PRAY FOR THE SOLDIERS FIGHTING IN KASHMIR AND THE SOLDIERS OF CHRIST JESUS

In the worst attack on the Army in many years, heavily armed militants suspected to be from Pakistan-based JeM stormed an army base in Uri in Kashmir killing 17 jawans early Sunday, prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assert that those responsible “will not go unpunished.”

Located barely a few kilometers from the Line of Control (LoC) and some 70 km from Srinagar, the base was subjected to the brazen attack by four terrorists at around 5:30 AM, causing heavy casualties in the Dogra regiment which lost 17 of its men. 20 more army personnel were injured, some critically, and were airlifted to the army base hospital in Srinagar. After the three-hour gun-battle, four terrorists were killed and army was combing to ensure there were no other militants. Most of the army casualties resulted from the fire in tents in which jawans were sleeping. India reacted strongly to the deadliest attack on the Army in Jammu and Kashmir in a quarter-century-old insurgency that sparked an outrage with Modi strongly condemning it. PM Modi continued to attack India reacted strongly to the deadliest attack on the Army in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Indian Army soldiers who were martyred during the terrorist attack at Uri, Jammu & Kashmir (PTI) Yes, we owe an incredible debt of gratitude to the men and women of our armed forces. The Soldiers of Christ Jesus

Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle. — Psalm 144:1

The Christian life is a life of unending joy: the Christian life is the life of unceasing trials. Living in the tension of those two realities is difficult and battles rage in the hearts of our people as we live in between the tension that a) God is good, God is faithful, it is a blessing and a joy to have the eternal security in Jesus Christ because of what He has done for us and b) living in the reality that there is an attack, there is a reality of the spiritual warfare that’s talked about through the Scriptures.

Two thousand years ago, “the Lord of hosts, the God of hosts, the God of armies” sent his Son to earth on a new kind of mission among his enemies (Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:3, 16). He would defeat them not by killing, but by dying, and He would gather those who surrender into the very family of His Father. The world had entered a new era.

Until His crucified, risen, and reigning Son returns to the earth in glory, God will no longer go out among the armies of his people with the weapons of this world. That Old Testament period of holy war is over. Now there are no nations, no peoples, no tribes to be defeated, because the crucified Lamb has “ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). The enemy is not nations, not peoples. The enemy is sin, and Satan, and hearts that hold fast to the inscription.

Day of Salvation

For now, until He comes again, there is no trumpet sounding God’s people to sword and shield and chariots and horses. Instead, the God of armies has dispatched His ambassadors among every enemy outpost with the message of amnesty, the offer of reconciliation with no recriminations for past disloyalty.

“We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

For now, in this “favorable time” — in this “day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2) — “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).

For now, until “the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8) — until then, the followers of the Lamb are called to imitate their Master, “because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). “When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure, when slandered, we entrust” (1 Corinthians 4:12–13).

And he would write the soliloquy, a message to himself, to encourage himself in the Lord. He asked himself some questions that I would put to you:

“Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own his cause, or blush to speak his name?

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend to grace, to help me on to God?

Sure I must fight, if I would reign; increase my courage, Lord. I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by your word.”
The Apostle THOMAS Biography, Doubting, Life and Death

What can we learn about the Apostle Thomas? Why is he sometimes called “Doubting Thomas?”

The Apostle Thomas

The Apostle Thomas might have been one of two twins in his family because his name “Didymus” means “the twin” but he is usually better known as or referred to more often, unfortunately, as “Doubting Thomas” which we will later read why he was referred to by this nick name. We don’t hear much from Thomas in the gospels at all and he is rarely mentioned until just prior to Jesus going to the cross and after His death at Calvary. One thing that I admire about Thomas is that he asked questions when others might have just been wondering about things but were hesitant to ask. For example when Jesus said that He was going away and that He was going to prepare a place for the disciples and would come again for them (John 14:2-4) everyone else was silent. When it seemed no one else would speak up, Thomas asked “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way” (John 14:5)? The other disciples might have been thinking the same thing but Thomas wasn’t shy about asking. At least he asked where Jesus was going to which Jesus responded by saying “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16) so we should give Thomas some credit as he was apparently ready to die for the Lord, unlike the other disciples at that time.

“Doubting Thomas?”

I think it’s unfortunate that Thomas has the label “Doubting Thomas” because he was never called that in the Bible. That is a label that a believer with put on himself and I do think it’s a bit unfair to him. How many of us who had been eyewitnesses of Christ and thought that He was the Messiah but was then later killed by unjust methods, illegal trials and evidence, by despicably wicked men would have doubted just as Thomas had? Wouldn’t we too have given up when all of our hopes were apparently dashed to pieces when Jesus was humiliatingly crucified? I believe I would have. Thomas must have been heartbroken, having all his hopes crushed when Jesus died on the cross.

