

4-9-2011, COTR Texarkana

Title: Persecution

Purpose: Expose Christian persecution around the world and provoke believers to help those being persecuted and endure hardship when they face it.

Spiritual Truth: Jesus promised to be with us when we face hardship or persecution.

Text: Jn 15:18-20

Topic: Persecution, Hardship, Suffering, Martyr

Persecution

I. Introduction

A. You Tube Video: Christian Asia Bibi faces blasphemy death sentence

B. Persecution of Christians doesn't happen like this in America but Christians are being persecuted around the world today.

1. Persecution: to harass, punish, injure or murder someone because of their faith.
2. According to *The Hudson Institute* 600-700 million Christians worldwide are experiencing some form of persecution...that's approx. 1 in 3 people who profess faith in Christ is suffering as a follower of Jesus Christ.
3. According to *The Intl. Bulletin of Missionary Research* approximately 176,000 Christians were martyred in a 1 year period between mid 2008- mid 2009. This number is growing every year.
4. Most martyrs suffer and die anonymously, unknown, forgotten, their deaths not recorded except in heaven.
5. Persecution takes many forms:
 - a. Being denied the protection of religious freedom.
 - b. Being prevented from converting to Christianity because of legal or social threats.
 - c. Being physically attacked, beaten or killed.
 - d. Being forced to leave their job or home because of the threat of violence.
 - e. Being imprisoned or interrogated for refusing to deny their faith.

C. Today: a sobering message...**Title: Persecution**

D. Purpose is 3 fold: Expose Christian persecution around the world and provoke believers to help those being persecuted and endure hardship when they face it.

1. Today I'll share the pulpit with a Christian from a Muslim country who has been persecuted for their faith.

E. Spiritual Truth: Jesus promised to be with us when we face hardship or persecution.

II. Jesus told us we'd be hated and persecuted if we followed Him

A. John 15:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ **"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.** ¹⁹ **If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.** ²⁰ **...If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you...**

1. There is a spiritual war going on in the world between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Christians are targets in this conflict.
2. Persecution happens when people, inspired by the devil, attack Christians. They are spiritually motivated by an illogical hatred of God's Kingdom.

III. The early church experienced the presence of God during persecution

A. Acts 7:1-2, 8:1-2 (NIV) [Stephen is lied about and brought to trial by Jewish leaders who hate Him because he follows Jesus Christ]

¹ Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?" ² To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham ...⁵⁴ When they heard this, **they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.** ⁵⁵ But **Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.** ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." ⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to **stone him.** ...⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" When he had said this, he fell asleep. *Chapter 8* ¹ And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. **On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem...**

1. The New Testament was written to believers who were living amidst persecution.
2. No one likes the thought of persecution. It's painful and involves loss and suffering.
3. Steven experienced a hostile attack from people who hated him because he was a Christian but at the same time he experienced the supernatural presence of God. God helped him face death with a concern for the soul of those persecuting him.
4. This same supernatural grace from God will help you if you face hardship for your faith in Christ.
5. The Bible doesn't promise us a trouble free life. In fact it says just the opposite.
 - a. 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)
¹² ... **all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..**
6. We're also promised the grace and presence of God when we face hardship for Christ.
7. Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)
¹⁸ Jesus... told his disciples, ¹⁹ ...**go and make disciples of all the nations...** ²⁰ ...**And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

IV. **Turkey: Christians Despised** *Voice of the Martyrs* ...Four years after the brutal murders of three Christians at a publishing house in Malatya, Turkey, attitudes toward Christians in Turkey have become even less favorable. The Christian minority in Turkey suffer discrimination, slander, personal attacks and attacks against churches on a daily basis. Missionary activities are still considered a national threat...Christian parents have reported that schools are not allowing them to withdraw their children from Islamic teaching...Last week, Turkish media reported that police had detained two teenagers on suspicion of plotting to murder a church leader in Istanbul.

A. Introduce guest speaker

