

Standing Firm Together in the Face of Opposition | Ezra 4:6-16

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daley preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living. We're delighted to share this sermon with you. Well, welcome everyone. Yes, by popular demand, we have added notes to your notes.

So as many of you know, I always have a lot of notes for you guys, but if you feel you want to take your own notes, we do have that now. So I think it was when Tom Greco came to visit, he wrote all over his notes.

He's like, I'm running out of room, Pastor. We got to have something on here. So I know moving forward, we'll have something, we'll have those available for you on there. So it's really good to be here with all of you today.

And we are going to continue from our biblical exposition of the book of Ezra. If you want to go ahead and open your Bibles, it's going to be Ezra chapter four, verses six through 16.

[1 : 10] And this last week, we began chapter four. This is where the adversaries, right? They came in and they tried to stop the progress from what the people of God were doing.

Remember, the people of God had rebuilt the altar and they were laying the foundation of the temple. And this is where adversaries were coming in and they were trying to just be a disruption. And the leaders of the people of God, they were saying, you know what, we don't, I understand you guys are offering help, but we don't want anything to do with you because you guys are against us. So we went over that.

In the ending of verses four through five in Ezra chapter four, it was showing us that the adversaries, right? It says the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah.

Made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus and even until the reign of King Darius, the King of Persia.

[2 : 06] So that's a long time to be discouraged. And this is leading us today. The adversaries, they're continuing. They're going at one step further. And we're going to see that they wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes.

And they were focusing on doing basically everything that they could to stop the rebuilding of the temple. And I know that for many of us, we probably had a season in our life where it seems like people were stopping at nothing to stop progress that was being made.

I know that a lot of us can relate to something like this. So there's a lot of really good spiritual truths and things that we can learn from today and things that we can apply to our own lives.

And it's important for us to open God's word and say, God, how are you going to speak to us today as a congregation and as a church? And so again, when we're looking at these adversaries, they were trying to divide and to discourage.

That doesn't happen to us today, does it? It happens all the time, right? Right, and these people are going so far that they're writing a letter to people who are in authority, to those in higher political powers, and they're making an accusation.

[3 : 14] They are blatantly lying to stop the progress that's being made. And it's in verses like this, it can be very discouraging when you're reading something like this. When you're looking at these verses, you're like, okay, there's these people who are enemies of God, and yet they're trying to stop anything that's happening.

In verses like this, it's important for us to go over because there are things we can observe, things that we can learn, and things that we can apply to our own lives. And so before we go any further, I wanna offer this time, this sermon, this time together to God.

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to be with us, to reveal truth to us, to open our minds and our hearts to the truth. So let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for just giving us the time and the chance for us to gather today. As we are continuing in this sermon series through the book of Ezra, we pray that we can learn these lessons. We can see the clear observations and the clear lessons. We ask that you make your word easy to understand for all of us, and that you speak to every single one of us in your own divine power.

[4 : 23] We know that there are people who are new to the faith and those who have grown up in the faith. We ask that your word speaks to each and every person today.

And we know that sometimes we find passages in scripture, Father, that's difficult for us. We know that sometimes evil sometimes comes in our lives and sometimes evil will do whatever they can to stop progress that's happening, or a trajectory that we may have in Christ.

We pray, Father, that you will give us wisdom, clarity, and insight that we can have in our own lives. Help us to live out the truth that comes from your word, especially when we are dealing with adversity, especially when people who are against us are playing dirty or they're blatantly lying or they're slandering.

Whatever it may be, may we remain rooted in you. May we place our trust and confidence more so in you.

Send down your spirit, Father, to stir our hearts, to be like an oak tree that's rooted in you, not like a mushroom. But may we balance grace, the love that comes from you and the truth that comes from your words.

[5 : 33] It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray and we all say together, amen. And so in Ezra chapter four verses six through 16, I mentioned in verse six, right?

You're seeing in here, in the beginning of his reign, ahas sehrus, I hope I got that right, right? It says they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

You know as Christians, it's important for us to know we need to focus on the things that matter most and that is our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Focusing on his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

From the moment that we believe in the Lord, we are saved and in turn we are called to be on a path to live and to love like Jesus Christ. We're not called to remain stagnant, we're called to grow in Christ.