We should realize that the disciples were not any less doubting than Thomas was because after Jesus’ death, they were in hiding and had the doors locked for fear of the Jews, perhaps thinking that they would be next (John 20:19). It was only after Jesus appeared to them that they finally believed. That’s when they tried to tell Thomas which is recorded in John 20:24-25, 28 which says, “Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe’” (John 20:24-25).

Conclusion

Thomas got a bad rap. He was no more doubting than the rest of the disciples and the only reason he doubted and the others didn’t was because they had seen the resurrected Christ. When the women came back from the empty tomb and after seeing the risen Christ, the disciples also believed. We should realize that we cannot add much more to this account and do so with absolute certainty.

The Prayer Rio Gold Medal Gymnast Prays Everyday!

Awesome… Laurie Hernandez (USA) of USA competes on the vault during the women's team final. (Reuters/Mike Blake)

Gold Medal Gymnast Laurie Hernandez prays 1 Thessalonians 5:18 over every day.

She is clothed in strength and dignity as her body twists through the air, legs extend and breath stills.

But where other athletes may credit hard work or coaching or perseverance for that feat, gold medal gymnast Laurie Hernandez meditates on Proverbs 31.

“When I hear that, that’s me in a Bible verse. I don’t fear the future anymore,” Hernandez said before the Olympics.

Her USA Gymnastics team just won gold in the Women’s All Around. Hernandez qualified second for her beam routine.

“I just wake up thanking God for another day and go to sleep thanking God for another day … sometimes things just don’t work out and so you just gotta let God push you through those rough times,” Hernandez said.

But still, she meditates on the Word of God.

“I feel that everyday God molds me into someone that He wants me to be. So if that means just, like talking to teammates and helping them out, or like every so often I’ll post a Bible verse on Twitter or Instagram,” Hernandez says.
One of the challenges of complete surrender to Christ is that we don’t know what lies ahead. Doubtless, some of us might be more inclined to surrender if God would hand us a contract with all the details filled in. We’d like to know what to expect. We want to see all the fine print so we can read it over, think about it, and then decide whether to sign our name on the dotted line.

But that’s not God’s way. God says instead, “Here’s a blank piece of paper. I want you to sign your name on the bottom line. Hand it back to Me, and let Me fill in the details. Why? Because I am God; because I have bought you; because I am trustworthy; because you know how much I love you; because you live for My glory and not your own independent, self-promoting pleasure.”

**Unconditional Surrender**

Betty Scott Stam was a woman who trusted God to fill in the details of her life. Born in 1906 in Albion, Michigan, she grew up in China, where her parents were missionaries. When she was seventeen years old, she came back to the United States for her last year of high school, followed by college and study at Moody Bible Institute. During those years, Betty penned a prayer that has become the petition of many other believers who long to live a life of unconditional surrender to Jesus as Lord:

Lord, I give up my own plans and purposes, all my own desires, hopes and ambitions, and I accept Thy will for my life. I give up myself, my life, my all, utterly to Thee, to be Thine forever. I hand over to Thy keeping all of my friendships; all the people whom I love are to take second place in my heart. Fill me now and seal me with Thy Spirit. Work out Thy whole will in my life. Born in 1906 in Albion, Michigan, she grew up in China, where her parents were missionaries. When she was seventeen years old, she came back to the United States for her last year of high school, followed by college and study at Moody Bible Institute. During those years, Betty penned a prayer that has become the petition of many other believers who long to live a life of unconditional surrender to Jesus as Lord:

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I'm standing, Lord:
The black rock hems me in behind,
Above my head a moaning wind
Chills and oppresses heart and mind.
I am afraid!

I'm standing, Lord:
The rock is hard beneath my feet;
I nearly slipped, Lord, on the sleet.
So weary, Lord! and where a seat?
Still must I stand?

He answered me, and on His face
A look ineffable of grace,
Of perfect, understanding love,
Which all my murmuring did remove.

I'm standing, Lord:
Since Thou hast spoken, Lord, I see
Thou hast hest these rocks are Thee!
And since Thy love encloses me,
I stand and sing.

Leaving the Future with God

God did make the call to China clear, and after completing her schooling, Betty returned there in 1931 to serve with the China Inland Mission (CIM). But the question of marriage was still up in the air. Although she and John Stam had expressed their feelings for each other, John still had one year of schooling to complete and had not yet been accepted into CIM. Betty left for China with no formal commitment between them and chose to leave her future in God’s hands.

