

Spiritual Sacrifices

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[0:00] 1 Peter 2.5 it says, Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

I want to talk about spiritual sacrifices. Spiritual sacrifices. God has designed you and me to be lively stones, living stones, as a spiritual house, as a holy priesthood. Why? To offer up spiritual sacrifices. What does that mean? Spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Sacrifices. Sacrifices are something that are costly.

Something that speaks of surrender. It speaks of a yielding up of our will to God's will. Sacrifices speak of giving, of something holy, of something of purity, of love, of dedication.

Sacrifices. And we are called to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Spiritual sacrifices. We could think of that as spiritual disciplines, as holy conduct, as holy habits.

[1:30] Our Lord wants us to have a faith that grows, that matures, that is strong. A spiritual life, a relationship with Him that will be strong.

And part of that is in spiritual sacrifices that we are called to offer up. We don't hear much talk of sacrifice.

It's not a subject that we tend to think of as popular today. How are we to offer up spiritual sacrifices?

The Word says that that's what we're designed to be. To be that spiritual house. To be that holy priesthood. To be those living stones. To offer up a spiritual sacrifice.

A sacrifice has to go through fire. Fire. Fire. Fire. Now there are some popular preachers today who tell us that Jesus has come to give us our best life now.

[2:37] This kind of message today is probably not something you'll hear from them. But it is a blessing. It is a blessing for your life and for mine. It's a blessing that will bless your life.

That our Lord speaks of. A blessing that we can sadly miss out on. Or we can think we're missing a blessing when we experience it.

Our Lord tells us that persecution is a blessing. It's a paradox, isn't it? Persecution is a blessing. In Matthew 5, verse 10.

In that wonderful sermon on the mount. Our Lord Jesus is there. Addressing the people gathered on the mountainside. And amongst other things, in verse 10 of Matthew 5, he says, Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you. And persecute you.

[3:42] And say all manner of evil falsely against you for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad. For great is your reward in heaven.

For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Our Lord did not dish up some positive thinking platitudes here on the mount.

He did not give us what the regular ear-tickling kind of self-help gurus who masquerade as TV preachers will give you.

He gave a vital truth. A hard truth. A truth where the rubber hits the road. That blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

We do well to take in of this blessing of persecution. It's something that prompts us rejoicing. Of gladness. Of blessedness. In other words, happiness.

[4:48] Of great reward. Of something we ought to expect. We ought to expect persecution. I want to exhort you today to prepare for persecution.

Prepare for it. As Paul exhorted the folk in Acts 4 from verse 21. It says they've been preaching the gospel to the city. Verse 22.

Confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith. And that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

You know, this is something we don't often think of.

I know we hope that we'll not see the great tribulation. Whatever the case, we should be prepared for tribulation.

[5:51] We should be prepared for persecution. How are we to prepare for such a thing? Psychologically and spiritually. For persecution.

We should. It's something that the word exhorts us to be mindful of. And to be ready for. Here's some questions you could ask.

Am I prepared to die for Christ? Am I prepared to be persecuted? Even tortured for Christ?

Am I prepared for my children or loved ones to suffer and die for Christ? Are they prepared for such a possibility? These are strong questions, aren't they?

You can see that it's not a popular feel-good message today. It's not something that is a popular kind of message today. I'm talking about sacrifice.

[6:53] Sacrifice. It's not a topic that we relish. It's not going to build us a mega church here in Elizabeth. It's not going to draw a crowd to have a message such as this today.

But sacrifice is a common theme in the word of God, in the Bible. And so it's something we ought to know about. In Romans 12 verse 1, that familiar passage, I beseech you, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

I beseech you, present your bodies a living sacrifice. Now it's clear that a sacrifice must go through the fire. But it's been said that it's the fires of persecution that separate the faithful, in other words the gold, from the faithless, the dross.

God's plan is that we go through fire. To be that holy, set-apart people, who love Him more than life itself, who hold fast to the Word of God, when He sends us into a hostile world with the message of the Gospel.

He sends us into a hostile world with the message, the Gospel message. So no wonder the world will hate us when that happens. In 1 John 5 verse 19, it tells us that the whole world lieth in wickedness.

