

## Jesus Warns

### 1. Introduction

- Tonight will be one of the biggest and most important one day cycling races of the year – called Paris Roubaix
  - It is renowned for being toughest and most brutal race
  - Because not only is it 260km long ... but the riders have to travel over 29 sectors of cobbled country lanes
  - These cobbled roads are bone jarring shockers
  - One cyclist said this about them ...
    - *The best I could do would be to describe it like this - they plowed a dirt road, flew over it with a helicopter, and then just dropped a bunch of rocks out of the helicopter! That's Paris-Roubaix. It's that bad - it's ridiculous.*
  - Last year it was won by an Australian ... a guy called Matt Hayman in one of the greatest editions of the race ever
  - I remember watching the race and waking up half of Bawley Point where we were on holidays as I screamed at the TV as he cross the line
- A lot of my excitement was not just because an Aussie won one of the biggest bike races in the world ... but it was the circumstances in which it happened
  - You see Matt Hayman was 38 years old going into that race last year
  - He had been a professional cyclist 16 years > fair to say he is in the twilight of his career
  - But as a big guy ... he's much more suited to riding over cobbled roads than climbing mountains in the Tour de France ...
  - Normally in every other race he rides in is in support of other riders
  - But Paris Roubaix is the one race he every year he loves to ride the most because it's the one race he's riding to win
  - And for 15 years he'd ridden that race and never got close
- Last year, Hayman was having a great ride
  - The favourites had been turning on the after-burners during each section of cobbled road, leaving more and more riders in their wake
  - And Hayman was there with them, hanging on, riding well until there was only five left at the front of the race
- Then with about 17km left to race ... they approached the hardest sector of pave and in the rush to be first onto the cobbles, one of the other riders bumped Hayman off the road and he lost contact with the group
- And to all who were watching it seemed like this golden opportunity disappeared in a puff of dust as the other four rode off

- But then, as the leaders came off the cobbled sector onto the asphalt 2 km later, all of a sudden, Matt Hayman appeared out of no where
  - He had ridden himself back onto the wheel of the leaders and was back in the hunt
- On the run in to Roubaix all the favourites attacked and Hayman hung tough, closing down gaps and sticking with the big guns
- Then as they came into the velodrome ... everyone was expecting the fan favourite Tom Boonen to win
- Boonen had already won the race four times in his career and was aiming for a record fifth win
  - And then out of nowhere, Matt Hayman launched his sprint, held off the chasers and crossed the line first in shock and disbelief
  
- I was listening to an interview with Matt Hayman about his win last year ... and the commentator said it was a lesson in perseverance
- He persevered throughout his career ... and he persevered on the day
  - He could've given up
  - He could've bailed out
  - But he kept riding ... and he came through
  
- Friends ... when life gets tough following Jesus ... how do you respond
  - Do you persevere?
  - Do you stick with it?
  - Or do you give up and bail out?
- This is important ... because Jesus says .... if you're going follow me ... you're going to go through some pretty tough times
  
- And friends when you do ... what's going to help you persevere?
  - What's going to keep you going?
  - What reason will you have to carry on despite the hardship you're enduring?
  
- In Matthew 8-10 Jesus has been making it clear that he's the King of God's kingdom who's come with all power and authority ... the kingdom of heaven is near
  - Therefore it's a time for forgiveness of sins and calling of sinners into his kingdom
  - Because Jesus mission is to seek and save the lost
- And he's preparing his disciples for his departure by engaging them in his mission

- And he's been teaching them ... that now's the time is for urgent prayer and urgent gospel proclamation
- And he also wants to warn them ... that as they do ... they'll face tough times of persecution
- But not only does Jesus warn them ... he also shows them how they can persevere through those tough times

