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Sermon Notes

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Encouragement for the Suffering Church

Revelation 2:8-11

It is hard to imagine the amount of suffering that the church of Jesus Christ has had to endure for almost twenty-one centuries.

From the upper room in Jerusalem to the present almost world-wide extent of the church of Christ, the journey has been marked by incalculable suffering – a trail of blood.

Saul of Tarsus was a very big part of that trail of blood, on both sides of the equation! He had one famous morning awakened and dressed himself seething with rage at Christ and plotting murder against his disciples. He had begun a journey to Damascus to root out Christians there and drag them to prison and to death.

The story of Paul's conversion by a blinding light on the Road to Damascus is well-known:

Acts 9:4-6 "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Paul was blinded by this light, and was led by the hand into Damascus, where he began fervently praying. His day began as a persecutor... it ended by him becoming the most persecuted man in the history of the church.

The Lord commissioned a godly man named Ananias to go baptize the most surprising convert in church history... when Ananias understandably balked from going to this vicious persecutor, the Lord said GO...

Acts 9:16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

It seems like Jesus could have said that very same thing to his church... "I will show you how much you must suffer for my name... how high the price in blood will be to spread this gospel from Jerusalem, through all Judea and Samaria, and century after century from there, to the ends of the earth.

The first challenge was the spiritual conquest of the Roman Empire... as one Satanic emperor after another rose up to seek to crush the growing church, the trail of blood was effectively a trail of seeds... from each drop of blood sprang another convert.

Jesus had said very plainly:

John 12:24... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Godly men and women, boys and girls paid the price in blood to win over the elect among the Romans...

And this church in Smyrna was one of the earliest examples of a church crushed by Rome, crushed by the devil, crushed by false Jews who hated Jesus...

One of the sweetest fragrances in the ancient world was MYRRH... it was used for burials; it was stunningly costly... it was one of the gifts of the Magi to Jesus at the beginning of his life; it was used by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to bury Jesus at the end of his life

The word translated "Smyrna" was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the Hebrew word for MYRRH. Myrrh is a resinous substance, a natural gum that bleeds from a myrrh tree when it is wounded – people harvesting myrrh slice wounds in the branches and allow the sap to bleed out... after it bleeds out, it immediately becomes hard and glossy. These hard, gummy balls are crushed or burned to give off a sweet, aromatic fragrance

It is an apt picture of this small, suffering band of early Christians in Smyrna... and it is a beautiful living parable of the suffering church throughout history

The church is wounded, bleeds, is crushed, is burned... and a magnificent aromatic fragrance of deep piety, love, sacrifice, commitment rises heavenward as a pleasing aroma to God...

And God USES these sufferings to purify his church and to expand it!

It seems a paradox, but the more the church is persecuted in this world, the purer and stronger it becomes.

It is a lesson we here in the comforts of early 21st century America would do well to take to heart.

This brief letter from Jesus Christ to Smyrna contains NOT A WORD of criticism... only a command to be faithful even to death, and many encouragements from Christ

None of this was an accident... to some degree, Christ is always putting his churches on display

Remember the image of Revelation 1... Christ, resurrected and glorified, is walking in the midst of seven golden lampstands, representing seven local churches... the lampstands are the PLATFORM Christ puts his church on... the LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

In the same way, Christ SET UP this small, suffering church of Smyrna for the unbelieving world to see... he put them on a pedestal, on a lofty lampstand, to shed light not only in that one place and time, but down through the corridors of time, in every generation that read this letter, and understood how precious in the sight of the Lord is the suffering of his church

The suffering of local churches is not an accident... it does not mean that Christ has lost his power, or that he doesn't love that church anymore, or that Satan outwitted him. Christ set up Smyrna to shine throughout all time by their courageous suffering for his name

Let's look at the SETTING of this suffering church...

I. Christ Sets Up the Suffering Church

A. Smyrna Then is Izmir Now

1. The town of Smyrna is now called Izmir, in modern-day Turkey
2. It is five miles up the coast and due north from Ephesus
3. An ancient city, perhaps settled as early as 3000 B.C.
4. Smyrna had long been a staunch ally of Rome
 - a. Around 195 B.C., the citizens of the city built a temple to *Dea Roma*, basically Rome personified as a goddess

