Pastor John Miller, 11-01-2026, COTR Texarkana
Title: Unmasked, pt-7
Purpose: Expose satan's planned persecution of believers and his attempt to draw Christians into a godless culture in the last days.
Truth for Today: When we're persecuted for our faith endure it and stand for Christ. Choose to be godly in a godless culture.
Topic: Devil, Satan, Culture, Persecution
Text: Matthew 24: 3-14
Series Title: Unmasked
Series purp.: Expose the schemes, tactics, and strategies of the devil and demons and provoke people to recognize and resist them.

Unmasked, pt-7

I. Brother K: Internet audience, we're interviewing a pastor from the persecuted church. Audio but no video. No posting on social media. It could endanger his life.
   A. Questions
      1. What's it like for Christians living in the persecuted church?
      2. Have you suffered for Jesus as a Christian? What did they do? Why stay there?
      3. Tell us about your ministry.
      4. What can Americans do to help you and the persecuted church?
      5. What are your financial needs? Give on the app, "persecuted church". **$2,500**

II. Sermon Introduction (Prayer)
   A. Concluding Series: Unmasked pt-7. We've exposed the tactics of the devil so we can resist them. Today is also a transition to a new series, "Living in the Last Days".We'll talk about how satan will (1) persecute true believers and (2) create a godless culture.

III. In the last days the devil will persecute true believers
   A. The last days began at Pentecost. Peter quoted the prophet Joel in Acts 2:17. 3 OT/4 NT
   B. Jesus, [Mt. 24:3–14 (NLT) …His disciples…said…**What sign will signal your return and the end of the world**?" *(deception, false messiahs, world turmoil, war, famine and earthquakes)*…[9] "Then you will be **arrested, persecuted, and killed**. You will be **hated all over the world because you are my followers…]** AD 64 Nero blamed Christians for burning Rome and executed many. *Who's behind this?
      1. Smyrna [Rev. 2:10 (NLT) Don't be afraid of what you are about to **suffer**. **The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you**.] The devil's behind hatred.
      2. Persecution's happening now. Open Doors estimate 388 million Christians world face high to extreme levels of persecution; 1/ 7 Christians globally. It'll get worse.
      3. If we suffer for Jesus, our mindset must be to have a commitment to Jesus that He is more important than anything else. It may involve sacrifice of possessions, loss of position and relationships, hardship and even death but the reward is worth it.
   C. Our Response, [Vs 13 But the one who **endures to the end will be saved.** [14] And the **Good News about the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world… and then the end will come.]**

1. If persecuted, we have 2 priorities: (1) Endure as long as it lasts; don't turn you away from Jesus even if it costs you. Trust the Holy Spirit to help you, (2) Stay on mission; tell the world about Jesus to anyone and everyone you can.

IV. In the last days the devil will create a godless culture contrast believers and unbelievers

A. [Ephesians 2:2 (NLT) You used to **live in sin,** just **like the rest of the world, obeying the devil**...] So what do people who are under the influence of satan do?

B. [2 Tim. 3:1–5 (NLT) You should know this, Timothy, that **in the last days there will be very difficult times.]** i.e. it will be hard for us because satan is opposed to God's ways and culture and false Christians try to make us turn our back on God's ways. 19

1. Vs 2 people will love only themselves- We love God, others and are unselfish.
2. Love their money-"love of money is root of all evil" "You can't serve God and $"
3. They will be boastful and proud- We're to be humble, recognize God as the source of all we have and do e.g.sports and Pr."let others praise us, not ourselves"
4. Scoffing at God, ridicule and mock God's Word-We fear/ reverence God/ obey
5. Disobedient to their parents- Christians obey and honor our parents e.g. TV
6. Ungrateful (*entitled*) -"In everything give thanks…this is the will of God"
7. They will consider nothing sacred (*holy)*- The Bible is God's Word, Sunday is a day of worship, show respect for the church building, e.g. trash, sports Sunday
8. Vs 3 unforgiving- we forgive those who do us wrong
9. They will slander (*speak evil*) of others FB- we find the good and praise others
10. Have no self-control (*do whatever they feel like*)shooter-we control our ungodly desires
11. They will be cruel- we are kind and show God's love by helping others.
12. Hate what is good- we love and practice what's good. We try to be a good person.eg
13. Vs 4 They will betray their friends- "a friend sticks closer than a brother"
14. Be reckless do foolish things without thinking drag race stoplight-we carefully consider our action by finding and obeying God's will and His Word.
15. Love pleasure rather than God i.e. hedonism- we love God more than anything else
16. Vs 5 They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. They reject Jesus as Savior and refuse to follow Him as Lord- We do both.

