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So the Chief Priests Made Plans to Put Lazarus to Death Also

John 12:7-11

**Prayer:** *Father God, we do again praise you and thank you for the gift that you are to us in your Son. Lord, we just again thank you for this day in which we can focus on what it is your Son has done for us. We just pray as we examine your word, examine what it is he has done, that you would accompany us, that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit to enable us to learn anew and in a deeper and broader level what it is you've given us in the gift of your Son. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, once again it's the first Sunday of the month and again, this is the day that we remember Jesus Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them. And we read from *Matthew 26th the description*, it says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."* And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, *"Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the*

*covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."*

Jesus took the bread and he took the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat that sacrifice on a regular basis, this is what we do each month, and we call it the Lord's table. And we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, by asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing our sins, and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, as you know, we've been following the life of Jesus, we've worked our way so far up to the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John, and that opens up with a celebration. Lazarus who has been raised from the dead and Simon who's been healed of a dreaded disease are guests at a party that are celebrating these miracles. If you remember, Mary anoints Jesus's feet with this precious ointment and Judas is greatly offended. And last time we looked at Mary's extravagant anointing of Jesus and we understood it as Jesus did,

as something that was perfectly appropriate. *John 12:7* says this: *Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."* When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

I want to focus on two little words spoken at the very end of verse 10. Scripture is talking about the chief priests making plans to put Lazarus to death, and it adds these two words: "as well." I mean the "as well" is a reference to the previous plans of the Pharisees to kill Jesus for raising Lazarus in the first place. Now they want to kill Lazarus as well. And verse 11 says: *Because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.* I wondered if Lazarus even knew that his life was in danger and that he was in danger simply because he represented the goodness, the mercy and the power of Christ. You see, if you do that and you do that well, God promises you, too, will be persecuted. In *2 Timothy 3:12* he says: *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* So I wonder if we know that to the extent that we represent the goodness, the

mercy and the power of Christ we should expect to be persecuted as well. Now we've been witness to the persecution that our brothers and sisters in Africa and the Mid East are undergoing. They are seeing what the spirit of this world would love to do to every single one of us but thus far has been prevented by the grace of God. And still we should expect that standing up for Christ is not going to be well received by this culture at all.

And you know, there are many, many "christs" that this culture loves. There are some "christs" that this culture despises. And what is critical for us as his disciples is that we identify with, that we understand which "christ" is worthy to be persecuted for and which "christ" is just a cultural substitution for the real thing. You see, being persecuted for a phony, dredged up false christ is no different than any other false god. And make no mistake about it, there are plenty of false christs out there. There are plenty of left wing and right wing false christs that often substitute for the real thing, and so persecution comes to them as well. I mean, we've all heard I think of Westboro Baptist Church on the right, it's actually a church comprised of a couple dozen or so members mainly of the same family who love to court persecution and publicity and they do it by picketing at soldier's funerals and acting as if they are God's exclusive prophets. They are incredibly selective, however, about what it is they prophesy

about. These are the "God hates fags" people who love to hold up these incendiary signs and act as if they were God's exclusive representative. These are folks who literally court persecution, and I believe their persecution is well deserved and I think it has nothing whatsoever to do with the persecution that Christ said we all should expect to suffer.

Now on the other side on the religious left we have also have folks that think Christ's main purpose in coming to the earth was to stave off global warming and promote homosexual marriage. I mean, in their view, to be denied the right to same sex marriage is to suffer persecution, and their christ identifies with these folks as he does with all those who are beaten down and oppressed. And yet both of these christs are twisted distortions of the real Christ, the one who is revealed in scripture. And to the extent that we represent the real Christ is the extent we can expect, like Lazarus, to be persecuted by the right, the left and the center because the real Christ and the real gospel is going to offend every one of them.

So the question is how do we know that we are identifying with worshiping and imitating the real Christ of scripture or a phony christ, a phony christ that our culture has dredged up for us? Well, again we need to look to scripture and there we will find

real people responding in real ways to real persecution. Now Lazarus was persecuted but he was persecuted passively. I mean he didn't need to do anything to cause it. He simply existed as proof of God's mercy and power and that was enough to make the religious leaders want to take his life as well. I want to look at some examples in scripture of people who moved beyond passively representing Christ's goodness to actively presenting Christ to see if we can get an idea what the proper model for a Christ-like response to persecution is all about. I'm sure the religious folks on the left and on the right are fully convinced that what they're doing is godly, and so they think that any of the push back that they receive they consider to be some form of persecution. They are really mistaken. On one or more levels they are mistaken because real persecution is far different than what they've been experiencing.

