

# The Reality, Repentance and Resolve of a Hated People

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[ 0 : 00 ] After these events, King Xerxes honoured Haman, son of Hamadatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honour higher than that of all the other nobles.

All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honour to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour. Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, Why do you disobey the king's command? Day after day they spoke to him, but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behaviour would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the purr, that is, the lot, was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month.

[ 1 : 05 ] And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Xerxes, So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman, son of Hamadatha, the aggregate.

The enemy of the Jews.

Let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury. So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman, son of Hamadatha, the aggregate, the enemy of the Jews.

Keep the money, the king said to Haman, and do with the people as you please. Then, on the thirteenth day of the first month, the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people, all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples.

These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and children, on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

[ 2 : 22 ] A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality, so they would be ready for that day. The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa.

The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly.

But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing.

Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

[ 3 : 31 ] Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, the king has but one law, that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives.

But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king. When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer. Do not think that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape.

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai. Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do.

[ 4 : 46 ] When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. Thanks very much.

Let me just pray as we come to Esther 3 and 4. Our Father in heaven, we thank you are the speaking God. Thank you that you speak to your word by the power of your spirit.

And you speak to the Lord Jesus. Please now speak into our hearts truths that we might know your love and love you in return. For his name's sake. Amen.

Now, do you expect life to be fair? I think I expect life to be fair. I certainly think we raise our kids to expect life to be fair. If you try and do the right thing, if you're a good citizen, if you do your homework as well as you can, then you'll be rewarded.

But if you're unkind, or you do bad things, or you don't try hard at school, then you'll suffer the consequences. And as Christians in the UK, we've grown up, I think, assuming that the world is a fair place.

[ 5 : 56 ] It's a fair place that if, as a church, we try and do the right thing, we keep the rules, we put on events for our local community, we attempt to love our neighbours as ourselves, then we'll have a good reputation.

People think, those Christians, they're nice, they're lovely. The problem is that we follow the most loving, the kindest, the hardest working, the most righteous person to have ever lived, and the world killed Jesus for it.

And Esther chapter 3 brings us face to face with an irrational hatred for the people of God. Now, previously on Esther, we've seen, we're in the capital of the Persian Empire, Susa, it's around 480 BC.

King Xerxes has been humiliated by his wife. She won't parade before his drunken guests at the party. So the suggestion of his advisors, he comes up with a beauty pageant with a difference. The contestants don't enter, they're described as being taken. And the judging consists of a knight in the sack with his royal highness, where if you perform as he likes, and he can remember your name, he'll invite you back for another go.

[ 7 : 09 ] Well, Esther is one of the lucky girls chosen. She's orphaned, who's looked after by her uncle Mordecai. She's got a knockout figure. They are Jews, members of the people of God.

Not that anyone knows that, because Uncle Mordecai says, keep your head down, Esther. Keep it hush. The old trusting in the law business, don't let it out of the bag. And after a year, we saw before coffee at the Royal Health Spa, Esther's number comes up, with the results that Xerxes makes her his queen.

And we ended with Uncle Mordecai saving King Xerxes' life. You know, here's a conversation at the office between Big Thana and his mate Terry, who are planning to assassinate the king.

Have a look down at the end of chapter 2 and verse 22. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.

And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the Annals, in the presence of the king.

[ 8 : 23 ] After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman, son of Hamadatha the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

What do you mean, Haman? I'm a Mordecai, he's the one who rescued you. What do you mean, Haman? I mean, how's that fair?

I'm a Mordecai, does the rescue. Haman gets the honor. And here's the first thing we see. It's the reality of a hated people. Because we're told here, Haman is an Agite.

But, and Agag had been king of the Amalekites back in the day of King Saul, in 1 Samuel 15. That's the very Saul who we saw earlier Mordecai is descended from.

And what distinguishes the Amalekites is they hated the people of God. In fact, as soon as the Jews had become a nation, the Israelites, the Amalekites tried to destroy them.

[ 9 : 21 ] So Moses, back in Exodus, declares this. Listen to Exodus 17, verse 16. The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.

