

Learning From Persecution

by Peter Hammond

The sermon explores the profound lessons learned from the faith and resilience of persecuted Christians throughout history.

Duration: 49:29

Scripture: Exodus 32:26, John 15:18, 1 Peter 1:6-7, Revelation 6:15, Revelation 7:9-10, Revelation 7:17

Topics: "Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a faith that is not just intellectual, but also heartfelt and practical. He shares his personal experience of finding joy in the midst of difficult circumstances and learning valuable lessons from them. The speaker highlights the power of prayer and persistence, using the example of a persistent widow who obtained justice from an unjust judge. He also references the stories of Jeremiah Denton and Captain Redmayrd Daniels, who maintained their sanity and strength through physical exercise and mental focus during their time in communist prisons. The sermon concludes with an emphasis on the importance of Bible study, prayer fellowship, decentralization, Bible memorization, and fearing God.

Transcript

Learning from Persecution 1 Peter chapter 1 from verse 6 to 7 Let's hear the word of the Living God as it's found in 1 Peter chapter 1 starting in verse 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved in various trials that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the word of God. Gold is tested, gold is purified by fire and so is our faith.

On Thursday night we screened the film Tortured for Christ which is based on the book by Richard Wormbrugt who spent 14 years in communist concentration camps and prisons in Romania and on the 50th anniversary of the publishing of this book they've produced this dramatic film and it was quite uncanny because the privilege of travelling in Eastern Europe all throughout Eastern Europe from Poland, North, South, Albania and South with Bill Baffin I was introduced to many of the people that feature in this film or are mentioned by Richard Wormbrugt at the end as he lists many of these people and even the song at the end of the film by Brother Nicolae Moldovano. Nicolae Moldovano is an absolute legend in Romania. He is such a great musician.

You can say that the vast majority of the hymns in the hymn books of the church in Romania are Brother Moldovano's works. He produced thousands of hymns but what's absolutely extraordinary is something like 6000 of the hymns that he produced were produced in prison in solitary confinement. He would be beaten for his hymns that he would sing and so as Richard Wormbrugt said we sang, they beat us, everyone was happy.

Communists were happy because they got to beat us, we were happy because we got to sing songs and Brother Moldovano had at one point every bone in both of his hands broken. Communists smashed his fingers with hammers so that his fingers were mangled. When he came out of prison, although his fingers were horribly mangled he had to re-learn to play the piano because now of course his fingers weren't exactly where they had been.

His fingers were like eagles' talons, to shake his hands very strange and airy because of his deformed, crippled hands and yet he re-learned to play the piano. I mean that discipline. But think of the mental discipline of somebody locked up in a prison in solitary confinement without a pen or paper, without a musical instrument, without a Bible or a book.

And they said in all their 14 years in prison they never had access to paper, pen, book, library, Bible, anything like that. And so Brother Moldovano had the mental discipline he determined to compose a hymn of faith for every day spent in solitary confinement. And he stored it in his memory for years.

And when he came out he was able to put it all down. The music, the tunes, the words, scripturally sound to such an extent that they fill the hymn books of Romania. That kind of mental discipline, focus, Bible memorization is something that is almost impossible to understand outside the persecuted church.

People like Sabina Bomberg spent years as a slave in the communist concentration camps building the, they called it the canal between the Black Sea and the Danube River, a worthless project. But it chewed up tens of thousands of lives in this hideous campaign where everything is done by hand, without any machinery. In fact the women were used as like mules to pull the canals, the different boats along the canal, the barges, they would be roped up and be literally walking along the side to pull the barges along these canals.

She was thrown into the icy canals just for a joke by these so-called prison guards, sadists. And Sabina Bomberg said, before I went to prison I was very poor. When I went to prison I became very rich.

Because I had the only currency of any value in the prison, which was the Word of God. She had memorized so much of the Word of God that she was able to enrich many other prisoners with the scriptures which were stored up in her heart and her mind. When somebody asked Richard von Brandt, which scripture most helped you when you were in prison? And he said, you must understand, it's not knowing the shepherd's psalm that gets you through prison, it's knowing the shepherd.

He didn't only know the Word of God, he knew the God of the Word. And when the Word of God is not just in your mind but in your heart and in your life, you read in the scriptures that they overcame Satan by the Word of their testimony and they did not love their lives unto death. To know the Word of God to such an extent that you lived the Word of God, it wasn't just the Word of their mouth, the Word of their testimony.