You know, a few years back, a book came out entitled: *Persecution: How liberals are Waging War Against Christianity* by David Limbaugh and it was a book that detailed all the hostility towards Christianity and its values, it's all of this hostility in the name of diversity, tolerance and multi-culturalism that we see all the time. And I read the book and it had lots and lots of egregious examples in there about the war on Christmas, about how the ten commandments are being systematically removed from the public

square, about how hostile people are becoming towards the Bible and Christianity, but after I read the book and I put it down, I thought a far better title for this book instead of "Persecution" should have been "Annoyance," because that's really compared to the real persecution in the Middle East and Africa, that's really what the book was about, how annoying these things are. See, we who go through "persecution" in the United States have no idea what real persecution is. Still we need to examine the ways that we respond to a culture that is increasingly growing more and more hostile. And once again it is only the scripture that can provide a reality check when it comes to what God considers a godly life, one that is worthy of persecution. So I want to look at three different believers, all committed to Christ, three different believers who represent three different levels of response to the gospel. Lazarus we've already looked at, and we've already pointed out Lazarus passively represented Christ. I mean, he may have been a vocal, fearless evangelist for all we know but the scripture doesn't really tell us anything about him other than the fact that his existence, having been raised from the dead made him a target. So he's one type. He's the passive type.

We also have an activist. An activist who represented what the gospel really means in terms of a changed life, in terms of a godly life and for that we would choose Zacchaeus. Most of you know who

Zacchaeus is. He was a member of one of the most wicked cliques that ever existed in all of ancient Israel: He was a dreaded tax collector. I know nobody likes IRS agents today, but this is nothing like what it was back then. A tax collector was someone who sold out his own people for money. Tax collectors back then were given an amount that they had to give to the government that really didn't care how they got it, and as long as they were satisfied, he could keep whatever he could get. And so the tax collector back then was somebody who used his authority literally to rape his own people for money. And so Zacchaeus's testimony of what the gospel did for him, it centers on this sin of greed that had entrapped him and the grace that God had given him to get out of that life. This is the story as recorded in *Luke 19*, it says this, it says: *He (Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."* And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord,



*the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Okay. So Zacchaeus who was already actively hated is now just actively pointing to the grace of God in his life.

So Lazarus is passive, Zacchaeus is active, and we could also point to Peter as somebody who is confrontive. You could call him actively confrontive. Peter gives us an example of how to go about doing that. This is shortly after the Lord Jesus had ascended into heaven and Peter is addressing a crowd, huge crowd, and many of these people in this crowd had likely been there at the crucifixion. And so Peter is addressing all of them and he is not at all hesitant to confront, he doesn't mince words at all and this is what he says in Acts 2:36. He says: *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.* Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, *"Brothers, what shall we do?"* And Peter said to them, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our*

*God calls to himself."*

Okay. So we have three different representations now of what it's like to speak up for Christ more or less, I mean, Lazarus didn't have much to say, in the face of some form of persecution. We have Lazarus who is passive, we have Zacchaeus who was hated, he has now changed his life, he is active; and we have Peter who is confrontive. And all of them are godly representations of what it's like to imitate Christ and thereby be persecuted for it. Now you might be another Lazarus yourself. There may be people who intensely resent the way you live out your Christian life and you may not even know who they are, you may not even be aware of them. You may be more like a Zacchaeus, you may be somebody who is active enough and vocal enough to identify the sin that had defiled you and the Savior who had saved you. Or you might even be like Peter, willing to confront others with the truth of the gospel. I submit to you that all three models should define every single one of us depending on our circumstance. I mean, our lives should represent the light enough so that folks we don't even know might be resentful of that light -- not of us, but of that light that is in us. And we also should know folks on a much closer level and anyone that we know on that level should already know that we understand ourselves as sinners saved by grace just like Zacchaeus did. And furthermore, God will have people enter into our lives

for the purpose of being confronted with the gospel like Peter confronted. I mean, I know I came to Christ because someone was willing to lovingly confront me with my sin and Christ's power to heal that sin.

