

- ❖ **Imagine:** illegal to attend church, own a bible, become a Christian, speak openly about Jesus ... Hard to grasp because of where we live ... Freedom of Religion a beneficial blessing ... We must be careful not to anchor our faith to religious freedom, that if we lose it, we also lose our faith ... **We need to learn from the persecuted church how to endure**

- ❖ **Persecution:** mistreated, imprisoned, killed for one's faith in Christ ... Where Christ is rejected, Christian persecution is expected ... **CRUISE: FOR CHRISTIANS, PERSECUTION IS THE NORM, NOT THE EXCEPTION** ... **2Tm3:12, Jn15:18-20** ... Follows natural progression of **5:3-9** ... God's Kingdom is counter-cultural; stands in opposition against sin and evil (influences the world)

- ❖ **Blessed / Be glad:** why does Jesus say you're blessed; why does He say to be glad and rejoice ... Could it be God's purpose to bless you and grow you **through the means of persecution** – **YES!** (**1Th1:6, Pp1:12-14, Ac14:22, 1Pe4:12-19**)
 - **Persecution strengthens our faith in Christ**
 - **Our faith is genuine** – with persecution our allegiance is tested – Christ or the world ... We can only be faithful to one ... No one willingly faces persecution for a lie ... We willingly endure persecution because we cannot deny what we believe
 - **The Holy Spirit is with us** – how are you given the strength to stand firm, because of the Holy Spirit in you
 - **God's Word can be trusted** – who He is, what He's able to do, what He promises is tested and found to be genuine

 - **Persecution deepens our union with Christ**
 - **2Co4:8-11** ... As Christians, we're called to imitate the likeness of Christ ... **Includes His sufferings and rejection** ... **These situations cause you to experience the union you have with Christ** ... His life displayed through the strength He gives and through the faith we profess ... **Ac5:41**
 - What are you holding on to – the approval of the world or the approval of Christ ... The first, you'll never truly attain ... The second has already been attained for you – receive it by faith; hold on to it by faith ... **Ph1:20-21** ... **The world becomes less desirable when Christ becomes more desirable** ... Which do you desire more

- ❖ **Kingdom of Heaven:** More motivation to endure – our reward is great → the Kingdom of Heaven is ours to enjoy ... A reality we experience both today and still to come ... **WATSON: LOOK UPON THE CROWN, AND FAINT IF YOU CAN** ... Consider the example of Moses in **He11** ... What made his faith great – **11:26-27** ... His faith and eyes were fixed on Jesus – **12:2**