

Prepare for the Underground Church - Part 1

by Eric Foley

The sermon emphasizes the importance of preparing for persecution and equipping the Korean church to remain faithful in the face of increasing restrictions on Christian faith.

Duration: 59:48

Scripture: Matthew 5:10

Topics: "Persecution", "Faithfulness"

Description

This sermon delves into the history of Voice of the Martyrs, founded by Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who endured persecution for faithfully preaching the gospel. It emphasizes the importance of learning from persecuted Christians to remain faithful amidst increasing restrictions and challenges, focusing on red, white, and green martyrdom. The sermon warns about the changing landscape of Christianity in the free world, particularly regarding issues like homosexuality, and advocates for humility, learning, and preparation based on the experiences of persecuted believers.

Transcript

Good morning everyone. Good to have you here in our Voice of the Martyrs home. How many are visiting us for the first time today? Wonderful, wow.

Thank you. Welcome. Welcome.

I want to mention to you a little bit about our ministry so that you can understand the purpose of our seminar today. Speaking briefly about our organization, we will also talk about the purpose of today's event. About 60 years ago, the founding of the organization was founded by Pastor Richard Wurmbrand.

He was imprisoned for 13 years under the communist in Romania. The reason he was imprisoned was not because he was a political man. It's not because he was focused on campaigning for certain social issues.

It's simply because he continued to faithfully preach the gospel even after the communists occupied the country. He was actually in prison and then he served his prison term and was released. He went back to his church and did the same thing that he was doing before, which was to simply continue to preach the gospel faithfully.

So he was imprisoned a second time. He was spent three years in solitary confinement. He was in a jail cell below the ground.

Even the prison guards, they would wear slippers so that their shoes didn't make a sound. Because part of that imprisonment was wanting to isolate him in every possible way. So when Pastor Wurmbrand was released from prison a second time, Christians from the West made arrangements for him and his family to be able to leave Romania.

Basically, they paid a ransom for him. So when his family came to the West, he began to speak around the world about the suffering of Christians under communism. And at first, he received no support, no public encouragement from Christians.

He was accused of being a liar. The World Council of Churches spoke out against him. But he continued to speak.

And of course, ultimately, history proved him to be correct. Christians did suffer under communism in terrible ways. So Pastor Wurmbrand had spoken faithfully and accurately.

He believed it was very important not to exaggerate the stories of suffering. Or to use them for any political purpose. And of course, the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1980s.

But we should always remember that today more than one billion people still live under communism in the world. And they live under communism here in Asia. In countries like China, Laos, North Korea, and even today as we work with our Russian brothers and sisters, we see Russian Christians once again facing greater and greater restrictions on their religious freedom.

And so the issue of communism is not dead. But Voice of the Martyrs expanded its focus in the late 1980s. To focus on Christians experiencing persecution, not only from communism, but from any kind of system.

And so certainly, Islamic radical persecution is an important subject today. But even in places like Sri Lanka, Christians face persecution and restriction. So Voice of the Martyrs is not a political organization.

Our focus is not on campaigning for changes in the law. Our focus is not on speaking out on political issues to the general society. For more than 60 years, our focus has simply been to equip Christians to be able to know how to live faithfully in the midst of persecution.

And so Voice of the Martyrs Korea actually began in Korea in the late 1960s, early 1970s. And it was a movement not of pastors, but of lay people. They did things like balloon launches into North Korea.

Radio broadcasting. And so the man who had founded that Voice of the Martyrs movement, it was a different organizational name, but he died in a car accident some years ago. And so Voice of the Martyrs formally was founded in Korea about almost 15 years ago.

Dr. Foley and I had the privilege of founding the organization here. And each Voice of the Martyrs organization is independent. So we have Voice of the Martyrs organizations in the U.S. and Canada and Australia.

And so we all share a close fellowship with each other. And part of my responsibility is to oversee that network of Voice of the Martyrs organizations around the world. And so historically, the focus of Voice of the Martyrs in Korea has been to partner with underground North Korean Christians.

So we do not do missionary activity to North Korea. Instead, we support North Koreans to do activity to reach their own country. And so we participate with them in that mission work, but really we are following

the lead of underground North Korean Christians in what we do.

And so in the last several years, our work has continued to expand as we work with persecuted Christians in other countries as well. So regularly, every month or so, we are privileged to be able to bring persecuted Christians from different countries here to our office, and they speak in events like this. And so we bring Christians from Iran, and the Middle East, and Nigeria, and Sri Lanka, and Eritrea, and anywhere where Christians are persecuted, we bring them here.