The Word of God had become their life. And they said what they meant, they meant what they said, they were people of the Word. And so, as Revelation 12 tells us, they overcame Satan by the Word of their

testimony.

And they did not love their lives unto death. They were willing not just to live for God but to die for Him. They loved God more than they loved their own life.

They feared God more than they feared the enemy. They were willing to suffer whatever it took for Christ. And the sufferings, which are depicted to some extent, but as Richard Vaughan said, he could only give a little bit.

He couldn't exhaust all the sufferings and the tortures and evils that were perpetrated on him by the Marxists, who hate God and hate everyone who loves God. And yet you can see from torture for Christ, the testimony of this which was endured, how not only did the Christians endure, but they became strong. He said that there were times in prison that they experienced visions and experienced the presence of God in such a great way that it was like they were in heaven itself.

And that their prison cells, which were places of torture, became for them also places of incredible blessing and of the presence of God. And that may be hard for many people to understand. I remember reading *Torture for Christ* as a fairly new Christian.

I was in the army. There were several books I took with me. And there were these nice side pouches in a brown uniform.

So I always had a book in my side pouch, which I pulled out when I was waiting in a queue. And especially shooting range. We spent days on the shooting range.

There were always four off-lossings and each would take turns. So you spent three quarters of the time in the shooting range, sitting, waiting for the others. And most people just watched, but you can only watch so much of other people shooting.

So I used to read, and I'd get a huge amount of reading. I remember reading *Torture for Christ*, also *God Smuggler*, and several other key classics of the time. *Run Baby Run*, *The Cross and the Switchblade*.

I read at the shooting range in the army, just having it in my side pouch, pulling it out whenever we had time to spare. And the *Torture for Christ* book made an impact on me. It was impressive.

It definitely caught my imagination. But it never crossed my mind that I might ever meet any of the people who had gone through persecution, or that I might suffer any persecution myself. And I remember as a young boy in Rhodesia, seeing a picture of Ian Sutherland.

Now Ian Sutherland was a Rhodesian Special Air Service operative who had worked behind the lines in Zambia, which was a communist country, as a base of operations for the communist terrorists, and was coming across doing hideous operations in Rhodesia, including shooting down the bycounts with the Red Eye missiles and so much else. So Ian Sutherland, 1974, I was 14 years old, and I remember seeing a picture of this Rhodesian soldier, obviously black and blue with beatings, chained, ankles shackled, hands shackled, being led to the streets of Lusaka with some gloating Zambian military chap, obviously prodding him with bayonets and hitting him with rifles. But looking at this picture of Ian Sutherland as a 14 year old, I remember feeling absolute horror and thinking, how could he let himself be captured? And I can say that in all the years of my missionary work and military work and the rest across the border, I didn't really fear death, but I did fear being captured.

The idea of being captured by the enemy definitely put terror in my heart, because to be in the hands of people who've got no compassion, no integrity or humanity or kindness, no restraint on them to perpetrate evils on people in their power, I didn't have much problem with dying, even being crippled, although that was more concerning, but to be captured and tortured by communists to me seemed the worst thing that could possibly happen. And yet I was confident of the fact that that would never happen to me, I'd never let myself be captured. And extraordinary that it was that in 1987, just 13 years later, I would be locked up in the same cell as Ian Sutherland, cell 11 in Lusaka Central Prison.

I'd also be beaten and prodded by bayonets and shackled, barefoot, walking through streets, looking very much like Ian Sutherland did in that picture that I saw, bearded, hadn't had a chance to shave of course, unwashed, coming out of filthy cells, being paraded through the streets of Lusaka down Cairo Avenue. And an extraordinary thing that in the filth and degradation of those cells, Kasingulu Ferry where we were first captured, Livingston where I was imprisoned overnight, cells covered in human filth, where at the end of the first night I counted 65 mosquito bites in one foot. Didn't bother to count the rest, ran out of interest.

But it was like my entire body was one angry relief mat. The amount of insects, all kinds of crawling, biting insects all over, cockroaches all over and up the walls, filth and degradation. And coming out of the cell and on the table where I was being interrogated, it seemed like every frontline fellowship publication I'd ever written was on the table.

Now we didn't carry any of our literature across the border, so how did they have this? And how was it all there on the table? They knew exactly who they had and they were starting off with what I thought about communism, what I thought about liberation theology, what I thought about Kenneth Gohanda, well I knew what I thought because there it was written in front. And I asked the question, am I here because I've done anything against the laws of Zambia, or because of something I wrote and something I think? Next thing got a smack in the head from a rifle butt, shut up and answer the question. You're thinking, well how can you shut up and answer the question? But making those sort of observations doesn't really help and every time I made some kind of joke or tried to use some logic it didn't help, because the whole attitude was vicious.