- b. After that, the city acquired a reputation for its patriotic loyalty to the Empire
- c. Around the year 95 B.C., the Roman general Sulla's poorly-dressed army faced a bitter winter and was shivering in the cold; when the report of this reached Smyrna, the citizens reportedly took off their own clothes to send them to Rome
- d. This did not go unnoticed... because...
- e. around the year A.D. 25, many cities in Asia Minor were competing for the honor of erecting a temple for the worship of the Emperor Tiberius, and this honor was given to Smyrna alone
- f. Their loyalty to Caesar was a matter of both civic pride and civic prosperity

5. The Beauty of Smyrna

- a. Smyrna was said to be the most beautiful city in Asia
- b. Located on a gulf of the Aegean Sea, it had an excellent port, resulting in continual prosperity through trade

B. The Church at Smyrna

1. There's no record in scripture how the church at Smyrna came into existence... probably planted by Paul (Acts 19)

C. Smyrna's Suffering Declared (vs. 9)

Revelation 2:8-9 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. ⁹ I know your afflictions and your poverty-- yet you are rich!"

1. The word for AFFLICTIONS in the original language literally means "pressure"...
2. The Lord Jesus Christ here begins his letter to them by speaking of their afflictions... this is their time of testing; and it's going to get much worse!
3. What are the reasons for it?
 - a. First, the commitment of this faithful church to King Jesus
 - b. Second, the fanatic cult of Rome and Emperor worship
 - c. Third, the slander of Jews who hate them and oppose them at every moment

D. Roman Opposition: Christ and Caesar

1. We have already laid out plainly the cult of Rome in Smyrna
2. But the plot had greatly thickened by then... for the Emperor Domitian had declared it to be a CAPITAL OFFENSE to refuse to offer the yearly sacrifice to the Emperor... this was an open declaration of loyalty to Rome, and the Emperor demanded it of all the citizens in that region of the world
3. This sacrifice was made by burning a small pinch of incense on a fire in the temple; after you burned the incense, you were awarded a certificate for that year; to be without that certificate was punishable by death
4. Obviously, this was the essence of the affliction the Christians faced, for their loyalty to King Jesus would not permit them to worship Caesar in any way... it really came down to a simple choice: Christ or Caesar
5. Caesar threatened physical death... the first death; Jesus threatened eternal death in hell, the second death

Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

6. To burn the incense, one had to say "Caesar is Lord." But Christians could only say "Jesus is Lord"... this brought them into great affliction; the surrounding citizens would see this as a disgraceful lack of patriotism which, if it went unchecked, could threaten the city's special privileged status with Rome

E. Jewish Opposition: The Synagogue of Satan

1. To make matters worse, this refusal to take part in the Emperor worship was openly declared by the large Jewish population in Smyrna

Revelation 2:9 I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

2. The Jews had been permitted NOT to burn the incense to Caesar, but they were the only ones exempt
3. These Jews exploited their privilege... they hated the sect they called the "Nazarenes"... they sought to curry favor with the authorities by urging the Christians to burn the incense, and when they refused, to turn them in to the authorities
4. Jewish hostility to the gospel started in Jesus' lifetime and extended well into the Book of Acts
5. Everywhere Paul went, there was Jewish opposition to him and to his message

6. This Jewish opposition to Christ and to Christians was a major factor of the early church's suffering
7. It extended well into the second century AD, for when their godly leader Polycarp was burned at the stake (as we'll discuss in a moment), it was the Jews who were the most eager to gather wood for the fire

F. Four Specific Trials

Poverty... slander... prison... death

1. Poverty: Jesus says "I know your poverty..." (vs. 9)
 - a. Undoubtedly this refers to poverty that had come because they were Christians
 - b. Even during Jesus' lifetime, the Jewish authorities had decided that anyone who confessed Christ would be put of the synagogue
 - c. That would mean tremendous hardship economically... people couldn't make a living
 - d. Beyond this, any Gentile converts might similarly be ostracized in business if they refused to compromise their convictions in terms of pagan religion
 - e. And it is quite possible that some Christians in Smyrna had had their houses ransacked and that some had lost not only their freedom but their possessions

Hebrews 10:34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

2. Slander: Jesus says "I know the SLANDER of those who say they are Jews and are not..." (vs. 9)
 - a. Slander means to bring a harsh accusation against someone
 - b. The Christians had to face false accusations about their lives and their doctrines
 - c. The Jews were poisoning the minds of the officials in Smyrna and of the populace against Christians
 - d. They were doing the work of the devil... for the name "Satan" means ACCUSER, and Satan is called a LIAR and the FATHER OF LIES
3. Prison: Jesus says "I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer affliction for ten days." (vs. 10)

