

<OPENING SLIDE – YOU ASKED FOR IT>

<slide#2> Why does the persecution of Christians seem so prevalent & how should we respond?

you can text questions to throughout the sermon and I'll do my best to answer them at the end. **PRAY!**

Read Mat 5:10-12: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, (1min)*

Intro Facts/statistics:

I am also sure that all of us in this room have endured some form of suffering and hardship: relationally; physically; emotionally; perhaps spiritually too. But have any of us suffered persecution for our faith in Jesus? I feel safe to say that a few of us in this room have—As far as I can think, I have not personally been persecuted for being a Christian.

Let me define persecution so we are all on the same page about what I am saying this morning: I am not talking only about suffering or hardship (which of course are the result of persecution) but the <SLIDE#3> **persecution** I am talking about is marginalization that causes physical, economic, social, and psychological pain, distress, or loss inflicted on Christians because of their beliefs, which includes martyrdom (being killed for refusing to renounce ones faith). Darren Carlson

In Canada, generally the worst thing that might happen to us for being Christians is mild embarrassment or rejection... Many in the world however, are not so fortunate:

<SLIDE #4> Open Doors ministry says, * A minimum of 100 million Christians worldwide face discrimination and alienation, or suffer interrogation, arrest and even death for their faith in Jesus Christ. They estimate that the number of Christians killed for a faith-related reason in 2014 was 4,344

The **Pew Research Center** says that hostility to religion reached a new high in 2012, when Christians faced some form of discrimination in 139 countries, almost three-quarters of the world's nations.

The western world was shocked this Feb when ISIS aired an online video where they beheaded 21 Egyptian Christians. Millions of people have fled for their lives and now reside in many refugee camps at the hands oppressive regimes around the globe.

And a little closer to home – only months ago North America was horrified at the Charleston Shooting in N. Carolina where a caucasian gunman joined a prayer meeting only later to open fire and kill 9 African American Christians

<SLIDE #5> This leads into the question of why is persecution of Christians so prevalent?! (1) Jesus said we would be (2) somehow it works – *There is a saying that’s asks the question: What 2 things are you guarantee’d in life?* ... death + taxes

- (1) **Jesus said we would be persecuted <SLIDE #6> - In Mt 10** Jesus tells us that he is, “sending us out as sheep among the wolves; he says we will be handed over to the authorities; we will be arrested; and we will be persecuted!” The Apostle Paul tells young Timothy in 2 Tim 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”

Choosing a passage for this sermon was not easy. Both old and new testaments are filled with stories of God’s followers being persecuted for their **faith** and **obedience** to God. So I am sticking to Jesus—lets look at John 15

John 15:18-25 <SLIDE #7>:

Jn 15:18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

- Distinction: Either you belong to Jesus or you belong to the world and when we are obedient to Christ the world will know that we no longer live in it and will try everything to get us back

20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ ***If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*** If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

- This raises the question in my mind. Why aren’t I persecuted for my faith?
- Jesus is saying that in His physical absence on earth the world’s hatred will be directed towards his followers—those who now represent Him to the world you, me, and Jesus’ global church!

21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. **23** Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. **24** If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.

- Here, sin is the rejection of Jesus and the consequence of rejecting Jesus is that one rejects God the Father
- And because of the testimony of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the world is now held accountable for their rejection of God because of the faithful life that Christ lived

As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. **25** But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'

- ***The implication is Those who are faithful to proclaim Jesus and those who are faithful to God's Word will be in constant struggle with those who do not belong to God.***
- "Living for Christ in this world can be difficult, even brutal. As Christians this world is no longer our home, but a battlefield. The trials of life are the tools God uses for building us up and making us more like Jesus – *got questions*
- *Nik Ripken is a leading authority on persecuted Christians wrote his book, "The Insanity of God" after interviewing hundreds of Christians who were harshly persecuted for their faith in the most volatile parts of the world.*
- *Some of the believers He interviewed said this: Persecution happens all the time. It's the way things are. There is nothing unusual or unexpected about it. Persecution for our faith has always been—and probably always will be—a normal part of life."*
161 Jesus said that his we would be persecuted.

