

# The Sermon on the Mount #2

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Date: 09 January 2022

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Something happened 2,000 years ago. Something major. A pivotal event in history that was and is the biggest game-changer of all time.

Have you ever dropped a pebble in a steel pond and watched those concentric circles go out? On the outskirts of Jerusalem, something took place that rippled all the way out to Sydney, Australia, and has actually rippled throughout the entire world, permeating the 21st century.

That event? Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead. This was a miraculous event that completely defies the laws of nature, common knowledge, reasonable thinking, and goes against every lived experience and human understanding.

It's the linchpin that holds the Christian message together. No resurrection. Jesus was just another teacher or prophet who said and apparently did some amazing things.

But he's dead now. No message of hope without the resurrection. When you actually see someone destroyed, nailed to a cross, breathe their last breath, embalmed and laid in a tomb, and then three days later, you see them in a locked room, wind up eating fish with them by a lake, and hang out with them for 40 days, so there's no doubt.

[ 1 : 36 ] There's no more speculating or guessing. We don't reincarnate or cease to exist. We physically resurrect into a body that hasn't had its memory wiped, that is recognisable, a body that cannot be destroyed, and that will last forever.

Imagine seeing someone rise from the dead. It's jaw-dropping stuff. You're going to spend the rest of your life telling people about it, encouraging them, and warning them to be ready.

That all around us that we see, this isn't all there is. There is more to come. You wouldn't just feel obliged to tell people. There'd be a sense of urgency, as we don't know when Jesus will return, and we don't know when our time will be up.

If we really love and care about anyone at all, then we'd be telling them about what we know for certain. What happens next? We resurrect.

The resurrection turned weak-willed people who would cow down at the slightest hint of persecution into bold proclaimers of the gospel, ready to lay down their lives as they knew what would come back.

[ 2 : 55 ] that they would come back. And they didn't definitely make this story up and perpetuate some lie. Why would they die for a lie? You know the saying, YOLO, you only live once.

It's just not true. We live forever, and the gospel is good news that if we repent of our sin and trust in Jesus, we escape God's good and right judgment.

Do we realize that we deserve condemnation and the second death? By God's gracious gift, eternity awaits the faithful in the new creation, a forever kingdom which is completely upside down to the way in which the world currently lives.

What I've just said is the truth. This is not blind faith. We're invited to enter the Christian faith with eyes wide open.

We can use reason and logic and examine the historically compelling evidence. Yet for some in our current age and ever since the resurrection took place, this message is considered utter madness.

[ 4 : 04 ] What happens when the message is shared? Some people want to know more. Some rejoice and embrace it. And others seek to persecute, ridicule, and even attempt to completely silence and stamp out the message.

Last week, we began our summer series from the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus makes a pronouncement about the kingdom of God. Jesus invites us to be part of his long-awaited kingdom and instructs his followers about the nature of the kingdom life, detailing characteristics that are upside down to the world in which we live.

The Beatitudes, the beautiful attitudes, contrast Jesus' values and the values of the world. Jesus' values, poor in spirit, the world values, self-confident.

Those who mourn, self-indulge, seek pleasure. Those who are meek, those who are self-important and arrogant. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are self-reliant and proud. Those who are merciful, those who are self-righteous and unforgiving. Those who are pure in heart, those who are self-directed, libertines.

[ 5 : 29 ] Those who are self-governing, those who are peacemakers, those who are self-governing and hostile. Those who are persecuted because of righteousness, those who self-promote and are popular and seek to conform.

Now, while we just had the passage read to us about salt and light, being salt and light is one of the reasons we are persecuted. So I'm actually going to be emphasising the persecuted part today and pick up on salt and light next week.

We notice that the world's values place at the centre the self and life revolves around the self. In contrast, God's way is completely upside down and we replace self with Christ.

And we want to desire what he values and that is at the centre of our lives. We must not conclude that the Beatitudes are burdensome, ethical demands, which Jesus is calling his listeners to meritorious attempt at earning salvation by living out these characteristics.

Jesus' Beatitudes and statements are of grace, not law. These blessings aren't just for the future, they can be found in the present.