Learning about what it means to be a Christian and what it means to implement prayerful habits.

And well, it's a path of spiritual growth much like how we are constantly growing.

[6 : 37] And this is a path, right? We realize that as we are growing, we're putting our faith and trust in God even more because God will continue to work in and through our lives all of the days of our lives.

We are a work in progress my friends. God's always gonna work on us. God calls us to live out our faith actively like I said, not to be stagnant in it. It's an act of faith that we integrate in our everyday lives.

And in this walk with Christ and in our growth in Christ, many of us, we might think the path will be perfect. Well, that's incorrect.

Has it been the perfect path for you in Christ? In fact, there's gonna be seasons where there's gonna be trials and tribulations in our lives. There'll be times in our lives where people will flat out oppose us.

It might be your friends, it might even be your family. And how unfortunate is it when we go through those accusations or those adversities, you would think that in finding Jesus Christ and finding new life in him, you wanna share that and you share it with them and people are like, no, thank you.

[7 : 47] And it's very unfortunate when that happens. And so we find that in our own spiritual walk, you don't have to raise your hand, but I'm sure that all of us at one point have faced opposition in our own faith.

Maybe even there have been people in your life that have been unfair to you. And they've gotten dirty, so to speak. And I don't mean playing in the mud.

I mean, they've done things that are like, man, I just wanna fight you, but I can't, right? I gotta remain in Christ. In the Word of God, there are so many scenarios and there's so many stories where there are people that try to stop the people of God.

People trying to stop the prophets, the apostles, and even Christ himself, let's not forget that. So many times in scripture we see this. And these lessons, right, it's scattered throughout God's Word and it shows us in times such back then, same thing even today, right?

Does opposition only exist in the Bible? Or does it exist even in our own lives today? We've faced that. And so we're seeing here, look, I am convinced that when we're looking at chapter four here and the adversaries are opposing the rebuilding of the temple, they were going to try to infiltrate the will of God, what God had divinely planned for these people, or at least to get them to stop the project, right?

[9 : 20] Placing doubt or fear in their minds. And what is happening here in verse six is it's intensifying, right? We know in verse five, right, the bribing of the counselor, the frustration, the discouragement that's happened and continuing in that.

In the verse six, they go so far as to reach out to those in political authority. That's a very, very scary thing when you think about.

It shows that the adversaries, they wrote an accusation against God. So the adversaries, right, they, you see later on in verse seven through 11, there is a list of people that are opposing, so it wasn't just one person writing a letter, it was a group of people, so let's go into verse seven here.

In the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlum and Mithrideth and Tabil and the rest of their associates wrote to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. The letter was written in Aramaic and translated.

Rehom the commander and Shemshai, the scribe, wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes. The king as follows, Rehom the commander, it goes on and on, right, the Persians, the men of Erech, the Babylonians, the men of Susa and the Elamites and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnepar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province beyond the river.

[10 : 46] And so what you're seeing, you'll see it in your notes in here, right, that the adversaries wrote the accusation and there's specific people and I wanna take a moment here. There's one person that really, really sticks out to me in this.

If you have your Bible open, I want you to turn real quick. Go to Ezra chapter one, verse eight. So if you remember back in the beginning, right, the Lord stirred the heart of King Cyrus and the people of God.

In verse eight, you see here, and this is kind of the most significant person that you're seeing betrayal happen here. So it says here in chapter one, verse eight, Cyrus the king of Persia brought these out of charge of who?

Myth or death, right, the treasurer who counted them out of Shespazar, the prince of Judah. And then you go back into Ezra chapter four, verse seven, and you see there is myth or death again. But this time, that's like you see on the slide here, once for the people of God and now against the people of God and I wonder what happened. We don't really know what happened, but certainly something happened to the point where they ended up, this person ended up going against the people of God.

[12 : 04] And that's one person who really stands out to me, right? Someone who was there under King Cyrus who helped return the vessels with the return of God's people, but now they're against it.

And so you see there's judges and governors, people who are opposing this and you have people who are in positions of political power, people groups who are coming against the people of God. That doesn't happen today, does it? It doesn't happen at all. This is a historical thing that happened and we have no idea what that's like. Well, my friends, we should open our eyes a little bit, not to say you guys are all sleeping, but it's to say that it does happen today as it happened back then, that there are people groups.