## 2. Reality of persecution

- So in v1-15 ... Jesus has commissioned his disciples and is sending them out on this mission
- And in v16 he says ... "and by the way, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves"
- And then Jesus goes to spell out where they can expect this hostility to come from
  - And basically ... it's from everywhere!
- **Religious establishment**
- In v17 Jesus says persecution will come from the religious establishment
  - The phrase 'local councils' refers to 'sanhedrins'
  - They were the Jewish religious ruling council of a particular area
  - So persecution is going to come from them and the synagogues
- **State (v18)**
- In v18 Jesus says persecution will also come from the state
- That is from secular rulers and authorities > kings and governors
- Notice ... it's going to come from both Jewish and Gentile authorities
- There's no distinction ... the disciples and their message will be hated by leaders on both sides
- **Family**
- Then in v21 Jesus says persecution will not just come from rulers and authorities ... but even from one's own family
- **All Men**
- Finally, he basically says you're going to cop it from everyone
  - v22 – All men will hate you
- So Jesus is making it crystal clear

- Persecution will come from everywhere
  - Religious establishment
  - Secular authorities
  - Family
  - All men
- Jesus is not hiding the reality ... he's warning his disciples of what to expect
- He's saying ...
  - "This is what's going to happen"
  - "Don't be surprised by this"
  - "You need to understand this is the reality for those who are serious about following me"
- **Application**
- This persecution that Jesus is referring to started in the early days of the church with various persecutions breaking out against Christians
- Emperor Nero was notorious for this
  - Under his watch, Christians were soaked in wax, tied to posts and set alight as lamps for his garden
- In more recent decades, we've seen the government in China seek to stamp out Christianity and arrest and execute its leaders
- Pastor Jegan, one of the leaders of Island Gospel League in Sri Lanka, wrote to me recently asking me to pray for him and his church because they are being persecuted by Buddhists
- John and Jan Bales are one of our link missionaries in Greenacre, seeking to reach Muslims
  - When you talk to John, he says one of the biggest issues a Muslim faces when they become a Christian is their family
  - Because they know that once their family finds out ... their life is in real danger
- Over the last 200 years, Australia and much of the Western world has been free from public persecution
  - To that extent, the times we've been living in have been abnormal
  - Because the normal pattern is for the world to stand against Jesus and his people
  - But over the last couple of decades, it's fair to say that the tide is changing
  - Because hostility to Jesus and Christianity is clearly growing

- One area Christians are facing the heat here in Australia is from hyper-aggressive atheists that are pushing an anti-Christian agenda right across our culture
- We see this via the ***Fairness In Religions in Schools*** campaign
  - Not about fairness at all
  - Fairness to them is removing religion and in particular, Christianity from school altogether
- See it in via the LGBTI lobby which is aggressively campaigning against anything Christian
- ***Coopers Beer and Bible Society***
- Recently Coopers brewery teamed with the Bible Society to have its new light beer branded with the Bible Society logo and an acknowledgement that the Bible Society was celebrating its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Last month the Bible Society recorded and aired fellow Liberal MP's Tim Wilson and Andrew Hastie having conversation around the Same Sex marriage debate ... while drinking a Coopers light
- Tim Wilson supports gay marriage, and Andrew Hastie is a conservative Christian in favour of traditional marriage
- It was a respectful, genial and 'light' conversation
- But the LGBTI community went ballistic
  - They hammered Coopers on social media for their involvement in such a discussion
  - They petitioned pubs to stop selling Coopers beer ... which many threatened to do
  - In the end Coopers issued an online apology for their involvement in the video trying to distance themselves from any discussion that was not in line with LGBTI rhetoric
  - This is despite it being a friendly discussion with views presented from both sides of the fence
- ***Companies and Execs***
- A similar thing has been happening recently with members of the LGBTI community pressuring IBM to sack one of its managing partners because he is a board member of a Christian organisation
  - A similar social media campaign was successful last year in forcing him off the board of the Australian Christian Lobby, and out of his senior executive job at PwC
  - As a result, PwC leaned on their exec to quit the ACL board
  - He later resigned from PwC and found another job with IBM
  - One year later they have come after him again