Mordecai saves Xerxes. And Xerxes promotes Mordecai's enemy, Haman, the Jew-hater, to the post of Prime Minister. I mean, how's that fair? Don't you sometimes feel life's not fair?

You work hard. You do all you're asked to do at the office. They get the promotion. You love children. Your husband would make a good dad.

You pray. But you still just don't get pregnant. You prayed over your children's cots. You've done your daily family Bible devotions.

But you're still called into school. And when you finally get them home, they tell you that they hate church and they hate you. You thought they were your friend. You bought them that slightly more expensive birthday present.

[ 10 : 21 ] And they still put that picture of you on Instagram. And everyone has a good laugh about it. See, life's not fair. It's the nature of the world we live in.

The world that humanity's made by choosing to live by our own standards rather than the God who loves us. By choosing to love self rather than love God and others.

Life's not fair. Look at verse 2 with me. But he went only as far as the king's gates. Sorry, I read the wrong chapter.

Here we go. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman. For the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay honor to him. Perhaps it was too much for him. A bit like a Jew of today, say, meeting someone who was a concentration guard during the war. He just couldn't bring himself to kneel before a man who was the sworn enemy of his people.

[ 11 : 22 ] The others in the office keep asking him, why did he disobey the king's command? Perhaps they were thinking, now this is the Mordecai who foiled the assassination plot. I mean, look, Mordecai, you don't have a problem with Xerxes, so why won't you bow to his new top man?

Eventually, Mordecai confesses at the end of verse 4, I can't because I'm a Jew. No, this isn't about, this is about who he is.

And just like all yes men, well, these yes men go off and tell the boss because there's no fun being a yes man unless you can show up those who don't conform. And Haman's fragile ego can't cope with a bit of low level insubordination.

Do you see how he reacts in verse 5? When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.

Literally, he was filled with fury. A fury that's driven not just by a deep hatred of Mordecai, but of all God's people. Look at what he does in verse 6.

[ 12 : 28 ] Yet, having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of King Xerxes.

This isn't a proportionate response, destroying people because of a slight of one individual. This isn't rational because to be one of God's people puts you in the firing line of a world who hates God.

Haman starts his plotting. And because he's superstitious, you can never be too careful when you're planning to commit genocide. He casts lots to choose a date for his crime.

Haman, verse 7. In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month of the month of Nisan, that is, Pur, that is, the lot, was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and a month.

And the lot fell on the twelfth month in the month of Adar. Well, for Haman, it appears revenge is going to have to be a dish served up cold because the lot is cast for about a year later.

[13:40] And as Proverbs, chapter 16, verse 33 says, the lot is cast into the lamp, but its every decision is from the Lord. Just like we saw, the sovereign Lord is overseeing for his people.

Even as Haman begins to scheme, his plot is unraveling because the sovereign hand of God is in the background. Not that Haman knows that, so he totters off to appeal to Xerxes' ego and Xerxes' greed.

That happens in verse 8. Then Haman said to King Xerxes, there is a certain people, dismissed amongst the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, who keep themselves separate.

Their customs are different from those of all the other people, and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

Don't worry about who they are, Xerxes. I mean, it doesn't really matter. They're just a certain people. They're odd, by the way. They don't fit in. They're just different. Well, that's probably true.

[14:40] And they're disobedient. Well, that's just simply a lie. You'd be much better off without them, Xerxes. In fact, you'd be about 10,000 talents better off.

Because what Haman does is he offers him a huge bribe in verse 9. This is the Russian oligarch buying off the British establishment. Oh, I'll make it a few billion pounds worth your while.

And Xerxes, his eyes light up. I mean, he's not bothered about who or how many die. He just likes the idea of a quiet life and loads of money. So he gives Haman the royal signet ring of authority.

And look what he says in verse 11. Keep the money, the king said to Haman, and do with the people as you please. He doesn't mean keep the money.

That's just what you say if you're the king. It's like when you go out for a meal with your rich friends. And they say, we'll get this. And you say, oh, no, we'd love to pay. You don't really mean it.