The following year, John sailed for China to serve as a missionary with CIM and was able to reunite with Betty—and an engagement followed shortly. They were married in October of 1933 and served together in the Anhui province. During the day, they visited nearby villages to share the gospel; in the evenings, they helped to lead meetings with another missionary in the area. The work was difficult, as the area was mountainous and the people extremely poor, but the Stams rejoiced at the opportunity God had given them to share the good news of Christ.

On September 11, 1934, their daughter, Helen Priscilla, was born. Three months later, John and Betty, along with their infant daughter, were arrested by hostile Communist soldiers. After spending the first night in a local prison, they were forced to march twelve miles with the soldiers to another town. They finally stopped for the night at the home of a wealthy man who had fled. Before they left the next morning, Betty hid her baby in the house inside a small sleeping bag. Then, John and Betty were marched down the streets of the town, their hands tightly bound, stripped of their outer garments.

On their way to the site of the execution, a Christian shopkeeper tried to persuade the soldiers not to kill the couple. He, too, was dragged away to be killed. When John pled with the soldiers not to kill the man, the Communist leader ordered him to kneel, then beheaded him with a sword. Betty fell down bound at her husband’s side, no scream coming from her lips. Moments later, the same sword that had killed her husband ended her life.

Baby Helen was discovered thirty hours later by a local pastor. She was safe and warm, apparently none the worse for having gone all that time without milk. Inside her clothing, the pastor found extra dipea rs and two five-dollar bills that Betty had pinned there—just enough to provide for a rescue party to get her to safety.

At Any Cost

Betty was twenty-eight years old when she was killed. When she wrote the words of her well-known prayer, “Work out Thy whole will in my life at any cost,” she had no way of knowing what full surrender would cost her. Although some might consider the cost exorbitant, I am confident that Betty, having laid down her life for Christ, would not think the price too high. She had relinquished all that she was and all that she had, into Christ’s hands for His safekeeping.

A small group of believers found John and Betty’s bodies and buried them on a hillside. Betty’s gravestone read: Elisabeth Scott Stam, February 22, 1906 “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Philipians 1:21 December 8, 1934, Miaosheo, Anhui “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.” Revelation 2:10

God’s plan for your life and mine will not look exactly like His plan for Betty Stam. But as followers of Christ, we, like Betty, are called to give up our own plans and embrace His will, whatever that may be. God may be asking you to be faithful to a husband who’s difficult to love, or to homeschool your children, or to mentor another young woman.

Would you re-read Betty Stam’s prayer toward the top of this post and make it your prayer? Since His love surrounds you, you, too, can stand, and you can sing as you follow Him, wherever He may lead.

When we consecrate ourselves to God, we think we are making a great sacrifice, and doing lots for Him, when really we are only letting go some little, bitsie trinkets we have been grabbing, and when our hands are empty. He fills them full of His treasures.

- Betty Stam
Jesus Christ's tomb uncovered for first time in centuries in hunt for secrets of how and where He was buried

Researchers working at the holy site in Jerusalem have exposed the original rock tomb for the first time since at least 1555

Ben Kentish

Scientists working at what is believed to be the burial site of Jesus Christ have uncovered his original tomb for the first time in centuries.

The grave, inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City of Jerusalem, Israel, has been covered in marble since at least 1555 AD - and possibly centuries earlier.

But now archaeologists have removed the slabs and exposed the original, rock-carved tomb that Christ is believed to have been buried in. They are conducting further tests to establish more about where and how he was buried, according to National Geographic.

According to Christian tradition, Christ was buried in a limestone tomb made of rock hewn from the side of a cave after he was crucified by the Romans in 30 AD.

Christians believe he was resurrected after his death, with the Bible recounting that women who went to see him three days after the burial found no remains in the cave.

The new excavation of the site, which is the most holy in Christianity, is being carried out by a team from the National Technical University in Athens that has previously led restoration work on the Athenian Acropolis and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.

Beneath the marble covering, they discovered a "fill" layer of rubble and a grey stone surface, the nature of which is unknown but undergoing tests.

They will now carry out further analysis of the original rock that formed the "burial bed" on which Jesus Christ's body is believed to have laid. The tomb was first discovered by Helena, mother of the Roman emperor Constantine, in 326 AD.

Fredrik Hiebert, an archaeologist at the National Geographic Society who has been involved in the restoration, said:

"The marble covering of the tomb has been pulled back, and we were surprised by the amount of fill material beneath it,"

"It will be a long scientific analysis, but we will finally be able to see the original rock surface on which, according to tradition, the body of Christ was laid."

The work is part of a $4 million (£3.3 million) project to restore the tomb and the small structure, called the Edicule, in which it is enclosed. The research has in part been funded by King Abdullah II of Jordan.

