I can't be silent. Imagine an ambassador in another country never speaking up about the agenda of the country they represent. It's foolish. Knowing the fear of the Lord, we are compelled to talk.

He says—and if that seems crazy, here's another highlight, verse 13—"If we are beside ourselves"—that's a little Greek idiom for "If you think we're crazy"—"then it's for God's sake." You may not like us; you may think that some things we say are nutty; you may think that this is foolish; you may say, "Just keep your religion to yourself." If you think it's crazy, you've got to know that we're doing this because of God. God is our Master. He's called us with an identity that necessitates speaking up.

You want to flip over the fear thing? Let's flip it over in the following verse—verse 14: "The love of Christ constrains us." And because of that, we proclaim what we've concluded: this, that one died for all. That concept of me talking about the crucified Christ—that people need the substitutionary atonement of Christ on a cross—comes in part not only because I fear falling down on the job, but I fear the judgment of what will happen to my co-workers if they do not repent. I love the fact that God has saved people, and I want to see that salvation advanced—it's the love of Christ that constrains me.

Then, of course, it crescendos into this: "We are ambassadors of Christ," verse 20 says, "as though God were making His appeal through us." We can't shut up about this. "We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

And by the way, if you're crossing your arms and coming up with objections as to why you're going to cast this entire sermon out because you say, "Well, I can picture that and it's no good," I am not talking about you, every single time you talk to a non-Christian, talking about Christ. But I am saying that, given a reasonable amount of time, there's no one that interacts with me that doesn't find out that I'm a Christian and that my mission is to see more people become Christians. And



there are some people in my extended family—I recognize I’ve got non-Christians in my extended family—and they know preacher Mike is a Christian. And it may be even at this point in our relationship that that conversation only comes up when the topic is right there and the door is open, because I’ve done my job and I’ve shared the gospel, and you’ve rejected it, and you’ve told me to shut up. And so we can talk about the weather, and we can talk about other things. Every conversation is not centered on that. But here’s the deal: just like Ezekiel said—and we learned this in our daily Bible reading not long ago—their blood’s not on my head. Why? Because I warned them. I told them. They know, because I spoke up.

Temptation number one is to shut down and not say anything about Christ. You have no option there. You are an ambassador—either a good one or a bad one. It would be a compromise for you not to let people in your world know that you’re a Christian.

Here’s a second strategy and a second temptation to compromise when you do: avoidance—a very popular one. I read a very influential blog this week on this very topic, and it’s absurd that Christians swallow this hook, line, and sinker. And that is this: “Why don’t you just shut up about this whole thing about God’s judgment and hell and all that? Can’t you just talk about things? As a matter of fact, let’s not even talk about things—let’s just live a life that really shines for God. As a matter of fact, here’s the thing: let’s preach Christ with our lives.” Have you heard that one? “Let’s just do that.” Man, that’s wonderful.

Now, the Bible is concerned about you being a raving hypocrite—I get that. But here’s the thing about hypocrisy: it assumes you’re saying one thing and doing another, and that’s bad. But it assumes you’re saying something. So here’s the deal: those who want to live this Christian life and say, “Well, that’s really where it’s at—let’s live Christianly, and that’ll be our testimony for Christ,” and say nothing—it’s absurd. It is absurd. It’s like an ambassador going to another country and saying, “I’m just going to live the American life in front of them all. Oh, there are lots of things I know my nation wants me to communicate to this nation, but I’m just going to live.”

If you think your life is going to be so moral that people are going to flock to you to say, “How can I become a Christian?”—number one, you’re living in a fantasy world. And you need to recognize you’ve encountered people that live good lives, and you’ve never said, “Well, I want to become whatever religion you are.” Think about Mormons. You just want to talk about this impeccable reputation of being family-centered and good people and moral and upstanding. I mean, the Mormons have got a corner on that almost. Have you become a Mormon because of some good-living Mormon in your office? No. Why? Because you’ll never become a Mormon unless that Mormon sits down with you and says, “You know, you’ve got to be reading the Book of Nephi, and you’ve got to understand something about the message from Moroni; you ought to understand how Joseph Smith was a prophet, and you ought to become a Mormon.” You’re never going to become a Mormon unless the message of Mormonism is presented to you.