[8:26] A man, David Barrett, has calculated that 150,000 to 300,000 Christians die for their faith every year.

150,000 to 300,000 every year. That's staggering, isn't it? And apparently it's only in 24 countries that Christianity is completely free of restriction.

And this number is shrinking every year. It's been said that this number is shrinking. And at least 36 countries actively persecute Christians.

So these include nations such as China or Vietnam and North Korea. It's a fact that we live in an anti-Christian world.

We just happen to be in a country where it doesn't touch us all that much at the moment. And friends, there's a conflict raging across the planet against Biblical Christianity.

[9:32] A global war that opposes Christian values and an emerging global spirituality that is infiltrating and taking power by stealth.

So it's whether it's outright or it's kind of underhanded, there's a war going on against Christianity. And the mantras that we're hearing through the spin doctors are words like pluralism, political correctness, unity, social justice.

These words sound kind of okay in some ways. But what is it that is really being said? What is it that these people are saying? They are mocking Biblical Christianity.

When they attack other words such as absolutism or dogmatism, they're really attacking the absolute truth which we hold in our hands, the Word of God, the Bible, as we obey it.

This is absolute. Absolute. And we can be dogmatic about the truth. Biblical Christianity is under attack. Now, I talked earlier today of the global control that is really behind the scenes, as it were, of the moves towards a socialist, totalitarian, new world order.

[11:00] These are things that are happening today in the world that we live. A question we can ask is, why is there such little persecution in Australia's churches?

Why do we see very little persecution in Australia's churches? Why is this? Why is this? Because the popular church, by and large, has just conformed to the world's standards in virtually every aspect.

We've conformed. We've just followed the world's course of direction. And in the shallow, man-pleasing kind of church, it awakens no opposition because there's very little to distinguish the biblical church with the world at large.

It stirs no controversy. The fake church is worldly, it's accommodating, it's compromising, and its preachers are weak and cowardly.

And that's how we like it. So say many churchgoers today. That's cool with me, they say. They're like the people in Jeremiah 5, verse 30, who say, A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means and my people love to have it so.

[12:28] God's people of those days of Jeremiah 5, they loved it that way. They loved it that the preachers were preaching falsely. People, by and large, in the church popular today, the popular church today, love it that way.

They love the easy, breezy kind of Christianity. The modern apostate church is like the people of Isaiah's day. In Isaiah 30, verse 9, it says, this is a rebellious people, lying children, that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to the seers, see not, and to the prophets, prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy decease.

It doesn't matter to the lemmings, to the sheeple that their prophets prophesy falsely, that's how they like it.

That's how they want it, even though it isn't right. People like what they hear when it's sugar-coated, candy-flossed kind of messages, when it's smooth things, smooth things.

It doesn't jar their nerves, it doesn't convict of sin. And friends, today, Christianity is being redefined into this kind of easy, breezy, casual kind of message, where churches will just be redefined, Christianity is being conformed, and we're all going to march to that same tune.

[14:11] And this is what we're seeing, sadly, in the compromising church. It's lost its purity, it's lost the holy character, it's astray from genuine Christian faith.

And the modern church has become like a country club kind of atmosphere. Country club kind of Christians who just go along with it, just go along with the moral bankruptcy of our society.

Where they'd rather have fables than true. Really, the word for it is treason. Treason. Treason.

I looked up this word, treason, a definition of treason. It's variously defined as a violation of allegiance to the sovereign power.

Treason. It's a conscious siding with the enemy. It's a deliberate act of betrayal. It's a disloyalty and a breach of trust.

[15:11] Treason. Rick Warren calls Christian fundamentalism an enemy of the 21st century. He's against it.

He's against Christian fundamentalism. And in the context, he's talking about the five fundamentals, which are the obvious fundamentals of the faith. It's treason. Treason.

Treason. Treason. The popular church mocks the biblical command to be separate. You know, I've had occasion where people have said that to me.

Oh, I suppose you believe in be you separate. That's how he said it. He was serious. As if it's some kind of joke.

