

Understanding Verbal Persecution

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Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0 : 00] Welcome to the Providence Podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church. I'm so glad that you've joined me for yet another adventure in what is usually a careful study of God's Word and application to a particular area.

Today we're going to be thinking about the verbal side of persecution mainly, although I suppose what we will talk about today is a little bit to do with persecution in general.

If you think about it, when Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that we are blessed when we experience persecution, and then he goes on to say when people utter all kinds of false things about you and slander you and insult you, the win there is that everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted in some degree or another.

And we might think, well, that's just not true because most of us will never have to go to prison for our faith or so on and so forth. And I was like, well, that's correct, but the definition is much broader than that, and it includes people just saying nasty things about you.

[1 : 32] And in that respect, if you desire to live a godly life and you insert Jesus as you ought to as the solution to everyone's problems, you know, the closer you're aligned to Jesus, the more likely you are to experience some of that at the very least.

And I thought we'd talk about that today because really from John 11 through 12 in particular, also I think if I'm remembering correctly a bit of 13, we will see a number of people who are doing the right thing by Jesus.

You know, they're aligned with Jesus. They are bearing Jesus's name. They're unified with him in one respect or another. And they all kind of wind up in the world's crosshairs to some degree or another.

Not sure how to start. Let's just start at the beginning. Let's just say this. Okay. We are a marker of success. We should not be afraid. One way to think about this, a marker of success, the way to say it is, is that we can know we've made it when we've made a certain kind of enemy.

We can know we've made it when we've made a certain kind of enemy. This does not mean that people who encounter constant conflict or even stir up constant conflict are more mature than those who don't.

[2 : 45] We'll get to that, I guess, at the end of this conversation. But it does mean that you know you've made it when you've made a certain kind of enemy. Let me give you an example from John 12, 1 through 7.

We find Mary receiving unexpected criticism from Judas. Judas. She's just poured out an extraordinarily expensive perfume on Jesus' feet.

She is honoring him. And Judas responds, why was this woman, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? So here she's doing a good thing.

And Judas criticizes her for it. And we would say, well, Mary's doing good because Judas doesn't like her. We know she's made it because she's made a certain kind of enemy.

He says, why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? But in reality, he said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. And having charged with a money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

[3 : 46] We'll think more about that detail in a moment. And then right from there, you know, in John 12, 1 through 7, we go into the, I guess not the surprising, but I don't know, a bit of a turn of, a bit of twist of the plot.

And that is, is that in 12, 9 through 11, we find out that Lazarus's mere existence as a man who had been raised from the dead was causing a lot of people to put their faith in Jesus.

And so in that passage, the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death because on account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

So once again, who is simply by his others to cry it, quote unquote, to some degrees to the elevation of Jesus. On 12, we go to Jesus' full entry into Jerusalem and the crowd waves palm branches and they quote the Messianic Psalm, the Messianic Psalm, yeah, Psalm 118.

And, and in that case, we don't see the criticism coming in John. But when Luke records that same story, we see that the Pharisees tell Jesus to quiet the crowd because they are being inappropriate. [4 : 59] So three instances of three people kind of showing that they're right, they're right over the target even maybe, because of the enemies, the criticism that they receive.

Again, this is part of what Jesus said would be the case. Matthew 11, 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. So first point, don't be afraid to wind up in the critics crosshairs.

That's just going to be a part of you actually getting closer in your obedience to Jesus. Second point is, I think, probably the most important just for us.

And that is, we need to see through the critics camouflage. We need to see through the critics camouflage. Very often, obviously in this text I'll demonstrate it, but also in life, those who are attacking the ones whom Jesus loves will employ altruistic language to camouflage their actual motivation.

[6 : 13] So they're doing something bad, but they're talking about it as if they're in the background. Chapter 11, where they're just a worn out, you know, kind of a platitude.

That's in Luke, that's in John chapter. What you've got there is just, like, it's right for us to kill Jesus because this is actually going to protect the greater nation.

And there's a question that would emerge with that particular comment is, did they believe that or were there other motivations? And it's kind of irrelevant at this level as we're talking about it.

The point I want you to see right now is that their evil action was cloaked in altruistic motivation. And then you've got Judas' critique of Mary is, like, the really kind of obvious example of this.

Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? And here we see that Judas is transparently lying. He knows that the real motivation is he wanted a little slice of that pie, and he's just hiding behind this other thing.

[7 : 25] So he's making Mary and, to some extent, Jesus appear to be wasteful when the reality is that he's greedy. So he's taking the moral high ground in his criticism, and he's camouflaged his criticism with altruistic language.