[ 6 : 49 ] Today we're actually going to focus on blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. As I mentioned last week, this is counterintuitive and sounds masochistic.

What it does not mean is this. It does not mean we're to carry around a persecution complex, woe is me, or deliberately seek out suffering, living a miserable, self-inflicted Job existence.

Jesus is not talking about persecution that can result from our own sin. We reap what we sow and as a result may suffer as we justly receive consequences for our own foolish actions.

And Jesus is not talking about blessed are those who are persecuted because they're objectionable or because they rave on like wild-eyed fanatics or because they pursue some religio-political cause.

The blessing is restricted to those who suffer persecution because of righteousness. Those who experience suffering, they're mocked, they're ridiculed, falsely accused, brought down because they're determined to love and live like Jesus.

[ 8 : 07 ] sharing the gospel of forgiveness and the hope of resurrection and their suffering for it. Jesus goes on to teach that this is the way it was right back.

He says, in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. So I'm going to share some stories this morning that outline how this has played out through biblical history and flowed out into our modern era beginning with the prophets Jesus spoke of.

Now remember, a prophet is a messenger of God. Prophets brought God's message in word and righteous living and sometimes they had to live out a parable like Hosea.

There were warnings to turn back to God to repent and live obedient lives. Prophets were calling people to live compassionate lives and to seek justice and prophets also reminded people of God's promises that one day in the future there'll be a new hope a messianic age and a messiah's coming.

So trust God he's got it covered. Prophets were not popular. Usually whatever the king believed filtered down to the people. So if the leadership was disobedient to God's commands if they were immoral and idolatrous then the people followed that example and followed the leader's lead.

[ 9 : 32 ] The prophets frustrated the kings the priesthood and the common people. No one likes their disobedience highlighted and so when you're salt and light in the world that tends to highlight disobedience around you and again I'm going to talk about that more next week.

So just like in today's society if you proclaim God's word it's not well received. Because they spoke up and lived lives worthy of their calling desiring praise from God not from man here's how some ended up persecuted because of righteousness and their demise often came at the hands of the religious and their own people.

Tradition records Isaiah was thrown in two under the evil king Manasseh of Judah. Jeremiah was stoned to death by his own people for calling out idolatry.

Ezekiel was killed in Babylonia by what was recorded as the leader of the Israelite exiles for confronting them about their idolatry. Micah was killed by Joram King Ahab's son.

Amos was tortured severely by Amaziah the priest of Bethel and later mortally wounded by a club by Amaziah's son. Habakkuk was stoned to death in Jerusalem.

[ 10 : 54 ] Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven at the resurrection. In John's gospel Jesus declared to his followers if the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first.

If you belong to the world it would love you as its own. As it is you do not belong to the world but I have chosen you out of the world. that is why the world hates you.

Remember what I told you if they persecuted me they will persecute you also. Two thousand years ago something happened having given up at the cross the followers of Jesus had a new spring in their step resurrection hope and Jesus ascension and at Pentecost emboldened by the power of the Holy Spirit the first thing Peter does he shares the good news with everyone and like the droplet in the pond the message spreads like wildfire and we're speaking about it now on the 9th of January 2022 here in Sydney.

Luke records in the book of Acts events that followed as the apostles shared the good news of Jesus. firstly people were added to the number daily thousands God's kingdom was advancing there were people embracing the message and wanted to know more Jews and Gentiles were hearing the message of hope and turning to Jesus but not everyone felt the same way it's not long before there is an attempt to shut down the message in Acts 5 for sharing the gospel the religious leaders imprison apostles and put them in jail but during the night an angel comes and they're released when the religious leaders get the news of this this is what they decide they called the apostles in and had them flogged then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and then let them go the apostles left the Sanhedrin strangely rejoicing because they'd be counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of

Jesus later Stephen is stoned to death he's seized and we read in Acts chapter 8 verse 1 on that day a great persecution broke out against the church encouragingly the last words Stephen spoke almost emulate Jesus' last words Lord do not hold this sin against them and we remember last week blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy well how did the apostles meet their end John died of old age but everyone else well Peter Philip and Bartholomew were crucified upside down Andrew Thaddeus Jude and Simon were crucified Matthias and James son of Alphaeus were stoned to death like Stephen James son of Zebedee was beheaded or stabbed by a sword Matthew and Thomas were speared