And no one in your office is going to become a Christian because you have a great marriage and great kids. Not going to happen. It's akin to people—this is how foolish it is—painting their lives up so that they look so good and moral and godly, and yet never saying... It's like putting a sign on a road that's heading to a cliff in danger and just painting a nice, beautiful sign so that when people drive by, they go, "Oh, what a beautiful sign—not a speck of dust on that. Did you see how beautiful it is up here?" But it doesn't say anything. See, people are walking down a broad road and a wide gate that leads to destruction. Our message is the message of Christ: "Unless you repent, you will likewise perish. You need to turn to Christ." If you never say that, and you just live a good life hoping that someone will say, "Man, I want to be like you; you are so great; I want to know..." Who does that? Who's come to you and asked you that? And then when they say, "You have such a great life," and then you say, "You know what? You're a sinner, and you need to repent of your sins." "Oh, fantastic—I couldn't wait. Your life is so great; I want to do that." It doesn't happen.

It happens when we present the gospel, and they come back with questions, and we read, and we dialogue, and they bring accusations, and through gentleness and respect we answer their questions, and we bring them through the message of a talking ambassador to the place of conversion. Speak up. Don't be a nice sign on the side of the road that everyone could admire—that's all polished up and looks great and is a wonderful color—it just doesn't say anything. It's not helpful. It's not helpful. And people say, "Well, let's just do the things the world likes, and you'll get people to applaud." I get that. "They'll see my good deeds." I get that. But the emphasis—even in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus talked about that—was that we're speaking up for Him as messengers of a message that's clearly entrusted to us as the primary mission of our lives in a lost world.

Last temptation. Some people say, "Well, you know what? I'm not underground in my office. People do know I'm a Christian. And you know what? I do talk about Christ—I'm not just trying to live before them. I do talk about Christianity." But here's the temptation—and maybe this is the most subtle one of all—when I talk about Christianity, I only tell them the nice things about Christianity. I just think if I can just talk "God" to them in the best "God" terms and give them all those nice passages about peace and love and hope, that's what I'll do.

See, the good news—and we preach this a million times from this platform—is never good news until it's preceded and built upon the bad news. You're never going to win someone to Christ when they say, "Oh man, I'm having a tough time with my teenage son." "Oh, let me help you—can I pray for you? Let me pray for you. And not only that, let me give you some hints from the Bible, you know, because I'm into the Bible, and this will help you be a better parent." You can do that all day long, and unless you ever bring them face to face with the problem of sin and guilt and judgment, and if you never call them to repentance and faith—with all the problems in the Scripture that are identified regarding my state—you're never going to see conversions. You'll only see people feeling very "Christianly" and godly because they learned all your God-talk about the good stuff, but it doesn't really apply to them.

As a matter of fact, let's put it this way: this is a hermeneutical problem—and by that I mean you're misinterpreting the Bible. Are there messages in the Bible about hope and peace and love? Absolutely. Guess who they're directed to? Regenerate, converted, adopted people in the family of God. Those passages are focused to them. When you take those texts and you try to apply them to your non-Christian co-workers, and they don't know what the issues are regarding sin and judgment and the coming of Christ, guess what—you're misapplying the Scripture.

One passage on this. This is a temptation that almost the entire generation of preachers in the Old Testament that Jesus is speaking of here—that people spoke well of—this was epidemic. Turn to Jeremiah chapter 5. Jeremiah chapter 5—God the Father spells out in this text and even in chapter 6 clearly the problem of people trying to apply the text in the wrong way. Why did the Old Testament people speak well—all of them—of the prophets of the Old Testament who were false prophets? Well, because they modified the message. They cherry-picked their verses.

Take a look at this—verse 11, Jeremiah 5:11. “For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly”—if you have the ESV—“treacherous.” That's a word we don't use much unless you're climbing up, you know, the road to Big Bear in the rain or something—“Oh, it's treacherous.” Not what the word really means. Treacherous—the translation of the Hebrew word which means deceptive betrayal—“You've betrayed me.” The picture here is God saying to the people of Israel and Judah, “You've betrayed me; you've practiced deception.” Well, how's that? Verse 12: “They have spoken falsely of the LORD.” You've spoken about Me, but you haven't spoken rightly about Me. They said stuff like this: “He'll do nothing. He's not going to judge us. No disaster will come upon us; we shall not see sword or famine. Oh, God loves you—it's okay.” “The prophets will become wind”—they sit there and bloviate about God being loving and hopeful and peace and all that stuff—“but the word is not in them.” A part of it is they're talking about the Lord, they're quoting texts from the old covenant—I get that—but they're just wind. “Thus shall it be done to them.” What shall be done to them? All the things they say aren't going to happen to you—the disaster, the sword, the famine—are going to happen to them first.

