



Jesus Face Times With The Crowd

[Luke 12:49-53]

The Issue: When Jesus brings division, and what to do about it.

We live in a cancel culture. And it's not going to get any better anytime soon. NextGens are quicker than older generations to cancel relationships over disagreements. 27% of U.S. Gen Zs have severed relations with one or more of their parents. Five million North American grandparents have been cut off from their grandkids by their Millennial and Gen Z children.

An NPR headline said, "Dude I'm Done: When Politics Tear Family and Friends Apart." The lead story was about a man who *defriended*, and then *blocked* before he finally *ghosted* his best friend of 25 years after he voted for the "wrong" way in an election. Even religious folks end relationships over differences that are not critical to the Faith. Ms. Kristina Arriaga, of the U.S.



Commission on International Religious Freedom, said this at an August 2022 Trinity Forum:

“Cancel culture is one of the greatest threats to religious freedom. Today, people often try to censor statements they don’t agree with rather than embracing the right to share controversial ideas, argue, and then find a way forward. The answer for offensive speech is not to censor people. It’s to have more speech and more discussion.”

But more discussion is difficult for NextGens who practically live on social media, the digital kingdom of cancel culture. Many Millennials and Gen Zs view offensive speech as a form of violence. Often, that which people disagree with is labeled “hate speech.” This will only get worse as post-moderns increasingly define basic biblical doctrines as anti-women, homophobic, transphobic, anti-reproductive health, or intolerant and exclusionist, and even hateful. As the



Doomsday Clock ticks down to Armageddon, and a Tribulation looms on near horizons, cancel culture will morph into global persecutions beyond anything the world has ever seen.

So, how should Bible believers deal with cancel culture today and prepare for dangerous days ahead? Jesus tells us in his facetime with a Galilean crowd:

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

“From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” —**Luke 12:49-53**



When he speaks these words, Jesus is still wildly popular. Huge crowds follow him everywhere. He's the healer, bread multiplier, and bearer of good news. But, in **Luke 12:49**, he shifts gears: "I have come to bring fire on earth, and I wish it were already kindled!" Where did this Jesus come from? He

was gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Now he's the Firestarter! Pyromaniac Jesus! "I'm here to set the world on fire, and I can't wait to light the match!"

Then he pulls back the throttle in **verse 50**: "But I have a baptism to undergo..." Jesus is not talking about water baptism. He's already done that. He's talking about his impending baptism by fire. Unpopularity. Rejection. Betrayal. A Kangaroo trial. The lynch mob screaming, 'Crucify him!' Being beaten half to death and then crucified on a Roman cross. Taking on the sins of the world, becoming sin itself, enduring the wrath of God, descending into hell, and undergoing death. He will face all that and more in his fiery baptism. He is saying, in effect, "After I've gone through the fire, I will ignite another kind of fire that will sweep across the globe."

We know now what the Galilean crowd didn't know that day. After Jesus rises from the grave and ascends to heaven, he will pour out the Holy Spirit. It will come as fire to fill 120 disciples in an upper room above a Jerusalem backstreet. When he baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, John the Baptizer had prophesied, "I baptize with water, but he who comes after me will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire." **[Matthew 3:11]** His Spirit filled disciples will go onto the streets of Jerusalem with a fiery zeal. A spiritual blaze will



sweep across Jerusalem, then Judea, after that Samaria, and then set the whole world ablaze. God is a consuming fire [**Hebrews 12:29**]. People filled with his presence are firebrands. No one is more powerful or dangerous to the forces of darkness than an on-fire follower of Jesus Christ.

Jesus goes on to say this spiritual fire will not bring peace to the world. Instead, it will cause division [**Luke 12:51**]. Fires are frightening. They destroy everything in their path. But they also cleanse the earth of underbrush, garbage, decay, and rot. Forests grow back healthier. Fields are greener. Cities are rebuilt new and better after a fire. But cleansing fires are terrifying to those who are comfortable with the status quo, and those who profit from the decay and rot. Spirit-filled followers of Jesus become a clear and present



danger to them. As a consequence, in **Luke 12: 51-53**, Jesus predicts that, when he ignites the fire in his followers, it will cause division in their marriages, families, and communities.