And I want to take a moment and just say that of all the possible ways that people hide behind altruistic language to do bad things, I would say that the poor wind up being used more than almost any other thing I can think of.

Concern for the poor winds up almost always winds up being common forms of order to, in the name of the poor, they're doing moral high ground. This is a very basic strategy for Marxism.

And there's a reason that Frederick Engels, Marxist pal, held a special hatred for Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon routinely exposed this particular Marxist lie for what it was.

Like he would routinely say, they're saying it's for the poor, it's not, it's for power. And there's actually a book written called Karl Marx versus Charles Spurgeon, where Spurgeon was not, Spurgeon was not, you know, excessively political, in part, by the way, because both right and left in his time were really deeply ensconced in Christian principles still.

[8 : 55] So Spurgeon's living in a time where Christendom is still very active on both sides of the political spectrum. The one exception to that would be Marxism. And so in that regard, Spurgeon was quite political.

He was consistent in standing up against that particular error. And there was another error that Charles Spurgeon handled in his lifetime that nearly killed him.

Well, there were probably two more. One would be like the kind of emerging Darwinistic thinking.

But then the other one I'm thinking of is what's known as higher criticism, where in the name of unity, in the name of missional unity, in the name of intellectual advancement, a number of people were significantly watering down the authority of the scriptures.

And again, they're taking the moral high ground. They're saying, no, we're doing this because of love. We're doing this because of intellectual rigor, so on and so forth. And the truth is, is like they

were just doing it because they were evil and had all these other ulterior motives.

At one point, Spurgeon's own denomination sanctioned him and applauded loudly. I think I've done a podcast on this. He's applauded loudly, like the celebration that Spurgeon was sanctioned.

[10:12] And it was because they were framing him as rude and mean by his insistence that he stand with the truth.

And one thing Spurgeon talks about is he's kind of one of the original guys to talk about tone policing. And this altruistic camouflage can express like this. Well, that's not very nice.

And Spurgeon said this, who will not for the world. I know what people will say. They will say you are straight laced and that you will not throw much life into company.

Others will call you mean spirited. Oh, my brethren, bold hearted men are always called mean spirited by cowards. So first point, we should not be afraid of falling into the world's crosshairs, the critics crosshairs, because in some sense, we can tell that we've actually made it when we've made a certain kind of enemy.

A point to that particular kind of enemy will often seize the moral high ground as Judas did against Mary. And it's all a camouflage.

[11:17] Sometimes talk about this at the end. Sometimes the critic themselves are deceived by their own justifications, by their own camouflage. In Judas's case, he was not deceived by that.

He knew what he was doing was false. But in either way, people will criticize us and they will often hide behind altruistic language, using the poor or the vulnerable as kind of human shields for them to wage a war with us.

And yet we can't punch back. We can't say anything back because that would be mean. That would not be humble and so on and so forth. And you just eventually will wind up into situations where people will just go fully against you, like Spurgeon had when he was censured by his own denomination.

Okay, so this gets us to the third point. And this isn't so much about you facing conflict. This is about you responding well when your brothers and sisters face criticism.

So the third point would simply be, we must be faithful companions to those facing criticisms. We must be faithful companions to those facing criticisms.

[12:34] Now I want you to think about how that is not the easiest thing to do if you don't understand the first two points. So the tendency when a faithful brother or sister is facing criticism is to assume that they must have done something wrong because that's just weird that someone would be criticizing them.

But no, we kind of criticism and slander and lies is a part of actually an expression of maturity. We will know we have made it when we made certain kind of enemies. And then it becomes even harder sometimes to stand with our brothers and sisters who are being criticized because the critics are seeming to make altruistic points.

The critics seem to be people that are interested in loving others and in protecting others and so forth. And they're hiding behind these altruistic camouflage.

You know, in the case of Judas, it really would have been hard, I think, for the average Christian in that situation to stand with Mary.

I think they would have totally been deceived by Judas' complaint and thought, well, he has a point and so on and so forth. So in order to be faithful to our brothers and sisters who are undergoing criticism, we really need to understand that a lot of stuff is going on.

[13:55] We really need discernment. And also, we need to probably just assume loyalty and then move out from there, I suppose. I don't know. I think there's something to that. I get that in part.

And then Jesus is a special case, granted, in some sense. But I get that in part because Jesus just says to Judas, leave her alone, right? Leave her alone.

He just stands up for her. And that's what we need to do for our fellow brothers and sisters when they're in this particular situation. Michael Foster was talking about gaslighting, and he says this, Gaslighting is simple.

Lie with enough force and enough friends, and soon the truth teller starts to doubt his own eyes.