So I want to put this into a present day context. This is the situation. We are surrounded by a myriad of christs. And so the question becomes if I'm willing to be persecuted for Christ's sake, then for which christ am I willing to be persecuted, and how do I do that? How do I go about persecution? And you know, when the book *Persecution* first came out, there were very, very few personal stories. It was always some kind of corporate thing, a creche being removed here and ten commandments being removed there and there was very few instances of personal clashes that involved real persecution in the United States and that was about I think eight or nine years ago. And that's no longer the case. We are still nowhere near the extent that our brothers and sisters in the mid east and Africa are suffering. But if you are somebody who bakes wedding cakes, if you are somebody who makes floral arrangements and you've run afoul of the same sex marriage culture, well you've probably felt the sting of a culture and a government that is now turning against you. You see, one of the more contemporary examples of this type of persecution which is becoming incredibly common is the bakery owner refusing to bake a cake for a gay

wedding. A same sex couple goes into a bakery and they try to order a wedding cake and the owners who are invariably Christian say that because of their understanding that marriage is between a man and a women, they can't in good conscience bake the cake. And so the same sex couple is deeply, deeply offended and they seek a legal remedy. And this has happened in a number of states, I mean, it's becoming more and more prevalent and the results have ranged from a simple boycott of the bakery to a \$5,000 fine and a threat of imprisonment and a demand that the baker attend sensitivity classes. Well recently there's been a counter punch to the story. This is what happened in Colorado. This is very recent. Christian Science Monitor reported this, said:

"Two years after a judge determined that a Lakewood, Colorado, bakery had discriminated against a gay couple by refusing to sell them a wedding cake, another Colorado bakery is now facing accusations of religious discrimination -- this time for refusing to make a cake with an anti-gay message. When Bill Jack arrived at the Azucar bakery in Denver in March 2014 and ordered two Bible-shaped cakes, Marjorie Silva said she was happy to oblige. But when she saw the messages that Mr. Jack wanted written on the cake, she quickly decided not to go through with it. According to Ms. Silva, Jack pulled out a piece of paper with the phrase 'God hates gays,' and anti-gay passages he said were from the Bible.

Silva also said that Jack wanted her to draw two men holding hands with an 'X' crossing them out. After I read it, it was like 'no way,' Silva told USA Today, 'We're not doing this. This is just very discriminatory and hateful.' In a statement to a Colorado state news site, Jack said that he believed that the bakery had discriminated against him based on his creed."

Now I want to say in this case I agree with Miss Silva. You see, what Mr. Jack wanted on that cake was discriminatory and it was hateful but not for the same reasons that Miss Silva thinks. Let me state right off the bat that I think that same sex marriages are absolutely unbiblical and that they are sinful. But if we look at the examples of people responding to persecution, whether it's active or passive or confrontive, we see that nowhere, even in Peter's response is there a message of condemnation alone.

Mr. Jack's response to persecution is just that. And that's what's discriminatory and hateful. You see, after Peter confronted some of the very people -- these are the people who were responsible for Christ's crucifixion -- after he confronted them, he still didn't leave them with condemnation alone. He said to them: *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to*

himself." See, Mr. Jack's response to persecution, it gives no place for repentance. What it seeks to do rather is to punch back because it's been punched. We've been punched, I'll punch you back. And somehow that response is at complete variance with Jesus who said in *Matthew 5:38*: "You have heard that it was said 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." This is the Christ we are to imitate. You see, condemnation alone is not how Christ would have us respond. Far better if Mr. Jack had said he wanted the cake to say "God says homosexuality is a sin for which he came to die." And if there's a scripture at all to quote, I would have quoted this one from *1 Corinthians 6:9*, it says: *Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* Well, that may be an awful lot to write on the cake, but I'd ask him to write it real small. I would ask him to highlight the sentence "*And such were some of you.*" I suspect that Miss Silva would have objected to that as well. See, the point is not to win the argument, the point

is not just to persuade people but to speak the truth in love. That's the truth of who God is and what the gospel proclaims and the hope that the gospel gives. And what people do with that gospel is up to God. It's not really up to me, but we have the obligation to present the entire gospel.

In an article entitled "May Jesus's Name Be Known Through Me," Marshall Segal said this, he said: "Some will not listen. We should expect this in a world enslaved to sin and blind to the beauty of God. Don't be shocked when you hear, 'Thanks, but no thanks,' or worse. It doesn't mean you necessarily picked a bad time or said it wrong. The gospel is the most offensive news you can bring -- even though it's also the sweetest, most true, most hope-filled news anyone could hear. You are wicked to your very core, broken in every way, destined for unending wrath at the hands of an all-powerful God, and your only hope is in one message and one Man, no other. No wonder the world so often scoffs and screams at Christianity. Jesus didn't tell the disciples to stay until their audience surrendered. No, he said some will listen and others will not. I am not sending you to save, but to speak. I -- and I alone -- am the one who saves. Our commission is not to create listeners, but to discover them, and then make disciples of them. 'I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down

my life for the sheep. They will listen to my voice.'"