And somebody came in, put a hood over my head, tied it so that you couldn't see, I could hardly breathe and I was taken out immediately. You could hear people walk over gravel and I was walking over gravel and put in the back of a truck and the truck's driving and you can hardly breathe and it's stifling heat. This is in Livingston, the town of Livingston near Victoria Falls and as we were driving we went off the tar road onto dirt roads.

And of course your mind starts to wonder, are they just going to take us up in the bush, shoot us in the head, bury us in a grave, that doesn't sound so bad. But then we went onto a tarmac, I could tell this was a smooth tarmac, this has got to be an airstrip, where do you get something like that? Next thing, going upstairs and into what is obviously an aircraft. Now your mind starts to spin.

Now we had an Englishman with us who said, oh, when he felt that they were going into the plane he thought, oh, this is wonderful, we've been flown back home. How's that for gullibility? Whereas Rob and I, we were thinking, they're going to take us up an altitude and throw us out the door, which also didn't seem that bad. But as we kept going longer, I realised they could be flying us somewhere.

I might be being flown to Mozambique, Mozambique, Angola, all three of which countries we were wanted in. My writings had been far more exposing their trustees and heading to either Luanda, Harare or Maputo

would have been absolutely worst case scenario. And so for over an hour it seemed we flew and every time I tried to sort of take my hands up, sort of have a look, somebody was obviously watching us the whole time and not allowed to.

If we tried to pray or sing, we were whacked over the head with rifle butts. And when we came out onto Lusaka airstrip, I felt such relief that we were still in Zambia because Zambia didn't seem anything near as bad as Zimbabwe, Mozambique or Angola in 1987. But now we were taken through the streets of Lusaka.

The first thing I saw when the hood was taken off was on my handcuffs, Made in Great Britain, which for some reason seemed awfully funny. I found this so hilarious, laughing away at the fact that we were wearing British handcuffs in a communist country. And as we were taken through the streets, started to sing, This is the day that the Lord has made.

They started to smack us and whack us and prod us with bayonets. And we sang all kinds of hymns, including A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. And after a while the beating stopped and one of the soldiers even said, I'm sorry.

You could see there was some conviction coming upon him. As we moved into this prison, Lusaka Central Prison, it was like a nightmare. As we were taken through the big doors, actually through the little door in the big double doors, and then through the courtyard into the main entrance of the prison.

It's a very narrow door, very narrow, you have to bow to go through it. It's obviously so narrow you can only fit one person at a time. Easier for them to defend if there's a prison break, I guess.

And I came out from under the machine gun tower through this little hole into this courtyard. And the courtyard had over a thousand people there, looking in utmost degradation. Absolutely shocking scene of people in such a state.

That prison, Lusaka Central Prison, was built by the British for 80 prisoners. They put 1,200 in there. When the British ran that prison, there was electricity and plumbing.

In fact, there were beds and sheets and pillows and plumbing and showers and all sorts of things. In fact, when Kenneth Kohunda was imprisoned in Lusaka Central Prison, he was given a bed with mattress and sheets and pillowcases. He had a sofa, he had a desk, he had pens and paper, he had access to the library, he had a gramophone.

In his prison cell, he was brought three cooked meals a day and treated well, actually. In fact, he was able to do studies while in there and get extra studies while in the British-run Lusaka Central Prison. When we were there, there were no beds, no mattresses, no electricity, no plumbing.

There was nothing resembling any kind of furniture at all. Sixty-five prisoners in a cell. When the British had put one prisoner or two prisoners in a cell, they put 60, 65.

Which is interesting considering Kenneth Kohunda said, I could never agree with the Calvinist religion of my parents. His parents were Reformed Christians trained at Livingstonia in Malawi to be evangelists. He said, I could never agree with the Calvinist religion of my parents, which believes in the depravity of man.

I believe in the goodness of man, says Kenneth Kohunda. He wrote in his book, A Humanist in Africa. Well, he believed in the goodness of man.

Isn't it funny how people who believe in the goodness of man can be so cruel and so savage? The vast majority of people in that prison had never had their day in court. You could tell that because they were still wearing their civilian clothes. Prisoners who had been sentenced were wearing prison uniforms.

