

Show Solidarity with the Persecuted 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, we are commanded to remember the believers who are imprisoned and persecuted, not because for what they have 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 may show our solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ through prayer and support.

Content

Let me share with you three stories of persecuted believers in the world. All stories were taken from persecution.com.

Israel--Christians in Israel (including the West Bank and Gaza) have requested prayer amid ongoing conflict that began on Oct. 7 when Hamas fighters launched attacks along the Israeli-Gaza border. A church in one of the communities infiltrated in the initial attack asks for prayer as they seek to share the love of Christ and meet the needs of their community. Another church located in a major city struggles to meet the needs of their community as a blockade has restricted daily goods such as food and fuel. VOM (Voice of the Martyrs) has also heard from many front-line workers requesting prayer for family members who are directly involved in the armed forces and one worker whose parents' apartment was bombed. "As we live in a land where hatred and extremism continue to dominate, we realize there is spiritual warfare involved," a front-line worker said. "Pray that God might use our churches as active witnesses during this challenging time."
<https://www.persecution.com/stories/urgent-prayer-needed-for-families-churches-of-gospel-workers/>

Iraq--One day in May 2023, an Iraqi pastor answered his phone, not knowing it would be the last call he would receive from a young Christian friend. On the line was a university student who had recently converted from Islam. Some of the student's former friends had arrived at his home, saying, "We know about your new faith. We are going to give you a chance to come back." The group told him he could claim not to believe in any god, but he could not remain a Christian. The assailants gave him 24 hours to recant, or they would kill him. They allowed him one phone call, so he called his pastor, who prayed for him and told

him the decision was his alone. The pastor also reminded him of the eternal hope and home awaiting all followers of Christ. The young man said he would share the good news of Christ with his former friends and remain faithful. He was executed for his faith the next day. <https://www.persecution.com/stories/christian-student-murdered-by-former-friends/>

Laos---La and her husband became Christians while seeking a cure for his illness. Though he died three months later, they remained faithful due to the love and care they received from their brothers and sisters in Christ. In 2020, her daughter married a non-believer, and her son-in-law moved into her house. He practices animism, making offerings to spirits and trying to force his mother-in-law to do the same. He threw away La's Bible and tries to keep her from practicing her Christian faith. In June, La's son-in-law and daughter told her they would kick her out of the house if she continued to follow Christ. La continues to listen to Christian radio and receives encouragement from the church. She asks for prayer for her current situation. "No matter what will happen to me... I will not leave God," she said. "I have hope that one day I could meet my husband again in the kingdom of God, and I will meet my God, too." <https://www.persecution.com/stories/widowed-christian-threatened-with-loss-of-home/>

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). Our enemy the devil 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 happen to us? Why doesn't He protect 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. First, our enemy, the devil, attempts to thwart our salvation through persecution. 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. Next, 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." Thirdly, it builds up our character in endurance and perseverance (2 Corinthians 1:6). Fourthly, it strengthens other believers' faith (persecuted believers comfort other believers with the comfort that they have received from God, 2 Corinthians 1:4, 6).

Here's God's promise for us: He does not leave us alone during persecution. He is with us (Psalm 23:4). 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). Pray for those who persecute you, Christ commands (Matthew 5:44). Bless those who persecute you; bless them and do not curse (Romans 12:14). In the end, there will be a reward for those suffered in Jesus' name. God will also avenge for them: *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. I have experienced persecution myself. Even Jesus our Lord was persecuted by the unbelieving Jews (John 15:20). He said to us: *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 persecution. Both in the East and the West. Old and young. Male and female. All experience persecution. All because of their faith in Jesus.

Outside, persecution 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 glorifying or 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 we ought not to 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. Our momentary affliction, Paul said, is nothing compared to the glory in the future (2 Corinthians 4:17). Therefore, Christ urges us, take it like men and be courageous (1 Corinthians 16:13). Folks, we do not fully understand this divine mystery 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 endured persecution for Jesus' sake.

As pastor of this congregation, and with a sincere heart, I urge all of us to be prepared for upcoming persecution in America 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,"* they urge us *"keep your faith inside the church. Don't bring it out or share with others."* 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 another story of a family in Southern Mexico who was exiled from his own village after rejecting idol worship.

Feliciano had been ordered to appear at a community assembly so the other leaders could interrogate him about the new ideas he had been teaching in Avellanal, Chiapas. “You have changed your thinking!” they told him accusingly. “You are talking like an evangelical.”

At 52, Feliciano was content with his life. He had a good wife and eight children. He and his three oldest sons, all married, farmed their land and provided for the entire family. Feliciano was one of four lay leaders in his local traditionalist Catholic church. He was also a member of the leftist Zapatista rebel group and a respected member of his community.

All that changed one day in April 2013. While reading the Bible, he was convicted by the Holy Spirit that his worship of idols was sinful. He realized that the idolatrous worship of saints and gods in his traditionalist church was wrong, and he soon began teaching others what he had learned.

Others in the community began to take note, and his three co-leaders at the church asked him to appear at the Avellanal community assembly to answer their questions. The region around Avellanal was so opposed to evangelicals that 10 communities had posted signs banning pastors or evangelicals from even entering.

Feliciano appeared at the assembly with his entire family, all of whom had renounced idol worship and committed to changing their lives. The community was horrified. Feliciano and his family were rejecting their entire way of life — their identity as members of the Tzeltal tribe, as traditionalists and as revolutionaries.

Feliciano and his three oldest sons were immediately arrested by community police and fined \$500 each. They were locked in the community jails, rough structures in the town square, where they were subjected to public shaming.

For seven days, community members passed by to taunt them. “Come back to our faith, Feliciano!” they said. “There’s still time!” But Feliciano and his sons were unmoved. Instead of re-thinking their decision, they spent time praying and reading the Bibles that their family smuggled into the jail for them. Community leaders weren’t providing food for them, so family members also brought them *pozol*, a traditional drink made of cacao and corn.

The men were released after seven days in jail. Because they refused to return to traditionalist practice, community leaders told them they had lost their right to live in the community. But Feliciano and his sons told the leaders that they wouldn’t leave their homes and fields. The infuriated community leaders then began to scream at them, threaten them, push them and chase them with sticks. They eventually ran Feliciano and his sons out of town, but they returned the next day.

One day, community members told the family that they were going to burn their homes if they didn’t leave. The community gave Feliciano and his family six weeks to move

out, allowing them to resettle on a nearby mountain, where they would be free to practice their faith.

They had to leave everything behind — their homes, land and crops. In order to live on the steep mountain slope, they first had to level the land. Then they built four rough houses and strung up a tarp for their place of worship. Their efforts were hampered by the fact that no one in Avellanal was willing to sell them wood.

Throughout the year-long ordeal, Feliciano never wanted to leave Avellanal. He and his family continue to pray that the community will turn to the Lord and leave the “traditions of men” for the commandments of God. Feliciano said Mark 7:7–8 are his favorite verses. He said those who ran him out can be “changed and washed by the blood of Christ.”

He hopes that the signs forbidding Christians to enter will one day be removed and that everyone will be able to worship God publicly. “One day there will be freedom in Avellanal,” he said.

“Everything was worth it. We only wish we’d [become evangelicals] sooner for our kids’ sakes. I’ve learned that God is faithful. They took our houses; now we have somewhere to live. They took our harvest, and God gave us food to eat through many servants. They jailed us, but we know true liberty.” <https://www.persecution.com/stories/chiapas-family-exiled-from-village-after-rejecting-idol-worship/>

Amen to that. Let us pray.