

Romans 8:28 at Work: Persecution Backfires on Terrorists in Iraq

Working in northern Iraq's Kurdish region day and night to help meet the needs of people displaced by the threats and violence of the terror group Islamic State (ISIS) in Mosul and other areas, members of an Iraqi ministry team recently came into contact with a colonel from the Kurdish forces battling ISIS.

The colonel was serving as a division commander of the Peshmerga, the Kurdistan Regional Government's armed forces, which have helped to slow the incursion of ISIS in its brutal push to establish a caliphate imposing a strict version of Sunni Islam. With the aid of U.S. airstrikes, the Peshmerga have also slowly retaken some territory. They are helping to secure the Kurdish capital of Erbil, where the ministry team assisted by Christian Aid Mission is supplying displaced people with food, clothing, beds and medicine.

The colonel had a few questions for the team members: What was the reason for offering all this aid? What was the motivation, what was the source of it?

"We spoke with him explicitly, explaining everything to him, saying that Christ taught us to love and express our love to the people in a practical way," said the team director, who informed the officer that all relief items had been donated or purchased locally.

The Peshmerga colonel, whose name is withheld for security reasons, was quick to respond.

"You see the Arabs around you in the Gulf states, which claim to be religious Muslims, have not sent us anything but

terrorists,” he told the ministry team members. “But you who follow Christ send love and peace and goodness to people every day.”

The conversation continued at length, the ministry team director said.

“After we had a long talk with him about Christ, he bowed and prayed, asking Christ into his life,” the director said. “And he said, ‘Today I am the happiest person! I’ve had the privilege of making this decision,’ and he received a copy of the Bible.”

The colonel’s experience was just one of many taking place in Iraq. In cities of refuge like Erbil for people displaced from their homes in other parts of Iraq, people are turning to Christ at a stunning pace. Tent churches are springing up in the makeshift camps. Under normal circumstances, mission strategies focus on how to proclaim Christ effectively, but the challenge now is keeping pace with the number who would receive Him, the director said.

“The greatest challenge in the ministry right now is not whether these people will accept Christ or not,” he said. “In all our travel to deliver the aid and preach God’s Word, we did not find anyone opposed to or rejecting our message. The challenge is how and when we will reach all those people with the message of salvation in the squares, sidewalks, roads, inside the tents and out, and everywhere.”

Christian Aid Mission’s Middle East director said that as a result of this trend, some church leaders and workers for ministry organizations are remaining in Iraq even as the cruel practices of ISIS—beheading Iraqi children who refuse to deny Christ in Qaraqosh and Western journalists elsewhere—gain greater notoriety.

“I think of workers who stayed behind in Mosul and the surrounding areas because there are so many who are receptive

to the gospel,” he said. “They are willing to risk being in an area under the rule of ISIS for the privilege of more and more fruit for Christ.”

Forced to trust God more than they ever have before, these Christians are growing in their relationship with God in ways they had never imagined, he said.

“I respected them before the Arab Spring because they were serving in Islamic areas, but now they are serving more and maturing even more,” he said. “We need to intercede for these workers. They are all always in danger. They need God’s power to show His love to the thousands of helpless people.”

When Iraqi ministry workers assisted by Christian Aid Mission obtain more funds for food, water, medicine and other supplies, they have the opportunity to demonstrate Christ’s love in a tangible way, he added.

“God has put within the hearts of thousands of Muslims a desire to read His Word,” he said. “We can be the instruments of providing them with New Testaments and audio Bibles.”

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