And unfortunately there are even politicians that are against it. I'm not gonna name call anyone, that would be unwise to do. But I'm sure we can think with our mind for a second that there are people that are people groups, those who are in power.

And in all of this, it reminds me of how Ezra is speaking of the people of the lands, the people of the world against the people of God. You'll notice, and you don't have to turn there, but earlier in Ezra, it was talking about how the people of God began building, but yet even though they were building,

they were afraid of the people of the lands, which is language, which is talking about the people in the world, what we would call worldly people.

[13:30] And isn't that very interesting? You have the people of God and the people of the lands. And so even in scripture, there's this distinction. So this letter was written, it's this accusation.

Now these adversaries, let's go into verse 11 onwards. So you're seeing in here, it says this is the copy of the letter that they sent to our Xerxes the king.

And it says, your servants, the men of the province beyond the river. Now, beyond the river is a phrase that refers to, beyond the Euphrates River, which would include Judah.

So just a little fun note right there. So the adversaries are saying, okay, let's go in here. It says, be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have gone to Jerusalem.

What are they, what does it say? What are the adversaries saying the people of God are doing? It says they're rebuilding what? That rebellious and wicked city. You don't wait just a minute.

[14:32] That's a lie. But that's what they're saying. They're saying, oh, King Artaxerxes, you haven't been around enough. I need to tell you what these people have done. They're wicked and they're rebellious here, right? And it says they're finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.

Now, be it known to the king that if the city is rebuilt and the walls finish, they will not pay tribute custom. The toll or even the royal revenue will be impaired. So they're saying they're not gonna pay their taxes.

They're not gonna pay their fair share to the government. And so verse 14 here, now this is a funny thing. I think we have that. Do I have an image of salt by chance?

Let's go, yeah. So yeah, it says in verse 14, now this is a kind of a funny image because God has a fun sense of humor. It says in verse 14, now because we eat salt of the palace, are they literally eating salt from the palace?

Well, no, right? It's saying that, let's go on. Because we eat the salt of the palace, it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor because they benefit from the king, okay?

[15:35] So although it's quite a funny image to imagine the king maybe giving you salt packets or something, that's not what's being said here. And I love when sometimes you read things, you're like, well, what in the world does that mean?

So I put this image of salt here in front of some sort of, that's not real. It's just a made up image, right? But the idea here is, right, because we're benefiting, right?

They're speaking of their loyalty to the king because we receive protection or because we receive benefits from the king, we wanted to let you know of what's going on. I was like, oh, you wanted to tattle.

You wanted to bend the truth in such a way where it's benefiting the adversaries and not the people of God. So they're saying, you know, because we're loyal, king, we want to let you know, these are what these people are doing.

We want to let the king know now. So they're calling on, so it goes on, verse 15, in order that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers, you will find in the book of the records and learn that this city is a rebellious city hurtful to kings and provinces and that sedition was stirred up in it of old.

[16:45] That is why the city was laid to waste. We'll see later on what has to do with the records, but basically they're speaking the truth, but they're pointing the blame on the people of God.

That's the idea there. We make known to the king that if this city, verse 16, if this city is rebuilt and its walls are finished, you will have no possession in the province beyond the river.

And so they're saying, king, go look at the records. And one thing you also have to notice is, these people are so wicked and rebellious that if the temple is rebuilt, they're gonna have control, not you, king.

And you see the problem here, that these are all blatant lies that are happening here. And it would basically mean a direct threat to the king. And so with all this in mind, we have to think, well, what can we learn from these verses?

In all of this, it's a dark theme for us, letter being written against the people of God. Like, what in the world can I learn from that? That's very discouraging, that's very disheartening. And maybe you can think of a time where maybe a letter or something that has been put out in public, a decree even, to stop the people of God.

[17 : 53] Maybe you can identify with something like this. The first lesson that we can learn is the power of influence and opposition. Words and influence can be powerful tools for both good and evil, right?

