

And now the good
news...more suffering and
persecution!

1st Peter 4:12-19

Context, Context, Context

- Who is the author writing to?
- What's happening to them such that the writer saw fit to send them a letter?
- What's the cultural milieu of that time?

Peter's audience



What's happening at that time?

- After A.D. 50, Christianity was put on the imperial list of "illicit" sects, and after A.D. 64, it was declared illegal, though this did not always result in continual persecution.
- Due to persecution, Christians met in secret primarily in the houses of wealthy members. This only seemed to raise the level of hostility against them because of circulated rumors of orgies and cannibalism
- Christian refusal to worship or honor other gods (and the Emperor) was a source of great contention. Accused of being atheists and treason to the state.

What's the cultural milieu of the time?

- Christianity was born into a polytheistic culture with many Roman Gods being honored and sacrificed to appease them and to get their blessing
- There were many virtues, or deeply engrained values, within that culture including bravery, courage/perseverance, faithfulness, piety, and gravitas (having appropriate dignity & seriousness) being among the most significant.
- But the pursuit of honor for oneself and one's name is critical....to the point of acts of bravery unto death to show oneself as worthy of honor.

Themes in the first part of Peter's letter

- 1. You have been transformed through God's mercy and Jesus' sacrifice with a new birth, new hope, new life, new everlasting inheritance and as a new chosen people. 1:3-5; 2:9-10
- 2. There will be suffering, but God is redeeming this and your persecution, even as God purposed and redeemed Christ's sufferings and rejections 1:6-11; 2:4-7; 2:21-25
- 3. Know and live into your new identify and calling 1:13-17; 2:1-3, 4:1-6
- 4. Live your lives before non-believers as a testimony of God's grace, worthy of your calling by practicing humble submission as a citizen and as an employee 2:12- 20
- 5. Love and serve deeply using your gifts and operating in His strength 4:7-11

Peter's remembrances with Jesus

- Matthew 5:10:12
- John 15:15-25;
- John 21:18



Six Principles for Overcoming Suffering/Persecution

- **P**repared mentally for it v. 12
- **R**ejoice..... Why? Because we get to participate in Christ's sufferings (v. 13)
- **A**nticipating glory – You know the end of the story and who wins (v. 13)
- **I**nsulated by God's spirit – blessed with having God's spirit rest on you in the midst of being insulted as a Christ follower (v. 14)
- **S**hameless – no shame necessary, but instead praise God that you're known by your faith in Jesus – (v. 16)
- **E**stablished – having a mature faith (grown through persecution/judgment /suffering) – (v. 17 & I Pet. 1:6-7)

A few last thoughts from the passage

- What suffering and persecution is not (v.15)
- What is Peter driving at in vs. 17-18?
- Who allows suffering? (v. 19)
- How do we respond to suffering? (v. 19)

So what happened in Peter's day

- Christians sometimes had their foreheads tattooed by Romans (some Christian slaves carried religion symbols to counteract images inscribed on them by their Roman masters) or were condemned to work in mines. In the worst cases, they were arrested and given the choice of recanting their faith or facing execution, with some being thrown to hungry lions in the Coliseum and other arenas.
- Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote Christians, "were nailed on crosses...sewn up in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the night."



In the first few centuries, Christianity grew quickly. By 200, the faith had permeated most regions of the Roman Empire, though Christians were mostly in the larger urban areas (Gaul, Lyons, Carthage, Rome). **By 325, an estimated 7 million were Christians with as many as 2 million killed for the faith.** This growth can be attributed to the new faith's meeting needs across cultural barriers, its giving general meaning to life for many, the overall transformation of those lives, the social concerns of Christians during the plagues for the sick and the poor, and the power of its doctrine. News of the resurrection of Christ produced great loyalty among followers. Under Roman rule, Christians were denied business opportunities and status in society, prohibited from worshiping, attacked by mobs, persecuted, tortured and killed in organized campaigns by the Romans government. Christian martyrdom also, ironically, created vast interest in and respect for the Christians and increased their numbers.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"--Tertullian

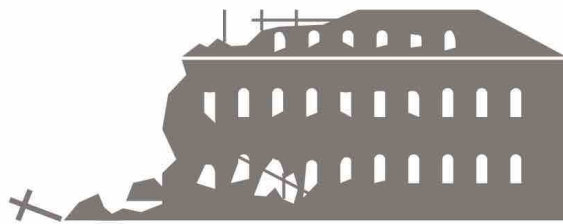
But surely that's all behind us now, right?