"We are at the critical moment for rehabilitating the Edicule," said Professor Antonia Moropoulou, who is leading the project.

"The techniques we're using to document this unique monument will enable the world to study our findings as if they themselves were in the tomb of Christ."

The tomb was uncovered after the church was closed early to the many tourists and pilgrims who visit the site every day. The candles that usually light the sacred Edicule were replaced with bright construction lights, allowing hard hat-wearing researchers to reveal previously unseen details.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was first built in 335 AD and forms the heart of the Christian Quarter within the walled Old City of Jerusalem. It is jointly managed by representatives of six different Christian denominations, with the Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Armenian Church having the most influence.

Disagreements over the running of the site have led to a number of disagreements, including brawls between rival monks.

Because no part of the church can be modified without the agreement of all the different communities, much-needed restoration work is often prevented.

The keys to the church have been in the possession of a Muslim family since the 12th Century.
Hungary opens first ever office to tackle Christian persecution
Published: Sep. 16, 2016

As Europe’s leaders (minus the UK) meet in the Slovakian capital, Bratislava, the voice of the Eastern bloc leaders is being heard more, even if it’s not always comfortable listening for Brussels’ Eurocrats.

This week, Hungary, which has during the past year come under pressure for its handling of Europe’s mass migration crisis, has become the first government to open an office specifically to address the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and Europe.

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“Today, Christianity has become the most persecuted religion, where out of five people killed [for] religious reasons, four of them are Christians,” Catholic News Agency (CNA) quoted Hungary’s Minister for Human Capacities, ZoltanBalog, as saying. “In 81 countries around the world, Christians are persecuted, and 200 million Christians live in areas where they are discriminated against. Millions of Christian lives are threatened by followers of radical religious ideologies.”

Today, Christianity has become the most persecuted religion. The move sets a precedent on the international stage. It comes after Hungary’s right-wing conservative Prime Minister, Victor Orban, drew criticism in the EU by saying Europe should focus on helping Christians, before helping millions of “Islamic people” coming into Europe.

“If we really want to help, we should help where the real problem is … We should first help the Christian people before Islamic people,” Orban said.

Orban’s government has campaigned against an EU plan to spread some of the burden of the influx of migrants and refugees by requiring member states to accept quotas: he’s called a referendum on 2 October at which voters are expected overwhelmingly to back the government and reject any future quotas.

A ‘political war’

The launch of a government office directly concerned with Christian suffering comes at a time when Europe is divided between what Orban calls an “EU elite” and those, like him, who want to hold on to Europe’s Christian roots.

“The political war based on the topic of migration is a great opportunity for both parties. For the [EU elite], it is a great chance to destroy the Europe that is based on the conception of Christianity and national identity; to completely alter the ethnic-based foundations of the EU,” Orban said. “[The elite] know that Muslims will never vote for a party with Christian roots, so with the huge volume of Muslims, the conservative parties will be crowded out in Europe.”

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Since Germany in 2015 signalled its “open-door” policy (equally driven by Christian teaching) to refugees fleeing warzones in Syria, close to 1.5 million people have arrived in Germany to seek asylum. Many travelled through “the Balkan route”, though Hungary has now erected a fence on its southern borders with Serbia and Croatia.

Christian refugees

Hungary’s new office will have a starting budget of US$3.35 million. Minister Balog said it is of the “utmost importance” to help persecuted Christians, to raise international awareness of their “untenable situation” and to coordinate humanitarian efforts.

In Iraq, a Christian population esti-mated at more than a million before the 2003 war – and consi-derably more prior to that – today stands at less than 300,000. Many displaced from Iraq’s Nineveh Plains after the 2014 ‘Islamic State’ offensive currently seek a permanent home in the West.

In Syria, a similar situation has developed since the country’s civil war started five years ago. Other countries in the region have seen a haemorrhaging of indigenous Christianity with the resurgence of Islam as a political ideology. Since last century, Iraq ranks second on Open Doors’ 2016 World Watch List, a list of 50 countries where Christians come under the most pressure, while Syria is fifth. In almost 40 of the 50 countries, Islam either predominates or Islamist non-state actors (e.g. militias) are at work.

“Somehow the idea of defending Christians has acquired a bad taste in Europe, as if it means excluding other people,” von Habsburg said, and the Hungarian initiative is intended to show it doesn’t have to be that way.

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Contacts in Rome

Orban and Balog, respectively a Protestant layman and a Calvinist pastor, were the only non-Catholic members of the group whom Pope Francis received in a private audience in August.

A Christian Egyptian prays moments before his beheading on a beach in Libya (2015).

A view of the Hungarian capital from the top of St. Stephen’s Basilica. (Alcs / Flickr / CC)

A boy waits for food distribution in a camp for Christian refugees in Erbil. (World Watch Monitor)

A representative of the church confirmed to Christian Today that the plan will go ahead.

