

Nov. 13/11 “I Get Knocked Down, But I Get Up” 2 Cor. 4:7--12; Heb. 11:32--38

A little boy brought his home work to school one day for the teacher to inspect. The teacher scanned it, then said disgustedly, “This work is full of mistakes. How can one person make so many mistakes?” The little boy answered, “It wasn’t just one person! My dad did half of it.” If you are a Christian, you will find that life is full of little tests, curve balls and difficulties. They come as opportunities to reveal the calibre of our faith and let Jesus Christ be glorified in us. Today is the Day of Prayer For The Persecuted Church and the Persecuted Church certainly shows us how to be faithful in suffering, bold in spiritual warfare and courageous in sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us look at four lessons the Persecuted Church teaches us today.

I/ PERSECUTION IS UNIVERSAL Today, two hundred million Christians are persecuted for their faith in Christ. Consider some of the most recent news reports.

- 1. Nine churches were recently attacked in Nigeria.**
- 2. In Garissa, Kenya, a Pentecostal Church compound was attacked. Two were killed and three wounded. Our mission partners Aaron and Erica Kenney also minister in Kenya and they recently shared a prayer request for Erica’s friend Jess who was recently kidnapped by Somalian terrorists.**
- 3. In Egypt, a Coptic Christian student was beaten to death by his teacher and fellow students when he refused to remove a cross he was wearing.**
- 4. In Ethiopia, Christians are increasingly attacked as Islamic fundamentalists wield greater influence.**

In Iran, the president is committed to ruthlessly eradicating Christianity. In Saudi Arabia, it is still a crime to convert to Christianity. In Afghanistan, believers meet together in worship deep underground. Yemen has expressed its intention of ridding the country of Christians. Fifty-eight Christians were massacred in Iraq in October. These are only the worst offenders.

However, persecution is not restricted to examples such as these. The New Testament tells us all Christians will face persecution to various degrees. That means whether you live in Iran or Canada, you will be persecuted. The difference is in degree. The apostle Paul chronicled some of his own persecution in our passage today from 2 Corinthians. He shows us that all Christians undergo pressures, perplexity (confusion), persecutions, opposition and being struck down. In Ephesians chapter six, he also advised us to put on the whole armour of God. Here’s why.

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the

authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Eph. 6:12

Paul is saying that we must look beneath the surface of this world. We cannot understand what is going on in our lives and churches today by using microscopes or calculating with computers. He tells us we are not in conflict with what we can see, but rather with demonic forces of evil operating in our lives and churches. We need to understand there is a diabolical mind behind the things we are confronted with.

People generally respond to pressures, difficulties and persecutions in various ways.

- A. Denial Some pretend they are fine and try to keep a bubbly front up.**
- B. Some handle discouragements with anger and bitterness.**
- C. Some look for some one or something to blame.**

All of these miss the boat of God's blessing. We should view the negative circumstances that come against us as opportunities to say, "God has allowed this to bring forth my faith as gold and to let Jesus Christ be glorified in me." As the song goes, "I get knocked down, but I get up again."

II/ LESSON NUMBER ONE FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

PRESSURE WILL NOT DEFEAT US The apostle Paul said, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed." Ever been in a crowd where you are so hemmed in that you can't move? Maybe you're feeling that way right now. He's also using the image of crushing grapes. In New Testament times and parts of the world today, people get in a vat of grapes and crush them down with their feet. It's also the image of olives. Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed and was tested, means "Olive Press." There was a grove of olive trees there, and a press for squeezing the oil out of the olives. To paraphrase the apostle's words, "We're going to get hit on every side, but we don't let it squeeze the life out of us."

Through the centuries, attempts have been made to crush the Church of Jesus Christ, but these attempts have always failed. In Soviet Russia, an underground church only grew stronger. The same in Communist China. Despite Iran's efforts to eradicate Christianity, churches keep multiplying. When believers are persecuted in one area, they simply open a church elsewhere. Hebrews chapter eleven is often called the Hall of Fame of Faith. It shows us that faith is inexhaustible and unstoppable.

The Atlantic Baptist Convention can certainly relate to this. In an increasingly secularized culture, it has seen churches shut their doors, membership drop dramatically over the last ten years, finances dwindle and programs cut deeply.

III/ LESSON NUMBER TWO FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

CONFUSION WILL NOT DISCOURAGE US Often, when troubles come our way, they come at breakneck speed. It's the old saying, "If it doesn't rain, it pours." This often leaves us confused, spinning in circles, trying to make sense of things. Some times, we do not even know how to pray. Romans 8:26 indicates

therw will be times when a believer does not know how to pray. In those times, the Holy Spirit helps us to pray. In our church, we've certainly experienced this, e.g. financial stress, deaths of beloved members, cancer stricken people, etc.

I have read accounts of believers tortured for their faith in Christ, imprisoned and persecuted. Whenever I read these, I'm always struck by their clarity of vision and strength of faith. Feeling confused? Remember, Jesus is not confused. Feeling like things are spinning out of control? Remember, God is in control. He always sees the big picture, the end from the beginning.

