

American Pastor Writes Heartbreaking Christmas Letter From Iranian Prison

American Pastor Saeed Abedini—a U.S. citizen imprisoned for his Christian faith—has written a heartbreaking letter from his prison cell.

He talks about both the difficulty of spending Christmas trapped in a cold dark prison cell and how his faith in Christ is carrying him through this difficult time.

He writes:

These days are very cold here. My small space beside the window is without glass, making most nights unbearable to sleep. The treatment by fellow prisoners is also quite cold and at times hostile. Some of my fellow prisoners don't like me because I am a convert and a pastor. They look at me with shame as someone who has betrayed his former religion. The guards can't even stand the paper cross that I have made and hung next to me as a sign of my faith and in anticipation of celebrating my Savior's birth. They have threatened me and forced me to remove it. This is the first Christmas that I am completely without my family; all of my family is presently outside of the country. These conditions have made this upcoming Christmas season very hard, cold and shattering for me. It appears that I am alone with no one left beside me.

But he also wrote what Christmas means to him in the midst of this turmoil:

Christmas means that God came so that He would enter your hearts today and transform your lives and to replace your pain with indescribable joy. ...

The same way that the heat from the earth's core melts the hard stones in itself and produces lava, the fiery love of God, Jesus Christ, through the virgin Mary's womb came to earth on Christmas to melt the hard heart of sin and wickedness of the world and removes them from our life.

The letter was sent to a family member. It was just last week that a relative was able to visit him, the first time a family member has been able to visit him in well over a month. He remains in need of medical care, suffering from increased pain from internal injuries sustained as a result of multiple prison beatings throughout the course of more than two years in a harsh Iranian prison.

Yet even in the darkest of circumstances the light of Christ shines through. He concluded his message with this charge to everyone who reads his words: "So this Christmas let the lava-like love of Christ enter into the depth of your heart and make you fiery, ready to pay any cost in order to bring the same lava love to the cold world around you, transforming them with the true message of Christmas."

Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, and their two young kids, Jacob and Rebekka, are spending their third Christmas without their husband and father. Naghmeh said:

Reading this Christmas letter is quite difficult knowing the harsh condition that Saeed is in and the adversity that he faces daily. Saeed ... I wish you could see the lives that are touched and transformed because of you standing strong in your faith in Jesus Christ. The kids and I miss you and cannot imagine another Christmas without you, but we are proud of you and your endurance. Don't give up hope. Many are praying and taking action to bring you home.

This Christmas, as we celebrate our savior, we must remember those who are in chains for their faith, in chains for the

very gospel—the good news—we are celebrating.

Please continue to sign the petition for Pastor Saeed's freedom as we work to secure his release. And pray.

You can download Pastor Saeed's letter here or read it in its entirety below.

Rajai Shahr Prison 2014

Merry Christmas!

These days are very cold here. My small space beside the window is without glass, making most nights unbearable to sleep. The treatment by fellow prisoners is also quite cold and at times hostile. Some of my fellow prisoners don't like me because I am a convert and a pastor. They look at me with shame as someone who has betrayed his former religion. The guards can't even stand the paper cross that I have made and hung next to me as a sign of my faith and in anticipation of celebrating my Savior's birth. They have threatened me and forced me to remove it. This is the first Christmas that I am completely without my family; all of my family is presently outside of the country. These conditions have made this upcoming Christmas season very hard, cold and shattering for me. It appears that I am alone with no one left beside me.

These cold and brittle conditions have made me wonder why God chose the hardest time of the year to become flesh and why He came to the earth in the weakest human condition (as a baby). Why did God choose the hardest place to be born in the cold weather? Why did God choose to be born in a manger in a stable, which is very cold, filthy and unsanitary with an unpleasant smell? Why did the birth have to be in such a way that it was not only hard physically, but also socially? It must have brought such shame for Mary and her fiancé that she was pregnant before marriage in the religious society of that time.

Dear sisters and brothers, the fact of the gospel is that it is not only the story of Jesus, but it is the key of how we are to live and serve like Jesus. Today we like Him should come out of our safe comfort zone in order to proclaim the Word of Life and Salvation though faith in Jesus Christ and the penalty of sin that He paid on the cross and to proclaim His resurrection. We should be able to tolerate the cold, the difficulties and the shame in order to serve God. We should be able to enter into the pain of the cold, dark world. Then we are able to give the fiery love of Christ to the cold wintry manger of those who are spiritually dead. It might be necessary to come out of the comfort of our lives and leave the loving embrace of our family to enter the manger of the lives of others, such as it has been for me for the third consecutive Christmas. It may be that we will be called fools and traitors and face many difficulties, but we should crucify our will and wishes even more until the world hears and tastes the true meaning of Christmas.

Christmas means that God came so that He would enter your hearts today and transform your lives and to replace your pain with indescribable joy.

Christmas is the manifestation of the radiant brightness of the glory of God in the birth of a child named Emmanuel, which means God is with us.

Christmas is the day that the heat of the life-giving fire of God's love shone in the dark cold wintry frozen hearts and burst forth in this deadly wicked world.

The same way that the heat from the earth's core melts the hard stones in itself and produces lava, the fiery love of God, Jesus Christ, through the virgin Mary's womb came to earth on Christmas to melt the hard heart of sin and wickedness of the world and removes them from our life. In the same process, the work of the Holy Spirit is a fiery rain of God's holiness and mercy that flows into our body, soul

and spirit and brings the light of Christ into us and through us making this dark, cold, wintry world into radiant burning brightness. He is turning our world into a world full of peace, joy and love that is so different than the dark, cold and wintry world that we used to live in. Hallelujah!

So this Christmas let the lava-like love of Christ enter into the depth of your heart and make you fiery, ready to pay any cost in order to bring the same lava love to the cold world around you, transforming them with the true message of Christmas.

Pastor Saeed Abedini

Soaking in the lava love of Christ