But our purpose is not to have them speak and share about how terrible their lives are. Our purpose is to learn from them. From the Bible on through present times, we know that everyone who seeks to live a faithful life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

And persecution takes a variety of forms. So when we think of the word persecution, what usually comes to mind is someone who is killed violently in an instant because of hate speech. And in our organization, that typically happens several times a year in our work with North Korea.

But historically, the church has affirmed three kinds of martyrdom. So the idea of people who are violently killed in an instant, the church has always called red martyrdom. And so as you walked into our building, you may have noticed the timeline on the right-hand side, the red timeline.

And the names, all the plaques on that timeline are people who were red martyrs. But the second kind of martyrdom that the church has recognized is what is called white martyrdom. White martyrdom means to die to the world.

It means that we no longer participate in the world's systems. And so when we think of modern-day white martyrdom, we might think about things like prayer mountains or retreat centers where people may go even temporarily in order to die to the world and focus only on the Lord. And so that's why you see the second color it's represented in our office is white.

Like in our Voice of the Martyrs logo. This office itself is a kind of a white martyrdom. It is a place where we retreat temporarily in order to learn together, discuss together.

And then return to the world. But by far, the most common form of martyrdom that the church has recognized is what is called green martyrdom. And so when you see all around you, you'll see that the main color in our office is green.

Green martyrdom is to die to self. All Christians are called to green martyrdom. And according to Christ, it's not even advanced discipleship.

It's the first step of following Christ. Because Christ says, whoever would follow me must take up their cross. Every day.

And so that is why you are in this office with red, white, and green. And that gives you an understanding our organization is not a political organization that is oriented towards changing laws or lobbying the government. That's all very important work.

But it is not what our organization does. Our organization, as you can see from the logo over here, is focused on keeping the martyr's spirit in the Korean church. And that is the spirit of red martyrdom, white martyrdom, and green martyrdom.

Our goal is to train the Korean church to continue to be faithful in every way in the face of persecution. So the reason why we are holding this seminar today is not to answer every question and to lay out a comprehensive strategy in two hours. It's to begin a conversation that we expect will last for many years until Christ returns.

Which could be today. So our focus is on equipping. It's not on lobbying.

Our focus is on the Korean church. It's not on Korean society or the Korean government. Our focus is to learn from persecuted Christians, not to learn from experts in our own society, but to really sit at the feet and learn from those who have suffered in the body for Christ.

So in our organization's history, everything began with Pastor Wurmbrandt's publication of this book, which is called Tortured for Christ. So it is both a testimony but also a theology of what I've been sharing with you today, about a philosophy of learning from persecuted Christians how to be faithful in our own time. So a lot of the books we publish are like that.

It's the testimonies and theology from Christians who have been persecuted. And our goal isn't just to share their stories so that people become scared. It is to share their stories so we can learn.

So we are an interdenominational organization. In other words interdenominational. We serve every denomination in Korea.

We also serve many denominations in Korea. except for cults of course, and so that's why in our books like Extreme Devotion we share the stories of Christians from every kind of denominational background. In our work with North Koreans, we wrote the book These are the Generations.

The reason why we wrote it was because we felt that it was important that Korean Christians could learn from the North Korean underground church. How have North Korean Christians managed to keep the faith over now more than three generations under such difficult conditions in North Korea? But this month, we begin really a new chapter in our organization's life. That is with the publication of this book which is called Preparing for the every day of the last almost 15 years of our life serving with underground North Korean Christians.

In that process, our faith has grown as we have learned from them. But we've come to what we believe to be a very important conclusion related to the Korean church. It's the very same conclusion that Pastor Richard Wurmbrandt came to 40 years ago regarding the church in the free world.

Countries like Korea, Canada, the U.S., and the U.S. As Pastor Wurmbrandt traveled around the world in those countries and he shared the stories of persecuted believers, he also began to see something about the church in the free world that concerned him greatly. He began to discern that the free world, the church in the free world, would soon come under increasing persecution, but that it was not prepared to know how to respond to that persecution, because it was so confident in the laws and the culture of the free world that Christians in the free world could not imagine a point where their freedom to be Christian could be restricted. So 40 years ago, in Johannesburg, South Africa, Pastor Wurmbrandt preached a sermon and the sermon was called Preparing for the Underground Church, and that sermon he then developed further and it forms the basis of the book which he published this month.

It was always one of Pastor Wurmbrandt's least popular books. People always wanted to read Torture for Christ. They wanted to read books like Extreme Devotion.

But the idea that Christians in the free world would be restricted in their faith was an idea that Christians in the free world found ridiculous. So the book is a book that has never been widely circulated. But in the last 10 years, in the United States and in Europe, we have actually seen growing restrictions on the practice of Christianity.

Please listen carefully to what I'm about to say here, because it's a very important point of what we're talking about today. So there's two kinds of situations that you see when Christian faith is restricted. One thing that happens is some Christians continue to be faithful and they continue to practice the things that the church has always practiced.