As if, oh, that's not something we believe anymore. I've crossed that one out of my Bible. It's a biblical command to be ye separate.

[16:09] And yet, today we're seeing a compromise, a spirit of compromise with sin. An indifference to Bible truth. A wanting acceptance by the world.

And a prevailing ungodliness. Why is it we have so very little persecution here in Australia's churches? Why is it so persecution?

Because persecution comes when Christians are actually disciples. The fake Christians won't be persecuted. In fact, likely, it'll be the false brethren who will mock our strong stand for the faith.

Friends, we are in dire need of a revival of the faith, of the power of the early church. and to see as Matthew 5, 11 says, that persecution is truly a blessing.

A blessing. Not something to be afraid of or shy away from. Persecution is meant to be normal. It's normal that we are persecuted as Bible believers.

[17:20] We should expect it and count it a privilege. In 2 Timothy 3, 12 it says, Yea, and all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

It's guaranteed. Persecution. It relates to being pursued, put to flight, oppressed or harassed. That's the meaning of it.

it's meant to be a normal part of Christian living. And in times of old we read accounts of where God's people's faith was strong, where they weren't afraid to stand, no matter what the opposition. For example, a quote, salvationists. We're not talking about the modern variety. Salvationists, they were roped, punched, kicked, spat on and pelted.

with ships, rockets and burning sulfur, while entire gangs of hundreds, even up to thousands, rallied to stop the little holy band.

[18:31] But the army marched into town anyways, covered in slime, but not ashamed. Kneeling in the centre of the town, they lifted up their battle cry, Lord Jesus in your name, we claim this city for God.

And then they got up to take it, regardless of circumstances. End quote. Men and women of old used to stand and be counted.

And friends, we too, if we can only walk in the will of God, we will go through persecution. The Lord Jesus tells us in John 15, if the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

Because you're not of the world, the world hates you. Because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

[19:51] We're living in perilous times, perilous times. Will we be willing to stand out rather than fit in? Will we be of the world?

Or will we offer up spiritual sacrifices sacrifices? Persecution is on the increase today. We don't see it so much in our land, but Christianity is becoming increasingly unpopular.

It's not cool. Come on. It's not the cool thing anymore. It never really was. It's not trendy to be a Bible believing Christian.

And people rant against the Christians. We see that in the media. We see that in the popular press. People rant. against the Christians. They paint them. They label them as bigots, as right-wing fascists, as extremists, as fundamentalists.

And Biblical Christianity is becoming a crime. At least in the sense that it's becoming something that's distasteful.

[20:58] Something that's looked down upon, that's scorned and laughed at. that. We are truly what you would call a persecuted minority group.

The Bible believe in Christians. And friends, we see that in Daniel's day of the three Hebrew children. Three Hebrew teenagers, they were given a choice.

Bow or burn? Bow or burn? Which will it be? the Lord was with them in the fire. The Lord Jesus, he was with them and Jesus is still in the fire.

He's still in the fire for you. The Lord Jesus is our sustainer. And are you willing to be living sacrifices? Are you willing to offer up spiritual sacrifices?

Are you willing to abide the refiner's fire? The refiner's fire. You know, it sounds all quite theoretical, I suppose, in this world, in this life that we live, when we really have got very little challenge that faces us today.

[22:10] But friends, I want to urge you, beloved, today, prepare for a fiery trial. Get ready.

Get ready. In 1 Peter 4 it says, Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice in so much as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad, also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you, on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

So when they're mocking Christ, they're mocking you as a Christian, really, God has been glorified. God has been glorified. It goes on, verse 16, yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.

We can see that in history there's a correlation between the fires of persecution and true revival. They go together.

[23:31] Persecution and revival. And persecution is actually a benefit. It's actually a benefit to us. Why? Because it wakens us to duty. It wakens us to pray, to fast, to praise, to take time to take a Sabbath, to hold fast the Word of God, to stewardship.

It wakes us up. These are spiritual disciplines. They don't come easy. They're spiritual sacrifices. As we pray, as we praise, as we hold the Word of God, as we give, we're called to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

And friends, I want to urge you, urge you, one and all, to consider how can I offer up spiritual sacrifices in my life?

