

# Faith Under Fire

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, today is all about how to live when your faith is under fire. How to live when your faith is under fire. So, I want you to imagine the following scenarios and ask yourself, what would you do in this particular situation?

So the first scenario, you go and pray silently outside a local abortion center. Not making a fuss, just quietly asking God for mercy and care on the people and the babies in that facility.

Policemen arrive who tell you you're not allowed to pray, and if you don't comply, they will arrest you. You explain that you're not saying anything, you're just saying words in your head.

And they still maintain that you're not allowed to be there. What would you do? Scenario number two, you're applying for a job. Your prospective employer, as they do these days, looks at your social media pages.

And they pick up that you go to church regularly. But you've made a few comments that cause them problems. And they say you need to stop posting certain religious content because some people might find it offensive.

[ 1 : 18 ] How do you respond? Or scenario three, you've got a family member that has said you're not welcome in their home if you're going to talk about Jesus or God or the Bible.

You've got various options, I guess. How to respond to each of those circumstances. But it's likely that in our own lifetimes we're going to have to face similar situations and answer a very important question that Jesus addresses in our passage today with his disciples.

And that is, what are you going to do when your faith is under fire? Because whether we like it or not, if you're a disciple of Christ, you will come under some form of opposition in your life, one way or another.

And the first thing we see in our passage today is that opposition in the Christian life is unavoidable. Opposition in the Christian life is unavoidable.

So Jesus prepares his disciples for what lies ahead. When they take the gospel of the kingdom to the rest of Israel and beyond, but here he's just looking at Israel for starters, and he says that far from being a picnic, taking the gospel message out, it is certainty that they will face opposition and persecution.

[ 2 : 40 ] So I'm just going to go through a few verses in the section where Jesus says these things are going to happen. They will happen. So verse 17, he says, Beware of men.

They will deliver you over to the courts and flog you. In verse 18, he says, You will be dragged before governors and kings.

He doesn't say this might happen. He says when this does happen. Later on, he says in verse 21, Brother will betray brother to death, And children will rise against parents and have them put to death.

Meaning that one of them is a Christian. And the other part of the family doesn't want them. And betrays them and has them killed. In verse 22, You will be hated by all.

And so we see that opposition to Christ and to his message is unavoidable. And to his messengers.

[ 3 : 46 ] And the reason for that is that they're proclaiming a new king in town. It's like those old western movies. There's a new sheriff in town. And he's come to clean out the rubbish. Jesus is the new king in town.

As we sang earlier, Our God reigns and he's seated on the throne. And the problem is that the old ruler in town, The devil, And those who have bought into his lies, They don't want to hear about this new king in town.

And they're not going to give up without a fight. And so we see that anyone involved with Jesus and his mission Will find themselves in the middle of this clash of kingdoms.

Where allegiances are tested. And life and death hang in the balance. So I think for us, That means we mustn't be surprised when opposition comes into our lives.

So don't be surprised when opposition comes into your life. The difficult truth is that, Like the twelve apostles, Jesus is talking specifically to his disciples here.

[ 4 : 54 ] But like them, We too will face opposition. It is going to happen. Sadly, This is not something that many Christians are prepared for.

It's a shock That their Christianity is going to cost them something. And many Christians are caught off guard. Because their Christianity is not built on a proper biblical basis.

And not built on the Jesus of the Bible. Their Christianity promises blessing. And power. And miracles. All the good stuff. Kind of the stuff that Jesus said earlier in this passage.

When they go out, They can do all these things. And they forget that Jesus goes on to say, Yes, But people aren't going to like it. Their Christianity says that anything bad must not come from Jesus.

But here, We see that Jesus is fully aware Of the dangers of what it means to be a true follower And to own him as king. So friends, Don't be surprised when opposition comes into your life.

[ 6 : 01 ] Being a Christian is not about living a cushy life. It's about joining the fight. So those are warning words and fighting words, really.

But how does Jesus want us to prepare for this battle? Well, anxiety could tempt God's messengers to compromise the message. To be silent.

Or to fight back in a way that's unhelpful. Jesus says neither of those are an option for him or his followers. Rather, we are to speak gospel words. We are to take the gospel message in a wise and faithful way.

And so we are going to look at what it looks like to be wise combatants When we take the message forward. Be wise combatants. So the first thing that Jesus says is he wants his people to be wise In how they deal with the enemy.

So that's verse 16. He says, Depending on your translation, it might be wise as snakes or clever as snakes Or innocent or harmless or blameless as doves.

[ 7 : 17 ] So what is Jesus saying? He's saying that there must be a balance Or Christians must strike a balance when they deal with the world. Jesus wants his people to be bold But not rash.