Look across the page to chapter 6, verse 13. It gets even more revealing here because it reveals the motives. You may think of money when you read this, but it's more than that. And it can be—certainly with the topic on our table—it can be a greed for other things. Look at verse 13: “For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.” Now the theme is people are twisting and contorting the word, saying things that aren't true, making people feel better. And everybody's applauding them—New Testament equivalent, 2 Timothy 4: people have itching ears, and they've accumulated teachers that will tell them what they want to hear. And the text here says that's because their motive is they're greedy for gain.



Now, when you're a prophet for hire, and you're a preacher for hire—which, by the way, you want to talk about that: if I wanted to go out and make some money, all I have to do is tweak my message. I can get up on stages and probably big venues and say all the nice things to non-Christians, and I would be a speaker in demand. Whereas now I usually get invited to places once; when we're done, "We'll call you again maybe if we ever need you." That's not always true, but often.

Now here's the thing. What's the deal? Greedy for gain—that's one thing. But what's the topic on the table this morning? Greedy for what? I mean, it can also be true that we're greedy for approval. But what did Paul say? "Am I trying to get the approval of people, or trying to get the approval of God?" I've got to make a decision in my mind. Am I greedy, as it were, for the approval of God, or am I really hungry—craving—the approval of people? I've got to make a decision. If I'm craving the approval of people, I'm going to do what the Old Testament prophets did that did garner everyone speaking well of them. All they did was tailor the message—make sure we don't say anything that's offensive. Let's preach the good things. And does that sound like a pattern? It's pretty popular these days—even among so-called preachers. Careful.

What did they say specifically? Verse 14: "They have healed"—which you can put in quotes because it did no healing—"they have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." Why was there no peace? Because they were unrepentant sinners. They needed to repent of their sins.

I think of that statement—I'm quoting Galatians 1:10—when I just injected that here: "Am I trying to win the approval of men, or the approval of God?" Here's what Paul says—now listen, this is Galatians 1:10: "If I were still trying to win the approval of men, I would not be a servant of Christ." Now think that through. If I really sought to win the approval of people—if my goal were to get everyone to speak well of me—then I really wouldn't be a servant of Christ.

It's like you employers—or maybe you're a manager or supervisor at your job or whatever—can you imagine having responsibility for some employees? They all go to lunch at noon, and half of them don't return until 4:45. And you ask the employee, "Where were you all afternoon?" And they say, "Well, after lunch I was passing by the office building across the street. I saw they had a lot of things going on, so I've been in there all day trying to help them out. I just wanted to make sure they were all set and had all their needs met." Okay, well, "You're fired" would come to mind at that point. But I'm thinking to myself, you are no employee here if what you're concerned about is meeting the needs of everybody in the office building across the street. If you are an employee of God—if you are a servant of Christ—then your mission is very clear: I've got to please Christ. And here's the thing about messengers: they give all of the message; they give the whole story.



And for all the grief I get—speaking of my wife saying, you know, “Unfortunately, don’t debrief on something you’ve got experience with.” Listen, I know I’m experiencing this—for all the grief I get about, you know, negative, and “it’s terrible,” and “fire and brimstone”—listen, it’s just because it’s included in the message. It isn’t because I’m doing series on it: “How Hot Will Hell Be?—22 Weeks by Mike Fabarez.” I mean, you’re not hearing that. I’m preaching the Word, and I happen to give the good news and the bad news. And I get grief for it constantly as your pastor. And what’s the point? My temptation is what your temptation is sitting at the lunchroom at your office, talking to the neighbors over the mailbox: “I just want to say the good thing. If you can go away having a good opinion of God, that would be great.” And so we curtail the message. “Woe to you when people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

Lastly, verse 23—Luke chapter 6, printed on your worksheet—let’s end on a good note. And the good news is this: if you’re willing to pay the price of aligning yourself with Christ, speaking up for Christ, standing with Christ, and you get some of that negativity—that hatred, that exclusion, that reviling, that spurning of our corporate name—and they pegged you as a Christian and think bad things about you, the Bible—as bizarre as it sounds—says this, verse 23: “Rejoice in that day.” When you come home from work and someone’s slammed you because you’re a Christian, “leap for joy.” Why are you... I mean, hyperbole—I understand, right? No one’s coming and going, “Yeah, I got crucified today and my reputation got slammed.” You’re not. But this is the kind of statement that God is trying to make to us in this text—to say you need to let the paradoxical joy of understanding that this is the right thing—not only that, but the next phrase: “because your reward in heaven is great.” God is going to greatly reward you. And not only that—the solidarity with the real prophets: “for so their fathers did to the prophets.”