Roman prisoners who were still waiting for their day in court, they were still wearing their civilian clothes. They were arrested and all the tattered remains thereof. Some had been there eight years and hadn't yet had a day in court.

And so, as the sun was setting, we were forced into our cells. And I went into cell 11, which is exactly where Inner Sutherland had been. And as they put us into cell, the guard said, these are white terrorists from South Africa.

They're responsible for the deaths of millions. Slammed the door and we were in the dark, surrounded by a whole lot of interesting people, mind you. We got to know them.

There was an Indian, Hindu-Indian, who had owned a mine and the communist confiscated it, so they just threw him in prison. There was a Muslim trader from Mali, a businessman. He had business dealings with some Zambians who chose to call him a spy, confiscated all his wares, threw him into prison.

There were all sorts of people there, including an engineer who had studied at Sandhurst, who was a Zambian officer who had been locked up because he had said sanctions will hurt Zambia more than South Africa for the treasonous comments he was thrown into prison. And there was a South African truck driver, Azamu Moro, 26 years old, father of two, from Soweto. He was locked up there and he had really been tortured.

There was pus all over his body, there was pussy sores, all these where they put metal in the fire and then when the fire was on iron, it pushed into his body, so he had sores that swelled up of pus and then would burst and dozens of these sores all over his body. And his knees were obviously calloused from the time he spent on his knees praying himself. Well, we didn't have Bibles, we didn't have shoes, we had been stripped of our belongings and you could imagine in a situation like that, the sun's going down, it's dark, you're in a cell without electricity, no windows, stifling heat, the only hole for ventilation was a little one foot square hole in the door and that was it.

Corrugated iron roof, you could not imagine how stuffy and hot. We start to preach and to share the gospel, obviously without Bibles. Now, at a time like this, and with the soldier confined in the circle before and then when we were captured in Mozambique in 1989 and put in soldier confinement and tortured there, suddenly books like *Torture for Christ* come to mind.

And an ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory. It is uncanny how important those things that you've read in all the scriptures that deal with persecution suddenly become so important at that moment. And the extraordinary thing is, I didn't have any of the terror or fear that I had anticipated I'd have if I was captured.

There was a peace of God, there was a courage, there was a boldness. I preached in that prison cell through the night often. We had great Bible studies, all kinds of interesting discussions.

And each day in the prison, standing up and preaching to the 1,200 prisoners there and sometimes the gods on the walls and the towers were coming to listen to. At some point they tried to stop when they saw the impact I was having and so I was dragged away on six occasions for interrogations. Interrogations tend to last five or six hours at a time.

And they had all kinds of means of waterboarding. In fact, the word waterboarding is being too kind because water would have been a nice alternative to what they used. The British and Americans are accused of waterboarding Islamic terrorists but I believe they used clean water.

We were waterboarded in filth and suffocating in literal filth and urine in buckets so that you ingested filth and passed out. That kind of filth so that when we came out washing in the Zambezi River wasn't enough. We needed dettol baths multiple times over to feel like I'd gotten clean after that hideous experience.

The interrogator at one point, when I saw my Bible in the corner on one of the desks in Lusaka Central Police Station where we'd gone for interrogation by the Special Branch and I said, can I have my Bible? This very arrogant Special Branch policeman pulled out a little red book and he says, you can have a copy of my Mao's little red book instead. He said, this is my Bible. So I picked it up and I leafed through it and I said, you know, it was in English, but Mao's thoughts and I leafed through it a bit and I said, you know Mao never died for our sins.

He never rose from the dead. He couldn't walk on water. He couldn't multiply loaves and fishes.

He can't forgive your sins. He can't take you to heaven. I gave him back and you can imagine what that provoked in reaction.

But it was acts of resistance like this that kept me strong and I believe it's so important to resist. And interestingly enough, just shortly before that imprisonment experience I'd come in contact with Senator Jeremiah Denton who as Captain Jeremiah Denton had been locked up for seven and a half years in Hanoi Hilton. That's what they called the communist concentration camp outside Hanoi in Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Captain Jeremiah Denton was the most senior officer of the Americans captured by the communists and shot down over North Vietnam and he was tortured in there, hideous tortures for years, four years in solitary confinement. Now, Jeremiah Denton's book, When Hell Was In Session had come into my hands and I started to correspond to them. In fact, his secretary actually came over and worked for Gospel Defense League Sharon Golden for some years.

