

The Persecuted Church in the End Times

by David R. Barnhart

The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing on God's Word in the face of persecution, identifying with persecuted brothers and sisters, and the possibility of revival and reformation in the church.

Duration: 36:13

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:14

Topics: "Persecuted Church"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher's main purpose is to break the hearts of the listeners, focusing on the persecution and suffering of fellow believers in the persecuted church. The preacher emphasizes the need for Christians to have their hearts broken for the world in need and to see mankind as God sees. The sermon references the Quran to highlight the violence and persecution faced by believers. The preacher also shares recent examples of persecution, including the killing of Ethiopian Christians in Libya and the burning of a Christian boy in Pakistan. The sermon calls for believers to separate themselves from unbelievers and to strive for holiness in the fear of God.

Transcript

I continue this morning in this series I've been preaching called Countdown to Eternity and this morning my focus is the persecuted church in end times. I would like to read two scripture passages that carry us into this message that I think should focus us rightly where God wants us to be today. In Revelation chapter 2 and verse 10 the Lord himself declares, do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer.

I tell you the devil will put some of you into prison to test you and you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. And from John 16 and verse 2 they will put you out of the synagogue.

In fact a time is coming when anybody who kills you will think he is offering service to God. The main purpose of my message this morning is to break your heart. I know that's precisely the opposite of what sermons are supposed to do.

We're supposed to be bright and happy Christians going along life's way and not focus so much on anything that is considered negative. Consequently sermons generally speaking are meant to elevate our spirits. But this morning my desire and prayer is that not only will your heart be broken over these matters but that hearts throughout the whole of the Christian Church today throughout our nation will be broken

over what fellow believers in the persecuted church are now enduring.

As the hymn said that we've just sung together, let your heart be broken for a world in need. See mankind as God sees. Let your heart be broken for your brother's pain.

I recall Jesus in his ministry on earth and how often he went about healing the sick, raising the spirits of those who were downcast. But there were times when Jesus is revealed as weeping. On two separate occasions Jesus wept over conditions in this world.

In fact he wept for you and for me. The Bible also talks to us how Jesus looking out upon the multitude and realizing their lost condition had compassion on the crowd. There is one passage where it says of Jesus that he had compassion because they appeared as people, as sheep without a shepherd.

Let me assure you today that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ in near and distant places are going through crises and persecution that is greater than any of us can imagine. And while we are here in this great land of freedom and while we might like to just simply focus on the joys and the good that we have, it behooves us all today to see the challenges that brothers and sisters in Christ are facing. Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 12:26, if one member of the body suffers, all members suffer with it.

Would to God that were true today throughout the church regarding our persecuted brethren. And I think of our persecuted brethren specifically in North Korea, in China, in Africa, throughout the Middle East, and hundreds of other places across this vast globe. I also think that if 1% of these tortures and killings and persecutions were happening here in our country, there would be protests from every pulpit, every church, throughout every city, village, and countryside.

The fact that they're happening in distant places, I believe God wants us to elevate our minds and to think more thoroughly and completely of identifying with these precious brothers and sisters. The fact that these acts of violence are taking place on what we would call the other side of the world can allow believers to relax and largely have our lives go untouched. But I keep wondering if we continue on in our churches here in the West today without enough and adequate concern for our brothers and sisters who are suffering, who are being persecuted, who will stand with us when our time comes.

The Bible makes it extremely clear that at the return of Jesus Christ there will be a great wave of persecution. Christian persecution, in my opinion, is the number one crisis facing the church today, yet it barely makes the news in the media and even in the churches. Last year, Open Doors, an organization that works with martyred families, with persecuted Christians, they reported that 4,344 believers were killed for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was double over the figures for 2013 and they estimate that this 4,300 figure will be exceeded this year. There is a new book out now by a man named Tom Doyle and the book is entitled Killing Christians and it's presenting an amazing account of Christian persecution in our world today. One chapter of this book, just one chapter, describes 40 Egyptian churches that were burned to the ground.

House church leaders in Iran who have been incarcerated in the infamous Evin prison in Iran. That same chapter talks about 80 Christians who were murdered in North Korea for simply owning a Bible. It talks about believers who were nailed to crosses in Syria and I might add there are children being nailed to crosses today in Iraq.