- This is likely to be the flavour of persecution you and I will face in the decade to come
  - That is ... for you to voice a Christian worldview ... let alone the gospel itself ... is likely to be met with hostility and persecution
  - If you're a Christian you will be branded an intolerant bigot who hates the LGBTI community
  - You'll be portrayed as the evil one who's views need to be silenced because to share them with anyone else is just plain wicked
- The irony of course ... is the LGBTI activists want equality and free speech ... but not for Christians
  - That is, they want to push their own agenda
  - But they shout down, bully and silence Christians when they speak
- So whether the persecution is coming from your
  - human resources department
  - School P&C
  - Staff room
  - Friends
  - Education department
  - Media
    - This is the reality that is before those who are committed to following Jesus and carrying on his mission of preaching the gospel
- And Jesus wants his followers to know the reality of what lies before them
  - Because you can be sure that as you proclaim the message of Jesus ... people around you will hate you

### 3. Reason for persecution

- So Jesus tells us to expect persecution
- But why? Why is there so much heat towards Christianity and those who proclaim it?
- Jesus tells us in v22 - *All men will hate you because of **me***
  - Jesus says ... the reason you'll be persecuted by people is because of **me**
  - If you identify with me ... then it's me and my message that's going to bring the heat on you
- Now why? Why is Jesus so offensive to people?

- ***His Claims***

- Jesus is offensive because of the enormous nature of his claims
- Jesus is always saying things like
  - *Before Abraham was ... I am ... taking the divine name*
  - *I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me*
  - *When the Son of Man comes he will sit on his throne and separate the sheep from the goats*
  - In other words, on judgment day, people are going to come to him because
    - He created the earth
    - The God of all the earth
    - The judge of all the earth

- ***Forces us to extremes***

- Now when you have claims like that, what does that do?
- It offends people
  - The reason its offensive is because nobody wants this
  - Because when we hear the claims of Jesus it pushes us to extremes
  - The only way to be consistent is to take an extreme position
- Because when you hear about Jesus and the good news you either have to say ...
  - I'm going to live completely for him
  - He has to be the highest priority of my life
  - Every single decision I make ... everything I do in life ... should be done to please and honour him
- Or ... I either do that ... or I reject him completely because he's such a liar and a fraud
  
- In Flannery O'Connor's short story ... 'A good man is hard to find' the central character is a misfit, he's a criminal who's killing people
  - At one point he describes why he's so mean
- He says
  - *"Jesus is the only one who raised the dead ... and he shouldn't have done it. He's thrown everything off balance. If he did what he said, then it's nothing for you to do but to throw everything away and follow him. And if he didn't, then there's nothing for you to do but to enjoy the few minutes you've got left the best you can by killing someone or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him"*

- That is a more consistent response to the claims of Jesus Christ than to come to church and say 'I believe in him' but not centre your whole life on him
  - He's offensive because he forces us to extremes
  - If he did what he said ... there's nothing for you to do but to throw everything away and follow him
  
- **Exposes us**
- But there's another reason Jesus is so offensive, and it's not what Jesus says about himself ... it's what Jesus says about how you can be saved
- Jesus comes and says something so different than every other religious founder
- Every other religious founder says ...
  - Here's what you have to do
  - Here's Buddhism's 8-fold path
  - Here's the 5 pillars of Islam
- Every other founder of religion comes and says
  - "here's what you have to do ... in order to be saved"
  - "here's what you have to do ... to connect with God"
  - "here's what you have to **do**"
- Jesus comes and says ...
  - "You can't do anything"
  - "You're a sinner in need of saving and you can't save yourself"
  - "You're broken, you're weak and there's nothing about you and there's nothing you can do to merit your salvation ... and I've got to do it all for you"
  - "I've got to do it ALL for you"
- That is the most offensive claim of all religions
  - All other religions give you credit for doing stuff
  - Christianity gives you none! None at all!
- And people don't like to hear that they're sinful and no better than anyone else when it comes to standing before God
  - People don't like to hear that they can only be saved by God's grace
  - That they can only be saved because God chose to have mercy on them ... rather than because they somehow earned it and that they deserve it
- People will find this offensive
  
- And what really insults ... what's really offensive ... is if
  - Jesus really is not just a teacher but God himself come to save you by grace ... then he has to be the supreme way to salvation