How can I be that one who will give to that which I value, my love, not out of compulsion, but in a true spiritual sacrifice, willingly, using our treasure, using our talent, and trusting our lives, offering up spiritual sacrifices?

Let it be that you will be willing to be a living sacrifice, that your whole life becomes an offering unto Him. How do we get ready for this persecution?

[24:51] Learn God's truth. Hide God's Word in your heart. Meditate on it. Study the Word of God. Memorise God's Word. We see that in many cultures where the Christians were persecuted, what do they do?

They take their Bibles away. The Bible becomes scarce. It's hard to get a hold of in persecuted lands. So we need to hide the Word of God in our hearts.

Let me leave you with three Ps about persecution. Three Ps about persecution. Firstly, persecution prompts us to pray.

Persecution prompts us to lean on our Lord and His stream. In Colossians 4 verse 2 it says, continue in prayer and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

Prayer is something that will help you when the persecution comes. Learn to pray, learn to develop that intimacy with God, that relationship, that continual presence of God that you're aware of.

[26:02] It includes fasting at times. Prayer, it changes us. Persecution prompts us to pray. Secondly, persecution leads us to praise.

In 1 Peter 1 verse 7 it says that the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

The trial of your faith, much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise, and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Persecution leads us to praise. It actually glorifies God. And thirdly, persecution brings purity, a purity to our faith.

Where is the church most purified? Where it is most persecuted. Persecution brings a purity like as of gold to our faith.

[27:11] How are we to prepare? How are we to be able to go through this fire? By faith. By faith. Paul commended the Philippians for their sacrifice and service of their faith.

In Philippians 2 verse 17. It's when the storm comes that the disciples cry out on the turbulent scene. They cry out, Lord, save us, we perish.

Will we cry out in faith? When persecution comes, cry out in faith. Cry out in faith. Spurgeon said this, faith increases in quality, assurance and intensity the more it is exercised with tribulation.

Faith is precious and its trial is precious too. I'll repeat that. Faith increases in quality, assurance and intensity the more it is exercised with tribulation.

Faith is precious and its trial is precious too. friends, I put it to you, I earnestly believe for every Christian in some measure your faith will be tested.

[28:29] Your faith will be tested. Your faith will be tried and will be sent into a place of fire.

Will it be found precious? Will it be found faith that is precious as of pure gold? I urge you as citizens of heaven, be light and be soul where you live and work and go about your day by day. Be light and be soul. And in the coming persecution learn to love one another, help one another and encourage one another as we see the day approaching, as we prepare for the coming persecution. Pray for strength, pray for guidance, pray for boldness, pray for God to make you faithful through whatever lies ahead.

Memorise God's word. Determine to memorise God's word. Give thanks, rejoice and be glad.

[29:41] And offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Philippians 1 29 it says, For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer for his sake.

Friends, I don't know how long we'll have freedom in this land. I believe it's reducing, I believe the times are changing.

Who knows what the new year ahead will bring. Will it mean we'll have to stand and be counted? I think it will whatever happens anyway. And I just urge you one moment of all to stand strong for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word is truth and your saints are here tonight. Saints of the living God.

Lively stones, a holy priesthood, a spiritual temple, offering up spiritual sacrifices. Lord, may they be acceptable unto you by Jesus Christ.

[31:02] May our lives be a spiritual sacrifice, a living sacrifice. May we find whatever challenges faces, whatever trials our faith has to go through, that it will be found to come forth as gold, pure, precious, stronger because of what we've been through.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in persecuted lands, that this is not just some message that we can theorise about persecution, but it's a practical reality for them.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in chains, imprisoned, some tortured, some brutally hurt, hurt, some put to death in slow and agonising ways, simply because they love you, and they will not turn away.

We pray, Lord, that we'll learn from their boldness and bravery. Help us, Lord, to be in their number, that we might likewise bring praise and glory and honour to you.

We love you, Lord, we praise you. Help us to find ways to be offering up spiritual sacrifices in these days that you give us for your glory, we pray.

[32:38] Amen. CONGRATIST Thank you.