

Are You Willing to Preach the Gospel—Even When You're Persecuted?

I hesitate to share the following true story with you because I have feared for years now that it might cause a mindset where a man is honored for something that only Jesus deserves the credit for.

I believe that even in the lives of those that have been and continue to be martyred for the faith, there is a glorious and divine assistance that envelops these dear saints as they enter a more perfect union with the Lord by way of death to the natural body. Reference the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7.

Several years ago, I was on an overseas ministry trip. One evening, after I finished preaching in a church where several pastors had gathered, a visiting pastor who was in attendance that night asked me if I would be willing to speak at his church. My immediate response was that I would be honored to come to his church and to preach for him in the future. However, I was not aware that he meant that he wanted me to come and preach for him that same night.

It was already late and to be honest, I was tired after preaching as well as praying for dozens of people before the meeting was over. Even though this was the case, I felt prompted to go with this pastor and share the Word of God with his people. I wasn't sure when I would be in this region of the world again.

As we left the church building, we began to drive and ended up driving for well over an hour when the pastor announced to me that we had just crossed the border into his country. I will not mention the country here, but I will let you know that it is in a Muslim region where terrorist activity is common, even

unto this day.

We continued to drive for another 45 minutes or so, and then the pastor stopped the car and let me know that we would need to walk the rest of the way. I anticipated a brief walk, but I realized that we were in a wooded area with no structures in sight so I wasn't sure how far away his church actually was.

After walking for over a half-hour, we reached a very small steel building. The building was actually the back of a large transport truck that had the axles removed so it sat flat on the ground. When I walked in, I noticed that the only lighting in the facility were three kerosene-type lanterns placed throughout this small structure.

I also noticed that the people were packed in very tightly while sitting on the floor, as there were no chairs. The inside of this steel structure was very cold, as I could see my breath, and realized that there was no heating system. This environment had no comfort attached to it whatsoever, but what it did have was a room full of hungry hearts for Jesus!

As I stood in the center of the room that night and began to share as the pastor translated, I felt unworthy to even be there. I say this because I was made aware before speaking that this congregation of faithful believers had suffered ongoing persecution for years. I also knew that the pastor's children had been beaten with rods in the center of this village on multiple occasions because he refused to stop preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. I knew I was among the persecuted church and to say I felt very humbled and honored would be an understatement!

When I was about 20 minutes into my exhortation that night, I began to hear loud thuds against the side of the building. I immediately knew that something bad and dangerous was taken place. The pastor told me that a group of young men had obviously found out about the meeting and that they had

gathered outside and were throwing rocks against the building in order to intimidate us. However, he strongly encouraged me to keep preaching.

To be completely honest, I had several thoughts flood my mind. I realized I was in a dangerous region and situation and that God alone was my protection and strength. I also understood that within a matter of minutes I could be stoned, beaten or even killed for the gospel. Fear was clearly present, but grace was present all the more!

I also felt the sorrow of not seeing my wife and children ever again on this side of heaven. These thoughts caused my emotions to well up within me; however, something supernatural took place that night that has forever branded me with God's eternal purposes and supernatural provision, even in impossible situations!

As I continued to preach, I began to notice that no one in the room exhibited any fear whatsoever. They continued to sit and receive the Word of God with obvious hunger. I then noticed something I have never forgotten. I saw their faces in the dim light and actually witnessed what I can only describe as "eternity" beaming from their countenances. It was as if an actual glow was shining forth from each of them.

Upon observing this, everything changed. The next thing that happened is hard to describe. It was as if warm oil was poured over me and an unusual boldness came along with it. From that point until I finished preaching, all I can say is that the Holy Spirit possessed my being with great power, joy, grace, wisdom and more. I have said before and reiterate here that I have never preached like that before or after that experience.

As we finished the meeting that night and went on our way, we were not sure of what might happen next. The pastor instructed me to cover my face with my hands and to follow him. I actually anticipated having rocks thrown at us or even worse,

but for whatever reason, we were spared from any physical persecution as we walked back to the car that night. I'm not sure if the Lord dispatched angels to protect us, or if He withheld the group of men Himself, but we left that night rejoicing at what the Lord had done!

I share this story with you this week in order to encourage you regarding the reality of eternal life. May we realize more and more that we are made for eternity and that there is a place of intimacy with Jesus (even while in this present age) where we are enlightened to His glory and divine purposes.

It is in this place that we find and experience the deep faith and confidence I so wonderfully witnessed in the faces of the saints of God whom I was honored to exhort on this amazing night years ago.

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