You need to contemplate that compensation of all this. Number three—let’s put it that way: we need to consider the compensation. God is going to compensate you, and that should make you leap for joy. The Greek word, by the way, for you Greek people, linguists—this is a Greek word—if you have a Greek text open, you’ll see on your iPad or whatever—it’s the word from which we get our English word “to skip.” It’s a transliteration of that word. Now, you don’t picture, you know, skipping through the main hall, you know, *Sound of Music* or whatever, after you’ve been insulted or excluded. But the skipping, the joy, the sense of—man, let’s just try to rethink this. Let’s mitigate the pain of what is really painful by recognizing the coming compensation.

Let me just break that down a little bit. The compensation that you’ll find—as barbaric as it may sound to you, and I’m sorry for your sensibilities, but I’m here to preach the Bible to you—as barbaric as it may sound to you, one of the great rewards that’s constantly refrained in the Bible, coming up over and over again when we talk about our persecution, is this: it’s the reward of vindication. That’d be a good way to jot it down—the reward of vindication. And that reward is not just that we can stomp on the graves of people that accused us, but it is a sense in which you recognize when you are being wronged, what’s happening is they’re wrong—and one day that wrong will be exposed. And in that sense you can even start to, with a compassionate heart, feel bad for those that insult you for Christ. You can literally say, “I’m glad for a lot of reasons regarding my



reward, but one of the things is that all of those who insult people for the cause of Christ will be ashamed.”

And all you’d have to do is look up passages on persecution and look at how many times it comes back around to, “Hey, God is going to take care of this. God will settle the score.” I think of 1 Thessalonians 1, 2 Thessalonians 1. I think of 1 Peter chapter 4 that we read. There will be a day when God settles the score. That gives you some comfort. And you ought to think maybe like the psalmist—and this is David in this case. Psalm 37 would be a good homework assignment. David—you’re going to talk about a guy who was in the right, just trying to do what God asked him to do. In those early years of his kingship—he wasn’t even enthroned yet—he was public enemy number one, sought by Saul—constantly persecuted; constantly maligned—called a dog by the king, right? “He’s just a dog—a dirty dog.” All of that’s coming from the powers that be. He writes this psalm in Psalm 37, and he says, in effect (as he speaks to others), your righteousness will shine—the justice of your cause—like the noonday sun. You’re going to be vindicated one day. And he really puts it—just to read a little bit of it—he says, even though the wicked plot against the righteous, even though they gnash their teeth at the righteous, the Lord in heaven—He simply laughs. He laughs because He knows, as He considers the wicked, that their day is coming. He’s not sweating it. We take it far too seriously. You spend the rest of the night, when you come home from work, being slandered for Christ—over dinner with your wife you’re talking... Listen, I’m just saying—can we turn that around a little bit and recognize, “Man, I should feel pity for those that criticize us, who mock us—whether it’s on some comedy channel, or whether it’s some loudmouth at work, or some cynical neighbor.” Bottom line is every one of those people is going to kneel before the King of kings one day. You talk about an apology. Talk about shame. The reward of vindication is big, and it’s all throughout the Bible. That’s why it says throughout Psalm 37—start in verse 5—that refrain: “Don’t fret. Don’t fret. Don’t fret. Don’t fret.”