Peaceful But not a doormat or a pushover. Truthful But not antagonistic. We all know it's not clever to go into a sensitive high stakes situation Like a bull in a china shop.

We know there are wolves out there And they want to shred us to pieces. We're not to add fuel to their fire About how we behave And how we say things.

It's a bit like being an undercover agent in wartime situation. You want to be able to assess how dangerous your enemy is But at the same time seem like you don't pose any threat to them at all. Because then you can go undercover And create more mayhem and havoc And get your objectives. So I think the first thing for us is to realize that there are real wolves out there.

[ 8 : 26 ] There is no neutrality in this cosmic conflict between this clash of kingdoms. Later on in Matthew 12, Jesus says, He who is not with me is against me.

That's big fighting. Big time fighting talk. And so I think Christians need to realize that Any institution out there That doesn't have Jesus as their king Is serving another king.

This includes Government Media Education We often tend to think That these things are neutral And that we can get along with them And they don't mean us any harm.

We need to be cleverer than that. We've got to be wise as serpents. We need to see clearly That the world out there If they're not Christian Are not serving Christ But serving another God. 1 Peter 5.8 Tells Christians to be Sober minded and alert Because Your enemy The devil Prowls around like a roaring lion Looking for anyone To devour To realize that there are real wolves out there And act accordingly And then secondly I think We have to make sure that we are sheep Not wolves Make sure that you're a sheep And not a wolf Jesus says I'm sending you out like a sheep Amongst the wolves Meaning Don't act like a wolf Amongst the wolves I think for us that means Don't think That you need to Automatically Fight fire with fire In the culture wars today Don't think that you've got to

Fight fire with fire Take care As to what you post For example Online How you engage with people Especially online Think about how it's going to be received Online posts tend To sound harsh And angry Especially when you speak the truth Especially when you speak directly You don't intend it But it just seems to come across that way In your relationships Leave space for dialogue If it's at all

possible Christians are to be blameless Not the ones causing offense Peter writing in One Peter again Says this Even if you should suffer For righteousness sake You will be blessed So you're going to suffer For doing the right thing But you're going to be blessed If you do Have no fear of them Don't be troubled But

[ 11 : 05 ] In your hearts Honor Christ the Lord As holy Always being prepared To make a defense To anyone who asks you And to give a reason For the hope That is in you So we're not to remain silent But be prepared To give an answer For why we're Christian But Do it With gentleness And Respect Be wise as a snake Innocent as a dove Having a good conscience So that when you're slandered Those who revile Your good behavior In Christ May be put to shame Now that They may not be put To shame here And now But they're going to Face the judgment day And then you're going To seem to be innocent And they're going to Get into trouble Because of what They did to you But if you fight Fire with fire It's not that the judgment Is going to fall on you But they're going to say Well You are part of the problem

No wonder they try To tear you to pieces So be careful About how You speak to people And what we post online Now Speaking the truth In love Is vital Because when we're Under fire We're going to want To remain silent But the next thing Jesus wants In how we To handle When our faith Is under fire Is he wants people Who are faithful Messengers We are to be Faithful Messengers Wise combatants And faithful messengers Jesus' goal With his warnings Is not so that We will escape From being persecuted That's our goal No one wants To be persecuted No one likes it Jesus' goal Is to have the message Go out About him So the message Is everything We are not the goal Jesus is the goal Our safety Our comfort

Our security Is not the priority The gospel Is the priority And that's why At the center Of Jesus' instruction On what to do When your faith Is under fire Is this repeated word Speak So have a look At verse 19 And verse 20 When they arrest you Not if When they arrest you Do not worry About what you Are to say Or how to say It's the same Underlying Greek word It's speak What you are to speak Or how to speak it At that time You'll be given What to say Or what to speak For it will not be You speaking But the spirit Of your father Speaking Through you So you see The emphasis On Jesus' words Is keep On speaking Don't Stop And when you do

You get this Wonderful promise That God is with you And that the spirit Will use your words To either convict Or condemn those Who are Arresting you Or dealing with you In fact in a section You've got the trinity You notice in verse In the first verse In verse 16 He says I Jesus says I am sending you Out like sheep Jesus knows what's Going to happen It's him doing the sending So he knows what's coming He's with you And then in the moment The father is with you And the father sends a spirit To speak about Jesus It's a wonderful promise But it will only be A comfort to you If you have Jesus As the central point Of your life Rather than your own Self-preservation But that's what Being under fire Will do for you It will reveal Where your real priorities Really lie