Think about how quickly that became a reality. Eleven of his twelve disciples were martyred. Thousands of his followers were devoured by beasts in Roman arenas and countless others were butchered in the most gruesome ways. Historians

have conservatively estimated that 70 million Christians have been martyred since Jesus spoke to that Galilean crowd. More than half of those were martyrs in the 20th Century alone. Countless millions more have been disinherited by their parents, divorced by their spouses, disavowed by their families, and disdained by their friends and neighbors. Cancel culture is not new. Jesus was canceled. We will be too. There will be division and persecution as long as there are Spirit-filled believers intent on igniting and spreading the gospel flame. So, how do we deal with this reality?

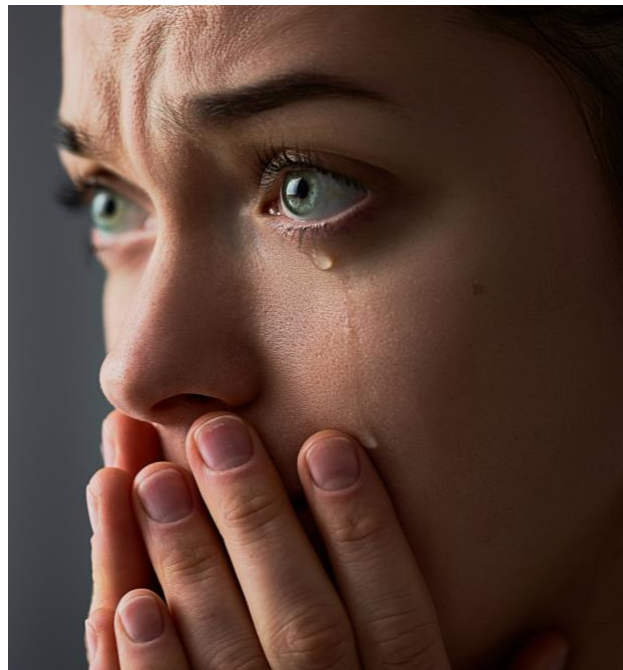
One, EMBRACE REALITY: UNION WITH JESUS BRINGS DIVISION WITH OTHERS.

When we give our lives to the One who loves us most, we may well lose those we have loved most. This is not an easy reality to embrace. But Jesus says to all would-be followers, "Those who want to be my disciples must first deny themselves and take up my cross. [Matthew 16:24] In the days of ancient Rome, when the condemned picked up crosses, and carried them to the places of execution, they are never going home again. They said goodbye to family, friends, neighbors, and possessions. Jesus lays it on the line: "Either I am the Lord of all, or I am not your Lord at all." Discipleship is all or nothing. It is death to self.



The Way of the Cross is too often soft peddled in an age of the Prosperity Gospel, cheap grace, and soda fizz theology. Our postmodern view of God is that of a benevolent Grandfather who excuses our sins with, "Boys will be boys and girls will be girls (or whatever gender they prefer)." At the end of our day, this postmodern god gives us a grandfatherly pat on the head and blesses us with his most ardent wish: "I hope a good time was had by all."

Yet, when God was here in the flesh, he said in **Luke 12:51-53**, "I have come to bring division..." He then describes it as dividing us from those we love most in this world, even our closest family members. Truth cuts like a razor-sharp sword. A Bible-believing mother recently told me that her LGBTQ daughter had cut off all communications with her because she wouldn't affirm or celebrate her lesbian lifestyle. Her pain was palpable. Her gentle and nonjudgmental stand on



biblical truth had cost her the human relationship she held most precious. She existentially knows what Jesus meant when he said that taking up your cross begins by denying yourself of that which pleases you most, even life itself.

When I reminded that mother of Jesus' words in **Matthew 5:10-12**, she responded that she didn't feel *blessed* for being persecuted for righteousness sake. Nor was she finding it easy to "rejoice" or "be glad" or take comfort in the promise that her "reward in heaven is great." The pain was too immediate and all-consuming. The Way of the Cross is never easy. We shouldn't fault ourselves or others when we struggle with it. Nor should we be surprised when it comes. Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are you *if* you are persecuted..." He said, "Blessed are you *when* you are persecuted..."