- a. They lost their freedom as a result of these SLANDERS...
 - b. They were put in Roman prisons... which were horrible places
 - c. they were in dark holes, unable to see the light of day or be around people they loved
 - d. There was no provision of food or water or medical care
 - e. The stench was horrible
 - f. There were often tortures done by sadistic guards
 - g. There was no *habeus corpus*, no need for authorities to show just cause for imprisonment, no promise of a swift trial or right to a bond to have freedom until their trial
 - h. They often threw people into prison and effectively threw away the key
4. Death: Jesus says “Be faithful even unto death...” (vs. 10)
- a. Often throughout the history of the early church, death at the hands of the legal authorities was common
 - b. Tertullian said “The blood of martyrs is SEED for the church”... Christians DIED so that others might spring up from their bloody witness to seize hold of their faith
 - c. Jesus calls on the Christians at Smyrna to LOVE HIM more than they loved their lives

Revelation 12:11 They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

- d. The Famous Story of Polycarp
 - i) Of all the Christian martyrs of the ancient world, Polycarp stands as one of the most famous
 - ii) Polycarp was bishop or overseer of the church in Smyrna... tradition tells us that he was personally disciplined and trained by the Apostle John
 - iii) On February 2, AD 156, Polycarp was arrested... he had fled the persecution when his congregation begged him to, but he had finally been tracked down and caught outside the city; apparently he made no attempt to flee from his arresters, but actually offered them food and drink, and asked permission to go pray before they took him... this was granted and he prayed for two hours

- iv) Then they brought him into the amphitheater to be arraigned before the proconsul
- v) He wanted Polycarp to insult the Christians by saying the common slogan used by pagans—“Away with the godless!” ... so with some humor, Polycarp swept his hand toward the crowd and said “Away with the godless!”
- vi) The proconsul said “Respect your years! Swear by Caesar... burn the incense!” “Revile Christ and I will release you!”
- vii) Polycarp said very famously, **“For eighty-six years I have served him and he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?!”**
- viii) The proconsul said “I have wild beasts!” Polycarp said “Bring them!”
- ix) The proconsul said, “Since you make light of the beasts, I will burn you with fire!”
- x) Polycarp said, “You threaten a fire that burns for a little while, then is extinguished. God threatens a fire that will burn for all eternity.”
- xi) Finally, the proconsul ordered him to be burned; he refused to be fastened to the stake, but prayed “O Lord, Almighty God, the Father of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to know you... I thank you for counting me worthy this day and hour of sharing in the cup of Christ among the number of your martyrs.”
- xii) The fire was lit, but a gust of wind drove the flames away from him and greatly increased his suffering... a sympathetic soldier put an end to his torment with a sword

G. A Timeless Call from Christ to Suffer for Him

1. Christ here calls on all Christians for all times to be willing to suffer for him

Revelation 2:10 Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

2. Suffering is foundational to our love for Christ... no progress can be made in either internal journey of holiness or external journey of mission without suffering

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it 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. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

H. A Mark of a True Church

1. The more faithful a church is, the more likely it is to suffer persecution
2. In the parable of the seed and the soils, the stony-ground hearers are those who receive the word with joy, but since they have no root, they cannot survive ... when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away... these are not genuine Christians
3. So a church made up of cowards is no true church at all
4. All around the world, the church is undergoing similar sufferings... those who compromise are deemed false Christians

I. Our Temptation to Compromise

1. How is the church in America?
2. More pointedly, how are WE??
3. Christianity is becoming increasingly unpopular in the U.S.
4. Many of our doctrines are hated by the world
 - a. Our views on gay marriage and transgenderism are seen to be SICK and HATEFUL
 - b. Our views on the exclusivity of Christ, he being the only way to salvation, is seen to be arrogant
 - c. Our views on the inerrancy of scripture is seen to be laughable
 - d. Our views on sexual purity—the unlawfulness of all sex outside of marriage—is seen to be prudish and Puritanical and ridiculous
 - e. Our commitment to life contrary to abortion and euthanasia make us seem hateful to women and meddlers with those who want to die with dignity
5. We are under constant assault toward sin and compromise... the question is, are we willing to deny ourselves and take up our cross and die for Christ day by day?