IV/ LESSON NUMBER THREE FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

OPPOSITION ISN'T GOING TO STOP US Paul wrote, "We are persecuted, but not abandoned." Over and over again, the story of the Persecuted Church through the centuries has been that opposition failed to shut it down. In the fires of persecution, God nurtured His Church and made it stronger. As Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

The root word of the word "persecution" is the Greek word "to pursue." It is the image of the hunter pursuing his prey. Psalm ninety-one makes reference to the snares of the fowler or the traps of the hunter being set for us. Satan is the hunter coming to steal and kill sheep. The apostle Paul knew what it was to be persecuted. Wherever he went, his integrity was challenged, his message ridiculed and his ministry opposed. He told the Church in Corinth of an opportunity with opposition. "A great door for effective work has opened to me (Ephesus) and there are many who oppose me." 1 Cor. 16:9

If your life is always smooth sailing and trouble free, chances are you are not making your mark as a Christian. You've likely earned yourself a spot in Satan's file, "Low risk, non-effective, weak witness, unproductive, low threat." Some one has suggested that persecution, pressures, difficulties and problems are a compliment from Satan, evidence of the threat he sees and an indicator you're headed for greater things. .

The Persecuted Church has certainly taken seriously the Great Commission found in Matt. 28:18--20 The more it has been opposed, the more boldly it witnessed for Jesus Christ. Often, when we think of witnessing for Jesus, we feel scared and intimidated. This is because we sort of feel like we will be going out to the playground where the school yard bully waits. The bully may have different names, e.g. Intimidation (What Will People Say?), Rejection (What If I Am Rejected?), Failure (What If I Fail?). We need to stop looking at the bullies, and start looking at Jesus Christ who is greater and mightier than bullies. See 1 Jn. 4:4 We forget that the Great Commission carries not only the threat of opposition, but an opportunity to watch Jesus go to work for us. We forget that not only did He give us a commission, but He gave us two powerful promises.

A. All authority on heaven and on earth has been given unto Me. In Luke chapter ten, He told us He was bestowing that authority on us.

B. I will never fail or forsake you. I am with you always.

Some one has said, "The door of opportunity swings on the hinge of opposition."

V/ LESSON NUMBER FOUR FROM THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

HARD HITS HURT, BUT THEY DON'T DESTROY US Hockey players know that. They regularly get checked into the boards, get bowled over, but keep getting up to play again. When its time to play for the Stanley Cup, every player commits to "playing through your setbacks." Paul said, "We are struck down, but we are not destroyed." I have read Richard Wurmbrand's Tortured For Christ. He took a lot of hits, but came out with a faith stronger than ever.

Understand this. There is a strategy in the hits we take in life. Satan is always looking for the knock out punch that will knock us out of our witness for Christ. He is always hoping that just one more hit will be all it takes to drop us to our knees in discouragement so that we give up. That's the key to understanding the book of Job. Satan got permission from God to take a crack of Job and put his faith to the test. He tried and tried to deliver a knockout punch. Didn't work. In the end, Job said, "He (God) has brought me forth as gold." We always try to have a plan for troubles, e.g. if we get sick, we will go to the doctor and get a prescription, if we need advice we will find some one to talk to, we try to save money to fend off financial difficulties in the future. But as the boxer Mike Tyson famously said, "Every body has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." Some times the hits we take leave us stupefied and speechless.

I know what it is to get knocked down. When I was a teenager, I once saw a horse grazing in a field. I noticed he was near a fence. I reasoned, "I can climb the fence, jump on his back and ride him." I did, but he reared up and I slid off, landing on my back in the dirt. Did I let that stop me? Nope. Another time, we went somewhere they had horses. They saddled them up for us, and told me, "If you want him to stop, just pull the reins." Didn't work. This one started galloping. I held the pommel for dear life so I wouldn't fall off. He headed straight for a fence, then suddenly planted his feet and stopped, hoping I would sail off over the fence. Didn't work. I had a death grip on that pommel. I got down, but I was proud he hadn't been able to get me off his way. Another time, I was on a horse ride in the Rockies. You're in a line of riders, all following the lead horse. We stopped for a break. They neglected to tell me that when you stop and get off a horse, you are supposed to drop the reins over his head so he can move his head freely and feed as he wants to. He was mad cause I didn't do it and he backed into me, knocking me down. They told me what to do. The point is that I got back on and rode him to the end of the trail.

Dark times will come. But think of it this way. Where is light most clearly seen? On a sunny day or in the darkness of the night? Jesus said we are the light of the world. It is easy to sing on a sunny day, but tougher to sing in the midnight hour as Paul and Silas did in prison after having been flogged and locked in stocks. Life is not a cafeteria. We don't get to choose our troubles. Persecution will surely come. Regard it as an opportunity to smell beautiful, emanating the fragrance of /Christ. Whatever the situation you are in, say, "This is my opportunity to let my faith be brought forth as gold, to let Jesus Christ be glorified in me. I get knocked down, but I get up again."

Nov. 13/11 A Word From Pastor Alan

Today is the Day of Prayer For The Persecuted Church. There are 200 million Christians in the world today who are being persecuted for their faith in Christ, and Christians around the world today are praying for them. Generally, most people think of persecution as being tortured for your faith, being imprisoned or being martyred. Those are the extreme examples. The Bible teaches that all Christians will be persecuted in some way. The word persecution comes from the Greek word “to pursue.” It is the image of a hunter hunting prey and Satan is the hunter. He uses pressures, troubles, difficulties, tests, setbacks, etc. to try to knock us out of commission. If we are sailing trouble free through life, it most likely means we are being regarded by the devil as minimal threat and unproductive.

How do you handle persecution and troubles? The way we handle these things says a lot about our character and our faith. It also reveals who we are and Whose we are. Christians are blood bought, blood washed children of the King of kings. Today, the Persecuted Church has a great deal to teach every Christian about witnessing for Christ, spiritual warfare and strength of character. We need to stand in solidarity with these brothers and sisters in the Lord. I urge you to pray for them daily. To learn more about the Persecuted Church, you could Google two excellent web sites, Open Doors Ministry and Voice of the Martyrs. To learn four important lessons from the Persecuted Church, please go to the sermon on this site.