

Must-See Video: These Persecuted Christians and Ted Cruz See America's Religious Liberty Slipping Away

Ted Cruz made the most relevant pitch to evangelicals and faith-based voters this weekend, during his Rally for Religious Liberty in Des Moines Friday night.

Cruz, who has been outspoken about social issues, did not disappoint in his own speech nor the the "heroes" he surrounded himself with. Beyond the economy, education, or other concerns, Cruz said religious freedom is the pivotal issue of the 2016 election.

"You want to know what this election is about? " Cruz asked the crowd of 2,500. "We are one justice away from the Supreme Court saying 'every image of God shall be torn down.'"

Threats to religious liberty "have been growing for decades but never have the threats been greater to religious liberty than they are right here and now today," the Texas senator said. "There is a war on faith in America today."

"Is the next victim of persecution your pastor, your charity, where you volunteer your time at a crisis pregnancy center?" he asked.

Christians should not be demoralized, he said. "The greatest trick the left has ever played is to convince conservatives that Americans don't share our values. America is and remains a center-right country, we are and remain a country built on Judeo-Christian values."

And he put the blame squarely on Christians who stayed at home

on election day. "You wonder why we have a federal government that comes after our free speech rights, that comes after our religious liberty, that comes after life, that comes after marriage, that comes after our values?" Cruz asked. "It is because 54 million evangelical Christians stayed home [in 2012]."

"Well I'm here to tell you, we will stay home no longer," he said to applause. "The persecution of religious liberty ends today!"

Despite a well-delivered speech and laudatory remarks from talk radio host Steve Deace, among others, Cruz was not the real star of the show. That limelight shone for once upon those who too long suffered in the shadows: Christian victims of political correctness.

On the stage with him was a who's who of Christians persecuted, fined, bankrupted, and/or kidnapped because they refused to silence their witness for Christ: Dick and Betty Odgaard, Aaron and Melissa Klein, Barronelle Stutzman, Kelvin Cochran, Nagmeh Abedini, Philip Monk, and Blaine Adamson. Each shared their stories of the government – of the United States or Iran (quite a pairing) – squeezing them for their stand on behalf of Christ and Biblical morality.

"We could not celebrate a sin," Betty Odgaard told Cruz. You can see their inspiring testimonies below. Christian music sensations the Newsboys also performed.

Cruz continued the theme on Saturday at an event hosted by Americans for Prosperity – the Koch brothers group dedicated solely to economic issues – in Columbus, Ohio.

"I think my natural second bracket is the evangelical bracket," he told the (Raleigh, NC) *News & Observer*. "I think at the end of the day, [Mike] Huckabee and I come out of that bracket neck and neck." Polling in Iowa and South Carolina show the two candidates within one or two percentage points of

one another.

Entrance polls show that 57 percent of GOP caucus voters describe themselves as evangelicals.

Ted Cruz's opening remarks:

Dick and Betty Odgaard:

Nagemh Abedini:

Steve Deace with the "Heroes Panel":

Congressman Steve King, R-IA:

Steve Deace:

Ted Cruz's keynote speech: