

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
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The Cost Of The Peacemaker: Persecution
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Well, in the spirit of Thanksgiving, I want to express my gratitude for the acts of peace that this community is putting into practice. And so I'm just going to do some shout outs right now and I'm going to go on a rapid fire, okay. I'm going to start with NCC Kids who generously gave blessing bags over and abundantly to those in need on the streets and our kids also helped in the D C Dream Center Drive that blessed 154 families with a meal. Pretty awesome. We had 90 friends from our church and the streets enjoy our annual friends giving in DC over at Ebenezers and we also fellowshipped with friends at Alexandria gratitude table and just had one of the best Thanksgiving meals in the DMV. That's what we provide. We go big or we go home. And we also listened and we learned from friends and anti-trafficking work. We had families like the Hammond showing up at neighbors doors with meals just to show out love. We had 40 people walking the streets and prayer walking, pouring blessing into our neighborhoods. And lastly, one of my favorites, one of our small groups gave away 300 pairs of long johns to those out in the cold. And if long johns don't spell peace to those out in the cold, I don't know what does, right. And so I prayed today that just like Hebrews 10:24 it says, it talks about spurring us on to love and good deeds. I hope these just quick testimonies are a spur to all of us that continue to be peacemakers in our city and in the DMV.

It's Matthew chapter five verse nine it says, *"blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."* Scripture is packaged so nice and neat and we read it and we talk about it, we're compelled to be peacemakers, but the scripture continues on. And today I don't just want to talk about the lofty aspiration, but I want to talk about the actual cost that it takes for us to pursue this and to follow Christ truly. The scripture continues on in verse 10 it says,

¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."*

I don't know about you, but that's not the kind of blessing I was necessarily looking for, right? The kind that leads to persecution, but when we read the scripture, we understand that persecution is a result of our true and of our genuine faith. Other scriptures show us this and they confirm the same idea.

Second Timothy chapter three verse 12; *"Yes and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."*

Luke, chapter six; ²² *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!"*

It's just going to be one of those feel good messages, isn't it? Started off good. I had a rough week, but man, now we're talking about hatred and being spurned and being hurt. And I was really looking forward to this message. So thank you for bringing it, but we're just leaning in.

Today, so, Lord, we ask for your help as we lean into your word today. Give us your heart and your thoughts in Jesus' name.

I wonder if you've ever experienced persecution because of your faith. And maybe I'll make a bold statement today and feel free to disagree with me freely as we've talked about. But if you haven't experienced persecution in your faith, I gotta wonder how closely you're following Christ because it comes with the territory. It's part of the deal when we follow him. Too many of us are following Christ at a distance, though, right. We're close enough to see his power but we're too far to actually be in fellowship with him. We want to go to the party. We want to eat the turkey and the stuffing and the cranberry sauce, but we don't want to say for cleanup, do we? No, we want to get out before it gets messy. That's our reaction. And the problem in our churches is that many of us; we haven't really made up our minds to truly follow Christ, to call him Lord over all of our lives. And we stick our toe in the water of faith but to learn how to swim, you gotta jump in with both feet, don't you? You've got to go all in.

Katherine Eads is a former NCC'er that felt called to go back to her small town of Waynestown, Indiana. She left this area and she shared with our team this weekend. She shared one line that's been sticking with me the entire week. She said, you know, I knew Jesus as my Savior, but I didn't know him as my Lord. I knew Jesus is my Savior, somebody who saved me, who picked me up, who pulled me out, but I didn't know him as Lord, somebody that I've followed and submitted to and lived my faith in obedience unto him.

Prepping for this message and you know, this is the last topic that I would naturally think you know what, this is going to lead to me offering an opportunity to take a step of faith and to go all in in your faith talking about the topic of persecution, but that's exactly where I felt compelled as I studied. And I just want to mention this at the end of this message I'm going to give you an opportunity to make a bold confession of faith. I just want to throw that out there as we talk through this topic to prepare our hearts. When you truly follow Christ, the enemy is going to come against you. There you go again with that encouragement, right? He's gonna come against you. And this is hard and I see it on a micro level in my family even.

And when my kids experience persecution for their faith already, and the dad in me wants to come out. You know what I'm talking about? When my girl gets mocked for her faith, not for something she did, but because she has a faith, the dad wants to rise up and go take care of things. But then I step back and I pray and I read the scripture and I'm reminded, you know what, that's fruits of a genuine and sincere faith in Christ. And even our kids, they need to have doses of persecution because that's how the scripture reads. That's what, that's what we're called to. That's what we are told in the scriptures will happen. Matthew 5:10 says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted.*"

The word blessed, It can be translated as the word congratulations. Congratulations to those of you who have been persecuted. It doesn't make sense, does it? It doesn't feel right but this is the

fact of the matter. Congratulate you are blessed when you are persecuted on his behalf. Verse 10 says it, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness"*.

Now let's take a step back for just a moment and talk about what persecuted is not before we lean into what it is. Some of us mistake persecution for minor inconveniences we have and we can get a victim mentality, can't we? And we go to Target, right? And we get our Christmas gifts and we go up to the clerk and Merry Christmas to you and now Happy Holidays. Right? And we get one of those and wait, okay. I was just trying to buy the, am I allowed to call them Christmas ornaments? Right? And don't snap back dude Jesus is the reason for the season. No, don't snap back with that in that moment. Well, we think, oh, that's persecution. That's not persecution, no, that's just a minor inconvenience in a moment. Right?

And we do other things. We translate things other ways as well. We mistake persecution for the results of self-righteousness, not righteousness. There's a book called 'Lost and Found' Ed Stetzer, he talks about...well he gives a stat, 46% of unchurched people say that they're annoyed by Christians. It's kind of a surprising stat, right? Only 46% are you kidding me? You've been around the people? No, I'm just kidding. No, you guys are all good, you're 0% there's a margin of error 5% but hey, you're all good. And we find ourselves sometimes; maybe I can be a little ignorant. Sometimes maybe somebody is responding because I made a conceded statement or we can be arrogant and that can come through, right? And so it's not persecution when someone's responding to an arrogant statement that we make. And we say things like, you know, I just speak the truth. Oh, the scriptures say to speak the truth in love, right? And people don't even get to the offense of the cross because we've offended them on their way to it.

The word persecution used here in the scriptures, the word 'dioko' meaning to follow or literally pursue as one does a fleeing enemy. It means to chase, harass, to pressure. FF Bruce commentated that the persecuted are not merely men who have passed through a certain experience, but men who bear abiding traces of it in their character. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Now notice this, the last part of this phrase, it's actually seen in the very beginning of this scripture passage. The passage is called the beatitudes and we see it at the beginning of Matthew chapter five. And so we see it in two different spots as you'll notice on the slide, and it starts in verse three it says,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It's a literary device known as inclusio and it makes clear that this is a package deal, right? You don't just pick what you want, pick a Proverb and throw the other one back. No, if you're going in for it, you do all of these things. And so you want to pursue God to be a peacemaker. Guess what? The persecution will also come alongside that, you get one, you get the other.

Verse 11; *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."*

Persecution can be as mild as being mocked for your faith. It can be as serious or severe as somebody being imprisoned or losing their life. According to Open Doors World Watch List in 2019 245 million Christians experienced high levels of persecution. Christians are persecuted more than any other religion in the world, followed closely by Muslims, and then the Jewish faith would be third. Over 2,600 believers have been detained without trial. Over 4,000 I think it's around 4,100 Christians were killed for faith related reasons this year, equating to about 11 Christians killed every single day. So while we were just worshiping, while we had our hands lifted up and were singing songs of praise, or you're watching someone else, while we were doing that, somebody lost their life for trying to do the same thing.

Verse 12; *"Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven."*

It's what he just said. We put together a resume of our faith and it's this grandiose idea. It's this grandiose list of accomplishments that we've made but then you hear Racine's (sp?) story and it's quite the opposite isn't it.

And then you read the Apostle Paul's resume of faith. And here's what it says in Second Corinthians 11 he says;

"²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, from Gentiles, in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and in thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

Verse 30 he says; *"³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness."*

First off, if you're here today and you believe in Christ, but you're kind of half in and you're half out. You're in, as long as it's convenient, you're in, as long as it's not that expensive, you're in, as long as it fits your schedule, as long as it doesn't cost you that much, let's call it what it is then. That's not faith. That's mooching, that's prostituting your faith for personal gain, for personal benefit. And this is how we view and tell me, just ask the question anytime at any point in your history that you've had a meaningful relationship when you've only had the perspective of what you want to take out of it and not put anything into it.

I'm here to preach to somebody today that when you put your whole faith in Christ, he will come and he will give you new life. He will fill your spirit and fill your soul and fill your heart and he will make you new. That's what the scripture says in Second Corinthians chapter six verse two, today is the day of salvation, not yesterday, not tomorrow, no, this day today. I reach out to you but I'm going to say right alongside that, but there is also persecution and there is also challenge, there is also trial that comes with the territory.

Second, if you've stopped short of seeking God because of one of his followers has been arrogant or hypocritical or conceded, I'll just say thank you for your grace cause that's true, that happens sometimes, right? And the fact is this, that all of us have our misgivings and our shortcomings.

The scripture puts it this way; we all fall short of the glory of God. We all make mistakes, but my encouragement to you today is this? Don't let somebody else's mistake stop you from becoming who God made you to be. He has plans and he has purposes over you. Don't be a victim of someone else's false faith.

Matthew chapter 16 verse 24;

"Whoever wants to follow me must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. 26 What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his own soul?"

Jim Elliot wrote in his journal at 29 years of age, right before he died at the hands of the Alka Indians he wrote, 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.'

Third, as we were just encouraged, we need to step out and pray for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted. This is a calling that we have. Hebrews chapter 13; *"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners and those who are mistreated as if you yourself were suffering."*

We're called to join in suffering and remembering via prayer and via care to gain understanding of our family as they're hurting. On Palm Sunday in 2017 bombs went off at two Coptic churches in Egypt killing 50 people and injuring more than a hundred. Hours after the blast amid outreach and grief Father Boules George stood up before packed church and he gave a sermon with three points and it was entitled 'A Message to Those Who Kill Us'. It has three points.

- Thank you.
- We love you.
- We're praying for you.

Thank you because the killers gave the dead the honor of dying for Christ and they allowed all to have a perspective on eternal destiny. Then he said, we love you because as Jesus said, even murderers and thieves loved those who love them, but only those of us who received Jesus can love our enemies. And last he said, we're praying for you because if a killer could taste the love of God it could chase even the hatred out of his heart.

A peacemaker is not someone without a backbone. It's not someone who has no opinion or who will take no stance. It's not someone who is weak. On the contrary a peacemaker is someone who is strong, who has a great backbone, who steps in to the places that nobody else will go, who has a perspective on the presence of God leading and giving strength in the soul and into the very bone to lean and to forgive where no one else has the fortitude to forgive, to lean in, to love where no one else has the idea or the strength to love somebody else in those moments.

What does this look like for you? It might mean your family will cut you out or treat you differently or say hurtful things towards you. It might mean taking a risk to obey God's word in a way that would cost you professionally or relationally. It might mean taking a step in your career that feels risky, but what did Jesus do? He put his life, his body on the cross. He shed his blood.

He died for you and I. He sacrificed himself so that we might be reconciled to God and to our fellow brother and sister.

Years ago, a young man named Gatu (sp?), he was enjoying a cup of coffee over at Ebenezer's coffee house and he heard our services going on downstairs in the performance space. And so he wandered down and he joined in. And when he did, the Holy Spirit did what the Holy Spirit does. And he began coming and as he did, God began working in him. And he was so compelled and inspired that he decided to shift from his job. He was a contractor over on Eighth Street. In fact, a lot of the old bars over on Eighth Street, he actually built. And so he went to his partner, he went to the owner and he said; "Listen, here's what's going on. I'm going to take a step back. I think I'm going to stop." And he got taken to task and his partner wouldn't have it and he gave him a hard time for it and eventually he sat him down and he went, they actually printed out the core beliefs of our church. And he brought those into the meeting and he sat down and he said; "Listen, we're going to talk through this. Do you know now this church believes that Jesus is the Son of God? That he came to this earth to give his life, to die on the cross for you so that you might have relationship with God?" He said; "Do you believe that?" And he said; "You know, no one's ever asked me that, but yes I do." He said; "Well, do believe that scripture is the inspired word of God?" "Yes I do." "Do you believe the Holy Spirit is active and lives in you so that you can live in the fruits of the Spirit so you can be empowered with supernatural giftings?" "Yes, I do." And what was meant to be an inquisition to push him down did quite the opposite. He made a confession of faith, of boldness in that moment. It was supposed to push him back, supposed to take him down in fear, but instead faith rose up in him and he stood up for his belief. Listen, he walked away and he left a lot of money on table, but he found who he was made to be in Christ.

I mentioned it earlier. I want to do that right now and invite our bands to come at all locations. I just want to give us an opportunity to express faith today to make a bold confession of faith. And I don't know if you're here and maybe you've been half in, half out. Maybe you're kind of committed, but not really. Maybe you believe things but you're not living it. Or maybe this would be your first time to make a confession of faith, but I just want to speak this out today and I want to pray this and as I pray a line, then I'll ask you to pray, a line. And then I'll say the next line and then you can say the next line. And we'll just go through this confession of faith and then our worship teams will lead us in worship and we'll have some moments just to seek God together. But I want to ask at all our locations, if you'll stand up with me today and I want to lead us. Only do this if you feel compelled today by the Lord. If you're willing to call Jesus as Lord of your life, and you're willing to say with boldness, who he is today, if that's the case, I want to ask you to join me as we make this confession of faith.

Lord Jesus, I believe you are the son of God.

[Congregation repeated]

I believe that on the cross you took my sin,

[Congregation repeated]

my shame and my guilt

[Congregation repeated]

and you died for it.

[Congregation repeated]

You faced hell for me so I wouldn't have to.

[Congregation repeated]

You rose from the dead to give me a place in heaven.

[Congregation repeated]

a purpose on earth

[Congregation repeated]

and a relationship with the Father

[Congregation repeated]

Today, Lord Jesus,

[Congregation repeated]

I turn from my sin to be born again.

[Congregation repeated]

God is my father.

[Congregation repeated]

Jesus is my Savior.

[Congregation repeated]

The Holy spirit is my helper

[Congregation repeated]

and heaven is my home

[Congregation repeated]

in Jesus name.

[Congregation repeated]

Amen.

[Congregation repeated]

God, we thank you today that we can make a confession of faith to who you are. I pray, Lord, today that our spirits would follow our words. Lord, that you would pull us up from a place of apathy, that you would pull us up God, from living in the places that are dark, that you would pull us up God, from not living to our full potential. God, I pray today over every single one of us that we would step into the destiny and the purposes. That we would understand the persecution will come. If it hasn't then we're not living truly for faith. But God, I pray that we would stand up for righteousness and that we would live as peacemakers and your name, I bless us today. Amen.