That's the first lesson. We see that the adversaries, the letters, it shows the power of their words, right? The power of influence rhetoric as it were. And it can have a profound impact, right? We think of politicians or kings or pastors, they have influence on people. Well, sometimes you may have the opposite effect, right? Where if you're writing a letter to your mayor, right? Or I'm going to write the governor, or I'm going to call a governor. It's something like that that's happening. So it can have a profound impact on politicians, those who are in positions of power. And words can be powerful tools that can be used for good or for bad. And unfortunately in this situation, we can see a time where it's used for evil and not good. And that's something that we have to remember. I'm reminded in Proverbs, you don't have to turn there, it's on your notes.

[18 : 53] Proverbs 18, verse 21, it's a famous verse that says, death and life are in the power of the tongue. And those who love it will eat its fruit. And so all this is to say that words and influence can be used for good or for evil, right?

And we can see this in the political sphere. We can see this about even the words that we say to people. Are you speaking words that are good to people that help edify, that help encourage or empower people to come to know the Lord?

Or do you do the opposite? It's the same question with politicians. And it's just right there in scripture that we can see. The second thing is facing unfair accusations.

It says, as believers, we may face unjust accusations, but we must remain true to God's word and maintain our integrity. The big lesson here is that people will fail us, right?

God is perfect, God is light, He is truth. But how often do people fail us, right? We're all sinners, right? Does anybody here perfect, raise your hand, right?

[19 : 58] I hope none of you raise your hand there. But the idea is that, look, this is a scenario, right? We can learn that there may be a time in your life where you face an unjust accusation.

There may be a time in your life where there's some sort of spiritual attack. And my friends, if you haven't experienced it, you probably will face a similar scenario.

The people of God, they face this accusations from this letter, this using political influence to bend the truth and to fit it into a narrative, making the people of God appear rebellious and wicked.

I hope nobody's ever had a letter like that written about them, right? But we've had our own battles, as it were. And something we can learn, we can see that for us as Christians, there will be times where we will face an accusation or a spiritual attack, as it were.

It's just reality, look. And even in the case of Mithredeth, that was someone who betrayed the people of God. That's always disheartening, right?

[21 : 03] When you find in scripture someone that was with the people of God or with, I mean, think of Judas even, right? Someone who was with the disciples.

And yet betrayal happens. So you see that in scripture. It's important for us that when an accusation or a spiritual attack happens, we are to remain true into the Word of God.

We are to remain as people of the Lord. Even in times of trial, even in times of tribulation, we stay rooted.

In fact, that's time where we place our trust in God even more so, knowing that God's going to be with us no matter what accusation or what trial or what temptation or tribulation comes through your life.

Now one thing I want you to remember here is even though it's a discouraging letter for us to read, right? We must remember something, and I want to make it very clear, that even though man may write against the people of God or may do actions against the people of God, God will have his will be done.

[22 : 13] God will intervene and he will see to it that he fulfills his promises. And it will happen one way or another. And Ezra, this book is a wonderful example.

We're just at the part where it seems like, man, it seems hopeless. It seems like the project stopped and we're done. But we continue on and we'll see what's going to happen. So even with the accusation, even with the discouragement, the halting of the building of the temple that happens at the end, right, verses 17 to 23, we're not even going there, but there's the halting, the stopping of

the project, right?

It's humans, people will try to stop the will of God. But look, it won't stop what God has planned for your life, for the church, for the people of God.

And that's comforting words to know. I know in my own story, there have been times where people have tried to stop me and people have said, I'm going to tell you a story years ago.

I've been interested in serving in ministry for many years. And when I first began, this was about 2014, 2015, I met a pastor who we really hit it off.

[23 : 31] We really got to know one another. And unfortunately, he said, well, because you don't have children, you can't be a pastor. Now, that was unfortunately, and I'm not giving names.

It's the story. It's the lesson here. And at that time, I did not have children. And I remember the discouraging words that I heard. I thought, well, then are you saying that your interpretation of the scripture is you must have children to be a pastor?

For him, it was yes. And that was a discouraging moment in my life. And I thought, well, what am I to do? And I contacted some men of God that I really trust.

And I said, is this accurate? No, it's not accurate. But I remember at that moment, being in that moment, being so discouraged and thinking, maybe this guy's right.

And had I listened to him, I wouldn't be where I'm at today. And it required, I still remember that to this day. But I use it as a reminder not to forget that what man may do will not stop the will of God in your life.

[24 : 43] I want to make that very clear. Because when we're reading this, it's like, this is horrible. They will reap what they sow. That's a reminder for us.