EACH MONTH

322 CHRISTIANS ARE
KILLED FOR THEIR FAITH



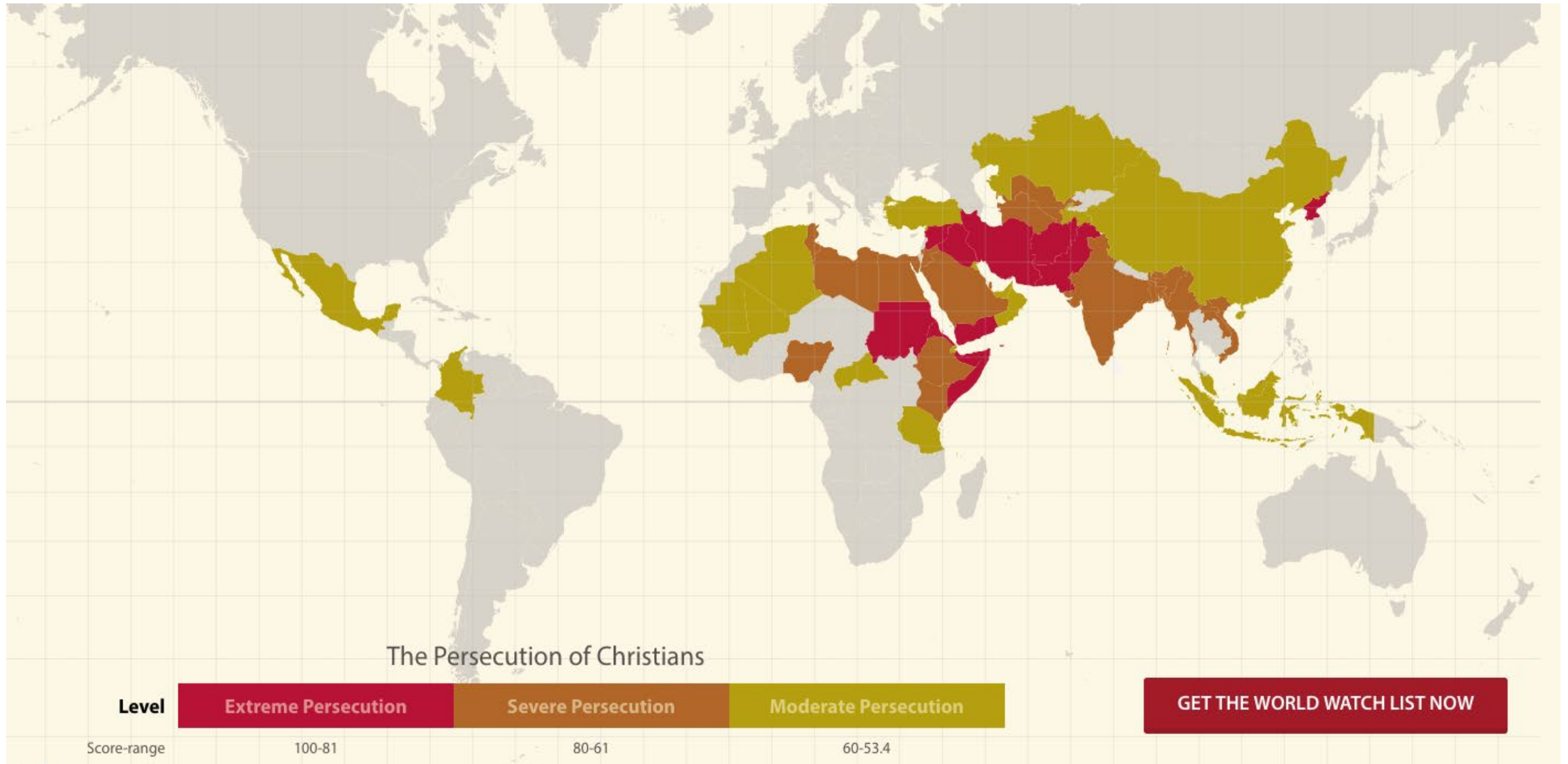
214 CHURCHES AND
CHRISTIAN **PROPERTIES**
ARE DESTROYED



772 FORMS OF **VIOLENCE**
ARE COMMITTED AGAINST
CHRISTIANS *(SUCH AS BEATINGS, ABDUCTIONS,
RAPES, ARRESTS AND FORCED MARRIAGES)*



360 million Christians live in countries where persecution was “significant”



A couple cautions for safe & rich Christians

- “The devil doesn't persecute those who aren't making a godly difference in the world.” P. Chappell
- “Seducers are more dangerous enemies to the church than persecutors.” Matthew Henry
- Read stories of those who are persecuted for their faith

Praying for the Persecuted Church

- Pray that persecuted Christians would know the hope God gives (Ephesians 1:18).
- Pray that Christians facing persecution would rely on God, and not themselves (2 Corinthians 1:7-9).
- Pray that persecuted Christians would fearlessly tell others about Jesus (Ephesians 6:20).
- Pray that their witness would inspire those who plan to harm them (Acts 16:25, Luke 6:27-31).
- Pray that God would provide for the physical needs of persecuted Christians (3 John 2).
- Pray that they would experience God's peace, despite their weakness and current circumstances (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- Pray that God would protect them, according to His will (Matthew 26:39).
- Pray that God would ultimately rescue them out of dangerous circumstances (Psalm 91:15).
- Pray that persecuted Christians would feel deeply connected to Jesus in their suffering (John 15:19-20).