



Supporting the Suffering Church

On the 8th July this year Government published a report on the Persecution of Christians across the world which revealed that Christians are the targets of about 80% of all acts of religious discrimination or persecution – which makes Christians the most persecuted faith group in the world.

But what can we do? Their suffering can inspire our faith and work.

The first thing is to recognise that the problem exists. There's much information on the web – see e.g. Open Doors; The Barnabas Fund; Release International

Secondly to pray – on the next page are some prayers from Release International for the Church in China, which you could use.

Thirdly as you become aware the Lord may stir you up to take consider other support eg writing letters, signing petitions [see web sites mentioned above]

Fourthly we can stand alongside our brothers and sisters by standing firm for Jesus in our lives, work places, communities etc.

Peter Morden, the Senior Pastor at South Parade Baptist Church, Leeds, in his book, 'The Message of Discipleship' observes that like the early apostles who locked themselves behind closed doors although "we may not face the same level of danger, ... we too can be gripped by fear." He admits to his own fears when his wife faced the possibility of being made redundant [not through persecution]. But then asks himself: "Why was my first response so unbiblical, so at variance with the life of a faithful Christian disciple?"

[Because:] "This is what we often do when we feel threatened. We behave like hedgehogs when they sense danger, rolling into a ball with the sharp spines sticking out. Fear stops us living generously and expansively for others. Instead of joyful, trusting, missional discipleship we protect ourselves. But, excitingly in John 20 the first disciples are released from their paralysing fear." **How?**

[1] the disciples had a dynamic encounter with the risen Lord [Jon 20:19-20]

Locked doors could not keep Him out. "His presence makes all the difference. The locked room, previously full of fear, becomes a place of peace, joy and transformation."

[2] The disciples become filled with Christ's authentic, life-giving, life-changing peace, and an exuberant, overflowing joy.

[3] The Resurrection is the key. Death has been conquered. Jesus will never die again. His victory is our victory. "Death does not have the last word for those who believe in Jesus! Even if we experience martyrdom, as many Christians have done and continue to do around the world, the stories of our lives will have happy endings. This can sound trite, but it is profound truth. .. the resurrection ... fills the most tragic situations with sure and certain hope." Whatever happens to us: "Jesus is risen! The resurrection is the ultimate game-changer. For all disciples the last word will always be *life* – life for evermore."

"This great truth has the power to overcome our worst fears. It is not that the things we fear disappear ... but [that] the reality of the resurrection ... enabled the first disciples ... to confront the very people who had made them so afraid and ... live and speak with such extraordinary boldness and courage. The resurrection can have the same effect on us."

[4] Jesus sends the disciples out to carry on His mission, which is His Father's mission. The Son's mission becomes our mission. And the Father and the Son are already ahead of us.

A key for our mission is to " 'see what God is already doing and get on board with that.' He is already working in the communities we live and work in, stirring people up, touching lives and situations by the Holy Spirit. Discern what He is already doing and how He is calling you to be involved as His disciple.

[5] The content of our mission is already shaped: proclaim forgiveness. That's to say "it is God who forgives. [Yet as we] share the gospel and speak of the possibility of free and full forgiveness, hearers are confronted with the need to respond. If they receive the good news they are forgiven.... Tragically, some will refuse to respond to the offer of forgiveness ... Yet, by God's grace, many will."

[6] Like Jesus we are to be 'wounded healers'

The wounds of the cross are still visible in His resurrection body. The victory of the cross is implemented by the way of the cross. [see eg 2Corinthians 6:4-10].

“As we engage in Jesus’ mission, doing it Jesus’s way, we will make ourselves vulnerable ... We will receive ‘wounds’ as Jesus and Paul did. Sometimes these wounds will be inflicted on us by the very people we are seeking to reach.

Yet “suffering is not merely something that happens to us as we participate in mission it is the means by which the mission is accomplished.” The gospel is only spread by our being willing to suffer for Jesus, as he suffered for us.

[7] To share in God’s mission we need faith in the resurrection and the living power of the Holy Spirit. “Without the Holy Spirit we cannot hope to engage in God’s mission... This mighty power is given to His disciples by the risen Lord Jesus [and] to us for mission.” Scripture encourages us to ask God through word and prayer to “pour out His Spirit upon us so completely that we are filled with joy, victorious over sin and bold to witness.”

Our sharing Jesus in word and action declares our togetherness with our suffering brothers and sisters [see eg 2 Corinthians 7:5-7; Philippians 4:14-19]

Finally we can bring this to worship for the suffering church. On November 11th we remember those who have suffered and died to defend our liberty. May we set aside a November Sunday – there is no fixed date for this - to remember those now suffering & even dying for their freedom in Christ e.g. 17th Nov.

From Release International: some suggested Prayers for the Suffering Church in China [see <https://releaseinternational.org/pray>]

for members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province in China. Eleven members are in custody, including Pastor Wang Li and his wife, Jiang Rong, detained since December.

Chengdu officials have also pressured several landlords to evict Christian tenants in the city. Pray for a husband and wife in the Church who were allegedly beaten & tortured by local police in March. When they returned home, they were told they were being evicted. Pray God will provide safe homes for the Early Rain Christians.

Hundreds of Chinese pastors have been joined by church leaders from across the world in signing Pastor Wang Li’s ‘*Declaration for the Sake of the Christian Faith*’, calling for an end to persecution. Pray the Chinese Government will respond positively to international pressure.



Want to know more about the Suffering Church?

See these websites:

The Barnabas Fund at
<https://barnabasfund.org/en>

Open Doors at
<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/>

Release International at
<https://releaseinternational.org>

which also includes information on the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church at <https://releaseinternational.org/idop/>