

I N T H E S I L E N C E

"GOD IN THE SILENCE" WEEK 4 NOTES **JANUARY 22**

KEY THOUGHTS

- Life Lesson #4 from book of Esther: Trust is a faithful whisper when God's silence is painful.
- While the read of Esther is encouraging because we see the "end of the story", in the midst of the threat of genocide, the concept of God's providential control can be a struggle. Providential controls means:
 - God can do anything His character allows.
 - Nothing happens without His causation or permission.
- Today we tackle this question: Where is God amid the widespread suffering of people?
- A Biblical perspective on the persecution of God's people: "dioko", the Greek word we translate as suffering, means to chase down, pursue, harass
- Matthew 5:10-12 – persecution comes in spectrum of harassment all the way to death
- Kevin DeYoung in "Are Christians in America Persecuted" - "We should not think more highly of our suffering than it deserves. But neither should we make it out to be something less than it is."
- From Israel in Egypt, to the exile, to prophets, persecution has been in many forms. (See Hebrews 11:35-37)
- And it continues even greater today – Christianity Today article, "The 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Follow Jesus in 2023"
 - Over 124,000 displaced from their homes each year due to faith in Jesus, and 5,600 who lost their lives.
 - "Overall, and same as last year, 360 million Christians live in nations with high levels of persecution or discrimination. That's 1 in 7 Christians worldwide, including 1 in 5 believers in Africa, 2 in 5 in Asia, and 1 in 15 in Latin America."
- Where is God in the midst of all this? What does Scripture teach us?
- **From the beginning, even in the best times and places, God's people have been a minority who have historically been oppressed.**
 - Matthew 7:14 and 1 Peter 4:12-13
- The typical Old Covenant response was to expect that God would certainly step in to change things.
 - Exodus 5:22-23 – the first instance recorded of God's people suffering oppression – Moses expected God to right the wrong
 - That continues throughout the Psalms
- BUT with the New Covenant, response to personal persecution has changed.
 - God has a plan which INCLUDES persecution.
 - John 15:19-20 and 2 Timothy 3:12
 - Hey Jesus follower, what did you think you signed up for?

- Persecution is a tool used by God to refine, bringing perseverance, maturity, and courage.
 - Philippians 1:12-14 and Esther 4:16
 - Wybo Nicolai, Open Doors field director: "What we noticed is not just an increase of persecution, but also an increase in the size and the strength of the body of Christ," Nicolai said. "Yes, a lot of atrocities, a lot of drama; at the same time, a lot of church growth, as well."
- The persecuted follower of Jesus has a special place in God's heart.
 - Acts 5:40-51, Philippians 1:29, and Philippians 3:10
- What do I do now?
 - Pray for them and for you. Acts 4:29 – what the early followers of Jesus prayed for was courage, not release
 - Obey the small nudging of the Lord, and don't fear persecution.

SCRIPTURES

- Matthew 5:10-12 and 7:14
- Hebrews 11:35-37
- 1 Peter 4:12-13
- Exodus 5:22-23
- John 15:19-20
- 2 Timothy 3:12
- Philippians 1:12-14, 1:29, and 3:10
- Esther 4:16
- Acts 5:40-41 and 4:29
- Revelation 6:9-11 and 20:4-6

PRACTICAL & REFLECTION

- If you find yourself currently in a period of trial or suffering, we encourage you to go to cccsumter.com/spotify or cccsumter.com/sunday and listen to a playlist of songs we selected to deal with God in the Suffering.
- In the midst of persecution, or the threat of persecution, what do you pray for? Shift your prayer life to pray for courage and boldness.
- Pray for the church of Jesus, around the world, which is currently undergoing persecution. God is good, and His faithfulness never changes.