

Remember the Persecuted

Hebrews 13:3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.

Introduction

Today is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Throughout the world, all the churches in Christ remember the persecuted believers in their prayer. This morning I am going to talk about the persecuted in Christ. By the end of my message, I hope and pray that the Lord move our hearts and minds so that we may prepare ourselves for upcoming persecution and that we may stand together with our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

Contents

We are going to consider two sides of persecution: when we ourselves go through persecution, and when our brothers and sisters go through persecution.

When you go through persecution, show courage. When persecution falls on you, do not be alarmed. Do not lose your heart, either. The Lord is with you. Stand firm in your faith and the Lord will see you through.

God's Word points out that persecution is a natural part of the Christian life. It is part of God's salvation plan for us. To strengthen our faith. To bring us closer to God. To perfect our salvation through suffering (Hebrews 2:10). Therefore, expect persecution in your walk with Jesus, especially, when you want to be faithful to the Lord.

From the very beginning of Christianity, Christ never sugarcoated the life of His followers. He, in fact, repeatedly warned His disciples that they will be hated by people because of their faith in Him: *And you will be hated by all **because of My name*** (Matthew 10:22). *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you **because of Me**”* (Matthew 5:11). On the night before His crucifixion, as the disciples partook in the Lord's Supper, Christ reminded them again of the upcoming persecution: *Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well;* (John 15:20).

Even Paul the Apostle gave us a heads up on persecution in the last days: *Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted* (2 Timothy 3:12). Do you hear?

Persecution is not to be avoided with cowardice but to be embraced with faith and courage.

Unless Christ is joking (He is not), we must prepare ourselves for persecution and learn to endure as we undergo it. We deal with persecution in prayer (for the persecutors) and blessing (of our enemies).

When brothers and sisters undergo persecution, show solidarity.

Since the birth of the Church, countless Christians underwent all kinds of suffering. Hebrews 11:36-38 lists the types of persecution that our forefathers had gone through: ³⁶and others experienced **mocking** and **flogging**, and further, **chains** and **imprisonment**. ³⁷They were **stoned**, they were **sawn in two**, they were **tempted**, they were **put to death** with the sword; they went about in **sheepskins**, in **goatskins**, being **destitute**, **afflicted**, **tormented** ³⁸(people of whom the world was not worthy), **wandering** in deserts, on mountains, and **sheltering** in caves and holes in the ground.

Such persecution continues in the 21st century.

The following four testimonies tell us what our brothers and sisters in Christ go through. All because of their faith in Christ. All the stories were taken from www.icommittoprayer.com.

- a. *An Iranian court has taken a “Muslim” child out of the home of the Christian couple who adopted her. Sam and Maryam adopted Lydia from a local orphanage in the city of Bushehr when she was three months old. Lydia has significant health issues, including a heart defect and digestive problems. Six months after the couple adopted her, intelligence agents arrested Sam and Maryam in their home. They were released on bail and charged with “propaganda against the regime.” Sam was given a one-year prison sentence, and Maryam was barred from working as a nurse in government-run hospitals. Eighteen months after Lydia’s adoption, a court determined she was not eligible for adoption by the Christian couple since she was born a Muslim. The court noted that if Lydia were returned to the orphanage, “there is zero possibility of giving her away to another family” since, as a nurse, her mother was uniquely equipped to provide care for her. Heartbroken, her parents appealed, but in September 2020, a court upheld the decision. The couple is now waiting to hear if the court will order them to return Lydia to the orphanage, and they request prayer during this deeply distressing time. Pray for a miracle so they are allowed to keep their child. (<https://www.icommittoprayer.com/>)*
- b. *Only days after he accepted Christ, 15-year-old Seng was already facing the persecution Jesus often spoke about. After his parents learned of his decision, they sat down to talk with him, telling him he needed to renounce his “foreign” faith. If he didn’t, they would kill him or kick him out of the house. When Seng told them he wouldn’t, they bagged up his belongings and told him to leave. “Go stay with those Christian friends of yours. You are not welcome here,” his parents said. “Stop this*

religion at once.” Seng is staying with friends with assistance from VOM. Pray that he remains firm in his faith and grows in maturity in Christ. (*ibid.*, Laos).

- c. A Bru community in rural Laos was so determined to drive out a group of Christian families that they resorted to drastic measures. “They were so resistant to their faith, they were trying to scare them out of the village or to renounce their faith,” a VOM field worker said. Persecution began in 2018 when the villagers killed the livestock and crops of the three families. They even planted a bomb in their cooking fire, hoping to scare or injure them. The Christian families are also banned from using the village well. Even so, the believers are determined to stay in their village as a testimony to God’s power. Pray that the firm bravery of these families will cause many in their village to turn to God (*ibid.*, Laos).
- d. My name is Janette. I am a Christian and I love Jesus with all my heart. I love my children and I love the people of my country, the Central African Republic. There are both Christians and Muslims in my country, and we lived as neighbors as I worked to reach them for Christ. But my hope for a peaceful life didn’t last. Our village was ambushed by the Islamist attackers. Guns started firing, and we started running as fast as we could into the bush. All the Christians in my village were killed or driven into hiding. I fled with my children. We didn’t have time to even put on our shoes or clothes. Attacks like these have been targeting Christians in the Central African Republic for eight years and continue today. Churches and missionary stations that have been built over decades have been destroyed along with Christians’ homes that have been burnt to the ground. Thousands of Christians have spent years in makeshift temporary shelters far from their homes as the violence and instability continues (*ibid.*, Janette).

When it comes to the persecuted Christians, it is easy for us to brush it off saying, “It is not my problem. It is not happening in my neighborhood.” However, God commands us to show solidarity with the suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. Both domestically and abroad. God says in Hebrews 13:3: *Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are **in the body**.*

In the body, when one member suffers, so does the rest of the body. When a Christian brother in North Korea is tortured, so are we the believers in America. So is Christ the head. When a sister in Christ cries in Africa, so do we. So does Christ the head. All because we belong to One Body of Christ. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 25:36-40: *I was in prison, and you came to Me.’...³⁹ When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’⁴⁰ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’* Do you see the connection?

Conclusion

God speaks to us all this morning: when you go through persecution, be a man and woman of faith. Do not be ashamed of Jesus and His gospel. Join in Christ's suffering for the gospel. Be strong and endure persecution. Your reward will be great.

The same God speaks to us again: when you see your brothers and sisters in Christ go through persecution, show solidarity. Remember them in prayers. Support them. Be there for them.

Action Points:

- **Pray** that our persecuted brothers and sisters endure persecution with courage. Pray that the Lord would protect them from those who intend to harm. Pray that they would not deny the Lord (Matthew 13:21) but love and pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:44). Pray that we too follow their examples of faith and courage. Use the bookmark in your bulletin to pray for them daily.
- **Support** the organizations such as *the Voice of the Martyrs* that provide medical and financial support to the families of the persecuted all around the world. E.g. Last spring, MUMC shipped 23 (twenty-three) Action Packs to our persecuted families.

Let us pray.