Secondly—I have no time for this one either, so maybe I’ll just refer you to the sermon on the back. I always give you sermons that are related to the topics that we’re discussing. And in the middle box there you might want to highlight 05-705—talking about the reward of vindication. I think of passages that use the words “you’ll get great reward,” like that in Hebrews 10. That sermon there, “Motivated by Christ’s Reward and His Return”—it’s an exposition of the reference there in Hebrews 10:35–37. In that section I take a whole hour to talk about the fact that—as I often do—that heaven is not some translucent place with Casper the Friendly Ghost floating around on cotton-ball clouds, playing harps and all that. This is a real place with real tangible rewards. Your reward will be something greatly valued. And all I’m saying is: every time you’re insulted for Christ, every time you’re not invited to that thing, every time that you’re not included and you’re slandered and maligned and mocked as a Christian, the Bible says God’s just pushing stuff over on your ledger—the things that you’re going to enjoy in the eternal kingdom—because you’ve suffered for the name of Christ. There’s a reality there. I don’t have any time to talk about it, but real rewards should motivate you to be faithful—and, in this case, standing faithfully with Christ and boldly speaking up for Him.



Lastly—and let’s get this in, verse 23—the solidarity with the prophets: “Rejoice in that day; leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets.” Now that’s a different idea. The idea now is—now think about it. I’ll call it this: the reward of being in good company. Okay? The reward of being in good company. I don’t know—maybe you don’t—but if there’s any... Let’s just speak here on the lowest level. If you get criticized this week at work for being a Christian, and you have any kind of respect for me at all (which I know not everybody does), but if you happen to, just know I get that all the time. You and I this week are in the same kind of club here, because I get criticized for speaking up for Christ and you got criticized. And that’s really nothing—that’s the low level.

You want to talk about the higher shelf here? He says, “Think about the prophets of the Old Testament.” Now, all you have to do is think about them not in their humanity and what they did here and some of their foibles and problems, but I want you to think about them now. Where are those prophets now? Well, I can peel back the curtain and show you—it’s called the Mount of Transfiguration. Here are two of them. Two people show up with Christ. Who are they? Sunday School graduates: Moses and Elijah. They are flanking the glorified Christ. Peter, James, and John see this, and they’re falling on their face. “We ought to build some tabernacles here—this is... wow!” And who’s there? They want to build tabernacles for—not only Christ—but they want to build these places of worship for Moses and Elijah. And there they are in their majestic, glorified state. They’re the heroes of heaven.

I just want you to think for a minute about Moses. He’s one of them. Moses—the great prophet. “Yeah, he had a great life. No one criticized him ever.” All the time. Matter of fact, you read through Numbers—it’s like the whole book is about how many ways can we criticize Moses. But it is all about him incurring slander constantly. Now think about our topic: he wasn’t getting beaten; he wasn’t being whipped; he wasn’t being martyred. But the people sure were beating him up verbally. They sure were opposing him. Talk about excluding—“You want Moses at your birthday party?” I mean, he was the kind of guy... oh, he was... People were tardy—even his family members were criticizing him because of his relationship with God and his speaking of the truth to the people.

Who was the other guy? Elijah. Great prophet—absolutely. One of the great prophets of the Old Testament. How was his life? All just, you know, everything was wonderful for him? No. You know his life: filled with all kinds of opposition—persecuted constantly—so bad that he’s depressed. “Nobody likes me. No one’s for me. No one’s with me.” I mean, that was the life he lived. And when you feel that way on Thursday afternoon, and you’ve taken some heat for Christ this week, I want you to think about Moses and Elijah—but not just in their humanity (though they experienced the thing), but what Christ did in exalting them at their deaths. There’s reward there—being in that club. I’d like to be in that.



With this I'll close—turn with me to Hebrews 12. Talking about the bottom shelf—I don't know, think of me. If that does you any good, we might just want to skip that and just think of Moses and Elijah, the prophets of old. That's what Christ asked me to think about. Let's go to the top shelf, though. You really want to think about a club you want to be in? You want to think about a paradigm you'd like to echo with your life? Let's think about Christ. This text is great. It gives us a great little equation here to apply—a template for our lives. Let's just figure out where we're going here by reading verse 3 first. Hebrews 12:3: "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself." I mean, you want to talk about one who had it worse than Moses and Elijah? Christ. "So that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