Now that was just simply one week in that chapter. One week of events in the persecuted church in 2014. But if you think that's amazing, if you're jolted by that, consider what's happened in the past week and a half right here in our ears watching on our own televisions.

What's happening to the persecuted church? ISIS released another of their infamous videos showing 30 Ethiopian Christians being put to death in Libya. Half were shot and the other half were beheaded. Last month you'll recall they beheaded 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in the same place.

About a week ago there was a Christian boy in Pakistan who was set on fire by Muslims simply because he was a Christian child. He had burns on 55% of his body and even at this very moment he is languishing in a hospital in Pakistan. 12 Christians seeking to persecution, and this is just this past week, were thrown overboard by Muslims off the coast of Italy because they refused to deny Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

And in a tragedy beyond comprehension, 900 people, many of whom were Christians, died when their boat capsized off the coast of Italy as they sought freedom from tyranny. According to open doors, the vast majority of these killings are being committed by Islamic terrorists. The hatred of radical Islam for Christians knows no bounds.

The murdering rampage against Christian goes on daily, and yet the governments of the world, including our own government, view this is just another problem they'll have to deal with someday, somehow, sometime, someplace, if they ever get around to it. All of this is strangely reminiscent of the Jewish Holocaust in World War II, during which time leaders in the United States and Europe and the Vatican knew exactly what was happening to the Jews and said and did nothing to stop. Today it seems many government officials, including our own government officials, have great difficulty in identifying these killers of Christians as Islamic terrorists.

But the fact is this kind of killing comes directly out of the Quran. These massacres of Christians are nearly always acknowledged when they're happening as being obedient to the Quran and for the glory of Allah. Here's what the Quran says in what is called the verse of the sword.

And there are many verses that describe the same thing. But here's the Quran. When your Lord revealed to the angels, I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe.

I will cast into the hearts of those who disbelieve. I will strike off their heads and strike off their fingertips. In Islam, the killing of non-Muslims is called jihad.

But it all boils down to a declaration of war against Christianity and Judaism. And until our government leaders understand that, the killing will go on. Today we are standing on the threshold of a great new wave of persecution that has been prophesied in the scriptures that will unfold prior to the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I think again we need to understand that this is one of the signs of Jesus' soon return. In Revelation chapter 20 and verse 4, we read, and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the Word of God. And those who had not worshipped the beast or his image had not received the mark on their forehead or on their hand and they came to life and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

This is what the Bible says will happen in the last days and we are witnesses to it. And I believe it ought to stir the hearts of every Christian not only to be looking for the coming of Jesus Christ, but to be staying the course with those persecuted brothers and sisters who are called upon to endure this. I urge you all, I urge every Christian in every church to get involved in the struggle to help the persecuted church around the world.

I would encourage you to subscribe to the publications of the Voice of Martyrs and Open Doors, all of these organizations that are supporting the persecuted church. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ and the inaction of governments and of the church must not be allowed to continue. I do believe, and I'm sorry and saddened to say, that persecution is also coming to our country.

In fact, in many ways it has already begun. What is happening to the chaplains in our military is a national disgrace and the church should be up in arms over chaplains who are penalized now for naming the name of Jesus Christ or from quoting the Bible. All we're not facing persecution at this time by beheading or slaughter.

It's much more subtle than that. It is a persecution through fear and intimidation. More than a few voices are being heard inside and outside the government that would negate the First Amendment being applied to Christians.

In a discussion on MSNBC just a few nights ago, maybe some of you saw it, there were panelists who held the same views, all of them, that Christians, priests, business owners, churches should not be allowed to hide behind religious freedom laws. And this was especially true, they said, on the subject of those who oppose abortion and same-sex marriage, that we ought not be allowed as a church, as a people of God, to make any kind of distinction in where we stand. Already on college campuses across the country, you hear about it constantly.

There are those who hold to biblical positions on these and other subjects and are not allowed to voice those positions on the campus. Today, Christians in America are being urged to be seen but not heard. Many churches today, churches, have unwritten policies, some of them are written, that they will not allow anything deemed political or controversial to be spoken.