Why is persecution a certainty for us? It is certain for the same reason the prophets and Jesus were persecuted. Truth divides! Why was Jesus cancelled? He is the *TRUTH*. He thought, spoke and lived the truth. If we think, speak, and live like Jesus, we will surely be treated the way he was. Some folks will hear and receive the truth. Others will find half-truths, fake news, and outright lies to be more comfortable and useful. They will try to dissuade or discredit truth-tellers, and, when all else fails, silence and destroy them. Jesus is clear about this reality, the Bible repeats it, and history proves it. And, if we aren't being rejected by more people than we are, we should examine our lives to see if we are living like Jesus or just going along just to get along.

So how does this mother "rejoice and be glad" when her LGBTQ daughter has cancelled her out of her life? How will you and I respond when we are rejected by those we care about most? We have to embrace the words of Jesus that this goes with the territory. It means that we must hold on for dear life to the One who loves us infinitely more than those we love most on this earth. We must keep reminding ourselves that an eternity with Jesus far outweighs a few years of fragile or broken relationships with those who really never loved us as much as they love themselves or this world. Above all, it means we won't betray our Lord for thirty pieces of silver in the form of a few years of peaceful coexistence with people who don't love him (or us).

Two, WORK AT MINIMIZING UNNECESSARY DIVISIONS.

Jesus didn't say that everyone would go against our beliefs. In **Luke 12:52** he



says, "From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three." Notice, he didn't say, "It will be one against four" or "you against everyone else." Some will join you as fellow believers. Others will remain neutral. Some will even affirm you for your beliefs without embracing them. It was that way for Jesus, and it will be that way for you. Though division and persecution will come, you shouldn't go out of your way to invite or ignite it. Jesus said, "Be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves." [**Mt. 10:16**]

Please pay close attention to our Lord's words: "Blessed are those who are persecuted *for righteousness...*" [**Matthew 5:10**] Notice, he didn't say, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted for being a loudmouth, know-it-all, judgmental, bombastic, nasty, mean, foul-mouthed, insulting, arrogant, or insensitive." The list of stupidities that unnecessarily divide followers of Jesus



from nonbelievers is endless. Again, Jesus warned us to be "as shrewd as snakes." He would tell us not to die on hills that aren't worth dying on. He also said, "Be as harmless as doves." In an age of polarization, angry, bombastic, or unhinged Christians are more likely to be persecuted *for unrighteousness* behavior.

Jesus also said we are blessed if "people insult, persecute, and say evil things against you *because of me.*" [**Matthew 5:11**] When we think, act, speak, and respond like Jesus, some people will love us. Jesus is the most beloved person in history. But others will hate us. Jesus is also the most hated person in history. He is both a uniter and a divider. It is possible, in the name of unity,

to try to bring people together by condoning views Jesus abhors. A lot of squishy religious leaders are trying to do that today. They are selling out Jesus in the name of a unity that is fake and powerless. On the other hand, it is easy to divide people unnecessarily by speaking the truth of Christ while doing it in a way that is ugly and un-Christlike. So, let's act like Jesus. If we are persecuted for *that*, so be it.

Three, TRUST JESUS TO GIVE YOU HIS SPIRIT AND WORDS IN PAINFUL SITUATIONS AND TOUGH CONVERSATIONS.

St. Peter tells admonishes us, "Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that lies within you." [1 Peter 3:16]

Being prepared should be a way of life. Every morning when we arise we should ask the Lord to fill us afresh with his Holy Spirit; to fill us to overflowing with the presence and power of our Resurrected Lord. We should ask him to remove anything inside that would crowd out or impede the work of Jesus through us. We may have to repeat that prayer several times during the day, especially when we face tough situations.



As Peter promises, when people see hope in us when we face

circumstances that would put others in a state of hopelessness, they may well ask us to give them a reason for our optimism and perseverance. Our best evangelistic opportunities often come when we are hanging on with uncommon grace during times of persecution. Tertullian, a North African Church Father, famously said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." The narrative of Scripture, as well as the testimony of history, proves that even our persecutors may be won to Christ by Holy Spirit generated hope we display during our most painful moments of rejection and suffering for our Faith.



It's good to have answers when people ask us for a reason for our hope. We should be prepared as possible when those moments come. Every follower of Jesus should work hard at honing compelling answers to tough questions. But we should also take great comfort in what Jesus says in **Luke 12:11 & 12**.

“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time about what you should say.”