Now it gives us the clue, and it's in verse 2. But for the sake of context, let's start in verse 1: "Therefore, since we're surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses"—referring back to chapter 11, all these heroes of the Old Testament—"let us lay aside every weight"—everything that's bogging you down—"and the sin that clings so closely; let us be godly here; and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." And running—you know, if you want to run after church, I'm not up for that. That's hard. That's exhausting. And yet that's the picture of the Christian life. Now, when you do run, and it's hard, and you struggle, "look to Jesus"—"looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith." Now here's the paradigm to follow: "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross"—now you're supposed to endure in your race this week. You look at Christ now and consider Him. He endured so much hostility against Himself from sinners. Now, the ultimate expression of that hostility was the cross. "He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Now, how did He do it? He did it "for the joy set before Him." That was not the joy of the cross—of course it wasn't. That was the shame. But He looked beyond that. He looked to the joy of—what?—being seated at the right hand of the throne of God. He saw the payoff, and He was willing to go through the ridicule, the hostility, the opposition—being hated and spat upon. You want to talk about shame? You've never seen the shame of the cross. I don't care if you've seen Gibson's film and saw all the Renaissance paintings of the crucifixion—you've yet to see an accurate depiction of Christ who didn't have, by the way, in the Renaissance painting, all these nicely, prudently placed swaths of cotton having to go over His private parts when He's hanging on the cross. You know He was stripped naked and beaten and bleeding? We can't even paint pictures of it because it's so shameful. That's the naked Christ, dying on a cross after being beaten by Roman soldiers, after having His back ripped open. That was hostility that you'll never experience in your life—at least this week, right? You're not going to be tortured and crucified for the cause of Christ.

And the Bible says He could look at that—and here's the word: "despise" it. He could despise the shame of it. Why? Because His focus is on the goal, is on the payoff, is on the reward. What is that? To be exalted and seated at the right hand of God.



As I often point out when I quote this verse, that word “despise” is a great, very vivid Greek word—*kataphroneō*—it’s a compound word: *kata* (down) and *phroneō* (to think). To think down on—to think less of it; to think little of it; to belittle it in my mind. See, it’s painful when someone ridicules you—hates you, excludes you, reviles you. It’s a big thing. And the Bible says, in your mind—hmm—look down on that. It’s so smart to despise that. It’s no big deal. It’s a big deal in our emotions, but think less of it, because you’ve got the joy set before you. And that allows you to endure the shame.

The reward of being in good company, the reward of vindication, the reward of just the various rewards of God are the kind of compensation that should so saturate our minds that, if you’re excluded, hated, reviled this week for Christ, you can endure it. As Paul put it in Romans 8:18, these temporal afflictions with which we wrestle—they’re nothing compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us. God’s storing up for you plenty of comfort, and it’s coming. Don’t doubt it.

Let’s pray. God, we like to be liked—obviously. We talk about it; we joke about it. We prefer to be hailed and respected and all of those things. People want to speak to us and be our friend and all of that. But because we stand with Your Son, and because we’re willing to be His ambassadors and His witnesses and to proclaim the excellencies of You who called us out of darkness to light—because we’re called to speak up and live for You—even just our life is going to be a rebuke to non-Christians. I mean, there’ll be some that will listen to us, and they’ll respond to our message, and we’ll become their spiritual hero perhaps because we’re helping them grow in Christ, or we lead them to repentance and faith. But for most people we’re just a thorn; we’re a pebble in their shoe; we’re a constant source of frustration—just even being who we are—because we won’t do the things they do; we won’t go the places they go. We live by a different set of rules. We love You. And the real problem is—it says there in John 15—as Your Son said, it’s because they don’t know You that they don’t like us.

And we don’t want to capitalize on that by being annoying or frustrating or irritating. We don’t want to make a sport out of gathering more people that don’t like us. But we just want to stand with You faithfully. And if we incur those difficulties, we just want to be able to endure them. And God, we want to endure them because we know—as You said—it will affect us so much that we could say just bizarre-sounding things like we’re going to rejoice in that day; we’re going to skip and leap for joy, because we know our reward in heaven is great. And we know that we’ve joined an alliance of people like the prophets and even Christ Himself. We’re in that club of being rejected by the world but loved and valued by God. And God, we want to value that. We want to see that as our priority and our goal. We want Your approval way more than we want any of these people to like us.

So God, for that we pray—that it doesn’t make us a curmudgeon or, you know, some kind of negative person. We don’t want to be any of that. But we want to be willing to know what the cost of following You is and to pay it gladly. So God, thanks for teaching us in this text today. Thanks



so much for the straightforward nature of it—even that it speaks to not being flogged or beaten or killed, but just being maligned and relationally hurt because of our Christianity. And let it be a great encouragement to us this week. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.