

Praying for the Persecuted Church

In light of today being the “International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church,” we are reminded to pray for our fellow believers who are facing violence, harassment and even death for their faith in Christ Jesus. I want to delve into the faith-filled courage required to please God. We see in The Book of Joshua that Moses, a leader who represented the Law, has passed and his understudy, Joshua, representing Jesus, has taken Moses’ place. The Law could not take the Israelites into the Promised Land, but the Grace of God in Christ Jesus will. The Lord is doing a new thing in the earth today by His Spirit. And He desires us to fully participate in its conception and manifestation. This will require **courage** as spelled out here, not just for Joshua, but for those of us who follow after our Heavenly Joshua – Jesus, Son of the Eternal God! Here is what the Lord said to Joshua, beginning with the word “*And*” in the Hebrew text, which speaks of the connection between the Books of Deuteronomy and Joshua.

Be Strong and Brave

Joshua 1:1-9 TPT “And after Moses, YAHWEH’s servant, died, YAHWEH spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ faithful assistant, and said, 2. “My servant Moses is dead. Now get up! Prepare to cross the Jordan River, you and all the people. Lead them into the land that I am giving to the Israelites. 3. Every part of the land where you march I will give you, as I promised Moses. 4. Your borders will extend from the southern desert to the northern mountains of Lebanon, and from the great river Euphrates in the east, to the Mediterranean in the west – including all the land of the Hittites. 5. Joshua, no one will be able to defeat you for the rest of your life! I will be with you as I was with Moses, and I will never fail nor abandon you. 6. You must be strong and brave. You will lead the people to acquire and apportion the land that I

*promised their ancestors I would give them. 7. You must remain very strong and **courageous**! (TPT note: “To be courageous means to translate your convictions into bold actions.”) Be faithful to obey all the teaching that My servant Moses commanded you to follow. Do not deviate from him to the right or to the left, so that you will have overwhelming success in everything you undertake. 8. Recite this scroll of the law constantly. Contemplate it day and night and be careful to follow every word it contains; then you will enjoy incredible prosperity and success. 9. I repeat, **be strong and brave**! Do not yield to fear nor be discouraged, for I am YAHWEH your God, and I will be with you wherever you go!”*

From **Voice of the Martyrs’ I am n** devotional, we find that “n” is an Arabic symbol for “Nazarite”, followers of Jesus. It is the symbol put on the houses of Christians living in the Middle East who are marked for persecution by radical Muslims. The story of Kazim goes like this: “Kazim of Pakistan spoke boldly for Jesus, which resulted in his capture and being forced to chop wood from sunrise to sunset. The ash-white handle of the ax turned to red from his bleeding hands. He said, “Whenever I tried to rest, they beat me. This happened every night. They tried to force me to deny Christ, but I refused. The Spirit of God gave me power and guided me.” Eventually let go, Kazim was later apprehended. When a pistol was held to his head for several minutes, he stood firm for his Lord in the face of death. God intervened, and instead of the trigger being pulled, false charges of robbery landed him in jail, where he was beaten daily for two weeks. How amazing to read this in his story: “By now, the daily beatings had left Kazim weak, exhausted and un-able to speak. Pain radiated through his shoulders and across his back, and yet he felt a peace he could barely comprehend.”

“Our brother Kazim was finally let go and allowed to return home by the men who had held him hostage: the Muslims who

had made him do backbreaking work and often beat his already broken-down body. If Kazim had then decided to stay home with his wife in the evenings, we wouldn't have blamed him. You know, keep a low profile, play it safe. Instead, he again chose to evangelize after his twelve-hour workdays as a farmer.

"One night Kazim was accosted yet again by the same men at his home just as he was getting ready for his nightly routine. He pulled aside his young nephew, only seven, to give him his most precious possession: his Bible. Kazim's words convince us as to what he expected to happen. "Today they will kill me. Please take my Bible and keep it with you."

"Shafiq, the stranger who appointed himself leader of Kazim's tormentors, was the one who held the pistol to Kazim's head for agonizing moments. He promised to shoot Kazim if he didn't declare Muhammad as the one and only true prophet. Looking Shafiq right in the eyes, Kazim refused. But he didn't leave it there. [Kazim] told Shafiq, "If you want to shoot me, do it. I will happily accept being killed. But remember, if this is not God's will, you cannot kill me." **Henry Martyn**, a Bible translator and later missionary to India and Persia, said, "I am immortal until God's work for me to do is done. The Lord reigns."

