

Persecution against Christians

Hebrews 13:3 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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

Introduction

God's Word commands us to remember the prisoners in Christ. In our context, it is the believers who are imprisoned, not because for what they had done wrong, but because of their faith in Jesus. So, once a year, I preach on this topic of persecuted believers in Christ with a hope and prayer that all of us would be there for them, not only in prayer but also with financial help. May the Lord stir up our hearts and minds this morning so that we would show our solidarity with them along with prayers and support.

Content

Let me begin with a story. The story of a sister in Christ. Her name is Hanifah.

Hanifah was born into a Muslim family in Uganda and married a Muslim man. But when her children became very ill, her faith in Islam was shaken. Her husband had called in Muslim clerics to pray for the children, but nothing had helped. Eventually, Hanifah felt compelled to take the children to a Christian church. Because she knew her husband would not approve, she took them to church in secret, and believers from the church began to make secret visits to their home. After much prayer and fasting, the children recovered from their illness.

Hanifah and her children soon placed their faith in Christ and received baptism. They continued attending church secretly, but Hanifah's husband eventually found out about their Christian faith and kicked them out of their home. He also cut off all support to Hanifah and the children. Hanifah then sought refuge at her church, but she and the children struggled to survive. When Hanifah's husband heard about their difficulties, he asked her to recant her faith and come home so he could support them. But Hanifah remained firm in her decision to follow Christ.

"I have seen the power of God and the joy we received in Christ. I cannot go back to Islam. I have found the God who heals. If He healed my children, then He will be able to feed us and clothe us." – HANIFAH (www.persecution.com.)

Persecution against Christians is nothing new. It has been with the Church from its beginning. It is one of the devil's weapons against the followers of Christ (along with others such as lusts, greed, deception, fear, and anxiety). He uses persecution to bring some believers down from their faith (Matthew 13:21). Here's a burning question: why does the

Almighty God allow persecution to us? Why doesn't He keep us from it forever? Please listen to what God's Word says about it and then you decide.

Here's the list of the biblical reasons why we experience the persecution. Persecution comes upon us to thwart our salvation. It happens 'when,' not 'if,' we believe in God's Word. It falls upon us when we faithfully follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior, because the devil doesn't want to lose us from his grip. Persecution also burns away the dross in our faith and practice. It is like fire that refines gold and silver. It strips away superficial belief. It sifts through "false and fair-weather Christians." It builds up our character such as endurance and perseverance (2 Corinthians 1:6). It also strengthens other believers' faith (we comfort other believers with the comfort we have received from God, 2 Corinthians 1:4, 6). God does not leave us alone during persecution. He is with us. He comforts us (2 Corinthians 1:4) and rescues us from persecutions (2 Timothy 3:11, 2 Corinthians 1:10). Persecution can never separate us from Christ's love (Romans 8:35). In the end, there will be reward for those suffered in Jesus' name. God will avenge for them as well: *And the Lord your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you* (Deuteronomy 30:7).

I must say no faithful believer is exempt from persecution. No. On the contrary, every good believer will experience persecution. Consider Jesus our Lord for a second. In His own words, He was persecuted by the unbelieving Jews (John 15:20): *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.* We too will be persecuted, says Jesus. Think of the apostles (except Judas Iscariot). All of them were martyred due to their faithful witness to Jesus. Think of the countless Christians who suffered torture, imprisonment and even the loss of their lives. All throughout the history of the Church in the past 2000 years. Today, faithful believers still go through persecutions. Both in the East and the West. Old and young. Male and female. All experience persecution. All because of their faith in Jesus.

Persecution outside looks like a curse, but inside it is a blessing. A true blessing. Listen to Jesus. When you are persecuted for the sake of the gospel, Christ says, consider yourself blessed, for yours is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10). He continues, *Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great* (Matthew 5:11-12). Please don't misunderstand Jesus. He is not merely advocating persecution for the sake of suffering. No. Rather, He knows everything about faith and what it entails. He kindly reminds us that persecution is inevitable yet do not be afraid of it. Jesus says it's worth it. He says that it is a great witness to His name. He says there's a great reward in heaven, too. Therefore, He urges us, take it like a man (1 Corinthians 16:13). Folks, we do not fully understand it now, but when we stand before God in the last day, God will reward us with glory and honor that are reserved only for those who suffered for the sake of Jesus.