C. When we act godly rather than worldly, some will hate us; let them. Some will follow us; we're rescuing their soul from an eternity without God. It's not always easy living the Christian life. Live it anyway and it'll be worth it when Jesus says well done.

V. Conclusion: Good news! [Romans 16:20 (ESV) **The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.]** Stomp Until then God will give us grace to endure persecution as we choose to follow Jesus instead of the ways of the world.

VI. Response

A. Souls: Why Pastor K suffer for Jesus. Because Jesus loved him, forgave him for his sin, gave him happiness, peace and purpose in life and the promise of eternal life. You can have a relationship with God like this if you believe and follow Jesus.

VII. Bibliography/ Resources: Logos Bible Software and Library, Platinum Edition, was used to prepare this message.

1. Litfin, A. D. (1985). 2 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 756). Victor Books.
2. Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 935). Victor Books.
3. 'Open Doors' World Watch List

VIII. Supplemental material

A. Summary review

1. Text: [1 Peter 5:8–9 (NLT) **Stay alert! (be constantly ready) Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (destroy). (NCV) 9 Refuse to give in to him, by standing strong in your faith.]**
2. **What do the devil and demons try to do to us? i.e. his strategies, tactics**
3. #1 Satan wants to stop God's Word from taking root in our life. Parable of the Sower
4. (#2) Satan influences people to do evil. Judas betrayal of Jesus
5. #3 Satan disrupts our plans to advance the gospel. [1 Thes. 2:18 (ESV) we wanted to come to you-I, Paul, again and again-but Satan hindered us.]
6. #4 Satan strategically puts people in positions to prevent people from following Jesus. [Acts 13:6–12 (NLT)… they met a **Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet** named Bar-Jesus…[7] **He had attached himself to the governor**,
7. #5 Satan seeks to pull believers away from God and back into the world. [1 Thess. 3:5 (NCV), I sent Timothy to you so I could learn about your faith. **I was afraid the devil had tempted you, and perhaps our hard work would have been wasted**.]
8. #6 Satan schemes to divide and destroy churches
9. #7 Satan and demons torment people and make them act out in self- destructive ways. [Luke 8:27-30 (NLT) a man who was **possessed** *(def. influenced or controlled)* **by demons** came out to meet him *(Jesus)*. For a long time he had been **homeless and naked, living in the tombs**, 29, **This spirit had often taken control** of the man. Even when he was, put in chains, he simply broke them, **completely under the demon's power.**]
10. #8 Satan wants to use our uncontrolled anger to do his bidding. [Eph. 4:26-27 (NLT) And "don't sin by letting anger control you, or anger gives a foothold (ESV opportunity) to the devil.]
11. Temptation Satan manipulated and controlled Judas through the love of money
12. [Pr.18:19 (NLT) An offended friend (NCV insulted, NIV wronged) is harder to win back than a fortified city. Arguments separate friends like a gate locked with bars.] Def. Offended: To feel hurt, angered, mistreated, or wronged by what someone did or said; To be outraged because we feel attacked or insulted.2 Gk. skandalon, the bait in satan's trap
13. Today: he creates a godless culture and persecutes true believers.

B. You'll suffer for 10 days. But **if** you **remain faithful** even when facing death, (*Polycarp the bishop of the church in Smyrna, was martyred[1])* I will give you the **crown of life**.

C. Revelation 20:10 (NLT) Then **the devil**, who had deceived them, was **thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur,** joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be **tormented day and night forever and ever**.