"Shafiq's shaking hand didn't end up pulling the trigger, but he did make sure Kazim spent time in jail, suffering terrible mistreatment when he first arrived. Kazim was released on bail four months after his arrest, only to find his wife gone and Shafiq, his tormentor, in his home instead. Shafiq had claimed ownership of everything that had belonged to Kazim and his wife, Yasmeen, including their livestock.

"Shafiq threatened to kill Kazim and his wife if he didn't leave immediately. Kazim found Yasmeen, and they fled the village and all that was theirs with only two dollars. Fear of being targeted cause more than one friend to turn them away when they sought a place to stay.

Phil. 4:19 TPT “I am convinced that my God will fully satisfy every need you have, for I have seen the abundant riches of glory revealed to me through Jesus Christ!”

“Yet Kazim’s faith didn’t waver. “I knew God would provide help, but I didn’t know how He would help us.” That *how* came from a Christian man in another village who provided a place to live, along with clothing, food, and a Bible. Other Christians came alongside and offered provisions, including a rickshaw for Kazim so he could support his family as a taxi driver.

“In all the turmoil of that time, when he had been stripped of everything, Kazim revealed in this: “I had one blessing with me, and that was the freedom to preach the Word.” He bears the scars of his beatings, but what is even more obvious is his joy in Jesus. [He said,] “We forget all our worries, and even today we still feel fresh in Jesus’s faith. I start each day in prayer and then drive my rickshaw.”

Editors of **The Voice of the Martyrs** “**I am n**” book summarize their work, “As our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ walk this path, they begin to see their circumstances through God’s eternal perspective. That perspective changes everything. It leads them to view themselves not primarily as the persecuted, but as those who serve on the front lines as God accomplishes His purposes in the midst of evil and chaos. They don’t focus their attention on their small minority; they focus on the majority of people who are reachable for Christ.

“Counting the cost, they stand firm, faithfully sharing the message of God’s grace to a world that desperately needs Him. **How can we let them stand alone or suffer in silence? Will we let their stories deepen our commitment to Christ and His Great Commission? Will we say, “Count on me. I am n, too”?**”

The apostle Paul shared similar thoughts when he wrote a letter of thanks to the Philippians that praised the Lord's sovereignty and grace during his first Roman imprisonment. Phil. 1:12-14

TPT *"I want you to know, dear ones, what has happened to me has not hindered, but helped my ministry of preaching the gospel, causing it to expand and spread to many people. 13. For now the elite Roman guards and government officials (or "Caesar's court") overseeing my imprisonment have plainly recognized that I am here because of my love for the Anointed One. 14. And what I'm going through has actually caused many believers to become even more courageous in the Lord and to be bold and passionate to preach the Word of God, all because of my chains."*

So don't fear suffering or pain on behalf of the gospel of the Kingdom. Step out in faith & trust that God will amply supply what is needed, including the joy of the Lord which is our strength!

Paul goes on to share about God's extremely generous nature and the power of prayer while sitting in prison in Rome: Phil. 1:19-21 **TPT** *"[And I will continue to rejoice] 19. Because I know that the lavish supply of the Spirit of Jesus, the Anointed One, and your intercession for me will bring about my deliverance. 20. No matter what, I will continue to hope and passionately cling to Christ, so that He will be openly revealed through me before everyone's eyes. So I will not be ashamed! In my life or in my death, Christ will be magnified in me. 21. My true life is the Anointed One, and dying means gaining more of Him."*

Paul longs, not for death, but for the more intimate presence of Christ that death will bring.

Finally, **Jesus's words are the source of our peace**, not the world's treatment of us. **Jesus** said in **John 16:33** **TPT** *"And everything I've taught you is so that the peace which is in Me will*

be in you and will give you great confidence as you rest in Me. For in this unbelieving world you will experience trouble and sorrows, but you must be courageous (or “cheer up”), for I have conquered the world!” **TPT note:** “Jesus has taken away the power this world has to defeat us and has conquered it for us. Peace is resting in His victory.”