

The Testimony of Jesus (part 3)

Matthew 16:17-18—Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”

We are thankful for that precious and magnificent promise because it would appear to the natural eye at times that the church is a failure. But we are thankful when we see from God’s perspective or when we see from a heavenly view that God is doing a great work. And we see that He is doing this in spite of all the opposition and hindrance that the enemy is trying to bring against Him. But we are thankful that this is the foundation we have as we move forward, looking to the Lord as He completes His great work, and our hope is that it gets completed sooner than later.

We have shared throughout this series that the battle is over the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1:17-18: “And when I (John) saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He laid His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.’”

We do not have time to go back over all the fulness of what the testimony of Jesus is; we did that in the introductory time, but in a summary way we see that the testimony of Jesus in these verses show that He is the all-inclusive One. He is everything; He is the Alpha, He is the Omega, He is the First, the Last. He is our very life. It is the character and nature of Christ that God is looking for within His people. That is what He is interested in, Him being our all in all, Him being our total life, and also the display that He is the all-victorious One. Thus, we are thankful that we gather today in the victory that we have in Him.

One final verse as we start today because we have seen it from the very beginning. We see it becoming more and more clear about this battle, and there is a great call that the Lord has upon us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians these verses in II Corinthians 11, and as these verses rang true in the time of Corinth, they ring true today and throughout history. Paul, in his great relationship with them writes this:

II Corinthians 11:2-3: “For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

This is what the battle is over. It is staying in that place of simplicity and purity of our devotion to Him. We will see throughout history how little things begin to erode that simplicity and we get distracted from the purity of it. Stuff is either taken away or something is added to it. When something is pure, the two ways you make it impure is by taking something out of it or you add something into it. Either way, it is not as pure as it was. Also, we see the simplicity that we have

in Christ and it is Christ alone. He is our all in all. Again, if we try to add something to that or take away something from it, it gets very complicated, and we are led astray from it. This is a great battle that we are in to stay in the simplicity and purity by devotion to Him. As we continue this time, as always we are not looking so much at the history, but we want to see the ways of God and the faithfulness of ones in the midst of great conflict and opposition that came upon them.

Let's pray:

Lord, we are thankful for the provision that we have had in You. Lord, we remembered You this morning, and we are ever grateful for that precious table. There again is that simplicity: I was lost but now I am found. I was blind, but now I see. Praise God! Lord, we want to stay in that place down at Your feet looking at You and beholding You. As we come to Your Word this morning, we have that open heart attitude that You would speak to us and show us Your ways, show us the path of life that You have for us in the days that we are living in that we could be encouraged and helped and exhorted and warned by the ones who have gone before us. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

As we begin part three today, we cannot look at the details of a lot of these things. So as I do a bird's eye view, there are a lot of resources out there that you can follow up on something specific if you are interested, and it would be good to go ahead and do that. However, we are just looking at the overall view.

The Testimony of Jesus

From a point of review, we saw how the church was in God's heart from eternity past. It has always been there, praise God! The church had a good and healthy beginning. The birth of the church in the book of Acts was glorious, and it was so healthy. There was no lack or need, and it continued to go on. As we said, the testimony of Jesus is the key to everything that God is doing. As we follow the testimony of Jesus and keep our eyes upon Him, it is the very key and essence to what the Lord is doing. We can see even at the end of the New Testament how the church was beginning to enter into a time of declension. Certain men were taking the place of the Headship of Christ at times, error was coming in, and things were becoming lukewarm. There was an element of declension and weakness beginning to come about. We looked last time at how severe the persecution was by the Roman Empire. But praise God, there were those faithful witnesses who endured whatever persecution came upon them. They maintained that simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ and loved not their lives unto death. We also saw how they encountered many internal problems, and we actually see this throughout history even today. There is always a battle from without and a battle from within. Therefore, we are having to keep our eyes on Him because He is the answer to both of them.

