



Week 3: Dealing with Opposition

**Jesus the Game Changer Episode 3: The Persecuted Church**

**Bible Passage(s): Acts 5:40-42; Mark 1:12-13**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sermon Outline** | **Notes** |
| Share a story of a time when you faced opposition to your faith. | Share a time when you faced opposition because of your faith.   * When was it? * What was it about? * What did it show you about the connection between faith and opposition/persecution   [If you don’t have a personal story you could use this story published by ACL - [watch video here](https://www.acl.org.au/freedoms)] |
| Inevitable difficulty and opposition | In Week One, we were reminded of Jesus’ last words in Acts 1:8: *“you will receive power…”* etc.  We quoted Alexander Maclaren who said this:  *“He [Jesus] shows them the armour of power in which they are to be clothed, before He points them to the battlefield.”*  Make no mistake - the mission to be Jesus’ witnesses is not a journey that is destined to be smooth sailing.  In fact, Jesus promises quite the opposite.  In Luke 10:3, when Jesus sends the disciples out on mission He says: *“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”*  In John 16:33, Jesus says *“In this world you will have trouble.”*  And then in Ephesians 6, Paul introduced us to the idea that Maclaren leans on - the armour of God.  Ephesians 6:11-12:  *“Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* |
| We see persecution throughout church history and this is a live issue for many people today. | Persecution and opposition are part what happens when we share our faith. You don’t have to spend long on Twitter and even vaguely share a post about faith to see the kind of potential for opposition and persecution that exists for us today. This has been the case for all of Christian History.   1. Persecution in the book of Acts.   Persecution was part of the story of the Gospel going to the ends of the earth. The Apostles and early followers faced some incredible opposition.  Read or re-tell Acts 5:40-42  However, they didn’t try to control the outcome. They faithfully preached and spread the Good News despite their suffering.   1. An example of persecution in Church history.   Choose an era or country in [this Wikipedia Article](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians) to share another story of when Christians have experienced persecution   1. Persecution today.   In certain parts of Africa, Asia and in the Middle East, Persecution on the grounds of faith in Jesus is a very real thing.  Open Doors releases a world watch list every year. The 2020 watch list is out and this is what it shows - [visit page about World Watch List here](https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/world-watch-list/)  [show map and explain definitions of persecution and how countries are ranked]  In the Jesus the Game Changer Season 2 episode on The Persecuted Church, we meet Hassan John from Nigeria and Maryam and Marziyeh from Iran.  Each of these individuals have experienced persecution because of their faith. Maryam and Marziyeh were imprisoned for distributing Bibles and Hassan has had church buildings burnt to the ground and suicide bombers approach his church gatherings. |
| But what about Western nations? | We started off today by talking about opposition we experience to our faith. There are times in life that stretch us, challenge us, break us or re-define us… But is this persecution?  The persecution we have looked at is the systematic mistreatment of an individual or group on the grounds of their faith in Jesus.  Based on the Open Doors data, we can see that in Australia (or any other Western nation) there is not a significant level of widespread or systematic persecution. However, that is not to say that those of us who attempt to share the Gospel in word and deed are not going to face opposition, resistance, negativity and even slander.  In fact, the Bible assures us that we will and that we should expect it.  2 Corinthians 2:14-17 says that to some, our message will be pleasing and to others, it won’t be.  And Jesus says to His first followers: *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.”* (John 15:18) |
| How does persecution shape us? It grows faith | When we find ourselves faced with opposition and challenge because of the Gospel, we actually find ourselves with the opportunity to develop something crucial… faith.  Mike Gore, head of Open Doors Australia, has two great quotes in the Jesus the Game Changer episode on persecution.  (VIDEO CLIPS: Week 3 – Clip #1\_JGCS2\_EP03\_Gore 1 and Week 3 – Clip #2\_JGCS2\_EP03\_Gore 2)  In one instance he says: *“I remember, he was a 70 or 80 year-old Chinese believer from the underground church, and as our time together drew to an end, I simply said to him, “Brother, can I pray for you?” And he says, “Yeah, I want you to pray persecution never leaves China”. I remember I paused, and I said, “Can you explain that?”; He said, “Well, we look at the Australian church as a prophetic example of what happens when faith becomes free’. He says, ‘The value of Jesus drops. I want you to pray persecution never leaves China”.*  And then he also shares this:  *“I grew up in a comfortable culture and a beautiful country. And I think when I meet with, and my time with the persecuted church, they talk to me, you know, the simplicity of their Gospel is being able to articulate who Jesus is and what He’s done in your life. But when I look at my own life, I feel that the relative safety of culture and the stability of the economic climate that I’ve grown up in, when I look back it makes it more and more difficult to see where the hand of Jesus has been, the highs and the lows. Whereas in the persecuted church they could speak to you for days, for hours, about what Jesus is to them, what He’s done in their life, the transformation He brings, why He matters to you.”*  Mike’s discovery is that Christians living under persecution have a deep and real dependence upon Jesus. They fix their eyes on Him in their difficulties and see His Hand at work.  Both of these quotes show us the unsung gift of facing opposition and challenge in this life - a deep and real faith in Jesus Christ. |