They're told, don't you dare pray in Jesus' name. Don't mention Jesus, don't mention Christianity or the Bible in your daily workplace or in schools. Some time ago, I remember reading a question that was supposed to stir the minds of Christians and it went like this, if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? An apt question for us to ponder today, because we need to think today about our own standing for the Lord Jesus Christ in the face of what is being raised through the government circles and our culture.

Consider for itself that in Europe as well as here in this country, efforts are being made now to make Sharia law part of our judicial system. This has happened in England already and in parts of Europe. Now, Sharia law can never be compatible with our Constitution and it's certainly not compatible with the Scriptures, but yet they want to move the country in that direction.

Now, I want to move in another direction here for us in our consideration of persecution, because I think this is kind of where the rubber meets the road and the bottom line, if you please, have you yourself ever taken a stand against evil and tyranny? Have you ever had to make a personal sacrifice for that stand? If you haven't, you will. I remind you once again of what the Bible teaches concerning warnings that Christ

gave, that in this world we Christians will always have persecution. In fact, Paul said that whoever remains loyal to Christ will suffer persecution.

And I would like to think right now in scope of the pressure that is being exerted upon Christians, upon God and his word and his truth, that if we're not making some people upset and angry over our stand and our position for God, we're not standing. I think we need to identify more carefully today that no matter what the cost, we choose to stand with God. John the Apostle wrote the book of Revelation because he was exiled, first of all, to the island of Patmos and there God gave him a vision of what was going to happen in the latter days prior to his coming.

And John identified himself on Patmos that he was there for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Then you have all kinds of martyrs and the persecuted brethren given throughout the Scriptures and throughout the history of the church. But I assure you that the persecution has gone on and continues still to this day.

Because it is subtle, because it is not over it in many ways, people don't understand it, but it is persecution nonetheless. I have observed in my work with Abiding Word Ministries over the past 30 some years countless Christians who have placed loyalty to their denomination above loyalty to God and His Word. But I assure you the day is coming when we'll stand before the Lord and we as Christians will be called to give an account of our stewardship and God, I do not believe, will have a word to say about how faithful we've been to a denomination.

But He will ask us about our faithfulness to His Word. No matter how far off the track many of these mainline churches become today, no matter how much their teachings violate the Word of God, there are those who choose to stand with their denomination rather than to stand on the Word of God. Countless Christians today remain connected to their liberal denominations because when it came time to cast a vote for God or for their denomination, they chose the denomination.

These churches can proudly say today as they do, we kept our property. But then they'll also have to admit, but we lost the faith. I have seen scores of once thriving churches that have had to close their doors because they chose loyalty to the denomination over loyalty to God.

But thankfully, I have witnessed thousands upon thousands of Christians across this vast country who have stood their ground on the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, even against their own churches and denominations. In the course of the past few decades, I've seen pastors put out of their churches. I've seen parsonages where the pastor was forced to leave them.

I've seen these things, and it is a form of persecution for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. A number of years ago, I recall watching a movie in which a black father and his little son were riding on a mule-drawn wagon, and they were going past a white church in more ways than one. And the little black boy said to his father, Daddy, have you ever been inside that church? And his father said, No, son, I haven't, and it used to bother me a lot till I talked to the Lord, and he told me he had never been in there either.

As a part of our work with Abiding Word Ministries, I have watched as Christians walked out of their denominations, their local churches, left it all behind because they could not compromise their deepest convictions of God's Word. Back in 1983, and I know that sounds like ancient history to many of you, but when I first stood against my own denomination and their departures from God's Word, there was a major

issue at hand that started it all, and that was because one of the Lutheran agencies in Minneapolis was, for its counseling purposes, showing hardcore pornography to troubled teenagers. I objected.

I spoke that word to my congregation in Minneapolis, and literally about 15,000 copies of that message went out over the country. One of them landed in the office of Dr. James Dobson, and Dr. Dobson invited me to appear on two of his radio broadcasts. The notoriety brought a lot of mail, I must say.