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

II. Christ Comforts the Suffering Church

A. Christ's Clear Command to Smyrna

1. Christ speaks a bold word to this suffering church

Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

2. Effectively, Jesus is saying "Be willing to DIE FOR ME! Be faithful even if they kill you!"
3. That is the hardest command Jesus ever gave any of us... do not LOVE YOUR LIVES IN THIS WORLD so much as to shrink from death
4. This command is timeless, and extends to us... we are searched by this, because we so frequently love our lives in this world more than we love Christ

B. Faith Drives Out Fear... the Stronger Our Faith, the Bolder We Become

1. Jesus specifically pits faith against the normal fear

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer..."

2. It is hard to anticipate suffering... in many ways, that is the hardest part
3. You hear that others have been arrested and thrown in prison
4. You know that the devil wants to harm you and hurt you; your fears of the unknown start to rise and take your imagination to epic levels
5. Your breath starts to get short, beads of sweat form, terror forms a lump in your throat, the devil is active and pushing on your mind
6. Jesus commands them DO NOT FEAR... just TRUST GOD
7. So often in the Bible, faith and fear are opposites

Psalm 56:3-4 When I am afraid, I will trust in you. ⁴ In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

8. The strongest words call on us to fear God far more than we fear man

Isaiah 8:12-14 do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. ¹³ The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, ¹⁴ and he will be a sanctuary

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

9. The more we see the eternal, infinite, powerful God sitting on his heavenly throne, reigning in blinding glory... the more human threats shrink to little and God is glorified in our courageous actions

C. Focus on Christ Above All

1. Christ is the Eternal God

Revelation 2:8 These are the words of him who is the First and the Last

- a. To claim to be the First and the Last is exactly the same as what was said of God the Father

Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

- b. Jesus as the First and the Last implies he is sovereign over the unfolding of human history
- c. Nothing can stop his eternal purposes from happening
- d. It also speaks of his unchanging nature

Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

- e. Meditating on the divine nature of Christ our Savior can drive out fears

2. Christ is the Death Conqueror

Revelation 2:8 These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

- a. Jesus Christ is the DEATH CONQUEROR... he has triumphed over his greatest enemy
- b. The suffering church at Smyrna is facing their own martyrdom knowing that Christ holds the keys of death and the grave
- c. He has promised us BECAUSE I LIVE, YOU ALSO WILL LIVE

John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.

d. This is a tremendous encouragement to all people suffering in persecuting lands and threatened with our own deaths

e. He frees people from the fear of death

Hebrews 2:14-15 by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

A few years ago, as I was preparing a sermon on that text for Easter Sunday, I spoke of how courageous Christ can make us in the face of death:

Spurgeon: "For these saints, to die has been so different a thing from what they expected it to be, so lightsome, so joyous; they have been so unloaded of all care, have felt so relieved instead of burdened, that they have wondered whether this could be the monster they had been afraid of all their days. They find it a pin's prick, when they feared it would be a sword thrust; it is the shutting of the eye on earth, and the opening of it in heaven..."

Thomas Goodwin: "Ah! Is this dying? How have I dreaded as an enemy this smiling friend!"

William Preston: "Blessed be God! Though I shall change my place, I shall not change my company!"

Charles Wesley: "I shall be satisfied with thy likeness... satisfied, satisfied!!"

Adoniram Judson: "I am not tired of my work, neither am I tired of the world; yet when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school."

John Pawson: "I know I am dying, but my death-bed is a bed of roses. Heaven has already begun."

William Everett: "Glory... Glory...Glory..." for the last 25 minutes of his life, until he was gone

Christ has the power to free us from fear of death, when we realize how completely he has conquered death...

Revelation 1:18 "I am the living One. I was dead, and BEHOLD, I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

3. Christ Knows Our Suffering in Detail

a. To every church in this list, Christ begins with the assertion "I know..."

- b. Here, to this dear church in Smyrna, he says “I know your afflictions, your poverty, I know the slander of the Jews...”

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

He is intimately aware of how many tears his people have shed:

Psalm 56:8 You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

4. Christ is Sovereign Over Our Sufferings

- a. Not only does Christ know the sufferings of his people, he is directly sovereign over them

Revelation 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

- b. The “ten days” statement means a MEASURED, short amount of time
- c. It will not go on and on and on as though there is no purpose, no meaning
- d. The ten days means everything is weighed out by our sovereign God

1 Corinthians 10:13 God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

5. Christ is Purposeful in Our Sufferings

- a. Vs. 10: Satan is going to put some of you in prison TO TEST YOU...
- b. Just as he said to Simon Peter

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

- c. The purpose of our trials is to test our faith, prove it genuine, and purify it

1 Peter 1:6-7 now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

- d. Christ puts his people through the fires of persecution to put their faith on display and purify it, and to win other elect people to the faith

e. Tertullian: “Blood of martyrs is seed for the church”

f. All of this that God may be glorified as our TRUE TREASURE!!