D. 3:1–5. As in his previous letter, Paul warned Timothy about the collapse predicted for **the last days** (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1–3), a term which includes the entire period between the first century and Christ's return. During this interim, according to the prediction, the world will see **terrible times** of societal degeneration. Paul gave an extraordinary list (cf. Rom. 1:28–32) of 19 general characteristics believers should expect. **People will be:** (1) **lovers of themselves** (*philautoi*, "self-centered, narcissistic"); (2) **lovers of money** (*philargyroi*; cf. 1 Tim. 6:9–10); (3) **boastful**—the outward manifestation of the fact that inwardly they are (4) **proud** ("arrogant"); (5) **abusive** toward others, which translates *blasphēmoi* ("blasphemers"). Several of the words which follow begin in the Greek with the prefix *a*=, meaning "without" (as in moral-amoral, theist-atheist), signifying absence of the designated virtue. Thus people will be (6) **disobedient** (*apeitheis*) **to their parents;** (7) **ungrateful** (*acharistoi*); (8) **unholy** (*anosioi*); (9) **without love** (*astorgoi*,
trans. "heartless" in Rom. 1:31, the only other place it is used in the NT); (10) **unforg iving** (*aspondoi*). *Diaboloi*, a word usually translated "devil" (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6–7; 2 Tim. 2:26), is used here with the root meaning (11) **slanderous;** (12) **without self-control** (*akrateis*); (13) **brutal** (*anēmeroi*, lit., "untamed," the opposite of civilized); (14) **not lovers of the good** (*aphilagathoi*; cf. Titus 1:8; Pss. 15:4; 19:8). The next two characteristics begin in the Greek with the prefix *pro*-, indicating an aggressive inclination toward vice: (15) **treacherous** (*prodotai*, "disposed toward betrayal"); (16) **rash** (*propeteis*, "disposed toward recklessness"). The final three characteristics are (17) **conceited** (lit., "puffed up"; cf. 1 Tim. 3:6; 6:4); (18) **lovers of pleasure** (*philēdonoi*) **rather than lovers of God** (*philotheoi*; the Gr. prefix *phil*= here and in characteristics 1, 2, and 14 above signifies "lovers of …"); (19) **having a form** (*morphōsin*, "outward shape," used only here and in Rom. 2:20) **of godliness but denying its power** (cf. Titus 1:16). Though these characteristics are cataloged under the auspices of a prediction about "the last days," it is clear that Paul considered them to be already present in Ephesus. Though they would intensify with time, Timothy had to beware of such people and **have nothing to do with them**. No doubt Paul had in mind here Timothy's official associations, since he had already instructed Timothy to be kind to everyone (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24).[1]

E. Church Smyrna, [Rev. 2:10 (NLT) Don't be afraid of what you are about to **suffer**. **The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you**. You'll suffer for 10 days. But **if** you **remain faithful** even when facing death, (*Polycarp the bishop of the church in Smyrna, was martyred[1])* I will give you the **crown of life**.

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trans. translation, translator, translated

1. James 1:12 (NLT) God blesses those who patiently endure testing…Afterward they will receive the crown of life…] Believers are encouraged to be faithful by contemplating what awaits them after death, namely, eternal life and a reward. [2]

F. An estimated 388 million Christians worldwide face high to extreme levels of persecution or discrimination for their faith -equaling roughly 1 in every 7 Christians globally. 1 in 5 Christians are persecuted in Africa and 2 in 5 Christians in Asia.
G. Scale and Statistics
H. Global Numbers: According to global watch lists from organizations like Open Doors, hundreds of millions of believers live under daily threat, intimidation, or legal restriction.
I. Highest-Risk Nations: The countries ranked with the most severe levels of Christian persecution include North Korea, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan, Libya, and Iran.
J. Violence and Casualties: Thousands of Christians are murdered, detained, or violently attacked each year for their faith, with high concentrations of physical violence occurring in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (such as Nigeria) and regions experiencing militant or sectarian conflict.
K. Government Restrictions: Research from sources like the Pew Research Center shows that government-imposed restrictions on religion- including property closures, surveillance, and anti-conversion laws-have climbed globally, heavily impacting the Asia-Pacific and Middle East-North Africa regions.
L. Forms of Persecution
M. State Control and Surveillance: In nations like China, authorities use digital tracking, camera surveillance, and forced closures of unregistered "house churches" to suppress independent religious practice.
N. Legal and Anti-Conversion Laws: In countries like India, several states enforce anti-conversion laws that penalize evangelism and restrict charitable or social outreach by religious minorities.

Extremism and Militancy: In the Sahel region of Africa and parts of the Middle East, non-state actors, jihadist groups, and militant factions target Christian communities, villages, and clergy through abductions, displacement, and targeted killings.

Social and Family Ostracism: Persecution is not always violent; it frequently manifests as job loss, eviction, denial of education, or rejection by immediate family and local communities for converting from a majority religion