

What Really Grieves Franklin Graham's Spirit

"If you're a Christian, stand up."

With those words, a God-hating gunman began a systematic killing at a community college in a rural Oregon logging town. By the time it was over, 10 people were dead, including the shooter, and nine others were horribly injured.

According to reports from at least one of the survivors, the shooter ordered students to stand up and state if they were Christians. "And they would stand up, and he (the shooter) said, 'Good. Because you're a Christian, you're going to see God in just about one second,'" the victim's father told a media outlet.

Other reports said those who said they were Christians were shot in the head, and those who said no or did not respond were shot in the leg.

Within five hours of the shooting, the president of the United States stood up and passionately pleaded for stricter gun control laws, saying, "Our thoughts and prayers are not enough."

Here's what I know: This was not about gun control. It was about a man filled with hate, especially for those who bravely and boldly confessed they were Christians. The shooter, who listed "organized religion" as a dislike on his Facebook page, perpetrated a hate crime against the name of Jesus Christ and those who follow Him.

The culture of intolerance and hate against Christians has been rising at an alarming rate across this nation. From the media, to the courts, to this current administration, there has been a flagrant, disturbing mockery of Christian values

and beliefs.

Those who adhere to the Bible's definition of marriage, who uphold the sanctity of life and who confess loyalty to Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven have become the objects of broadscale ridicule and even persecution.

Bakers in Oregon who refused to bake a cake for a lesbian wedding are convicted and fined a ludicrous amount of money by the state for standing by their sincerely held beliefs. A florist in Washington is pursued and fined by state officials for not providing services for a gay wedding. A Kentucky county clerk is sent to jail for refusing to give marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

In New Mexico, Colorado and across America, the intolerance and hate for followers of Christ has reached levels I never thought possible. Who would ever have thought that a U.S. president would light up the White House in the colors of the gay rainbow, flaunting an iniquity that the Bible says is an abomination?

Who would have thought that, here in our own country, there would be less empathy for Christianity than for any other faith? That God-fearing people who stand up for their biblical faith would be called bigots and be vilified while those who harass and mock Christians draw approval and applause?

As much as I am grieved over this increasing intolerance of the faith upon which our nation was founded, I realize Christians everywhere are under growing oppression and persecution.

Believers in the Middle East are dying because they hold fast to their faith. More than two-thirds of the Christian population across Iraq and Syria have been forced to flee by Muslim terrorists committed to killing people of the cross.

For more than three years now, American pastor Saeed Abedini

has been imprisoned in a notorious Iranian jail simply because he is a follower of Christ and refuses to recant his faith in Jesus. His wife, Naghmeh, who spoke to our staff here in Charlotte and at Samaritan's Purse in October, told us that the Iranian guards have beaten him severely—even tased him—yet he continues to lead other prisoners to the Lord Jesus Christ. Right now, it appears his initial sentence of eight years will be lengthened by Iranian authorities.

Countless other Christians are threatened, beaten, denied jobs, disowned by their families and persecuted in so many other ways because they follow the Savior and confess their allegiance to the one true God.

This should not be surprising. For millennia, Christians have been the target of God haters. Martyrdom has long been the powerful legacy of Christians who have refused to bow down to false gods and godless tyrants through the ages.

Jesus Himself said that “if the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ... ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18, 20).

Why is there so much hatred for Christians? Why are followers of Christ who seek to serve the poor, care for the sick, feed the hungry, and emulate the Savior so denigrated and disparaged around the world?

Ultimately, it is because men hate the name of Jesus Christ. They love darkness rather than light. They love their sin rather than the only one who can forgive their sin. They refuse to let go of their pride and self-sufficiency and admit there is only one way for sinful men to be reconciled to a holy God.

Jesus demands that we come to Him on His non-negotiable terms. He tells us that we are vile sinners in need of a Savior. To receive the gift of salvation, we must strip ourselves of any

claim to merit before God, and come to Jesus in genuine repentance and faith. Only then can the bad news of our sinful state be washed away in the Good News of forgiveness and everlasting life.

None of us know what the coming years will hold. I am concerned that the hatred toward the name of Jesus Christ and His followers will only continue to foster more ill will toward Christianity in our culture.

Here's what I know we can do: Like the courageous men and women at Umpqua Community College, in Roseburg, Oregon, we can stand up for our faith by unashamedly confessing Jesus Christ. They knew they would be killed when they stood and faced the gunman, and they stood anyway.

Would you stand? If you ever found yourself in a similar scenario, would you stand up for Jesus Christ? Would you acknowledge Him, even if you knew you would be killed? Decide in your heart now so that if that moment—God forbid—ever occurred, you would be ready. Jesus said, “I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him will the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8).

During the first three centuries of the church, Christians were severely persecuted by the Roman empire. One writer described the plight of the church this way: “Horror spread everywhere through the congregations; and the number of lapsi [the ones who renounced their faith when threatened] ... was enormous. There was no lack, however, of such as remained firm, and suffered martyrdom rather than yielding; and, as the persecution grew wider and more intense, the enthusiasm of the Christians and their power of resistance grew stronger and stronger.”

Would you stand?