So in this situation, what happens then is that they're punished in some way. And we're starting to see this kind of thing happen more and more, especially in Europe, but now also in the United States. So when you have an earthquake, you talk about the epicenter of the earthquake, the center where the earthquake happens and spreads out from.

So the epicenter of this persecution or restriction of Christian faith in the free world has been in what we call the Scandinavian countries. So Scandinavian countries would be like Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway. But you might think to yourself, yes, but I haven't heard many things about Christians being punished in those areas.

I haven't heard those things. But remember, I said there were two responses that happen in these kinds of situations. The first is that Christians continue to be faithful and then they're punished for their faithfulness.

But the second thing that happens in these kinds of situations is that the church changes its practice so that it will not experience punishment. And this is what has happened in the Scandinavian countries. Churches in those countries, what we might call the state churches, the official churches, have consistently changed their practice since the late 1980s on through the present time.

This is by far the much more difficult form of persecution. In other words, it's very hard, but the easier form of persecution is when you're challenged, you respond faithfully, and you suffer for it. The more difficult form of persecution is when the church becomes conformed to the world.

So you know Paul in Romans 12, 1 and 2, he says, don't be conformed to the world. And so what's happening at the epicenter of persecution of the church in the free world is that the church is being radically reshaped in these countries. And the church then proclaims a new kind of Christianity.

And then those people who try to be faithful to what the church has always believed and practiced end up being punished, not primarily by society, but by other Christians. So if I were to give you the clearest example of that that you could see, it would be the church in China. The official state church or the Three-Self Church in China has reshaped the Christian faith.

It still believes a lot of what Christians have always believed and practiced. But it begins to leave out certain things that the church has always believed. And it reshapes certain things and proclaims that this is what it means to be a faithful believer.

So as Dr. Foley and I have spent the last 15 years working with underground North Korean Christians, we've had the privilege of traveling around the world and speaking. And what we've seen across the free world is both of these kinds of persecution beginning to affect Christians in the free world. Christians who continue to faithfully believe and practice what the faithful church has always believed and practiced are

now beginning to be restricted and punished.

It happens through the court system. It happens also through the general public. These days, social media is one of the strongest forms of persecution that believers face in the free world.

People's ministries are destroyed overnight because of things that get posted on Facebook. But what concerns us most is to see churches in the free world reshaping what it means to be Christian in an effort to avoid persecution, in an effort to remain relevant or popular, in a belief that it's okay to compromise in certain areas if we can still accomplish other goals. And the effect that this has created in the churches, especially in Europe and the United States, is astounding.

And it happened literally in the course of just a few years. And it didn't happen only in the liberal parts of the church. And it didn't happen only in the state churches.

But even among what we in Europe and the United States would call the evangelical churches, the most Bible-believing churches, we see pastors in those churches leading a change in the faith and practice of the Christian faith. To the point that today, in the United States, the estimates of the percentage of Christians who believe that homosexuality and gay marriage is compatible with the Christian faith is around 70%. So this is not just the general public in the United States of America.

This is not just the liberal churches or the state churches. This is the evangelical churches, the Bible-believing churches. So our purpose in publishing this book, the purpose in convening this seminar today, the first of what we hope to be many gatherings, is based in this belief.

It will be increasingly difficult for Korean Christians to remain faithful in the belief and practice of what the church has always believed and practiced, not in some distant future. But literally beginning already. And our goal in this process is simply to carry out what Voice of the Martyrs has always done, which is to try to draw upon the resources of persecuted Christians to help us to know how to continue to practice the fullness of the Christian faith.

No matter what it costs us. In our opinion, churches in Europe and the United States have already lost the battle. We can look at their experience and learn from it.

But we should not imitate how they responded in this battle. Now when I say that, I understand that's a controversial statement. Christians in the U.S. and Europe worked really hard.

They prayed a lot. They used every resource that they had at their disposal. They used the intelligence of Christian doctors.

They worked with the best Christian lawyers. They sent out the best spokespeople to speak in the media. They did large demonstrations.

They lobbied government after government. And still they lost the battle. We think that there's a message in that from the Lord.

The message is not that Christian doctors and Christian lawyers and Christian media are bad. That's not the message. The message is that what they can share with the world is not sufficient to win this battle.

In order to win this battle, we believe it is necessary to humble ourselves. And learn from some of the smallest Christian congregations in the world. From places like North Korea, and Iran, and the Middle

East, and Nigeria, where they have faced restrictions on their belief.

And where they have been successful in resisting that urge to change the Christian faith. Our strategy is not focused on the church trying to win some battle against the public in the media or in the courts. Our strategy is focused on equipping the church to remain faithful in this difficult period.