As pastor of this congregation, and with a sincere heart, I urge all of us to be prepared for upcoming persecution against our faith in Jesus Christ. Listen to Paul who is

talking about the end times: *Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted* (2 Timothy 3:12). It seems already upon us, especially when we want to live a godly life in Christ. Would you agree that it is getting harder and harder nowadays to freely express our faith in Jesus Christ? Even some leaders, political and religious alike, try to mum us about sharing our faith with others. “*Christians, keep your faith inside the church. Don’t bring it out or share with others,*” they urge us. That’s a form of persecution. It is also a counterattack against Christ’s command to go out and preach the Word (Matthew 28:19-20). Anyway, I can go on and on. But I urge you this morning to show your solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who are already in persecution. By the way, there’s one excellent organization you can support. ‘The Voice of the Martyrs’ which I have been supporting over 30 years. Please consider supporting this great ministry.

I am going to end my message with three more stories of brothers and sisters in Christ as prayer concerns. All taken from the Voice of the Martyrs prayer website.

Somali Christians Mourn Loss of Fellow Believer (Somalia)

Somali Christians are mourning the loss of an influential Christian woman. A man who served alongside her wrote, “Those of us left behind may grieve because we miss our brothers and sisters, but the believers who die are happy to be with Christ. In [Somalia], followers of Christ look forward to heaven where there is no more pain. Here on earth, life can be lonely. **The families and community of Christians [cannot] share their beliefs.** The few disciples they manage to share the gospel with seldom meet regularly. There are no church buildings and no fellowship gatherings. On rare occasions, they may meet for worship in private houses. These believers also do not have the comfort of getting proper care in hospitals when they get sick. The challenges go on and on. [Our sister who died] dedicated her life to serving her people because of her faith in Christ. She left comfort to travel to a country suffering from war, famine, the collapse of civil foundations, and terrorism. She spent years apart from her family, apart from her brothers and sisters in Christ, and apart from a comfortable lifestyle.” This fellow believer has pledged to continue this woman’s legacy. Pray for those mourning her passing, and pray for believers in Somalia to remain strong amid trials.

Authorities Tell ERCC Christians to Leave Their Homes (China)

Government persecution against the Early Rain Covenant Church (ERCC) in Chengdu continues. On Sunday, Aug. 22, officials arrested 28 people gathered in a home for a worship service. The leaders of the service spent two weeks in jail and were fined. A week later, ERCC church member Zhang Fan, whose wedding was scheduled for Aug. 28, was forced to find a new wedding venue — twice — after officials threatened the venue’s owners. Zhang ended up hosting her wedding in her home that day. A few days later, a group of police, national security agents and others circulated in the Jiaoda Garden Wuhou gated community and told ERCC members to move out of their homes within three days while others were not allowed past the gate into the neighborhood. ERCC church members have endured intense

persecution since Dec. 2018 when the church was raided and head pastor Wang Yi was arrested and sentenced to nine years in prison. Thank God for the faithfulness of many of the church members: “If God can be for us, who can be against us?” one church member wrote. Pray that their needs will be provided for and that their faith will remain strong.

Sold into Slavery, Redeemed by Christ (India)

At age 17, Soni was sold into slavery by her own aunt. She spent three decades as a prostitute in India before a Nepali Christian helped her escape. This woman shared the gospel with Soni, and Soni joyfully accepted the invitation of salvation through Christ who loves her. But once she returned home, her family did not accept her because she had been a prostitute who then **became an “untouchable” by becoming a Christian.** “Everybody rejected me; Jesus was the only one who loved me,” Soni said. Her family physically pushed her out of the home, causing Soni to fracture her leg. She is now being cared for by a church. “Please pray that God will provide all my needs and that all my family will come to know Jesus, so that one day they may also come to the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,” Soni said. “Because Jesus died not only for me, but also for them as well.” Praise God for Soni’s faith, and pray that her request is fulfilled.

Let us pray.