| Illusion of control | In the end, the only difference between the developed and the developing; east and west; free and persecuted; is our illusion of control.  We will all face trouble and we will all face opposition to the Gospel. The trouble for those of us who don’t face the kind of systematic persecution of those on the World Watch List is that we have fooled ourselves; we have fooled ourselves into thinking that we have a degree of control over our life and our circumstances.  Richard Rhor says that the opposite of faith is not doubt; the opposite of faith is control.  [Here are some examples you could use to illustrate our Illusion of control]:   * Financial independence: how our economy, household incomes and job security gives us a sense that we control our destiny. * We’ve developed mechanisms to controlling life - from contraception to end of life (abortion, treatments, new technologies, euthanasia). How have these measures given us an illusion of control over life and death? * Technology and social media - this allows us to flick, scroll and swipe through content that doesn’t appeal to us or news that we don’t like. We choose what we watch, when we want it and we craft our own image. How does this perpetuate our desire for and illusion of control?]   However, we are unable to avoid the trouble of real life. The moments that confront us with our humanity and remind us that we are not in control.  [Use an example below or tell a story of a time when you were confronted with a life event that highlighted your inability to control an outcome or change a circumstance:   * Unexpected diagnosis * Loss of job * Bullying * Natural disasters * Relationships and/or children] |
| Explain Jesus’ testing in the wilderness (Mark 1:12-13) and His option to control. | Many times in the Gospels, Jesus is given the opportunity to control His circumstances and control His reputation. Yet, time and time again we see Jesus leaning into difficulty and opposition.  In Mark chapter 1, right after Jesus has just been baptised and His identity has been affirmed by the Father, the next moment that Mark records for us is in verse 12: *“At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being temptedby Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.”*  Immediately after His identity is affirmed, Jesus is tested.  From Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 4:1-11), we gain more insight into how and what Jesus’ was tempted with: immediacy, legitimacy, and glory ([Adam Ramsey article](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-planting-idol-immediacy/)).  Jesus is presented with the opportunity to control His circumstances, to control His reputation and control His future, and He doesn’t. |
| Don’t ask why. Ask where. | Open Doors says this on their website: *“the common thread is that persecution exists where the Gospel is being shared.*  *For that very reason, Open Doors doesn’t exist to stop persecution, but to help the local church continue to follow Jesus, no matter the cost.”*  This is a statement that realises the inevitability of opposition. No matter where the Gospel goes, opposition and persecution will always be part of its journey.  The question is: will we be faithful with the message and have faith in God’s presence?  A well known Pastor from Africa was once sharing a story of a very challenging time in his family. And he was asked how he deals with the difficult situations in life. To this, he responded: *“I don’t ask the question: why is this happening? But rather, where is God? And the Good News tells me that God is with us in whatever the circumstances.”*  In JGC S2, Hassan John says a similar thing. When visiting pastors in refugee camps, he was asked by Karl Faase how he encourages them in these difficult times. He said this: *“With the pastors, I try to tell them and teach them that they are God’s representative, they are the shepherds of the sheep, and therefore, they must be able to teach and let people see the love of God in all that is happening. Not that God is absent, no. He is there, taking us through.”*  The question of why is about control: it’s our desire to know, to understand.  Where is God is a question of faith. It’s the question that lead Peter to get out of the boat. Where is Jesus? He was out on the water.  It’s a question that led him to Cornelius in Acts 10:10–16, where we see the Gospel go to the Gentiles.  And it’s the question that led Paul and his co-workers to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. |
| Respond | Questions for your congregation to consider:   * Are you facing opposition to the Gospel? Where you are unpopular because of your beliefs and convictions? Where is God? * If you’re not facing opposition: consider, why not? * Is there someone or somewhere that you need to take the message of Jesus - despite the opposition that might face you?   + Pray the words from the Chorus of the song, To the Ends of the Earth: “*Call me wherever your heart wants to go”* |