(2) **<SLIDE #8> Somehow, it works!?! –** Somehow persecution actually grows the church!

-In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples that they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth! And this has happened and is still happening!! Christians are everywhere! In Acts 1-6 The church grows in Jerusalem ... Stephen.

-In Acts 7-8!! Stephen is arrested, tried, and executed. Acts 8:1b says that "on that day great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem and the church was scattered throughout Judea and

Samaria. BUT DID THAT STOP THE CHURCH FROM GROWING?!? NO in verse 4 it says that those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went and the church grew outwards!!

Aisha's story (pgs 293-5 *Insanity of God*)

The persecution of Christians is growing God's family outwards in the darkest places on earth and healing the hardest of hearts!!!

<slide #9>So how should we respond?

The question we often want to ask in the West is this: How do we end persecution? <SLIDE #10> Ripken gives us an answer: His answer is twofold:

- (1) we stop having faith in Jesus Christ <SLIDE #11> - If we have no faith and if there are no Christians there will not be persecution
- (2) If we must have faith in Christ the only other way to stop persecution is if we keep Jesus to ourselves <SLIDE #12>. If you keep Jesus to yourself technically you can live anywhere and not be persecuted for your faith—the middle east; North Africa; hostile places in Asia - maybe even in North Korea!

Ripken suggests that if we pray to end persecution essentially we will be praying for the gospel to stop going forward. most persecuted Christians who Ripken interviewed never asked that we pray for their persecution to end BUT rather want us to pray that they would be **faithful** and **obedient** *through their persecutions* and suffering.

- Ripken **Satan's number one goal is not necessarily evil and destruction but simply this: DENYING THE WORLD ACCESS TO CHRIST!** <SLIDE #13> **The absolute worst thing Satan can do is to convince us to leave Jesus alone.**

Ripken **says when he and his wife speak at NA churches they often get asked if they think persecution is coming to NA - His response is rather pointed. He says quite sincerely, <Slide #14> "Why would Satan want to wake us up when he has already shut us up?!"**

So again, what can we do - what should we do to respond to the horrendous things done to our faithful brothers and sisters in Christ around the world?

(1) Prayer <slide #15>

a. Dmitri's story (151-154 *Insanity of God*)

- b. Open Doors prayer calendar <Slide #16> - go to opendoors.org→get involved→prayer (5:30mins - 25)

(2) <Slide #17> Financial Support:

- a. **opendoors.org** - started in 1955 by Brother Andrew to supply persecuted Christians with Bibles behind the iron curtain! Today they work with persecuted Christians worldwide in providing untold prayer support; Christian leadership training, Bibles and other Christian resources, and Christian community development. (1min - 26)
- b. <http://www.cmacan.org/refugee-sponsorship> - Canada is vowing to accept 13,000 more refugees from Syria and Iraq!!

(3) perhaps the best way that we can honor our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ is this: <slide#18> Be BOLD and COURAGEOUS

- a. **A Russian believer told Ripken: “I took great joy that I was suffering in my country so that you could be free to witness in your country.” Then he raised his voice to say, <Slide #19> “DON’T YOU EVER GIVE UP IN FREEDOM WHAT WE WOULD NEVER GIVE UP IN PERSECUTION—AND THAT IS OUR WITNESS TO THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST!”**
- b. **Christians throughout history are saying their persecution is worth it because Jesus is worth it! Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved! We follow the resurrected King Jesus who promises us His same resurrection power and hope for all eternity!! Will you join his mission!?! Vancouver is in a unique place where people from all over the world come to live. And as John Stackhouse said, we have the privilege of sharing the glory Jesus and making disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... and teaching them to obey everything that Jesus commanded!!**