We left off last time where Christianity was legalized by that unholy alliance with Constantine. Today, we would like to consider more of the impact of that unholy alliance, the relationship between the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, and Islam. These are the first three things that were really coming against the testimony of the Lord from the outside. Then we will look at the canonization of the Bible, the faithful witnesses and the

continued battle within. But praise God, in the midst of that there is always that silver thread in dark times. There is that precious testimony of Jesus that continues on.

The Impact of the Unholy Alliance with Constantine

As we consider the impact of Constantine when he became the emperor, Christianity became the state religion. There was an alliance between church and state, and a great corruption took place. Constantine made himself the head of the visible church, and at the same time he was also the Pontifex Maximus. What a name! That sounds like he pulled a muscle or something. He was the high priest of the Roman pagan religion. It shows the corruption and the folly of it.

The church became open to all. It was popular and accepted as the so-called church, and many unbelievers came in. And sadly, what the enemy could not do through persecution, he did by corruption within.

The Great Divide

At this point we have what I call a great divide in the way I will be sharing. Thus far, I have been able to interchangeably use the word church, testimony and Christian altogether, but after this point those words, particularly the word church, is used in a broad general sense. I hate using the word church because it is so misunderstood. It has been profaned, desecrated and misapplied in every which way. I had some help with what words to use because the first word that came to my mind I could not use here. It was not a proper word to use, and I did not want to offend anybody. So what we are going to be looking at is really the distinction between the testimony of Jesus and Christendom. The testimony of Jesus is that which is born of God, Christ centered, eternal, the life of Christ, that which we are following. That will be compared with Christendom, which is man-made, man-centered, and earth-bound. Now Christendom can do many good works which may be in the name of the Lord, but the difference in both of these is simply the origin. The origin of one is Christ, and the origin of the other is man, and that is what makes the eternal difference. I am thankful that in the days in which we are living and with all the tragedies all over the world, there are a lot of good people doing a lot of good works. They might not be of eternal value, but people need help, and they are taking care of ones. But we are focusing in this series particularly on the eternal things, the testimony of Jesus.

As we look at Constantine and the impact of that unholy alliance, there are several factors that occurred. The political capital moved from Rome to Constantinople, and the Roman Catholic Church then assumed power in the Western world. We will go into a little more detail about the impact of the Roman Church, but I just want to show in a brief form what happened. The emperor before Constantine was Diocletian, and in order to manage the Roman Empire he divided it between the Eastern and Western. He had headquarters in Constantinople, and he had headquarters in Rome. The Roman man was mainly the predominant one, and the Constantinople man was number two, although he was a close number one. They controlled the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire went all through what we call modern day France and Spain, all through North Africa, and all the way up into Britain. Then the Eastern part of it was all through Turkey,

Asia Minor, and Greece. When Constantine took over, he liked Constantinople, so he moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople, and that left a vacuum of power in Rome. The person in Rome had been the powerful one, but he left and moved to Constantinople which left a vacuum. And who was there ready to fill in that vacuum? None other than the Roman Catholic Church, which was the pope at that time. When Constantine moved the capital out, it left a way and a means for the Roman Catholic Church and the pope to gain more and more power, not only in the church but in the world. There was a great increase in power that the pope and the Roman Catholic Church had over the whole world at this time. This is where it started, and it emerged greater and greater throughout the world at this point and time.

The Holy Roman Empire & the Roman Catholic Church

Gregory I was the first one to claim the name pope, but then there was this little guy, Pepin the Short. He helped the pope conquer Italy. He was from France, and through him he was made the first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, so-called because it was endorsed by the church. There was always two entities, the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church. The power was mainly in the Roman Catholic Church, and probably one of the most famous ones was Charlemagne. At different points in time, depending upon the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire or the pope within the church, there was quite often a great power struggle over who was going to be in charge. For many centuries, the pope would appoint the one who would be in charge in France or Spain or Germany, all within the umbrella of that empire. So the pope had great influence and great power, but there was always tension and a struggle. Sometimes the pope was totally dominant over everything, and other times he would be the weaker one. Other times the emperor would be strong and would gain power. There was always this tension, but they actually needed each other to succeed. That continued on until close to the reformation before all of that ended. The Holy Roman Empire was very large, but the Catholic Church still had influence over France, Spain, and part of Britain.