Now, Jeremiah Denton's book, When Hell Was In Session described in detail how he stayed sane in communist prisons and torture. And again, this was very helpful. The idea of physical fitness.

Each day I'd walk up and down on the porch of him. People would want to talk to me, want counseling. Walk with me, we'd walk backwards and forwards.

You could accumulate many, many miles in this way, walking backwards and forwards. Physical exercise, push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, everything else. Keeping your body strong, keeping your mind focused.

And I also later on came after that, but before my Mozambican imprisonment in touch with Captain Red McDaniels. Captain Red McDaniels was another American locked up for six years in Vietnam, in Hanoi Hilton as they called it. And his book, Scars and Stripes, was quite extraordinary.

Now, Red McDaniels was a tall man, a big man, massive. And redhead. And his book, Scars and Stripes, gave other insights into how they resisted, how they made a stand, how they kept sane, how they kept their minds straight.

And it's very helpful to know that others have gone through this and gone through worse. And to give you encouragement, to give you insight. And really, there's nothing to beat hard, real experience.

This is why academics in ivory towers can't really help missionaries on the ground or persecute Christians that much, if all they've got is academic books and dissertations and footnotes and bibliographies. And if they don't put their faith into action, if they don't put feet to the faith, if they're not on the ground, if they don't suffer the faith, if they're not involved in arguing the faith, apologetics on the ground in the universities and in the mosques and in the communist terrorist bases and arguing at communist rallies, if you're not in the streets and in the field dealing with these things on a regular basis, then what do you have? A lot of untested theory. Battle-tested weapons are far more effective than weapons that just seem to work in a factory, in a laboratory.

And this is the problem. A lot of Christians have a faith that is up here, but it's not down here, and it's not here. It's not enough to be in the head, it's got to be in the heart, and it's got to be in the hands as well.

I found the joy of the Lord in such extent that I would have said, and it's an extraordinary thing to say, but a prayer that I was led to pray on the first day in the Soccer Centre for Prisoners, Lord, do not allow us to be released one minute before you've taught us everything we need to learn here, and not one minute later. My natural inclination would be, get us out of here now. And yet, I recognise there's a season, there's things God wants us to learn.

The sooner we learn it, the sooner we can be promoted to the next spot and delivered from this. If we need 40 years in the wilderness to learn the lessons, then God will keep us 40 years in the wilderness. But the children of Israel could have gone into conquering a promised land in the first year.

They didn't have to wait 40 years. It was because of unbelief, just because of disobedience, that they were kept by God in the wilderness for another 39 years. And so, in each of these experiences, I found that the scriptures that we had studied, the scriptures that had been memorised, the books that had been read, the testimonies of the faithful, the examples of people like Richard Fulmer and Jeremiah Denton and Rick McDaniels and others, were so key that it really gave courage and it gave the assurance that we will win, we will overcome this.

Light is more powerful than darkness. When I came out of my two years military service, my first devotions back at Hospital Christian Fellowship, as Hospital Christian Fellowship was my first mission, Brother Andrew was the guest speaker. Brother Andrew of God Smuggler fame, Andrew Vanderbilt, he came in and he unleashed a new plan.

He said, at the beginning of next year, 1982, we are going to launch a seven-year Jericho prayer march focused on bringing down the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain, opening up Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to the Gospel, and I don't know who initiated this idea because he presented it as that we are not going to be praying for the persecuted church as much as praying with the persecuted church, because this is an initiative that has already started in Eastern Europe. In fact it was called the Leipzig Prayer Meeting. In Leipzig, East Germany, the Christians gathered to pray against Communism and their symbol was the candle.

And the symbol of the candle was light is more powerful than darkness, not all the darkness can put out the smallest light. And so people come to the prayer rallies with an unlit candle and the one who had his candle lit would pass next and next into the spirit, giving the message of light overcomes darkness. Even

the smallest candle is more powerful than the greatest darkness.

Communism is darkness, Christianity is light. Light is more powerful than darkness. Where the light is, darkness must flee.

Submit to God, resist the devil, he will flee from you. Greater is he who is in us than him who is in the world. We are more than conquerors because Christ Jesus loved us.

And so having this vision of resistance and this vision of prayer against evil, when I was at Baptist Theological College, I was introduced to the Inquiry of Prayers by Professor Fritz Hauss. And Professor Fritz Hauss took us through the Psalms and showed us that the psalmist's prayers for justice, praying against evil, is the prayers of the persecuted church. And so as I began to minister to the persecuted church, it just gave tremendous comfort to Psalms.