When we falter, Jesus will be faithful. Notice that Jesus speaks of being attacked in the synagogues. Of course, he was speaking to Jewish followers who belonged to synagogues. But his words also speak to those of us who belong to churches. Some of our worst persecution may come from fellow Christians. History proves that our Lord's most faithful followers have been declared to be troublemakers, divisive, and heretical for challenging unbiblical teaching and behavior in their churches. They have been stripped of their vestments, excommunicated, shunned, tortured, imprisoned, and even burned at the stake.



Fully devoted followers of Jesus are also a clear and present danger to the culture, the State, and its institutions. What will we say when we are dragged before civil authorities, or even challenged for our beliefs by our family or friends? Jesus says, “Don't worry. I'll give you the wisdom and answers you need when that moment comes.” This promise should help us all to relax in the face of cancel culture. It should also cause us to depend more on the Lord than we do on our own wisdom, cunning, and wit.

Four, PERSECUTION GIFTS US WITH THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION.

Jesus is clear about the greatest blessing that belong to the persecuted: “...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” [**Matthew 5:10**] Persecution for speaking and acting like Jesus is one of the proofs that we belong to him and his kingdom. But, as those still in process, we don't always act righteously. There are times we succumb to old lusts, bitterness, anger, sins and stupidities. At times like that, it's easy to doubt our salvation. Thank God for those times when we are put on the spot, and we find the strength to stand for Jesus even when it costs that which is precious to us. At that moment, we know it's only because his presence and power is in us. And our heart is again at peace.

Not only are we rewarded now with assurance of salvation, but even greater rewards await us. Jesus says in **Matthew 5:12**, “Rejoice and be glad, for great

is your reward in heaven.” When St. John peered into heaven, he saw the martyrs hidden under the altar of God in the most sacred spot of all, reserved for heaven’s most valued saints. [Revelation 6:9-11] If we give up what is most precious to us on this earth for our Lord, we will be amongst his most precious in heaven. Revelation 6:9 seems to indicate that King Jesus will not return to this earth until the last martyr has died for him. That’s how precious to our Lord is the suffering that single saint goes through for him.

Five, A GLOBAL INCREASE IN THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS IS A SIGN THAT OUR LORD’S RETURN IS NEAR.

After talking about how he will divide even families, Jesus gives a warning: “Be dressed and ready for service and keeps your lamps burning like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.” [Luke 12:34-36] Jesus is coming back for his bride. He says,



in Matthew 24:9, one of the signs his Return is near is that Christians “will be handed over to be persecuted, and hated by *all* nations because of me.” We will see a spike in martyrdoms as the end nears. The Bible calls it The Great Tribulation. Many self-identifying Christians will fall away because of these persecutions. In Matthew 24:22, Jesus tells us how bad it will be: “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive. But, for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened.”

Will followers of Jesus be caught up in what some call “The Rapture” before the Great Tribulation, or will they go through it? Biblical scholars disagree on that. But all agree on this: we will know that the Second Coming of Jesus is at hand when a great and unprecedented global persecution of Jesus followers begins to take place. We may already be seeing the Great “Falling Away” of Christians described in biblical prophecy. Certainly it’s happening in North America and Europe. We are also seeing an unprecedented rise in anti-Semitism and anti-Christian rhetoric and hatred across the globe.

Jesus followers long for his Return, but it won’t happen before the greatest tribulation in history seen takes place. Before Jesus was exalted to a name

above every name, he was humiliated as a suffering servant. So it must be for all of us who are called to follow in his footsteps. But the joy to come will far exceed the fear or pain that precedes it. So, accept divisions as inevitable. Don't go out of your way to create them. Yet, see them as opportunities to show Jesus and share the gospel. Let the rejections by other people draw you closer to Jesus. And rejoice, for great is your reward in heaven.

DR. BOB'S QUESTIONS TO PONDER



- 1. Have you been cancelled by friends and relatives because of your Christian beliefs? Are you confident it was because you acted like Jesus? If not, what should you do next?**
- 2. Why do you think evangelicals in the USA are increasingly unpopular amongst our NextGens? Are their animosities legitimate?**
- 3. How can you minimize your persecution without compromising your Faith stand?**
- 4. Do you believe Jesus' Return is close at hand? What signs do you see of his Coming? What difference should it make in your life now?**