Sometimes that voice is going to be filtered through persecution. You know, chances are pretty good that Lazarus didn't really know that he was a marked man. He didn't really know that his mere existence was a poke in the eye of those who denied the power and mercy of Christ. Hopefully our existence as Christians moves our neighbors, most of whom we may not have even met, to at least understand us as different from the world. And those that we actually rub shoulders with should know us as sinners saved by grace because that's how with should know ourselves. And those who we have the privilege of confronting with the gospel should know us as people who mix the truth with love just the way the Master did.

As the elders begin to distribute the bread this morning, I would like us to just take a moment to consider how you are going to respond to persecution. Are you going to punch back because somebody punched you first? Are you going to turn the other cheek? Consider that. Consider also this warning that God gives about communion itself. This is from *1 Corinthians 11:28*, it says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many*



sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. You know, I say this each time, I say communion is extremely serious business and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. I plead with you, if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother and sister by bringing your sacrifice to the altar, then just pass the elements on as they come to you. I say it each month, no one's going to look at you or think you strange, instead they may think you wise. But again on the other hand, you can make the mistake of thinking that unless I am spotlessly perfect I'm therefore unworthy to receive communion, and that too is a mistake. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we don't fail and it doesn't mean that we don't sin or fall down. It means that we recognize that the salvation that God has given to us is a gift, and it's a gift that we are never, never capable of earning by being good. Again, as Dane Ortland puts it: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking you do." It also means that when we fail we are aware that we've sinned because God's Holy Spirit now lives inside of us, and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive us, who longs to cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is*

*faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin. It means that when we do sin, we know we have an advocate, somebody who speaks up for us before the Father. 1 John 2:1 says: My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. So because we have Jesus's righteousness and not our own, that makes us free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, again don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased just for you. He lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die so that we could be made worthy of heaven. So take some time as the elements are being passed out and ask yourself again, am I willing to be passively, actively, or confrontively Christ-like when I suffer persecution?*

*1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 23rd verse says this: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Take, and eat.*

I want to go back to that party that we looked at at the very beginning, the party where Lazarus was singled out to be taken out

along with James -- I mean along with, I'm sorry, with Jesus, and it was Jesus that they were after, but their hatred of him was so great that they wanted any and all that were even associated with his grace, his mercy, and his power to die along with him. This is a level of hatred that Jesus dealt with his entire public ministry. Our text this morning starts off with Jesus' reaction to the indignation that surrounded Mary's anointing of Jesus. Again, *John 12:7: Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."* I just want us to remember that this anointing took place, Mary comes in and she breaks the jar and begins to anoint Jesus from his head down to his feet. This anointing took place during a celebration, a party, if you will. I mean, Lazarus and Simon were both miraculously healed by Jesus and the event they're all at was a celebration of those two miracles. And in the midst of what had to have been an incredibly joyous celebration sits the Lord Jesus who alone knows that within a matter of days he is going to be crucified. So the crowd in all likelihood understood his statement about anointing as something symbolic, something they just didn't quite understand but they never understood a lot of what Jesus had to say. Jesus understood his statement exactly as he said it. See, he alone knew that within days he was going to be buried and no one at that time could even imagine what it was that Jesus was facing, I mean, they

thought he was on the verge of being declared the Messiah, poised to take over as ruler who would immediately ultimately vanquish the Roman occupiers. Jesus alone knew that for all practical appearances he would appear to be completely and utterly vanquished. Only Jesus knew that he was about to be stripped and flogged and have a crown of thorns placed on his head and mocked as a king and then crucified. Only Jesus knew that all of his so-called friends that were surrounding him at this party, well, they were all going to be scattered. Just picture the isolation that that knowledge would bring. I mean, you're in the midst of a celebration and you know for a fact you are about to die, but nobody will believe you. They won't believe you even if you tell them and you've told them over and over again, and they've chosen not to believe. See, none of his friends, none of his disciples have a clue about what is about to happen, except for perhaps Mary who was anointing him. We say no wonder she was one of the first persons to see Jesus after he had risen. And so I'm just -- I'm trying to picture this huge celebration with joy and laughter and singing, and Jesus is just sitting there in their midst realizing that not only could he not relate to a single person there, but that shortly thereafter his own Father was going to desert him, that he would begin to take on the sin of the world and a holy God would no longer see him as a beloved son but now see him as the personification of evil itself. Now there's isolation, and there

is profound utter existential isolation that thrusts you out where there is absolutely nothing whatsoever but evil. That's exactly what Jesus was looking at in the middle of this party. And Jesus faced it, the scripture says, with joy. He faced it with joy because he was able to look to what was on the other side of it. *Hebrews 12:2* says: *Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