[ 14 : 20 ] Luke was hanged on an olive tree Mark was dragged to death Paul was beheaded James Jesus' brother was thrown off a wall and then clubbed to death most of these at the hands of God's people the religious remember they gave up at the cross they gave up but something happened and they're emboldened by the resurrection they spoke boldly until Emperor Constantine large scale persecution followed often at the hands now of the Gentiles the Roman authorities one such example around 155 AD the pastor Polycarp was martyred he was taken to the Roman governor and refused to bow down and honour Caesar as divine Polycarp was burnt at the stake and he prayed Lord God Father of our blessed Saviour

I thank thee that I've been deemed worthy to receive the crown of martyrdom and that I may die for thee and thy cause in the days leading up to their martyrdom in 1555 the church reformers Bishop Latimer and Bishop Ridley were given a chance to recant their evangelical faith and convert to Catholicism they refused and were burnt at the stake where Bishop Latimer famously said to Bishop Ridley while tied to the post be of good comfort we shall this day light such a candle for God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out sadly just as the first Jewish believers in Christ were martyred for their belief by the religious Christian sectarianism has seen religious persecution in Queen Mary's reign alone 280 Protestants were persecuted and killed so let's now fast forward to the 20th century there's been more persecution in the last hundred years than all the previous centuries combined

Richard Wurmbrand the author of 24 books minister of the gospel and CEO of Jesus mission to the communist world until his death in 2001 of natural causes collated and recorded numerous stories of the persecution of Christians for being a follower of Jesus himself he was imprisoned for 14 years tortured in communist Romania between 1948 and 1964 he recalls one story from his book in the face of surrender Bishop Victor Belich a Ukrainian Christian spent 24 years in communist jails if he wanted to get out all he had to do was recant and say I turn my back on Jesus I don't believe this anymore and turn away from God the first 20 years 20 years so who's here in the audience not 20 yet so all your life so far and then add some on he spent in prison in a small cell where he had to walk around like an animal in a circus and he couldn't stop walking if he did they would throw cold

water on him and beat him if he broke down he would get a straw mattress and he'd only get seven hours sleep a night so for 17 hours a day he was wandering around this small cell surveyed by jailers no contact from family no contact from friends after this strict regime he was actually sent for another four years to northern

Siberia where the snow never melts Richard Wurmbrand met him and asked him how could you bear this persecution after years in solitary confinement and a starvation diet he replied singing a song that he composed himself and Richard Wurmbrand actually records that his face lit up when he sang it like Stephen's face that lit up before he passed and this is the song I don't know the tune he said with the flames of love's fire that Jesus kindled in my heart I caused the ice of Siberia to melt hallelujah wow I don't know if we could stand that ourselves or put up with it the organization open doors which you should know of or hope you know of seek to strengthen and equip Christians around the world who are facing persecution and discrimination because of their faith in Jesus Christ they have countless stories one of which includes the story of a Ugandan girl Susan who was just 14 years old when her strict

Islamic family found out that she had become a Christian her father locked her in a room and told her to sit on a mat until she was willing to deny Jesus she remained there three months before she was rescued she refused to deny Jesus according to the International Society of Human Rights now this is a non religious organisation 80% of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed at Christians approximately 340 million Christians in the top 50 countries of the world watch list experience high levels of persecution the Bible is banned in over a quarter of the world's countries one Christian is killed every five minutes now I hope I haven't laboured the point too much and I can assure you this is the edited PG version the lesson follow Jesus love like