LivetsOrd is the leading charismatic church in Sweden, and seen as in line with the Pentecostal movement in the US. It was founded in the 1980s, and is often criticised in secular Swedish society for being like a “cult”.

It runs a series of evangelical schools for children. The church’s mission director Christian Åkerhielm told Swedish broadcasterSVT, according to the newspaper The Local.

“Our ambition is to pass on the hope and love of the Christian gospel to a population living in closed areas where they are being denied human rights,” the LivetsOrd said on its Swedish homepage.

The church said that another organisation in the area would be carrying out the operation, but did not name the other group. “We start our project in a few weeks and hope to drop thousands of bibles,” it said.

A major evangelical free church in Sweden is preparing to use drones to drop thousands of Bibles into areas of Iraq controlled by Islamic State.

The LivetsOrd (Word of Life) church in Uppsala in the north of Sweden has said it will use drones flying at high altitude to release thousands of small, electronic Bibles into Iraq.

“The Bibles are the size of pill boxes and have a display. They require no electricity, but work on their own,” the church’s mission director Christian Åkerhielm told Swedish broadcasterSVT, according to the newspaper The Local.

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The church’s founders, Ulf and Birgitta Ekman, leftin 2014 to convert to Catholicism.

The church says on its website: “We believe in an unfaithing and never-ending love, given to us by God. And together we try to spread that love to as many people as possible. Both globally and closer to where our home is, here in Uppsala.”

christiantoday.com
Are You Willing to be Labeled a Fanatic for Christ?

By Billy Graham, January 20, 2013

Many times in the New Testament, people described Christ and nearly all of the apostles as being mad, crazy or extreme. In Mark 3:21 the Scripture says, “But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind.’” Acts 26:24 says, “Now as he [Paul] thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’”

For His friends to claim that He was beside Himself may have been an excuse or a defense, suggesting that He was harmless and had done nothing to provoke a revolution or an outburst of national fanaticism.

However, the enemies of Jesus could not fail to see His growing popularity and be upset by it. They could not deny the evidence of a power in Him that was beyond their comprehension. So they said, “He has a demon and is mad” (John 10:20). They tried to explain away His power by insinuating that it was due to demon possession.

There are other examples in the New Testament. Paul appeared at Caesarea before Festus, the new Roman governor, and Herod Agrippa. Paul set forth the salient facts of his career, his conversion and his conviction of the truth of the Gospel. He probably got excited, enthusiastic and even emotional. Festus interrupted him with a loud voice, saying in effect, “Paul, you’re crazy! Your religion has turned your head. You’re mad. You’re an extremist!” Festus did not want to face the realities of life. Paul’s arguments were beyond him. He could not accept such a faith. So in scorn and contempt he said, “Paul is mad!”

In every age, Christian leaders have been not only grossly misunderstood and misjudged, but considered mad. When we come across behavior we cannot understand, or when someone’s conduct seems to be wildly extravagant or utterly absurd, it is easy to say, “That fellow is crazy! To behave like that is sheer madness!”

This is an easy inducement to hurl at other people. It relieves us of the responsibility of trying to understand, and it relieves us of the responsibility of facing the realities of life. It gives us a smug satisfaction. It keeps us from having to examine and express our own moral principles.

People could not understand Jesus, so they said He was beside Himself. On the first recorded occasion it was His own friends who expressed this view (Mark 3:21).

Perplexing and alarming reports had reached them. In an effort to save Him from the dangerous consequences of His rashness, they journeyed from Nazareth to Capernaum to take Him quietly back home. He had flouted religious convention. He had shocked the straitlaced about the Sabbath. He had indicated the incompatibility of His actions, views and teachings with those generally accepted. He had flouted religious convention. He had shocked the straitlaced about the Sabbath. He had indicated the incompatibility of His actions, views and teachings with those generally accepted.

In every realm except the spiritual. The world accepts enthusiasm immediately it is suspect.

People could not understand Jesus, so they said He was beside Himself. On the first recorded occasion it was His own friends who expressed this view (Mark 3:21).

Perplexing and alarming reports had reached them. In an effort to save Him from the dangerous consequences of His rashness, they journeyed from Nazareth to Capernaum to take Him quietly back home. He had flouted religious convention. He had shocked the straitlaced about the Sabbath. He had indicated the incompatibility of His actions, views and teachings with those generally accepted.

In every realm except the spiritual. The world accepts enthusiasm immediately it is suspect.