[15:42] In fact, you're depending on the fact that every other time you've said that, they've said, oh, no, no, no, let us pay. I mean, you'd be stuffed if they said, oh, okay, you pay this time. I'm surprised you all did those two bottles of Dom Perignon.

No, no, the money is what Xerxes is about. And then verse 12. That's the day before Passover.

The great Jewish festival when they should have celebrated the Lord rescuing them from Egypt by his mighty acts of judgment. But this Passover, only one judgment is going to be thought about by the Jews.

That issued by evil Haman in verse 13. Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the orders to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and children, destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women and children.

They really like to be sure, these Persians. Like to all legal documents, they don't want you to misinterpret this. All God's people are to die.

[17:21] Total ethnic cleansing across the whole empire. It's a dreadful edict. It's ordering a holocaust. And it's taken out by Persian horsemen at top speed from the capital.

And with the deed done, do you see what happens at the end of verse 15? The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was rebuilt. Xerxes and Haman have a glass of shabli on the terrace without a care in the world.

But people around the city are saying to one another, Did you understand this new law? Kill all the Jews at the end of the year? Aren't they the ones that run the food bank down our street?

I mean, my Jewish neighbors, they have us in for drinks and mince pies every Christmas. I thought the Jews were a law-abiding lot. They've done loads in our community. You see, this isn't anti-Semitism.

That's a dreadful evil, by the way. But remember here, the Jews in the Bible are the people of God. These are our spiritual ancestors. It's not the physical nation of Israel today.

[18:29] No, we are the descendants of these Jews as Christians who trust the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who fulfilled all of God's promises to them.

And this is an irrational hatred of God's people. As Jesus said in John chapter 15 and verse 18, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

See, the people of God have always been irrationally hated. All but one of Jesus' apostles was executed for what they believed. And in every century since, thousands upon thousands of

Christians have been killed simply for being Christians.

It's no different in our world today. Even as I'm preaching here, people will simply have been killed because they believe in Jesus. One study had the figure at 90,000 for 2016 alone.

[ 19 : 39 ] That's one person every six minutes. Now, I think that's probably a bit too high, but martyrdom is alive and well in the 21st century. And we're seeing, aren't we, a rise to irrational opposition to God's people across the United Kingdom, even here in Scotland.

Increasingly, those who make our laws are not content to have a society where lots of different beliefs are tolerated. No, they're legislating so that one set of views has to be celebrated.

It's increasingly hard to be faithful as a Christian to what God has said to us in his word, in everything that we're asked to do in work or at school or in the community. See, if we seek to faithfully follow Jesus, we will be hated for it.

Now, if you're not yet a Christian and you're here, that might surprise you. The world that God made, the world that he loves enough to give his son for, actually hates him.

So, if you do become a Christian, not everyone will think that's wonderful. Some people's families will resent the fact that they've just become a bit too religious.

[ 20 : 50 ] Some people will think that you're stupid, you're boring. Work might not be quite so keen on promoting you. But being a hated people doesn't finish off the people of God.

You see, persecution doesn't destroy the church. Rather, it refines and grows it. I don't know if you know the Horrible Histories. You know the Horrible Histories? They're, my kids love the Horrible Histories by Terry Deary.

They're history books for children with all the gruesome bits left in. And in his book, Ruthless Romans, Terry talks about the persecution of Christians. I don't think Deary is a Christian, but his commentary on the martyrdom of Phibia Perpetua on March 7, 2003 AD in Carthage, it's very telling.

He records from her diary in prison. Her longing for a new baby. Her refusal to burn scented wood to the emperor, even when her father is beaten in front of her.

And then her calmness in death, asking for a pin to put her hair up, having been thrown to the ground by a bull in the arena. Finally, a nervous soldier hacks away at her neck and fails to kill her.

[ 22 : 04 ] And she guides the trembling hand to her throat so he can finish her off. And this is what Deary comments. The Christians died so bravely, they made thousands of others want to copy them.

Killing Christians in the arena didn't kill off the Christian church. It only made it stronger. And that is what is happening with Mordecai and Esther. Because have a look at chapter 4 and verse 1.

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly.