Thousands of letters poured in, and I was amazed by the number of people who identified with my concerns. I was amazed by the number of people who said that they were leaving, that they could no longer remain in their liberal churches because of the false teachings and unbiblical practices that were taking place. After my book came out, *The Church's Desperate Need for Revival*, and I really need to republish this book, thousands more letters came in, and Mary and I were amazed as we opened these letters that literally some of these letters were stained with tears as people wept over the condition of their churches.

But those tear-stained letters gave me hope that there is still the possibility of revival and reformation in the church if we can experience knee-bending and heartbreaking repentance. In 1984, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church was being formed, God led me in a very dramatic and quick fashion to withdraw. I stepped into the pulpit on a given Sunday morning of my 2700 member church in Minneapolis, and I read the passage which I would like to read for you this morning.

It comes from 2 Corinthians chapter 6, starting at verse 14, where God says in his Word, 2 Corinthians 6.14, do not be bound together with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? What harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has the believer in common with an unbeliever? Therefore, verse 17, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will welcome you. And in verse 1 of chapter 7, therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

And so it was at that time that I stepped into the pulpit of my church, and I read to them my letter of resignation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church. And I want to share just a few of those comments, because as I read this a few days ago, what struck me was it's exactly the same thing that is going on today. I told the congregation as I read the passage that I've just read to you, the conviction of God became overwhelming.

It shook my soul. It took me by surprise and holded me in my tracks. It is that conviction which I share with you now, unalloyed and without cosmetic, unless otherwise convinced of Holy Scripture, I cannot and I will not continue to abide in a church body that is so consistently, defiantly, and flagrantly diminished the authority of God's most holy word.

I cannot and I will not continue to abide in a denominational household where the heresy of universalism is both taught and tolerated, enslaving untold millions in their sins without hope of God's redeeming grace through Christ alone. And I cannot and I will not abide in a dominational household where ethics and values are determined by popular secularist views rather than by the infallible and unchanging word of God. And then I concluded, Mary and I have placed our lives and our ministry on the altar of God.

Time and God alone will rightly judge our decision and we are satisfied to rest it there. Thus I tell you we can do no other. We have peace as we know this is God's will for our lives.

And I can tell you over 30 years later that God has been faithful. God has allowed us through Abiding Word Ministries to assist literally hundreds of congregations and pastors to break free and stand up and stand upon his inspired infallible and inerrant word. We are grateful that God has also brought us here to this place.

Certain churches today are going through this identical thing. Just this past week there was a large Presbyterian Church in Texas that lost getting out of their liberal denomination by eight votes. Because you see typically what happens when the church is about to vote they bring in the dead and everybody they can find whoever passed by the church and they allow them to vote.

But the joy that's in my heart today is over those hundreds and yes even thousands of congregations across America today where Christians left it all, started with nothing but God and reestablish new congregations whose lights are shining brightly today for the world. My friends what I want to emphasize today in this message is grave and bitter persecution is happening throughout the church. Our persecution here in this country is starting and it's much more subtle.

But are we prepared today to stand up and be counted for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ? I said a couple weeks ago and I repeat it again we are here to establish a church not just another church but a Bible believing church that preaches Christ his truth and salvation that the lost may come to know him and that the world may know what thus saith the Lord means in all the issues that we face today. I assure you it will take great courage in the future that is ahead of us to be that kind of church and to be that kind of people. Listen to what Jesus said Matthew 5 10 blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you and then this passage captures it all in Acts chapter 4 this is a prayer of the early church after they had experienced profound and horrid persecution they said to the Lord in their prayers they assembled and now Lord take note of their threats and grant that your bondservants may speak your word with all confidence while you extend your hand to heal and signs and wonders take place in the name of your holy servant Jesus and when they had prayed the place where they gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak the word of God with boldness they didn't ask the Lord for protection they didn't ask the Lord to keep all these evils from coming at them they asked the Lord for boldness and in this hour today when we're facing such challenges as we are I pray that is our prayer Lord give us boldness to stand for the Lord Jesus Christ amen indeed father thank you so much today for your word thank you for its truth and the power it gives us to live Oh God it is our prayer this morning that whenever anyone will see or ask of us we can say with great joy we are on the Lord's side we are with the Lord on all things and we pray Oh God to that end you will increase and give us boldness to stand this we pray in Jesus name Amen

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