As the elders begin to distribute the cup, I just want us to consider that we were that joy that was set before Jesus. We were that joy that made him willing to endure the cross. You see, glorifying his Father by rescuing us made even the agony and the shame of the cross worthwhile to Jesus. And having ransomed and rescued us, he then told us that our ministry was going to involve persecution as well. Now, he not only told us that it was going to happen, he told us how we were to go through it. This is what he said in *Matthew 10*, he said: *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."* You know, Mr. Jack's same-sex marriage counter attack may have been as wise as a serpent but I don't think it was as innocent as a dove. To go back to the article, Miss Silva, the baker who refused to make the cake said this, says: "She told

Mr. Jack that she would make a cake with a blank Bible page so that he could draw the messages himself. She even claims she offered him frosting and a pastry bag to do so. I told him, 'I'll make you a cake any flavor and shape that you like and then I'll give you the icing and you can write the message yourself,' Silva, told the Daily News. But according to Silva's account, Jack became 'very pushy and disruptive,' refused to write the message himself, and said he needed to talk to an attorney."

I disagree with Mr. Jack's approach but I understand he is dealing in territory that nobody's ever been in before. All the more reason to look to the scripture for how to respond, how to behave. See, on a corporate, legal, or legislative level, we do need to be wise as serpents. And when the gospel is coming under attack from those sources, we need to use every single means we have to legally, legislatively fight back. When the gospel is coming under attack and when I am coming under attack from my neighbor, my relative or my co-worker, we are to be as gentle and as innocent as doves. That's not an easy task. In fact, it's an impossible task, and it requires a great deal of wisdom, you know, but God is the giver of wisdom and all God expects of us is to ask. See, there's no question that we are entering today into territory that nobody's ever been in before and there may well be persecution headed your way or mine in the very near future, and God wants us prepared.

See, no one knows persecution better than our Lord and Savior, our mentor and our model. He also wants us to know how to respond to persecution and how we should accept it. Jesus made that clear in *Matthew 5:10*, this is what he said, he said: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" Take a moment and consider how will I respond if and when persecution comes and arrives at my doorstep?

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, 25th verse says this, it says: *In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* Take, and drink.

This is the part that we call heads, hearts and feet, where we try to understand some practical way of what it means to remember Christ. I was thinking about what to end this with and I was reminded again of Nik Ripken's words about persecution, that we're walking in the dimming light of a collapsing Christian culture and that makes persecution a very viable option for us, and that gives us a whole different challenge and I think Nik Ripken -- I've read

this before a number of times but it bears repeating. I think he gives one of the best descriptions of how we relate to persecution. He says this, he says: "For most believers, persecution is completely avoidable. If someone simply leaves Jesus alone, doesn't seek him or follow him, then persecution simply will not happen. Beyond that, even if someone becomes a follower of Jesus, persecution will likely not happen if the faith is kept private and personal. If a person is silent about their faith in Jesus, the chance of being persecuted is very small. So if our goal is reducing persecution, that task is easily achieved. First, just leave Jesus alone. Second, if you do happen to find him, just keep him to yourself. Persecution stops immediately where there is no faith and where there is no witness. The reason for persecution then is that people keep finding Jesus and then they refuse to keep him to themselves." I think the question we all need to ask ourselves is is that us? Are we refusing to keep Jesus to ourselves or are we willing to keep Jesus to ourselves? That's the question we all need to answer. Let's pray.

*Father God, again, I just -- I look at this passage and I think of Lazarus, Lazarus becoming a target, becoming a marked man because people hated what he stood for merely by the fact that he was alive. I think of the passive persecution that he endured, I think of the active statement of who Zacchaeus now was compared to what*



he used to be and the active confrontation of Peter. And Lord, I believe every one of those roles is going to be appropriate for us as we walk through these next few days, months, years, where persecution is going to become more and more not something just out there but something real, something that's in our lives. And Father, I pray that we would understand that even in the most confrontive of responses that Peter gave to the very people who were responsible for slaughtering the Christ, even there Peter gave not just condemnation but hope and a call to repentance. So I pray that each and every one of us, when we feel the sense that we are getting punched don't just respond by punching back, that we would respond the way you would have us respond, by speaking the truth in love, by giving hope and the chance for repentance. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.