And so going back here, I'm reminded of 1 Peter chapter 3, 16, which speaks of those who slander to you. That should be in your notes. 1 Peter 3, 16, which says to have a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, they're not saying if you're slandered, they're saying when you're slandered.

That's a hard one. Those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. That's something to remember. We are to remain rooted in Christ and not get down and dirty with them.

And I know that's so difficult for us. It's a call for us to stand firm in the word of God and in righteousness, even when there's a letter. Or even if there's spiritual tax or words of discouragement or frustration in your life, we have to trust in God's provision, in God's justice, and remain having a clear conscience.

And as believers, again, we may even be in a season where we're facing unjust accusations. We remain true in God's word and maintain our integrity in Christ.

[25 : 58] Can I get an amen with that? The third one is human interference in God's work, despite human efforts to interfere with God's plans, his purposes will fail?

No. What's it say? They will ultimately prevail, amen? And you see that all of these lessons are all connected. This letter to the king is an effort by a man, by people, to interfere with the work of God. Do you see what's happening here? They're making their efforts to try to stop the trajectory. But what God had prophesized, that there would be the rebuilding of the temple, it's going to happen, even if you adversaries, people who oppose the people of God are going to try.

And that's what we're seeing in here. Despite the fact that man may try to stop the plan of God, man's plan will fail compared to God's. That is why you seek God and ask God to guide you in your plans.

How many of us have tried to do it on our own? And how many of us, when we're following God's will, we see all these crazy things happen, right? That's a testimony to this.

[27 : 12] When these bad events happen very often, right? You may have this question. Well, with these bad events that happen, some people may ask the question, why didn't the people of God fight back?

Why didn't they push back and say, you know what, we're not going to tolerate this. We're going to do what we have to do. Well, with this, the accusation from the adversaries is saying that the people of God are wicked and rebellious.

That's actually a very smart accusation to say. Is that, hey, these people are God, they're up to no good. So it's kind of a much more difficult situation to be in.

So that's a lot more complicated. In Acts chapter 5, verse 29, it says that we must obey God rather than man. Highlight that or circle that in your notes.

We must obey God rather than men or man. When something happens like this, we stand firm and we stand together. And certainly, we can speak out against.

[28 : 19] But to get down and dirty, especially in this scenario, don't do it. That's just the lesson we learn here. The accusation from these adversaries, it's saying they're rebellious.

What a horrible thing to say for the people of God. And so let us remember that despite human efforts, God's plan will ultimately prevail. And so in all of this, we learn about the letter.

We see that there are lessons. And then the question always comes up. And then, well, how do I apply this to my life? How do I live these verses out?

I realize that in reading these verses, it can be difficult, especially if you're going through a season like that, or you've been through one and you remember it. Just like how I gave you this story, it's hard for me to talk about it because I was hurt at that time.

So it can be very difficult. And perhaps you have been through a scenario like this where someone has tried to slander your name, or perhaps you have gone through a time where you've had to wait on the Lord, asking God for patience, or asking God, let me steward my money better.

[29 : 31] I have a funny story with that. So true story. So I was up a few years ago. I was up at a restaurant. I was doing a Zoom call.

And I had \$15 to my name. I thought I'll get something to drink. I'll get maybe a little snack or something while on this Zoom call. The soda was like \$3.

That's common now. I know that's a little more expensive. But I ordered a side of French fries. It was \$9. And I was expecting.

I was thinking for a second. Oh, man. I thought, what are you trying to teach me, God? And I remember I asked this. And this was right before it was a Bible study. It was a Zoom Bible study. It was right before the Bible study.

God, what are you trying to teach me? I'm out of money. I thought I was going to spend \$5, maybe \$6, and have some money left over. Give them a nice little tip. Guess what the lesson was about.

[30 : 32] Take a wild guess. It was talking about being rich in the eyes of God, having spiritual wealth and how money doesn't matter.

We should focus on true wealth from God. I cannot make this up. It even went over the parable where it says it's easier for the needle, right?

It's easier for the camel to go through an eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. You want to know a fun fact about that in that the whole takeaway from that Bible lesson is the needle's eye is actually a place to get into Jerusalem.