I am presenting the negative first because in the midst of all of this stuff there were faithful believers. I wanted to show how bad it was to see what these believers were up against.

The Great Power of the Roman Catholic Church

There are a few significant dates of the Roman Catholic Church at this time. One of the big things they held over people was that there was no salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church, and this gave them great power. You have to understand that most of the people at this time were very uneducated. They were very superstitious, so whatever the church told them they believed. They did not have the Bible so they could not read it. They kept introducing more and more things to draw the people under more and more control of the church. They worshipped Mary, and the bishop and purgatory were taught. In 600 AD the worship service got converted to Latin, and that was a power move. The people were dependent upon the priests who worshipped for them. Worship was only in Latin, and most people did not know Latin. Only the priests knew Latin, and now they were in a place where the priests could do worship for the people. It was a power struggle all about man, and so much of this is. It is really sad to see the degradation and the way it was going down and how long it had been going on.

In AD 1054 there was a great schism between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Church, which was the Roman Catholic Church. In history they will try to identify doctrinal and theological differences, but what it boiled down to or why they split, there was a power struggle from the head guy in the East and the head guy in the West in the church. The Pope in Rome versus the head guy in Constantinople. It goes back to the Scripture: "Who is the greatest?" Both of them wanted to be the greatest, so there was a split, and it is still split today. They have kind of made friends outwardly over the last years. We see the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church, and it goes on through Russia. But this was the great divide that occurred.

The Rise of Islam

Another thing that the dear brethren were up against during this time was the rise of Islam. We have the birth of Muhammad, and the Hijrah which is the migration from Mecca to Medina. We see how Islam continued to spread all throughout into India, Central Asia, Arabia, across North Africa, into Spain. It stopped in Spain at the Battle of Tours which was in AD 732. Islam would have swept on into Europe, but this miraculous battle stopped them. They started in Syria and ended up moving into Constantinople and up into the Balkan area. It had a great influence and a very simple gospel. It said, "Believe in Muhammad or die." You cannot get more simple than this. They just went through the land and said, "You believe or you are going to die." A lot of people just said, "Yes," but the faithful ones who said "NO" were put to death. It was pretty simple.

Between Islam, the power of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Holy Roman Empire, all of these dynamics that were going on is what believers during this period of time, AD 300-1000, were having to live under. It was a very oppressive, hard time. One of the first steps that they took was actually the canonization of the Bible. I am not going to go through all of how the Bible came about, but there are books on that if you want to read it, and it is very interesting. A little before the Lord was born, the Old Testament was translated into Greek, and people could read it. We know that from AD 45 to about AD 95, the books in the New Testament were written that we are familiar with. What really precipitated the canonization of Scripture was in AD 140-150 when Marcion, who was a heretic, established his own New Testament. He did not like Paul, so he edited a lot of his letters and added some of his own writings. He then published this as the official New Testament. So that really prompted the believers to say, "Wait a minute. We need to come together and establish what Scriptures should be in the New Testament. So they went through this process, and in AD 397 it was established. The council there came up with 27 books. There were various discussions that went on during this period of time about which books should be included, which ones should not be included. If you a historian it is an interesting read.

The Persecution of Diocletian

The persecution of Diocletian is one of the first times we see where the New Testament Scriptures themselves were confiscated and destroyed. The enemy has always hated the Scripture. All throughout history we will see that one of the ways the enemy tries to defeat the people of God is by taking away the Word of God, making it illegal. And we begin to see sniffs of that within this country today of how the Word of God is being turned and almost projected to be a hate Book. We need to learn the Word very well within our own hearts while it is still called

today because you will see all throughout history there is a great battle over the Word of God. We are thankful that we have the freedom to get it into our hearts today.