And it's the second thing we see here. It's the repentance of a hated people. You see, Mordecai's reaction, it's not hidden. It's out there for all to see. He wanders through the streets wailing.

He goes to the place of government, the king's gate, not dressed in his usual business suit, but in rough rags. The ashes of misery are poured on his head. He's not allowed in because Xerxes doesn't like people wandering around being glum and spoiling his fun.

[ 23 : 14 ] But Mordecai, the stealth Jew, is suddenly there for everyone to see. He sits down amongst the very colleagues who grasped him up to Haman, and he's not alone.

Did you see that in verse 3? In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing.

Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. Across the empire, Jews who'd been content to live in the background, the Jews who hadn't taken the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, the city of God, under Xerxes' granddad, Cyrus, maybe because they were just less keen on their Judaism, maybe a little more compromised with the pagan world around them.

These very Jews suddenly stand up and stand out. There is corporate repentance. Because Xerxes, he wasn't going to be impressed by all this moping around.

Now, this isn't an act for Xerxes. This is an act towards the Lord. This is what God's people do. It's a visible demonstration of their dependence on him, an acknowledgement for the way that they're sorry for the way they've treated him.

[ 24 : 28 ] It's a cry to him for help in their time of need. Indeed, that's what sackcloth and ashes is. Now, God's still not mentioned here. There's no word prayer, is there?

But the writer of Esther won't let us confine these events into a part of our life that we can call religion. Now, the writer of Esther still wants us to see that the Lord we worship is in every little detail of our lives.

He wants us to see that for our sake. So let me ask you, what do you think God has promised to do in your life? What do you think God has promised to do in your life?

What's his agenda for you? Oh, we're told in Romans 8, 28 again. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. The problem is we like to define what good is. And I think we think good is my life working, or at least me being content in the life that I have.

[ 25 : 30 ] That's what God wants for me, isn't it? For my life to work. But the very next verse goes on to say, For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

You see, God's agenda for you and me is to conform us to the likeness of Jesus. To draw us ever closer to his fatherly love, because we know we need it.

It's to bring us to ever more fully know the wonder of our relationship with him. And how does he do that? Through hardship and struggle. Through learning to depend on him.

In a world that hates us. In a world that's sinful. That's cursed. He does it by robbing us of our false gods. The hopes we're trusting in.

Maybe status. Comfort. Acceptance. Popularity. Even health. I mean, do you know that experience? Being forced to turn back to Jesus by your circumstances.

[ 26 : 32 ] That's why we shouldn't actually be afraid if it becomes harder to be a Christian in Scotland. Because persecution will mean that you have an ever greater security in God's love for you, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you know that? If life gets harder for following Jesus, the Bible tells us the result will be we will love him more as a result. And God knows what's best for us.

And if he uses opposition to drive us from our compromised, western, comfortable Christian culture, well, we should rejoice. No, not that that's what Esther sees at first.

Have a look at verse 4 of chapter 4 with me. When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

Perhaps she thinks Uncle Mordecai has fallen on hard times. Perhaps she's worried about the fact, maybe he's forgotten the plan to keep that Jewish thing hidden. I mean, she's supposed to be undercover in the harem of the pagan king, and now there's Uncle Mordecai doing some serious open religious stuff on the doorstep.

[ 27 : 46 ] Well, when Mordecai won't put on her glad rags, she sends out Hathak to find out what's going on with the old boy, what's getting him down. And Mordecai gives him a detailed lowdown, including exactly the size of the bribe that was paid.

The death sentence sealed with dough. Look at verse 8. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her.

And he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence, to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Now, Esther, now's the time to step up to the plate.

Now's the time to use influence to save people, because they are her people. The problem is that stepping up to the plate involves placing your hands in the life of a drunken tyrant.

Do you see what she says in verse 11? All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court, without being summoned, the king has one law, that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives.

[ 28 : 57 ] But 30 days have passed since I was called to go into the king. It's five years since Esther became queen. And Xerxes, well, he seems to have become a bit tired of her.

I very much doubt that Xerxes has been sleeping on his own for the last 30 days. But Mordecai is not going to be put off by his only hope. And his reply brings us to our third heading.