And that verse has actually been misconstrued to attack people with wealth. But it's talking about leaving all you have behind to enter into the kingdom of heaven. That is a very different.

And look it up sometime. It's called the needle's eye. And it's a small little space to enter Jerusalem. So it can be very easily concluded that when Christ is talking about the eye of the needle, he's talking about that small space to get in there.

[31 : 39] And I say all of this because the Bible is wild, right? There's many lessons that we can learn. And just as I learned that lesson with the \$9 French fries, and I'm never doing that again, so too may we be going through a situation where we're reading about letters, slanderous attacks, or discouragement, or frustrations in our walk with the Lord.

Maybe you've even had someone who's betrayed you, someone who's been very close to you, who's slandered your name. And that's something we have to remember. And look, these are many lessons we can apply for our lives. So I want you to think for a moment.

So what can we apply? First thing comes up. Consider your words and influence. Consider the words that you say and the influence that you have on other people.

As I mentioned before, in Proverbs chapter 18 verse 21, death and life are in the power of the tongue. James chapter 3 verse 5 says that the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire. Oh man, setting ablaze a fire, it's like starting a forest fire as it were. You have to be mindful of the words that you say.

[32 : 51] Let us consider, let us evaluate the words that we say to people, but also the influence that we have on others. It can be used for good. It can be used for evil. You would be surprised, the profound amount of influence that you have upon people.

And I'm talking your friends, your family, people in the community. Some people, they might go to the same restaurant every week. And the waitress remembers your order, right? Or you go to the same coffee place.

Or you go to, you, you, you, you, you, we're creatures of habit, right? You do the same thing over and over. People remember your name. Well, those small interactions can have a profound impact. That's, that's an everyday thing.

Well, maybe every week thing that happens. It can be even people you interact with at school or at work or, you know, people, if you run a store or whatever, just be reminded to be an ambassador for Christ and what you say and what you do.

Don't be like the adversaries, right? That's another way of saying it. Don't be like the adversaries who use their words and their influence for evil to manipulate people, to do evil, to blatantly lie.

[33 : 59] Rather, instead of deception and manipulation, let us speak truth and deal in the grace of God with others. Isn't it interesting?

The opposite of grace and truth is hatred and lies, or one opposite you can think of. Or in this case, it would be deception and manipulation.

Isn't that interesting? Let's not be people that speak or act death. Let's not contribute to the darkness. Let's contribute to the light and the love of Jesus Christ.

And just imagine for a moment, you can have a very profound impact on people's lives. When you speak words of encouragement, sometimes you have to have hard discussions with them. I'm not saying it never happens, right?

When you speak the truth to people, you are exhibiting the light and the love and truth of Jesus Christ. The next one that comes up is to respond to unfair accusations with grace and truth.

[34 : 59] When facing unjust treatment, respond with integrity, integrity, integrity, and trust in God's justice. And that's easier said than done.

I realize that. When people mistreat you, or they accuse you, or they put you in that season of trial, very often, I think especially for us men, right?

For us people. Sometimes we have the urge to fight back. It's easy to respond with an eye for an eye, as it were. But how difficult is it for us to respond with integrity, to respond with patience, and with grace, and with truth, and knowing that this person, I'm hopefully not pointing at anybody here, that a person who's done wrong, they're going to reap what they sow, right?

And we may have to wait for it to pan out. We may have to wait for that to happen. I remember my father used to always tell me a story about, there was someone who would basically do the wrong thing for years, never got caught, and then one day.

No longer had a job. I'm trying to make it very vague, because I don't want to give too much info on that story. But it's the lesson there. They will reap what they sow. And so in moments such as these, right, when we're learning what's happening, we have the urge to fight back or to retaliate, it doesn't mean that we retreat, though.

[36 : 32] I want to make that very clear, because some people think, well, what? I just need to stand there and take it? I'm not saying retreat. In fact, when we're talking about standing firm, you stand firm together with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It doesn't mean that we stop the trajectory of doing good in the name of Christ. We continue doing what we're doing, even in times and seasons of trials. It means that we double down.

It means that we trust in God, and we pray. We pray, and we respond in truth, grace, and integrity. And certainly, we can speak out.

We can stand firm, and we can stand together. This is not a call for us to retreat. It's neither a call for us to retaliate, though. That's difficult to do.