III. Christ Rewards for the Suffering Church

A. Temporally Poor, Yet Eternally Rich

Revelation 2:9 I know your afflictions and your poverty-- yet you are rich!

1. Clearly Jesus is alluding to the immeasurable riches awaiting martyrs in heaven
2. Those who suffer for Christ in this world are richly rewarded in the next
3. The essence of the reward: PRAISE FROM GOD

1 Corinthians 4:5 At that time each will receive his praise from God.

4. Symbols of the rewards: crowns of glory...

B. The Crown of Life

Revelation 2:10 Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

1. Crowns are emblems of special achievement
2. They are the glory of those who possess them
3. They are ultimately cast down before the throne of God (Rev. 4)

All glory goes ultimately to God and to Christ... but the crowns are still ours to lay down before him

Martyrs receive crowns of life and of glory as emblems of their courageous service to Christ

Thus did Jesus say:

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

IV. Applications

A. Trust in Christ for the Forgiveness of Your Sins

1. The church at Smyrna was suffering for their faith in Christ

2. The world was beating on the Christians because it hated Christ
3. Jesus said,

John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.

4. You don't want to have a comfortable relationship with this world

Luke 6:26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

5. Think again of the terror awaiting Christ's enemies

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

6. Flee to the loving arms of Christ for forgiveness!!

B. Understand the Main Message Here: In this World You Will Be Hated

1. The more faithful we are to Christ, the more Satan will pound on us
2. If you are not experiencing any persecution, it could be because you are not saying anything to any lost person about the gospel
3. We should not seek persecution, but we should be willing to suffer for Christ, that lost people may be saved

C. Learn About and Pray for the Persecuted Church

Hebrews 13:3 "Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

1. Study and pray for the persecuted church
 - a. Jesus Freaks/Extreme Devotion
 - b. The Insanity of God (Nik Ripkin)
 - c. Voice of the Martyrs/Persecution project

Five Facts about the Persecuted Church:

1. Christians are the most persecuted religious group worldwide. An average of [180 Christians around the world](#) are killed each month for their faith.
2. According to the U.S. State Department, in [more than 60 countries](#) Christians face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors because of their faith in Christ.

3. One of the [worst countries in the world for the persecution](#) of Christians is North Korea. With the exception of four official state-controlled churches in Pyongyang, Christians in North Korea face the risk of detention in the prison camps, severe torture and, in some cases, execution for practicing their religious beliefs. North Koreans suspected of having contact with South Korean or other foreign missionaries in China, and those caught in possession of a Bible, have been known to be executed. The conditions in this country have remained the worst in the world for Christians [for the past 12 years](#).
4. In [41 of the 50 worst nations for persecution](#), Christians are being persecuted by Islamic extremists
5. Christians face persecution even in countries with a [large Christian population](#). For instance, in Columbia Christian political rebels specifically target leaders because many people have left the rebel groups after coming to Christ. The church is frequently attacked because these groups view Christians as a threat.

2. Understand the UNITY of the church... Nik Ripkin's "Insanity of God", one persecuted brother steadfastly made the point that the Christians in the non-persecuted regions of the world are ONE BODY with the suffering church!

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

3. DELIGHT IN the glory of a church advancing by blood

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

There will be a heavenly GLORY for the martyrs of the faith... the more suffering, the more glory

We should honor and delight in that glory NOW!

4. GIVE MONEY to the suffering in East Africa... FAMINE mostly caused by Islamic persecution
 - a. UN calls it the largest humanitarian crisis since WWII
 - b. Five nations (Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Nigeria) facing a major food crisis... in all five, there are drought conditions

- c. In four of the nations, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Nigeria, it is directly related to Islamic militarist groups destroying society and wreaking terror, using food as a weapon... like Boko Haram in Nigeria
 - d. In Kenya, the drought coupled with the flood of refugees from Ethiopia has put that nation into a food crisis
 - e. This famine is a form of persecution for Christians, as it also affects everyone in that region
5. Be ready to suffer yourselves
- a. Here and now... our present level of suffering in America... people being rude, insulting you, rejecting you
 - i) Workplace
 - ii) Street witnessing
 - iii) Neighborhood
 - b. Future in America... it's going to get worse and worse
 - c. Missionaries willing to go to hotspots with gospel... like Nik Ripkin did flying into Somalia... a little hell on earth