You see, we've seen the reality of a hated people, the repentance of a hated people. But here's the resolve of a hated people. Because Mordecai reminds Esther of the truth of the gospel.

He tells us what it is to be in the people of God. Look at verse 13 with me. He sent back this answer. Do not think that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will

escape.

You're one of us, Esther. Don't think that rank or status will save you. We are your people. Our fate is your fate.

[ 30 : 00 ] We stand united together by the Lord who's loved us and he will save us. Did you see that extraordinary confidence in verse 14?

That's what Mordecai says. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place. Do you see what he says?

Relief and deliverance will come. The Lord always rescues his people. He always keeps his promises. He's never failed to keep his word.

He is the God who is bringing his people to himself. That's the end of Romans 8, isn't it? We're told, for your sake we face death all day long.

We're considered as sheep to be slaughtered. That's the reality of a hated people. But the verse goes on in verse 37. Knowing all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[ 31 : 10 ] For I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But that's what Mordecai believes. That's why he can issue that warning at the end of the verse. If you're not with us, Esther, you and your family will perish.

It's not simply that the Lord saves his people. It's that only the Lord saves only his people. And if you're not with us, Esther, you've got no hope.

Jesus says much the same thing in Mark chapter 8 and verse 38. If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory and with the holy angels.

If you won't stand with Jesus now, then you will fall under his judgment when he comes again. And that's far worse than any suffering this life can bring.

[ 32 : 19 ] And so at the end of verse 14. And who knows, but you have come to your royal position for such a time as this. Who knows?

This could well be why the Lord's put you there, Esther, for this time. And do you see how Esther replies? Verse 16. Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me.

Do not eat or drink for three days. Night and day, I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law.

And if I perish, I perish. See, that's the resolve of faith. She identifies with her hated people. You can imagine the news spreading throughout the palace.

The queen's a Jew. She's not eating. She's behaving like the rest of them. Esther says, with them I will stand, even if it means death.

[ 33 : 15 ] If I perish, I perish. Faith's always dependent. She fasts and I presume she prays. And faith is always active. She goes to Xerxes, whatever the cost.

Now, if we're going to be a people of resolve in a world that hates us, then we need to believe the same truths that Mordecai preached to Esther. We need to stand together and encourage one another in these truths.

Certain that we cannot be separated from God's love to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that God always saves his people, knowing that the Lord has put us where we are for his purposes to stand for him.

Who knows? Maybe you're the only Christian in your family for a time like this. So that by the way you seek to graciously speak for Jesus, despite their mockery, God might save them through your witness.

And maybe, who knows, maybe you're the only Christian in your office for a time like this. So that the colleagues you have can see that Jesus matters more to you than advancing your career.

[ 34 : 29 ] And so they want to know why he is so precious. And who knows? Maybe you're the only Christian in your oncology ward for a time like this. So that the nurses and your consultant can see that with Christ, you don't need to fear death.

And that makes them think. And who knows? Maybe you're the only Christian in your seminar or your class or your lecture for a time like this. So the people who make your life a bit of a misery by mocking you for going to church can see that you're more interested in what they think of Jesus

than what they think of you.

And maybe that will make them want to think about Jesus a little bit more. You see, being rejected and persecuted will drive us closer to the Lord.

It should make us resolve to pray and be counted with his people. Because we're certain that the Lord loves us enough to give his only son for us and he's promised he will never leave us and forsake us.

And who knows? Maybe he's put you here in Glasgow for a time like this, that by standing for him, you might make a real difference in the lives of many.

[ 35 : 49 ] Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we all have such different circumstances in our lives.

We're different people living in different places with different jobs and different responsibilities, different families, different studies. And yet you have put us exactly where we are by your sovereign will.

And you call us, Lord Jesus, to stand for you. Please help us to encourage one another in that. Please help us to remember the gospel in that.

That you are for us. And so nothing that is against us can succeed. That you will take us home to be with you. You will rescue us. And as we believe that, our Father, by the power of your Holy Spirit, give us the resolve to be compassionate witnesses to the glory and beauty of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.