It's a time for us to trust in God, and His timing, and His justice. Let us be reminded that when people do evil to us, they will reap what they sow. Romans 12, 9, beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine.

[37 : 37] I will repay, says the Lord. Now, often, do we say vengeance is mine. We'd rather say that, right? But in the scriptures, we see that God's got this.

He'll take care of that. The next one is navigate political interference with wisdom. The third thing we can apply to our lives is I'm not endorsing a candidate up here.

I want to make that very clear. I'm not saying you should be conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat when I'm saying this. I'm merely saying that when the government or kingdom or

politician or king interferes with the work of ministry, we can still stand firm in the Word of God. We can pray for divine intervention to happen. We stand firm in faith, knowing that we trust in God's timing. I can't help but think of what's happened a few years ago when things were shut down. That was a season of waiting for many of us. It was not the easiest thing to do. And I'm sure when the people of God were discouraged, they probably argued and debated on how to respond. [38 : 44] But what we can think of here, we continue, we pray to the Lord. We have to navigate through that when that happens. And for us Christians, we trust in the living God, who never fails us.

We don't trust in the people of the land as the verse has been saying. We must be discerning. And in any situation, even when it comes to our own convictions, we ask God for wisdom and how to stand in faith.

What does that look like? Because how it might look like for me may be different for you and the next person. That's another thing to consider. We have to find a way to continue to worship the living God.

That's the big reason why when we think of the church, we think of the body of Christ, the people. I know we like to come together in a building.

That is certainly a place where we come together. But in times where we can't, we're still the body of Christ, even when we are scattered. And so ladies and gentlemen, throughout history of Christianity, Christians have been persecuted.

[39 : 47] The Bible has been outlawed. People have been thrown in prison and even died for being a Christian. And I pray that this never happens. I pray that whatever trial or tribulation or with the government ever intervenes and tries to stop the progress, you may respond appropriately.

Stand firm in faith against pressure, but also maintain respect and wisdom from God, amen. These are hard. I know. I know. Next one. Trust God during times of delay.

Instant ramen noodles. Amazon two-day delivery. They even have two-hour delivery. Drones can fly by and drop things off at your house.

Some of us may remember the days when you had to go and rent a movie. You go to Blockbuster. You go to the local movie rental place. And you hope that you can find Jurassic Park.

And they don't have it. They said, sorry, we only had five. And you're like, man, well, now what am I going to watch on a Friday night?

[40 : 56] You had to wait. And unfortunately, when we think of streaming services and whatnot, we have access to all the videos in the world. But that's actually not true. There's times they remove titles because they feel like it.

So there's waiting even in the digital age to think of. We live in this culture where there's instant ramen noodles and instant gratification. It's a way of life. And I hope you don't eat that much instant ramen noodles.

But you get the idea, right? Fast delivery, unlimited entertainment, fast food, fast-paced life. But what happens when we need to wait? We don't like it. It can be very difficult in the waiting, even waiting for a trial to end or waiting on the Lord to respond.

It can be difficult for us. But let us remember, it may be an attempt by man to stop God. But God will intervene in His timing.

And I know that's very hard for many of us, especially when we're being exposed to the endless screens and scrollings of our time. It's very difficult now.

[41 : 57] Wasn't that difficult 10 years ago? And wasn't that difficult even 10 years before that? But that's the life that we live in today. We trust in God's timing.

We use times such as this to remain in the Lord, to pray to the Lord, to ask God for strength.

Sometimes the best things are worth waiting for. We have to remember that. Sometimes I don't want instant ramen noodles. I'd rather have nice, prepared ramen noodles at that point.

And I'm sure that the people of Ezra, they were waiting. They're like, wait a minute. Wait, wait a minute. God, we just traveled all this way, and we were building the temple, and we were doing our services, and now we have to stop again.

What gives? That's a natural response to think about. That's like if the government ordered for us to no longer attend services again.

[42 : 52] That would be a very equivalent, very natural thing to think. I'm saying all this because the people of God were afraid, discouraged, and rightfully so. Let us be reminded of what the Word

of God says in Isaiah 40, 31.

They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. So all this to say, my friends, be patient.

Trust in God during times of delay. You'll be amazed at what God will reveal to you when you wait. That's the wonderful thing. Encourage one another in times of trial.