In our opinion, the tragedy in the U.S. and Europe is not that the governments in those countries endorsed gay marriage and consider homosexuality now to be a human right. That's a tragedy, of course. But the deeper tragedy is that now in the U.S. and Europe, the church believes those things to be true also.

In other words, now in the U.S. and Europe, Christians support the idea that homosexual marriage is a biblical expression of marriage. The church supports the idea that homosexuality is a human right. And so this is the focus of our concern.

And so if you were to ask what is our general strategy, what is our general approach to this issue, the answer is that we believe that if the Korean church wants to change Korean society, it must first reform its own practice. It must first make sure that it is standing in the right relationship to God on issues of sexuality. Fortunately, in our own Korean church history, we actually have many Korean Christians who felt that same way.

And as you walk into our office on the right-hand side, you see the big pictures of three of those men. You might not recognize all three of them. But my guess is if you recognize one of them, it will be Ahn Chang-ho.

And Ahn Chang-ho, people tend to revere him as a statesman. And he was a great statesman. But few people are aware of his deep, deep Christian faith.

And so Ahn Chang-ho taught in his time when Korea was occupied by the Japanese that the solution, the way forward to a free Korea, was not in fighting against the Japanese militarily. It was in training each Korean to be fully Christian. Ahn Chang-ho's philosophy was new God, new nation.

Meaning that as each Korean came to know God fully, Korea would be transformed. And only on that basis could it ever be free. Now, an interesting prediction that Ahn Chang-ho made was he said he thought that would take 200 years to do in Korea.

So the good news is that if the Lord doesn't return, we still have some time to fulfill Ahn Chang-ho's prediction. One of the things we're really excited about later this year is that as part of our way to try to re-equip the Korean church to be faithful in this dark time, we are going to be republishing and retranslating a book by Dr. Kenneth Wells called New God, New Nation which shares this perspective that we're talking about today and shows that we have this great heritage that we can draw on from people like Ahn Chang-ho. In this battle, a different way of approaching this battle than Christians did in the U.S. or in Europe.

So we're going to be publishing that, Lord permitting, in May in both English and then a new translation in Korean. And we'll be bringing Dr. Kenneth Wells here. That's the first time we've announced this is to you today.

So if you're interested in having Dr. Wells come to your church or to your gathering, please let us know. Why I announce it is because what we're trying to do in this next several year period, the first step is to

help Korean Christians understand what is about to befall the Korean church. Second is to provide a place where Christians who are aware of these things can connect and network and receive resources.

And so this is the first such event today. And what I want to try to do for us this morning is to just provide within the context of what I just shared with you about our overall philosophy, what are we trying to accomplish here. We are trying to be a place of white martyrdom, a space of retreat where Korean Christians from all denominations can come together.

Not to strategize about how to approach the government, how to lobby for keeping marriage going, but simply for trying to create resources to help the Korean church to be faithful at a point where we believe that the Korean church will be squeezed to try to change its beliefs. So you've heard me mention the term sexual revolution several times today. And so I want to explain that term now.

It's a term that we begin talking to reporters as we've done press conferences on this subject. We're trying to encourage them to use this term in addressing this situation. Because we believe that the issue is actually much broader and deeper than the simple issue of homosexuality or gay marriage.

So one of the questions we need to be able to answer is why would this particular issue about homosexuality or sexuality be the issue that causes the Korean church to become persecuted? So I'm going to give you a brief answer to that question and to let you know that this is really what this book is about. There's two parts to this book. One part is Pastor Wurmbrandt's original message preparing for the underground church.

In it, he shares about 50 different strategies that he believes that the church and the free world should take in order to prepare for persecution. But the introduction in the book was the one written by me and it is an effort to explain what I'm about to share with you, which is why is this different than other challenges that we face. In other words, we might just look at issues of homosexuality and say, yeah, that's a sin in Korean society.

We see that growing in Korean society. But why not just deal with it that way and just evangelize people, share the good news, explain to them what's wrong with homosexuality? Why would it be a threat for persecution for the Korean church? So that's what I want to explain now. What Pastor Wurmbrandt saw as he was traveling around in the free world was, of course, he was speaking about the suffering of Christians under communism.

And he himself had suffered in the body as a result of communism. But as Pastor Wurmbrandt entered into the free world, he began to do research to try to understand communism better. He began to research the figure of Karl Marx, who was the founder of communism.

The information that he shared, that I'm about to share with you, is all publicly available. It's not just some kind of conspiracy theory idea that he had. All of it is publicly available in the writings of Karl Marx himself.

And that is a Karl Marx dream.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/NwmYD7Z23Ik.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/eric-foley/prepare-for-the-underground-church-part-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net