[ 20 : 09 ] Jesus live like Jesus declare this message and you can expect to face persecution in some form or another these are not my words these are Jesus words paraphrased Jesus words are these blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness they will share in the suffering of prophets who went before them Australia as a nation is moving further from the Christian faith don't wish it but expect pressure to ramp up the Christian journalist Greg Sheridan who's recently written a few novels the urgent case for Jesus in the world and God is good for you noted recently in the Australian our culture is in need of all the help it can get modern liberalism cut off from the sustenance of its Christian roots is running mad down every dead end diving into every poison creek of extremes and if not the war of all against all an increasing intolerance of almost all for anybody they disagree with the sermon on the mount is counter cultural it's upside down it holds the antidote for how we should live in the world but people don't want to hear it and they're actually working really hard to silence and shut down the gospel message if we don't side with the secular culture expect intolerance character assassination to be cancelled vilified in the press or worse the atheist journalist peter fit simmons regularly targets christians and apart from ridiculing the belief he labours the point keep it to yourself the problem with that is there's no place in christianity to hold a personal private quiet faith we're not to keep it to ourselves jesus commanded go and make disciples go go and make disciples that's every one of us it's easy to conform to go with the status quo and go along with the crowd we need to be on guard so that we don't fall away jesus warned his followers later in matthew chapter 7 watch out there'll be wolves in sheep's clothing jesus went on to teach in the parable of the sower it's very familiar in matthew 13 the seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word of god and at once receives it with joy but since they have no root it only lasts a short time when trouble or persecution comes because of the word they quickly fall away and it's because the seed has fallen on rocky ground sadly

Christians and religious leaders are buckling from pressure to conform in society to no longer listen to god's word or obey god's word and their roots are exposed as rocky ground it's even seeping into our Anglican schools throughout Australia our schools which are shaping our next generation there are chaplains who don't believe in the resurrection they openly endorse immorality they teach pluralism are given directives to assume that everyone is saved or to teach people are mostly good and talk in general terms about god but don't talk about Jesus an attempt to make Christianity attractional through moralistic theism which is basically be a good person and god's kind of good for you popular Christianity is not biblical and biblical

Christianity is not popular while we're all gifted in different ways we're one body with many parts if we really care about people we can't keep this message of hope to ourselves we share because we care and we care enough to share Jesus whatever stage of life we're in whatever our gender our

age our occupation the Sermon on the Mount calls the followers of Jesus to righteousness love and live like Jesus and openly declare this message both in word and deed how much do we value the name of Jesus and how willing are we to follow him Jesus reminds us to count the cost if anyone would come after me they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me for whoever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it grace is a free gift but there is a cost following

Jesus if we are salt and light in the world this exposes darkness and people don't like that and we're going to explore this a bit more next week in more detail taking up your cross and following Jesus means we have to accept the whole Jesus not only what is pleasant but his crown of thorns if you've never experienced some form of persecution and you're faithful I'm not wishing this on you but it will happen sooner or later at the moment in Australia I think it's low level maybe some name calling possibly some physical hit out or maybe you're shunned it's not so bad if you have experienced persecution and found yourself crying out why God remember Jesus has walked in our shoes Jesus was left alone Jesus was ridiculed Jesus was beaten down he was broken he was betrayed

Jesus was falsely accused he was let down by close friends he was hurt and he shed tears when we cry out in anguish we have one who sympathizes with us Jesus like the early disciples who were rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of Jesus if we suffer for the name of Jesus it's a sign that we're doing something right if we share in their experience rejoice God has a special blessing for those who have this beautiful attitude persecuted for righteousness heaven is theirs I want to conclude with the words of Richard Wurmbbrand who reminds us we can learn from Christians who have suffered Christians must be prepared to face adversity and personal trauma

[ 27 : 26 ] God can protect us and give us happy days but no believer is exempt from tribulations let us expect them with serenity our journey in life will not be easy but with God's help we may succeed let's pray father in heaven we know that blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven help us to stand under temptation trial suffering and persecution Jesus said blessed are you when people insult you persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me help us to be patient loving and forgiving and ready to speak the truth in love for the name of Jesus many have suffered we pray for our brothers and sisters globally who are facing extreme persecution right now comfort protect and deliver them from evil strengthen us by your Holy

Spirit to be prepared to go where Jesus has gone to be bold and take up our cross and follow him help us not to lose sight of the end goal when we do face hardships and suffer fill us with an inexpressible joy to rejoice and be glad knowing that great will be our reward in heaven in our Saviour Jesus name we pray Amen viele to happen