“Love one another! If you love one another, you will know all the commands of Christ.” … “In this house we have shared meals and provided you with the Word…” (1 Thessalonians 4:10; Acts 2:42). You can be as crazy as you like about the World Series. You can go to a major league baseball stadium, shout yourself hoarse, and everyone thinks this is normal. You can be as crazy as you like about money, pleasure or even drink. You can be wild about some musical group. And in each case you are thought to be sane and normal.

But bring the same enthusiasm into your moral convictions, and you are told that you are beside yourself. When you bring a grand and glorious abandon to your dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ, you are thought by many of your neighbors to be mad, to have “gone too far” in religion.

One of the great needs in the church today is for every Christian to become enthusiastic about his or her faith in Jesus Christ. This is the very essence of vital spiritual experience. The apostles had been with Christ, and they could not help but testify to what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20).

Every Christian should become an ambassador of Christ with splendid wildness and happy abandon. Christians should be so intoxicated with Christ and so filled with holy fervor that nothing could ever quench their ardor.

Church as Family

Christians should be part of a “church family” and not try to live spiritually on their own, says Saddleback Church senior pastor and best-selling author Rick Warren.

In his Daily Hope devotional on Monday, the megachurch pastor stressed that being part of a church family is essential to fulfilling God’s purposes for one’s life.

“You cannot fulfill the five purposes (worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism) on your own. Life is not a solo act. You were created for community,” wrote Warren.

“The only way you can fulfill God’s five purposes in your life is with people in your life who are giving you spiritual input. You need a church family!”

Warren added that a major reason for this need is that “the church helps you center your life around God” and that “God didn’t put you on Earth to live a self-centered life.”

“His purpose for you is to build your life with him at the core. You were planned for God’s pleasure. He made you to love you, and he wants you to love him back,” continued Warren.

“Can you see that God meant for you to be a part of a church family? When you are, it helps you focus and center your life around God so that you can fulfill His purpose for you.”

Earlier this year, Warren emphasized the importance of church in the spiritual life and development of a believer.

In June, he hosted a three-day “Purpose Driven Conference” at the Lake Forest, California, campus of Saddleback Church, which included attendees from 33 different countries and all 50 states.

In a devotional published days after the conference concluded, Warren noted that an important reason to be involved in a church community is that “it’s part of the ‘family of God,’ which will outlast all other things.”

“A thousand years from today, if there’s still Earth here, there won’t be a Microsoft. There won’t be a Hollywood a thousand years from today. There won’t be a United States of America, because no earthly kingdom lasts forever. There won’t be all of the things we think are so great,” wrote Warren this summer.

“But there will still be the family of God. God’s people last. It’s the only thing that’s going to last. . . . I make no apology in saying to you that maybe joining a spiritual family will be the most significant thing you do with your life.”

Source: Christian Post
Struck Down, But Not Destroyed

In the movie Creed, boxer Adonis Creed takes a brutal punch in the fight of his life, and gets knocked to the ground. He hits the floor hard. The people in his corner are shouting, "Get up! Get up!" His opponent is on the ropes celebrating, thinking it's over.

But while Creed is out, his mind is swirling through all he's been through up until that point, and all the people who love and motivate him. Like a jolt, he's up before the count of ten — and is back in the fight.

Creed's boxing life may seem to bear little resemblance to our lives as believers. Though we encounter battles, we don't train intensely for them, with dedicated professionals to put us through our paces and shore up our weaknesses. We don't know the time, date, and location of our next bout, such that we can show up prepared. Our battles are spiritual, seemingly unending the comparison.

But as the apostle Paul showed, boxing (like running) provides a vivid metaphor for the Christian life (1 Corinthians 9:26).

You Will Get Hit

We often don't see it coming. It could be a health crisis, loss of a loved one, an employment shake-up, betrayal, or some form of persecution. Or maybe it's something we're aware of, something we thought was mild or temporary, but it "hits" when it morphs from hill to mountain.

The question is not whether we will find ourselves in a battle, but when. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (James 1:2). Paul likewise says it's part of our privilege as believers. "It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). We remember vividly the times we have been hit. Many of us are still recovering.

Moreover, we have an enemy who specializes in sucker punches. He schemes how he will execute, watching for opportune times, hitting when he thinks it will connect with force. Nothing touches us apart from the sovereign sanction of the Lord. The Lord uses it for his purposes and for our good. But there's a reason he tells us to remain fully clothed in his armor. Forces are arrayed against us, shooting fiery arrows. There are times we will get hit.

You Will Go Down

Sometimes we are hit with such force that we are knocked down. Life takes a hard tilt, and the effect is tantamount to being thrown face down to the ground. The circumstance is devastating, the pain excruciating. Try as we might, in that moment it is difficult to grasp hold of any semblance of joy or hope.