It will unmask your heart What we want to hear I think Is Jesus saying When they arrest you Don't worry I'll spring you out That's what we want to hear Jesus says Don't worry I'll give you The right words to say But on occasion Maybe you're a bit like That bull in a china shop On occasion Jesus will give you Those wise words That helps to calm The situation Or maybe You're more like The dove That doesn't want To say anything And Jesus will make you Bold enough To speak about him Now So one way To make sure That we stay faithful To Jesus Is to literally Talk about him Don't keep quiet Keep talking But when you do Make sure you don't Compromise the message Don't water it down Don't fail to tell The whole counsel of God

[ 16 : 09 ] You know Jesus says Many things That are controversial To modern ears Don't worry About offending people If you speak The truth In love The spirit Speaking Through you Will save Those whom God Has appointed To eternal life It will have An effect You might not See it But it does happen We've got the book Of Acts Where Paul Time and time again Does exactly What It happens Exactly to him What Jesus says You're going to go Before kings And testify to me And you want to go Before kings You want to go Before the rulers Because they're the ones That can make a difference And often Paul has this ability To just Skate in between Danger on both sides But at the same time He tells them Exactly who Jesus is And they either Accept or reject it Depending on God's sovereignty But for us

The pressure will be To not say anything About Jesus So don't give in To the temptation To remain silent About him Remember The gospel Is the only thing That can change People's eternal Destiny And that's why You must make sure You know what The biblical Gospel is You need to make sure

That you know What the Bible's message is About Jesus And stick to that And make that Known Don't come up With your own version Of what is important In Christianity Don't make your own Personal favorite Hobby horse theology The thing that you're Known for Rather It is the biblical gospel That Jesus is king That will help you Stay steadfast Under pressure And endure to the end And so That's what we're Going to look at As our last point We need to be Steadfast Finishers We need to be Steadfast Finishers When we're under fire And the pressure is on We'll be tempted To throw in the towel Give it all up Jesus says Don't do that But calls us To endure To the end Have a look at Verse 22 And 23 All men Will hate you Because of me So note that They mustn't hate you Because of you They must hate you Because you're talking About Jesus And you can be As loving as you like You can be A mother Teresa But they will still Hate you It's not you The hating It's Jesus And his claim To be king All men Will hate you Because of me But he who stands Firm To the end Or who endures To the end Will be saved When you're persecuted In one place Flee to another I tell you the truth You will not finish Going through the cities Of Israel Before the son Of man comes So the Christian life Is not a sprint race But a marathon The only way to finish Is to keep going Not to give up The prize is obviously Worth the pain But to get marathon fit You need to build up Your endurance Over time And that means Training in the things That will help you Stay the course Anyone who's tried To get fit Knows what What I'm talking about Here Training looks Very ordinary But remember You don't win Marathons on the race day You can't just go out And run a marathon Some people can But you're not You're not going to Finish it well You don't win Marathons on race day But you win Marathons on the Practice field It's the same With the Christian life So that means For us Regular church Attendance Regular participation In the sacraments Living a life

Of prayer Practicing good works Make sure that you Come to the various Courses and events That we offer At St. Mark's All of these things Are intended to Stretch your comfort zones And get your Spiritual muscles Working Ask yourself this If you don't Do the exercise Now When there's No pressure How long Do you think You'll last When the pressure Is on Just think about That Every time you Decide to skip Church Or prayers Or read your Scriptures Or spend time With Jesus All of that Is to make you Strong enough To endure to the End But the last Thing we need To look at But still looking At steadfast finishes Is that the thing That will really Get us to endure Is to know Just what it means That Jesus Is the son of man You see he ends The section That last verse Verse 23 I tell you the truth

[ 21 : 14 ] I say to you You will not have Gone through all The towns of Israel Until the son of man Comes Now obviously He's talking to The disciples there There's a time limit To what his disciples Are saying This isn't something That's stretching out Throughout history He's not talking About when he returns At the end of the world He's talking to His disciples That's the context We apply to ourselves But he's saying That you boys Aren't going to Finish your job Until the son of man Comes Now There's a discussion About what that means But by now We should know Where this phrase Son of man Comes from In the scriptures We've done it Many times Yet it marks But I think Because it's so Important to this Passage Let's quickly go back To Daniel 7 It comes from Daniel 7 In your Bibles Or in your apps Just turn back To Daniel 7 And we'll see What Jesus is referencing When he says That the son of man Until the son of man Comes So Daniel 7 Is one of Daniel's dreams He's a He's a prophet