Faithful Witnesses

In the midst of all this we are thankful for these faithful witnesses, and they were found throughout. Ulfilas was in Northern Europe, Priscillian in Spain, Portugal and France, Ninian in Scotland, and through these various ones we are thankful how the Lord touched individual hearts. We saw how large that Roman Empire was, and people were free to move throughout that empire, so when different believers were scattered, some of them made it all the way up to Britain, throughout Germany, France, and different places. There were individual believers who were scattered in different places, and they had an impact on various hearts and lives, and we are thankful for that.

Ulfilas and the Priscillians were in Southern France, Patrick was in Ireland, Ninian was in Scotland, and Columba was in a little island called the Hebrides right off of Scotland. They sent people out in groups of twelve from Britain throughout Europe. Ones from Wales settled in France, and ones from Canterbury settled in Germany and in the Switzerland area. This is the impact of individuals on their own who were sent out in groups of twelve. They would go out and start little communities of believers in these various areas, and it is a precious testimony the way the Lord raised ones up to use them for the spreading of the gospel.

Rome hated these faithful witnesses. The Roman Catholic Church would suppress anything that diverged from the teaching of Rome. There was no gray areas. You had to be either absolute obedient or you would be classified as a heretic, and you had the right to be put to death.

Ulfilas

Ulfilas was the apostle to the Goths which is Northern Europe. He invented the alphabet there and translated the Scriptures into Gothic so that ones could actually have the Word of God. Imagine inventing an alphabet! That is kind of like Wycliffe does today. They invented an alphabet and taught it to the people, and he used the Word of God as the great teaching instrument for the people. It was his earnest faith, the Word of God and his very life that won people to Christ.

Priscillian

In Southern France you find Priscillian who was a young aristocrat. He was actually a Roman priest, but he got saved. As he read the Word of God, it converted him, and he started sharing the truth, the real Word of God with others around him, and many were getting saved. Because he was sharing the truth in the Word of God, he was the first Christian to be martyred by the Roman Catholic Church in AD 385. Then they burned all of his writings and teaching; everything was burned and destroyed. This is one of the characteristics you will find throughout this age. As you are trying to find out things about these people, it is really difficult because the Roman Catholic Church destroyed all of their documents. So much of the things that we know about these people is actually what the Roman Catholic Church charged them with. They will say that this person is a heretic. Or they did not believe that Mary was the mother of God. This person did not believe in transubstantiation, this person did not believe all of these sacraments; and that

made them heretics. You do not have a lot of their own writings at first, but you have the writings of what people wrote against them to see what they believed.

Ninian

We find Ninian in Scotland, but he was actually educated in Rome. He was converted also and preached the Word of God. It is an amazing testimony if you ever want to read about him. He ministered among the Druids, and many of them came to know the Lord. There was a darkness associated with the Druids, but the power of the Word of God set many of them free so they could come to know the Lord and the Word of God. When we look at these situations and these various ones who were ministering in the darkness and the impact of one person, it encourages us today because we see the darkness growing. We see the darkness getting darker and darker, and you can feel there is a hopelessness. What can we do? But praise God, when ones were given to Him and simply followed Him, He made a way for them to have an impact, and we are thankful that the same Lord we are serving today can have that same impact through us.

Patrick

The next person we find here is Patrick. Now first of all, Patrick was neither Irish nor Catholic. There are more legends about Patrick than anybody in history. He was neither Irish nor Catholic; he was a good Scotsman. He was born into a Christian family, but he rejected the Lord at an early age. One day he was out working, and some slave traders came from Ireland (of all places), and captured him when he was fifteen years old. There was human trafficking in those days; that is what it was. They took him to Ireland where he worked as a slave on a farm, but in the midst of that he found the Lord. While he was a slave, he found the Lord in Ireland. Six years later he was able to escape, and he went back to Scotland. After he got back to Scotland, the Lord really spoke to him. It was almost like Paul when he had that Macedonian vision to go over to Macedonia. In a similar way Patrick had a vision, in which the Lord was calling him to return to Ireland. He returned back to Ireland and lived there for the rest of his life. He led over a 100,000 people to know the Lord. It was a tremendous impact by this dear one, and many were influenced. Not only did they live in Ireland, but they would spread out and go to other places to share the gospel.