However, let me war

Are You Willing to be

However, let me warn you that when you take this position with Christ, you will be called crazy, you might be persecuted—you might even be crucified. You will be accused of being beside yourself, you will be called a religious fanatic, and some will label you an extremist.

Think of the glorious daring of Christ's men and women! Paul was satisfied with nothing less than taking the Gospel to Rome, to Spain, to any place the Lord sent him. John Wesley set out to preach Christ to the whole world.

These men had a magnificent obsession. They carried the flaming truths of the Gospel far and wide, surmounted obstacles, overcame difficulties and endured persecution. That was their craziness, the madness of doing great things for God.

It is this very commitment we lack in our churches today. Our vision is too limited, and our objectives are too small. We are suffering because we lack this fervor, enthusiasm and "madness."

We have become too sophisticated and respectable to be called crazy in our generation. Christianity has become so respectable and so conventional that it is now insipid. The salt has lost its savor.

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The Communists had that obsession to win the world to their views. And they almost did it. The enthusiasm that Communists showed for their beliefs put our half-hearted efforts to shame. The world had to take Communism seriously because of the abandon of its followers and their willingness to sacrifice and to suffer.

Would to God that the world found us Christians dangerous enough to call us mad in these days when materialism, evil and secularism are sweeping over the world! Would that we, too, could be considered to be beside ourselves, so that we might at least command the world’s attention and that we might be as enthusiastic for Christ as the Communists were for Communism.

The philosophy of men and women of the world is, “What can I get out of this? How can I benefit myself?” We witness a scramble for place and a grasping for the prizes which the world offers. However, the Bible warns that the world and the lust thereof will soon pass away (1 John 2:17).

The things that materialism offers cannot satisfy the innermost longings of the human heart, nor can materialism save us when the showdown comes, as surely it must.

Thank God, there are still those who are willing to stand up and be counted! We still have people who possess moral courage, who are willing to get involved in the great moral issues of our day.

Thank God, there are those who sacrifice time, talents, social position and lucrative posts, and who fling aside every advantage in order to serve the Kingdom of God! In the world’s estimation, these people are surely beside themselves.

The whole history of missionary enterprise is filled with names of men and women like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Mary Slessor, John Paton, David Livingstone and others who were thought by their generations to be crazy. Their dedication was unique, crazy and at times even insane.

The really sane people are often those whom the world laughs at and despises. As we look back on Christ, we can see that it was He who was sane, and His critics who were foolish. As we consider Paul, we must admit that it was he who was sane, and Festus who was beside himself.

To neglect the cross of Christ, to ignore the eternity toward which we are all moving—this is the height of madness. And to disregard salvation through Jesus Christ is the most foolish of all foolishness.

May Christians turn their backs on compromise, easy-going tolerance and reluctance to be forthright. May we make it clear by word and by action that we really believe that Jesus Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

The Gospel that Paul preached seemed madness to the world of his day. The apostle wrote that the Gospel was “to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

The Gospel of Paul that Paul preached seemed madness to the world of his day. The apostle wrote that the Gospel was “to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

In its reaction to the Gospel, the world of our day has changed little from the world of Paul’s day. A true Christian will always be considered strange, unique, crazy and at times even insane.

Let us have this madness! Let us capture some of the magnificent obsession that these early Christians had! Let us go forth as men and women filled with the Spirit of God! This is harvest time in North America. We do not know how long these doors are going to be open, but now God is speaking. Will you respond? Will you accept Jesus Christ as Savior? Do it today, Now!
PRAYER CALENDAR NOVEMBER - 2016

The Persecuted Church

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

“Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” Hebrews 13:3

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” 2 Tim 3:12

Our Lord Jesus has told us in His world, that we would face hatred from the world that follows the evil one. In fact, Paul goes on to say that ‘everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’. Thousands of Christians around the world today face mistreatments, abuse, torture and even martyrdom for their faith. Let’s ask God for His strength and wisdom for the church to endure to the end. And that our eyes will always be fixed on Him, the author and perfector of our faith.

i. Brought to trial / Interrogated for the faith:
There are many scripture portions that talk about Christians accused and brought before legal authority of the sake of Christ. Those portions also give us insight into how we can pray for them.
1. That they would willingly submit to Christ and His plan.
   To not be anxious and afraid but rely on the Holy Spirit to give the words to say. Jesus has promised that we would be His witnesses as we rely on Him during trial.
2. In many countries, especially the Middle-East, believers are falsely charged by the locals because even the government is supportive of them. Pray for God’s grace and favor for the accused.