I would say that the most popular book of the persecuted church is Psalms, followed by Revelation, very promptly thereafter, and maybe Acts thereafter. That's what I've observed, both in Eastern Europe and in Africa. There's a passage in Revelation that is very telling where the Apostle John was given a glimpse into heaven and he sees the martyrs and he hears their prayers.

Revelation 6. What are the martyrs who have died for Christ praying? Are they praying for God to bless Nero? No. Revelation 6 verse 9. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the test which they had held. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then a white robe was given to each of them and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the full number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

So here's a glimpse into heaven. Those who had been faithful to God, who had been slain for the testimony they had maintained, are in the very presence of God and they're praying. How long, sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And throughout the world, there are Christians suffering persecution in Egypt, in Syria, in Iraq, in Iran, in North Korea, in Saudi Arabia, in Red China.

And what are they praying? They're praying for justice. Now you may get many people in the West praying for peace, but the Christians in the persecuted church are praying for justice. And how does the Lord respond to these prayers? Does he rebuke them? No.

Each of them is given a white robe, signifying their right standing with the almighty God, and they're told to be patient for a little while. And when the full number of their fellow servants and brethren who had died for Christ, then their prayers for justice would be answered. And we read about that answer, Revelation 6 verse 15.

All the kings of the earth, and the great men, the rich men, the commanders, and the mighty men, and every slave and every free man, they hid themselves in the cave and the rocks of the mountains, and they said to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lord, for the day of his wrath has come, and who is able to stand? The day will come when the wicked would prefer to be buried under an avalanche than to face the wrath of God on the day of judgment. Our Lord Jesus warned us, If the world hates you, know that it hated me first. If you are

of the world, the world would love you.

It loves its own. But you are not of the world. But I chose you out of the world.

Therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than the master. If they persecute me, they will persecute you also.

And so we read in the word of God that everyone who wants to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We don't read some, many or most. All who desire to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Timothy 3 verse 12 We also read that the apostles encouraged the believers and taught them we must pass through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God. That's Acts 14 verse 20. We must pass through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God.

You can't imagine many amens in an average church. In fact some churches say get thee behind me Satan, I don't receive that. That's a negative confession.

But the apostle Paul and Barnabas strengthened the believers, encouraged the disciples by saying we must pass through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God. And Lord Jesus Christ said in this world you will suffer tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. And so this is the reality.

We are in a world at war with God. We are in a situation where there's immense hostility to Christianity and the standards of God. And we need to stand up today against the gay GB, the pink imposition, a whole range of hostility where if you try to stand for biblical standards they will scream at you, legalist, judgmental, racist, homophobic bigot, Islamophobe, anti-Semite.

They will scream at you every kind of intimidating term. But now Christians in previous ages were willing to be burned at the stake for Christ, to be beheaded for Christ. But today the average Christian would rather be a heretic than an apostate, than to be called a bad man.

They are so afraid of the power of words, toxic labels, to be pinned on them. And we need to understand that this has been the call of the church through all ages. There was a time that Christians were called heretics.

There were times they were called traitors. They were burned at the stake in the inquisition times in the middle ages for standing for the word of God. They were thrown to wild beasts in the days of Nero and Rome.

This is part of the history of the church. And so the passage we started with 1 Peter 1 verse 67 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is taste by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It has been an experience to travel in Eastern Europe, to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania with Bill Bathory.

And every turn on the road, in every village, in every town, in every church, there were testimonies and there were stories and there were miracles. And I encouraged him many times over the years, you've got to write about this in the results going through and going on books. Where Bill Bathory was given all kinds

of insights and to have met the members of the Persecuted Church.

One of Bill Bathory's good friends, Paul Negrute, said to me, you can always tell who a real Christian is. A real Christian loves God. A real Christian loves to read the Bible.

A real Christian loves prayer. And a real Christian hates sin. Interesting definition from the Persecuted Church.

We know that prayer works. The seven-year Jericho prayer march, focus on bringing down the Iron Curtain, opening up Eastern Europe and Russia to the Gospel, succeeded. The Leipzig prayer meeting spread all over Eastern Europe, even went to the West.

And by 1989 we saw the Dominos fall, the Berlin Wall fall, the Iron Curtain fall, one communist country after the other collapse, culminating in Christmas 1989 with Ceausescu, the dictator of Romania, being shot by his own army on Christmas Day and the people saying Dracula is dead, the Antichrist is being killed on Christmas Day, and for the first time in 44 years celebrating Christmas openly, singing Christmas carols in the streets, putting up Christmas trees openly, exchanging presents with strangers in the open. Light is more powerful than darkness. The power of God's answers to prayer are great.