Columba

Another one that was really influential in the days was Columba, and he was from Ireland. Some people have tried to draw a connection to him being influenced by Patrick, but you cannot say for absolute certainty. We do know that he went to a little island off Scotland called the Hebrides, and he founded a community called Iona. It was a community of believers, and they had a plurality of leadership, they had a simplicity in their worship, they had the Lord's table which was very similar to ours. They had a table that just had a cup and a loaf on it. The ministry of the word was through all the brethren as the Lord would speak, and there was great encouragement, and they saw the beauty of life together. It was not just individual; they were beginning to see something of what they called a community together, assembly life together. And because of that, brethren would go out by twelves throughout Britain and Europe, and they settled in many places. The ones who would go out, today, would call this church planting. They were not church planting; they were there just to spread the gospel and to testify of Christ. They

were not trying to build an empire or anything for themselves; they were so captured by the Lord in such a way. You have to remember back in the days they were living in, when ones would go from one area and move to another country, they were literally leaving everything behind and going to some strange place they did not know a lot about, but they went there to live amongst them and to share and testify of the gospel. It was a glorious work that Columba did with all who were there with him.

Nestorius

The last one we will touch on is Nestorius. The Nestorian is probably the name that has been more greatly misrepresented by the Roman Catholic Church than any other. If you look through much of official history, many of these people are called heretics because the official history has them as heretics, but Nestorius was from Syria, and he emphasized the humanity of Christ. There was a focus on the deity of Christ in the region they were in and an influence that the church was having, but there was not anything being shared or promoted on the humanity of Christ. So he was talking about Christ, that He was deity, but there was also a humanity to Him. And we need to see that the reason He had that humanity is that He can sympathize with us in all of our weaknesses. However, because of that, they thought he was denying the deity of Christ which he was not. If you fully read his writings. The main thing against him was that he would say and was very vocal about it, "Mary was not the mother of God." He was forced out of his area, and he and his followers went to Persia, India, and China. Actually, in certain parts of China where they lived, you can find historical documents and stones that are still there to this day testifying of how the gospel first went there back in this early time. It is amazing how through persecution this gospel is being spread through ones who were staying in a place of simplicity with Christ and not caring about themselves. And through this God found ones who had a heart for Himself and was able to use them. And would that we would have a heart available to Him in the days we are living in.

Arianism

Not only were there battles from without, but we mentioned earlier battles from within. It is interesting as you begin to look at some of the battles from within, they are still going on today. The first one was Arianism which says that Jesus was the firstborn of all created beings, and He was above everybody but technically not equal with the Father. They said Christ was a created being. And we know that there are certain teachings today, certain ones that deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ. But we know the truth that Jesus was not born; He was eternal and equal with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. There was an equality there. We see how these subtle things can come in.

Pelagianism

The second one, Pelagianism was a denial of original sin, and man is born in innocence. This teaching says that Adam would have died anyway. Adam died, not because of his sin, but he would have died anyway. We are only responsible and accountable for our own sins. Most of these heresies take different Scriptures from different places out of context, and say, "See, you can look at the law; each one is only responsible for their sin. Therefore, Adam was only responsible for his sin." It tweaks it a little bit and gets it wrong. Everybody is born in a place of

innocence like Adam, and therefore salvation is based on man's own will to choose right or self-help. You can improve yourself if you do better, and we are hearing that today. We hear the gospel of self-help quite often, but we know that all are born in sin because of the fall, and salvation is only by the grace of God.

Manichaeism

Then we get to Manichaeism, and this one drew from Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism and tried to establish a universal religion based on "truth" from all of them. And basically, it was the first ecumenical movement. Ecumenicalism is not something of the 21st century; it has been going on a long time. So you see from these things that there is nothing new under the sun. You see how some of these have been going on for centuries and centuries, and we are seeing the continued fruit of these errors that manifest themselves. That is why it is so vital that we need to know the truth and be established in the Word of God. We can think something is a new teaching. "Oh, this is a new teaching; it is profound, but it is not.