Please read the Scripture portion Acts 4: 5 – 20 and pray for the below points accordingly:
3. Pray the believers as they stand trial would be gripped strongly by the conviction that there is no other name under heaven that can save but the name of Jesus (v5-12).
4. Pray that God would fill them with incredible courage like the early church prayed and received the same (vs 13).
5. Peter and John, in Acts, answered when interrogated that they can’t help but speak about Christ – about what they have seen and heard. Pray for such compulsion to come on our brothers and sisters today, to speak of Christ’s love (vs 18-19).
6. Pray that such courage, conviction and compulsion will always birth out an intimate communion with Christ. (Read Acts 5: 33-41 for the below 2 points)
7. Pray that God would raise up someone from within their persecutors to incline favorably towards the ones being persecuted.
8. Pray that the persecuted will be filled with the joy of Christ amid suffering (Acts 5: 41)

ii. Christian Persecution Around the World:
Apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians says that God would deliver and help his co-workers in their persecution, helped by the prayers of the church (Read 2 Cor. 11: 8 – 11 and pray for the below points):
9. The Watch List 2016 report (by Open Doors Org.) released in Jan this year, reveals that 2015 as the worst year of Christian persecution in history since statistics have been tracked. Christian Martyrs have doubled from that of 2014. Top 10 Countries as below (India is ranked as 17)
10. Islamic terrorist is the main source of persecution in 9 out of the top 10 and 41 of the top 50 countries - that is 82 percent of the world’s persecution of Christians.

11. North Korea heads in persecution for the 14th consecutive year. There are at least 50,000 to 70,000 Christians imprisoned in labor camps in North Korea alone. Pray that God would open the Communist Dictator’s eyes to the surpassing glory of the godly life in Christ Jesus!

12. Islamic extremism in Iraq has risen to a level akin to ethnic cleansing especially because of ISIS and other extremist groups that wish to make the country purely Islamic.
13. Pray for the many Christians who are displaced, homeless and lost loved ones because of persecution in Iraq and Syria and other Middle Eastern nations. Pray also for those who minister secretly in the severely persecuted nations, for God’s wisdom, miraculous interventions and help from above.
14. Pray for better relationship between India & Pakistan and also pray for Kashmir & all the soldiers at the war front.

15. For Christians to sing and rejoice even in prison. Although this might sound insensitive, we can do so because we see instances in the bible. Paul and Silas sang in the prison. Peter was sound asleep in peace before the day he was to stand trial (Acts 16: 25, 12: 6, 7).
16. Pray for believers to commune with God even in prison. Some of the great revelations given to Paul come from his prison letters. Pray that they would minister to their fellow prisoners and also for confidence of future ministry outside if it’s in God’s plan (Acts 23:11)
17. For the church to pray for Peter and James when they were arrested saw James killed and Peter miraculously escape from prison (Acts 12).
18. Pray that the martyrs would have God in their vision and God’s glory in proportion to their suffering (Acts 7: 55-56)
19. Pray that the persecutors themselves would turn to Christ, looking at the loving and selfless sacrifice of the persecuted believers (Apostle Paul was so deeply affected by Stephen’s stoning to death, as he was approving it, that he mentions it twice in his testimony before the rulers.
20. Pray that the victims would pray for the persecutors, following the example of Jesus himself and Stephen the martyr. (Acts 7: 60)
21. Pray that they would have faith to see the invisible reality of eternal reward that awaits and the eternal glory that outweighs their current troubles (2Cor. 4: 17)
22. Pray that they would ask God to give them boldness to fearlessly preach the gospel (Acts 4: 24 – 31)

23. Pray for the ones that have lost their loved ones. That they would express their anger and grief as lament to God as they pray the psalms, in place of harboring bitterness and unforgiveness

vi. For us as Church
24. Pray for the ones coming from non-Christian backgrounds to stand up for their faith especially when it comes to marriage, not to be unequally yoked. Pray also that we would take care of the ones facing persecution from their families as our own (Heb. 11: 24-25)
25. Pray that we would be faithful stewards and witnesses to Christ in our workplaces even when we are mistreated. That we would excel in our work and conduct ourselves with integrity so that we would have nothing to be accused or ashamed of (1 Peter 2: 11-21)
26. Pray for wisdom, boldness and preparedness to answer every one that question us and/or is hostile to our faith. That we would respond boldly yet lovingly (1 Pet. 3: 15)
27. Pray that as a Church we would stand firm till the end. That we would become persecution ready and consider the present troubles light and momentary because of the eternal glory that is coming (2Cor 4: 16 – 18)
28. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it (1 Cor. 12: 26 – 27)

29. Resources:
New Life Assembly of God Church, Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
http://www.opendoors.org/Christian-persecution_world-watch-list/
https://www.persecution.com/pray

For Private Circulation only
write to us @ Persecutionrelief@gmail.com

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