- You see every other religious founder says "I'm a teacher"
- But Jesus says –
  - "I'm not a teacher come to tell you how to find God ... actually I'm God who's come to find you"
- If he's that ... then he **has** to be the way to God
  - He **has** to be the true way of salvation
  - And that offends people ... because that's an exclusive truth claim
  - It's saying you've got to be saved by Jesus Christ and this is the way to God and this is very exclusive
- If you identify with Jesus Christ, you will cop some heat ...
  - Because its Jesus and his claims that people find so offensive

#### 4. Relief from persecution

- Now if we left it there ... you'd probably want to give up
  - Why would you want to follow Jesus if that's the life that lies before you?
  - It's not a great campaign pitch is it? - Follow Jesus and get persecuted!
- But in the next few verses Jesus offers his disciples some relief
  - He offers them some comfort ... some reasons to persevere proclaiming the gospel even when they know it's going to result in hostility
- In v26-31 Jesus gives three incentives for his disciples which focus them on the future
  - And they centre around the three 'Do not be afraid' statements in v26, v28 and v31
- Jesus is saying "*I know you will be afraid ... I know this won't be easy ... but let me give you something that will help strengthen you and help you overcome your fear and persevere*"
- The first is **God's vindication** (v26)
  - On the final day when Jesus returns ... all will be revealed and everything will be made clear
  - As you go and proclaim the gospel, there's nothing to fear because on the final day when everything is laid bare ... God's vindication will be yours
  - People may laugh at you in the office, they may mock you in your family, they may tarnish your reputation, and you may be unjustly accused
  - But in the end .... everything will be made known by God and you will be vindicated by him

- The second is **God's power** (v28)
  - *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*
  - We may be fear of those who persecute and harass us and are hostile to us
  - But Jesus is saying ... "don't fear them ... because the worst they can do doesn't match the worst God can do"
  - So for the disciple who truly follows the Lord, there is no need to fear death, because God is the one who oversees your soul
- The third reason is **God's care** (v29-31)
  - His point here is ... if God's providence is so all embracing that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of God, then his disciples have no need to be afraid
  - If God cares for the smallest and seemingly least significant things like sparrows and the hairs on your head .... then surely he will care for you
- But there's one final thing Jesus says that helps us overcome any the fear of being a disciple who cops it for being a Christian
- He says in v19-20 ... you will never be **alone**
  - *But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, <sup>20</sup> for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*
- What does that mean?
  - The Father will be there!
  - If you get hauled up ... if you get the heat ...
  - Not only will it be a great opportunity to witness to Jesus
  - But God will be there with you
  - The Father will be at your side
- Now how can you be confident in all this
- How can you be sure about ...
  - God's vindication
  - God's power and
  - God's care
- How can you be sure God will never leave you alone?
  - Because of what Jesus says in v24-25
- Because in v24-25 Jesus is basically saying
  - "When persecution comes ... think of me"

- "Think about how I've been demonised"
- "Think about how I was persecuted"
- "Think about the hostility I faced"
- "Think about how I was called Beelzebub"
  
- Think about Jesus at the end of his life
- What happened?
  - Everybody deserted him!
  - They betrayed him > they denied him> they ran away from him
  - In his moment of need ... he was left all alone
- And it got worse!
- When Jesus was on the cross he said
  - "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"
- Jesus was absolutely alone
  - There was nobody there
  - The people he came to save, his friends, even the Father himself had left Jesus to suffer alone
- Why?
  - Because God was giving him the punishment we deserve
  - He was experiencing the aloneness we should have experienced so that we will never experience that aloneness ourselves
- He was giving his life for us ... so we could be right with the Father and the Father could be with us always ... especially when we face the heat
- How?
  - Because Jesus faced the heat for us
  - Therefore ... you can know that God will never ever ever ever ever ever forsake you
- And when you know that ... then you can get on with the mission that Jesus calls you to
  - To urgently get on with the mission Jesus has given us ...
    - to pray and proclaim the gospel the world that is desperately in need of saving
  - For the king has come!
  - He has come to save sinners and grant forgiveness and welcome people into his eternal kingdom
  - They just need to hear how from people like you and me

## PRAY