There's so much we can learn from the Persecuted Church. The importance of Bible memorization. If the Bible is taken away from our hands, do we have the Word of God stored up in our heart? Most importantly, to fear God rather than man.

How can they survive persecution? Only if we fear God more than we fear man. The fear of man will prove to be a snare, but the fear of God is liberating. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Decentralization is good. Home churches, home fellowships, Bible study and prayer fellowships are effective. The Communists could decapitate big denominational structures by taking over the bishop or the archbishop and restocking the leadership of the Orthodox Church or whatever it was with their KGB-approved leaders.

But how do you manage to counter the thousands of house churches in Cuba and the hundreds of thousands of house churches in China? Well, they try, but they cannot. It's so important for us to see the importance of rediscovering the Bible study and the prayer fellowship and the home fellowships and decentralization, Bible memorization and fearing God. The examples of people like Brother Moldovano who determined that he would redeem the time.

If they were going to lock him up for thousands of days in solitary confinement, he would produce a hymn for every day in solitary confinement. And he did. And his hymns are still sung throughout Romania.

And to have had that film, Tortured for Christ, end with one of Brother Moldovano's hymns, which was composed in solitary confinement in Romania in the prison, that they made that film in the very prisons where these things took place, in the very cells where it took place. They didn't build a set. They went to the actual scenes and sites where it took place.

And that's so powerful and so important. It's important for us to know what we believe, to know why we believe it, to know how to defend it, and know how to win our enemies to Christ. That's one of the most extraordinary things that Richard von Braun never lost, his desire to win the Russians, the Communists, or personally to Christ.

And they did. Just the example of the power that we have in prayer and pressure. In Luke 18, our Lord Jesus said that we should always pray and not give up.

And his example is of a persistent widow who continued to pray to God and pressure this wicked judge. Now this judge did not fear God and he didn't care about men. But because of the persistent prayer and pressure of this widow, he saw that justice was done.

God listens to prayer. Politicians only respond to pressure. As Ronald Reagan said the first time I heard him speak publicly in my first visit to America, politicians never see the light until they felt the heat.

And we need to bring pressure to bear on them. When I came out of prison in Zambia in 1987, I received an invitation to speak to a group of the Cape Town Sun. And Don Matoveni was leading a group of people, which included Howard Phillips, David Noble, Ted Bear, really key, important people, coming and I gave a presentation to them on what I'd just gone through.

I'd literally come out the week before. And all these men came up to me afterwards and said, you must come to America and speak about this. I said, why? Surely they know about this.

And they said, no, they don't. But America has the most advanced and sophisticated communication system in the world. How can they not know what's going on? And I was told by one of the other of these people, they don't know.

And anyway, they'll listen to you because of your accent. They won't listen to us. You must come and speak about it.

Well, that's how our relationship with Summit Ministries developed, because of David Noble there. That's how I got to meet so many key people, which launched a whole lot of our work overseas. That's how I got to meet people like Captain Red McDaniel.

But the extraordinary thing was, as I went on that first mission overseas to speak about the First Cape Church, went to Frankfurt International Society for Human Rights and had a conference in Frankfurt, went to London, spoke on BBC World Service and so on, went to America, spoke at National Religious Broadcasting Convention, other places like that, and many things developed. But one interesting anecdote, Isaiah Moyer later testified that the prison guards came running in great excitement to his cell, Cell 11, International Detainees, which is where I was. And said, Isaiah, Isaiah, that white Salafi missionary who was in here with you, he's on the radio.

He's talking about you. And they brought their shortwave BBC World Service radio, and Isaiah managed to hear the last part of my interview where I was speaking about him, where I gave his address and told people the sort of things they need in the prison to send through. And Isaiah said, after that, male sex were dragged into the cell.

He got soap and salt and he got pen and paper and books and vitamins and all the different things that he became the most popular person in prison. He became a celebrity in the prison. Nobody mistreated him anymore.

Everyone wanted to do favors for him. He had trading goods there. And all the prison guards sort of treated him as their favorite celebrity.

And he was released shortly after. Proving the point that light is more powerful than darkness. The church has the power to bind and to loose.