Keep it up long enough, and he might even apologize for things he never did. And it's our job as companions of those who are being criticized to not let them be gaslit, to help them come down to firm conclusions and understand, is this criticism fair or is it fallacious?

Is this criticism, the employment of this altruistic language, legitimate, or is that camouflage and so forth? We need to stand up for them, but we also need to stand with them.

[15:03] And if you want to follow Jesus, you've got to be like Jesus. And Jesus routinely stood up for his people. I can think of countless examples. Even, for instance, when the crowd was cheering for him in the triumphal entry recorded in Luke, Jesus says, listen, you know, and the Pharisees say, Quiet your disciples.

And he says, If they don't cry out the rocks. He's like, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to listen to you. I'm not going to criticize these people who are praising me. He stands up for people.

When the man born blind winds up getting kicked out of the synagogue, that's when Jesus goes back to him. He's like, you know, I'm with you.

When the disciples are plucking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus stands up for them. So that's a very important thing. I think we need to understand that at any given time, it's likely in certain cultural conditions, almost certain, that our Christian friends will, some of them, one of them, will be facing criticism.

That criticism will be cloaked in language that tempts us to side with the critic. And we need to be better than that. We need to stand up for truth and understand really what's going on.

[16:21] A final point is that we must ensure that the cause of a conflict we face is really Christ. We must ensure that the conflict we face is really of Christ, because of Christ.

So nothing I've said so far, and I mentioned I'd talk about this, nothing I've said so far should be taken as an excuse to be rude or ungentle or impatient. We are only blessed, going back to Matthew 5.11, we're only blessed when others revile us and utter all kinds of evil against us on Christ's account.

We're not blessed simply because people find us objectionable. We're not blessed because we're full of hot takes. We need to make sure that the kind of criticism that, to understand that the kind of criticism I'm talking about in this podcast, is the kind of criticism that comes because of Christ, not because of your own weirdness, your personality, whatever, right?

So to kind of put a bow on that idea, the Bible presents two, I would suppose, two main explanations for interpersonal conflict. One is noble and one is ignoble.

One is noble, one is not noble. The noble one, the noble explanation for interpersonal conflict involves a collision between the advancement of Jesus and the sinful ambitions of man.

[17:44] That noble cause, that noble cause of conflict is bound up in like a Psalm 2 phenomenon, where individuals with things to lose rally themselves against the exaltation of Jesus, the advance of Jesus' agenda for the world.

You'll see in John chapter 12, and I'm really, my brain is not working great today. Sorry, guys.

Sorry, some of my references are off. But you'll see after Jesus hears of the Gentiles seeking him, that Jesus then says, you know, now is the time, now is the time is in that same discourse.

And what's going on in the noble kind of conflict? It's a conflict between principalities and powers. It's going on between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.

And we're just like little representatives within this larger battle. And so when a conflict is noble, it's because Christ is on our side, and we are on Christ's side.

And the person who is criticizing us, even if they dress themselves in altruistic camouflage, is really acting out the side of the devil who knows his time is short, so on and so forth.

[18:56] So that's the noble way to wind up in conflict. But there's an ignoble way, and that's discussed in James 4. The noble way is the collision of Christ against sinful ambitions.

But the non-noble way is the collision of two sets of sinful ambitions. So that's James 4, 1 through 3. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this, that your passions are at war with you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You do not have because you do not ask. So we just need to be highly sensitive to the distinction and understand, is this a conflict happening because we are both being sinners?

Or is this a conflict happening because one individual is advancing the cause of Christ and the other individual is seeing aspects of their own darkness being threatened by the light?

[19:59] That's a huge factor in this. It will also help us to discern, you know, clear up some of those confusions that can come when people use altruistic camouflage.

It will help us to think through some of those things. So that's the basic idea. It's a theme that I saw as I was doing sermon prep for John 12 and just didn't make it into the sermon but did want to pass it on to you.

Number one, don't be afraid of winding up in a critic's crosshairs. Number two, make sure you understand they're not going to, like, tell you they're evil. They're going to hide behind altruistic camouflage. Number three, be a faithful companion to those who are facing conflict.

And number four, ensure that the cause of your conflict is really Christ. Twenty-three or so minutes of podcasts on handling criticism. I'm going to actually edit this into one podcast, but I'm about to go do a second podcast that's going to be even shorter.

These are just things that I've had on my docket to clear off, and so I'm going to try and knock a few of those out today. All right, well, enjoy the beautiful weather outside that we've had this week and look forward to seeing you in a few days as we gather to worship King Jesus on Sunday morning.

[21 : 15] Thank you.