This is an important thing. We are to encourage one another in times such as this, in times of trial, in times of tribulation, in times of waiting or difficult days.

We are to encourage one another in the faith. I want you to think for a moment. When you hear a lot of people say, you need to stand firm in the faith, don't stand firm alone. Stand firm together.

[43 : 54] Stand together with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Because how often, I think think of the adversaries. They wanted to divide. How often does spiritual attack happen when being separated from our friends and family, being alone?

We stand firm together. So the next time you hear stand firm in the faith, think for a moment. I want to stand firm together with my brothers and sisters in Christ, knowing that they're beside me, that they're with me in battle as it were.

And I mentioned last week the concept of the bundle of sticks, right, being hard to break. We are stronger together. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 24 through 25, let us consider how to stir up one another in love and good works, not neglecting to meet one another, encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

First Thessalonians 5:11, therefore, encourage one another and build up one another. The next slide is persevere through opposition, remain committed to God's work, and grow in faith during trials.

And this is an interesting one. When we get discouraged, very often we don't want to continue doing the work we've been doing. Very often we kind of want to just stop.

[45 : 13] But think about this. We remain committed to God during times, right? We remain in the Lord. And the work that God has set for us, don't ever give up. Continue to seek God and His guidance and His strength.

God knows your heart, and He knows what you're going through. And I think of the famous James, right? Count it all joy when you meet trials. Galatians 6, 9, let us not grow weary of doing good.

For in due season, we will reap if we do not give up. It's a call for us to continue, even if that may look different for us, right?

Just as these adversaries are going to reap what they sow for the evil that they have done, we will reap the good harvest for what we have sown in Christ. It's not to say you're saved by what you do. You're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But you're called to do work. Many of you know Ephesians 2, verses 8 through 9. Look at the next verse, right? We are to, we are His workmanship, right?

[46 : 14] We are to do good because we've been saved by grace through faith. That's a great reminder for us. And so in all of this, let us be mindful of the words that we say and how we act in times of trial and tribulation.

Let us respond by remaining rooted in Christ by standing firm and standing together with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us navigate through whenever man or the government or authorities interfere in the work that we do for Christ.

And let us trust in God when any of this happens, or even in a time where you may be going through a trial like this. Let us be the body of Christ encouraging one another in all seasons of life. The good, the bad, and even when the ugly happens. Let us always remember to persevere through the end. Always remember that when you're saved by grace through faith, you have God on your side.

And when you have God on your side, there's nothing for you to fear. An opposition may take many forms, discouragement, letters, frustration.

[47 : 19] We can see that not only in history, through scripture, but in our own lives, there are moments where we faced opposition. We must stand firm in the faith, and we must ask God to lead and to guide us.

Let us pray that God will give us the ability to discern good from evil and know how to navigate in any sort of trial or tribulation that may come through our lives. Let us balance grace and truth,

seeking God's strength and wisdom, and facing any sort of opposition that may come into our life. Let us pray together. Gracious fathers, we close our time here today. We ask that you remain with us. May we realize and recognize that you are there with us in any sort of season of trial or tribulation or even opposition.

We pray that if we are currently experiencing opposition or any sort of adversary, we may respond appropriately by trusting you and remaining firm in the faith.

But may we also be encouraged by the body of Christ. Father, I pray that if anyone's going through a trial, you may give them strength, peace, and wisdom to act accordingly.

[48 : 32] And however long that may be, we pray that we always pray that that can be shortened. We pray that we can respond by using the words and our actions by influencing others for good and not for evil.

We pray that we may speak truth and not lies. We ask, Father, that you're with us in every season of our life, in our morning, in the evening, in our living, in our dying, in our laughter, and in our happiness.

Let us celebrate having you as the source of life, the truth that we trust and the God in whom we love. And Father, be with us as we sing this last song, everything.

You are everything that we need. We ask, you're always there with us. Be with us. We know that you're with us, even though we may not see it.

May we see that. May we know you're there with us. In every season of life, may we trust in you. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. And can I get an amen?

[49 : 37] Amen. Thank you for tuning in to the Ontario Community Church sermon podcast. For more about our church and how you can get involved or support our mission, please visit ontariocommunitychurch.org.

May God's blessings be with you.