And through prayer and persuasion and the work, as Jesus said in Luke 18, like the parable of the persistent widow, publicity provides protection for the persecuted. It's so important that we speak up for them. The biggest problem is if we don't know their names and we don't know their stories, and so many suffer in darkness because nobody is speaking up for them.

It's so important that groups like Voice of the Martyrs and Open Doors and Frontline Fellowship and International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted are mobilizing Christians to understand what's going on. Every prisoner that we've campaigned to release, including that Australian who was locked up in Mozambique and the South African woman who's been tortured in Chikorubi and Lusaka, we campaigned for them, we saw them all released. When we know the names, we can get them out.

And that's why I was released. Because people like Ted Bear and others who I've taken into Angola and introduced to Jonas Limby, when they heard I was locked up in Lusaka, they organized prayer rituals outside the Zambian Embassy in Lusaka. They organized people to communicate with lots of complaints which came by telex and fax.

That dates us. And people were ringing the phone off the hook until the Zambian Embassy just ordered them to go out. And in fact, somebody even put our case in the hands of Margaret Thatcher.

Margaret Thatcher went to the October 1987 Vancouver Conference and when Kenneth Gunda was the leader of the Frontline State, so-called, the Frontline, the fight against South Africa, the president of Zambia, the dictator, whose presidential detainee we were on his orders, and when Kenneth Gunda was ranting and raving against Margaret Thatcher for not putting sanctions on South Africa, Margaret Thatcher said, Who are you to speak about human rights abuses in South Africa? You are the unelected dictator of a one-party state. You have four British missionaries being tortured by your security forces in the Sanko Central Prison, without charge, right now. And gave our names and details.

And Kenneth Gunda was struck speechless, knockout blow, the Iron Lady had won the debate, she wiped the floor with Kenneth Gunda, and apparently the first thing Kenneth Gunda said when he came off the plane in Lusaka Airport was, Get those missionaries out of here. And so, there's no doubt that we have power, even like that persistent widow that the Lord speaks about in Luke 18. We can help bring relief to others who suffer, by our prayers, by our publications, by our pressure, by letters to elected representatives, by representations and deputations to foreign embassies and others.

There's no doubt we can make a difference. We know this. When Senator Jesse Helms of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from North Carolina, he is chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the US government, he read my Mozambique report, what now is in the Killing Fields of Mozambique book, into the Congressional Record, and got all US foreign aid to Mozambique stopped because of the atrocities that we documented there.

And that led to Mozambique stopping persecution in the church, opening up for multi-party democracy, for freedom of the press, freedom of the church, returned thousands of church buildings to churches that had been confiscated, and many other good things came about. Now missionaries are legal in Mozambique. There's no doubt that publications provide protection for the persecuted, shining the light on dark dealings.

The cockroaches run for the corners, and the communists are just like that. And so we need to rejoice if we have been given the privilege of suffering for Christ. The suffering is temporary, but the glory is eternal.

Let's pray for the persecuted. We are told in the scriptures to remember the prisoners as if chained within, those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also. Let's pray.

Lord God, we want to thank you and praise you for great testimonies of brave and courageous Christians like Brother Nikolai Moldavano, Savina von Brunt, Richard von Brunt, the people in history like Perpetua and Polycarp. We thank you, Lord God, for Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, Bishop Ridley and Bishop Hooper, and many others who were courageous to the end. For Jan Hus, and so many names that aren't even known to us, suffering even today in North Korea, in Saudi Arabia, in Red China.

We pray, Lord God, that you may wake your church up to what the scripture teaches on the persecuted church. May you galvanize and mobilize our people to be more faithful in prayer, more steadfast in resistance, more dedicated in bringing pressure to bear upon the persecutors, to bring relief to the persecuted. Thank you, Lord God, for all that we've been able to do in delivering tons of Bibles and books and medical help and agricultural tools and seed to Christians suffering persecution in Sudan, in the Nubian mountains of Sudan, in Mozambique and Angola, boxes with love to pensioners in Zimbabwe, and so many others, to prisoners all over the continent.

We ask, Lord God, that you may continue to bless and protect and provide for every mission and ministry dedicated to serving the persecuted church. May you continue to multiply the effectiveness of International Days of Prayer for the Persecuted. We pray, Lord, that you would guide us as to what we can do to bring some relief and encouragement to your children, our brothers and sisters who are suffering for you.

Lord, make us faithful to your word, brave and effective in your service, we pray it in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Hymn 137.

Let's conclude by turning to 137. Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King? 137. Whoever is for the Lord, Moses said, come to me.

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