He's a seer He's caught up In Babylon After that Two chronicles passage When everyone Went off to Babylon Because of their sins But God has a message For Daniel For his people That The evil Nations Of the world Although they're Really evil They're not going to Have the final victory So when you read Through Daniel 7 It's a great chapter It's worth reading In its entirety You've got these Four beasts Which are four kingdoms And they're ripping The world to shreds God's people can't No people can stand In front of them Let alone God's people But God has an answer To these evil Kingdoms Evil systems Evil institutions That want to hurt His people And his answer Is Jesus Ascending into heaven And this is what Daniel sees But he doesn't Call him Jesus He calls him One like the son of man So Daniel chapter 7 Verse 13 In my vision at night I looked And there before me Was one Like a son Of man Coming With the clouds Of heaven He approached The ancient of days And was led Into his presence And he was given Authority And glory And sovereign power All peoples Nations And men Of every language Worshipped him His dominion Is an everlasting Dominion That will not Pass away And his kingdom Is one That will never Be destroyed That is the vision You need If you're going Of Jesus You need that vision Of

Jesus If you're going To be Steadfast And endure Till the end That Jesus When Daniel Says he's I saw one Like the son of man Coming on the clouds Of heaven Daniel at that point Isn't standing on earth Looking at Jesus Coming down That's why In this passage Jesus is not Talking about him Returning Not necessarily

Coming at the end Of his At the end of time Daniel is standing In heaven Looking at Jesus Coming up from earth On the clouds of heaven To heaven That's recorded In the gospels And in Acts chapter 1 When they see Jesus What's known as The ascension So back to Well before we go back To Matthew 5 Just to end A little bit there In Daniel Daniel Daniel the vision Goes on Daniel says He's troubled in spirit Verse 15 And he wants to know What's going on We don't have time Time to explain it all But I just want to Draw your attention To what happens At the end Of the chapter He talks about This fourth beast That's the worst beast Many people See that as The Roman empire That was doing Its worst To kill Both God's people The Jews And then later on The Christians

But this is what's Going to happen To this beast I'm going to pick it up At verse 29 In Daniel 7 This beast This is the fourth beast Now He will speak Against the most high So I'm in Daniel 7 verse 25 He will speak Against the most high And oppress His saints The governments Haven't stopped Doing that by the way They like this Fourth beast Anyone who Oppress God's saints Is like this Fourth beast And he's going to Try and change The set times And the laws He's going to try And overthrow Everything that is Right with the world The saints Will be handed over To him For a time Times and half a time I'm not going to Unpack that But just notice That even here in Daniel He's saying the same Thing that Jesus says Which is that We're going to go Through a hard time We're going to This beast Is going to hurt us But it's not going To end us Verse 26 But

[ 26 : 23 ] The court Will sit That's the heavenly court That Daniel had a vision Of earlier on The ancient of days Sitting there Enthroned in heaven The court will sit And his power The beast's power Will be taken Away And completely Destroyed Forever He's not Going to win Then The sovereignty Power and greatness Of the kingdoms Under the whole heaven Will be handed Over to the saints The people of the most high And his kingdom Meaning the son of man's kingdom Will be an everlasting kingdom And all rulers Will worship And obey him So what Jesus wants He's I'm going to go back now To Matthew 10 But just to explain this But what Jesus wants His people to hang on to Is this Glorious vision Of him Of Jesus As the ascended Lord Who is sitting at the right hand Of God

And who has been given All authority Over every rival Power In the universe And who will Come back To finally establish His rule On planet earth And hand out Judgment and rewards Like every king Does That comes Into his power He's going to reward Those who followed him Faithfully And endured Through trial And persecution To the end And he's going to Judge Those who caused His little ones To stumble So friends In closing If you're struggling With difficulty Difficult situations At work Or at home What you need to do Is recapture This vision Of Jesus Trust in this Jesus Trust him To do what he says He'll do He'll lift you up He will provide

A way for you Through the suffering He's going to Grow your faith To make you able To endure it He's going to Build your character He's going to Make you strong And ultimately To stay Faithful to him And that's when You can say With Paul In 1 Corinthians 4 We are hard pressed On every side But not crushed We're perplexed But not in despair We're persecuted But not abandoned Struck down But we're not destroyed Because we know That the one Who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead Will also raise us With Jesus And present us With you To himself Therefore We do not Lose heart Though outwardly We are wasting away Yet inwardly We are being renewed Day by day For our light And momentary troubles Are achieving For us An eternal glory That far Outweighs them all Our faith Is going to Come under fire But Jesus Will carry us Through it And his kingdom Will come Let me pray for us Lord Jesus We sang earlier How you have been Enthroned At God's right hand And that you reign From on high We Lord Are on earth And we are doing Our best to fight Your battles Lord forgive us When we don't Do it well Forgive us When we remain Silent Forgive us When we Overreact Help us Lord To be Wise Combatants

To be Steadfast Finishes And to Take your Gospel And to Speak to People To be Faithful Messengers To your Word Trusting Lord That you Will build Your kingdom Through what We do Amen