Sacerdotalism

Then there was Sacerdotalism which said that salvation can only be found in the church by millions of sacraments ministered by the priest or else this salvation is by works. And you have to be in the right place at the right time and the right church. Sadly, we know that even outside the Catholic Church today, there are what is called Protestant Churches that if you are not part of them you are not a believer. That continues throughout this day in time. We are thankful that salvation is by faith in Christ in His atoning death and resurrection. So these are some of the things they were having to battle.

In the mist of having to battle things from without like Islam, and everything else in the holy Roman Empire, there was a turmoil going on within. We are thankful for these faithful ones who were clear on knowing the Lord and the simplicity of that. That is why there was this silver thread in the dark times. The reason I call it a silver thread is if you looked at the big picture you could not see the testimony of Jesus with your natural eye. But in reality all throughout history there is this silver thread. Silver means the redemptive work of Christ being for given of our sins, of His death and resurrection, and there is that thread throughout history of the testimony of Jesus. Sometimes it might be just a sliver, a flickering wick, a flickering candle, but it is always there, and that is so encouraging. In spite of the dark times, there was always that testimony. They were suffering great persecution and martyrdom, and the Roman Church called them heretics. If you were not within the Roman Church, if you were opposing them, and you were considered a heretic. But these ones believed the Bible was the only authority, not the pope, and the true church is from God and not man. They basically lived simple lives free from the world. They were called by various names, but the names were put on them by other people. They simply called themselves Christians. We are going to look at a few of them in this time.

Paulicans

There were the Paulicans, the Bogomils, the Cathars/Puritans. The Paulicans were throughout Armenia and Asia Minor, into the Balkans. They moved from place to place because of persecution. The Paulicans started in Asia Minor and because of persecution they have to

move into the Balkans where the Bogomils are, and as they underwent persecution they had to move into France and Spain and Northern Italy where you have the Cathars. Next time we will look at the Waldenses who were a little later as far as the time period.

At this point in time Islam was centered in Asia Minor. Finally, it broke through Constantinople, and Islam started coming into this area, having a great influence. And there were great battles. The battle between believers and the natives and Islam that came in is actually the origin of what has been going on to our day and time with the ethnic cleansing between Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia. Again, that is not something new. It traces all the way back to this point in time. We are thankful that in spite of all that persecution, there were faithful ones there that held to the testimony of Jesus. Praise God for that!

The Paulicans were mainly in Armenia, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, and the key writing that came from them is called the “key of truth.” What is the key of truth? What is your Sunday School answer to every question? Jesus! The key of truth was Christ. That was the simplicity of that teaching—the key of truth. It just talked about salvation through faith, baptism of believers, and the Lord’s Table was for believers. It got into family life on how to raise a child up according to the Scripture, and you are to serve in humility. They found their spiritual unity was in Christ not in a teaching or belonging to a certain system. They were in Christ, in Him. That was a living thing to them, and they saw that was their way of life, and very precious. The great persecution came in and that was when they fled to the Balkans, and others who stayed behind ended up allying themselves with the Muslims and were defeated. They thought that they could make peace with them, be good neighbors, and they would live a peaceful co-existence, and it did not work. They were defeated, but thankfully, many of them fled to the Balkans and were safe.

Bogomils

Then there were the Bogomils, which means “friends of God”—all these funny names. They were in the Balkans throughout Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, and had been driven there by the persecution. Again, it is very repetitive; they had the priesthood of all believers, and when they came together, it was practiced in life. They had the Lord’s table, they had plurality of leadership, they saw that the true church is the body of Christ, and they were edified by teaching of ministering brothers. As various brothers had something, they would share and encourage one another with the Word. The Bogomils actually got caught from both sides. Islam was coming from one way, and since they were believers, the pope of the Holy Roman Empire sent crusades against them. So they were getting attacked one way by the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, and the other side Islam was coming in against them. They were getting wedged in. Many of them had to choose, and some of them fled up to other parts of Europe, Northern Italy and Southern France. They were having to make a choice. The ones who were going to stay there said, “Okay, we have the pope coming this way, the crusades of the Roman army, and we have the Muslims coming the other way.” It was like who was the least of two evils? And the testimony is that they chose the Turks, the Muslims as the least of two evils. It is sad because some did not end that well. Because of the pressures that they were under, it was either flee or you had to make a choice. Sadly, ones chose to be identified with the Muslims.

Cathars/Puritans

But the ones who fled were the Cathars or Puritans. This was mainly in Northern Italy and Southern France, and one of the key brethren there was Pierre de Brueys & Henri, and Pierre was burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church. It was very sad, but again they were teaching believers' baptism instead of infant baptism, the priesthood of all believers, simple reality of the Lord's table. It was a simplicity to these ones as they gathered, and many times they were having to gather in hiding places, they could not have large gatherings.

Bernard of Clairvaux

The person that persecuted them greatly was Bernard of Clairvaux, and he was the Roman Catholic Church, he was Abbot of France. He was probably the most powerful man in France at that point in time. And he greatly persecuted these dear ones. There is a great lesson here. We have five of his hymns in Christ in Song. We have "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee"; "Jesus Thou Joy of Loving Heart"; "O Secret Head Now Wounded". He wrote beautiful hymns, but yet at the same time he was persecuting what we would call true believers because they were not part of the Roman Catholic Church. You can draw a similarity to Saul of Tarsus who was so zealous for the Jewish religion and thought he was serving God, he ended up persecuting the believers. You cannot deny, based on his life, that he knew the Lord, but you had to be within the Catholic Church, and these people were outside. It is perplexing, but it is also a warning. He was so blind to his loyalty, but he knew the Lord. You can tell from his hymns and his writings, he knew the Lord, but one aspect of him was so blind and loyal to a certain system that he missed Christ in the other believers, in the true believers and ended up persecuting them. His persecution was not very effective. He was very involved in one of the crusades, another tragic thing of Christendom at the end time. But it is sad. You read about him, you see many good things in those precious hymns that he believed, and yet at the same time he was a persecutor of true believers.

As I was reading about him, it was very sobering because oftentimes one of the things you will begin to see throughout history is that the persecuted ones can then become the persecutors. The Roman Catholic Church persecuted the Protestants, and then the Protestants will end up persecuting the Anabaptists. The persecuted ones become the persecutors. I think from him there is a great lesson for us to learn. That is why I appreciate David's Psalm where he says, "Search me oh Lord and try me, and see if there is any wicked way within me." I do not want to be governed by blind spots or blind loyalty but allowing the Lord to show us how we are to be living in this day and time.

Next time we will look at some glorious things like the inquisition, the crusades and getting up to the prereformation. In many ways I do not like talking about the negative stuff, but you have to see the picture and environment that ones are living in. It encourages us for the days that we are living in because of the intensity of evil that is growing, the darkness that is growing, the corruption of everything that is growing, and the question is asked today: "What is truth?" And if we do not know what is truth, we can be led astray and come under things and faint in the day of adversity. So the desire is that as we see faithful ones, the silver thread throughout history, that ones are able to remain loyal and faithful to the Lord, faithful to the testimony of Jesus, maintaining that simplicity and purity to Him that that will keep us pressing on. Where we have

things in our lives that are distracting us from that, the Holy Spirit can be convicting us and setting us free that we could be that bright light in the midst of the dark time.

Let's pray:

Lord, we are very grateful for the testimony of Your life and the very goodness of it. Lord, You are so faithful, and we worship You for that. Lord, we see these ones in many ways so long ago, and it is hard to relate, but we can also see that there are things that we can relate to. So we pray that we could be learning these lessons and that we would be open, Lord, to Your Spirit working in us that we would stay in that place of simplicity and purity of devotion to You, staying in that place of following the Lamb wherever He goes that the testimony of Jesus might be a very clear testimony within our lives together and individually. In Thy name we pray. Amen.