

***Courageous Conviction (Part 3): The Persecuted Church- Acts 23:11-35***  
**Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading**

**Notes from the Sermon**

Sometimes our version of what it means to be a follower of Jesus gets a bit twisted. Our culture and context allows us to live out our faith in Jesus with relative freedom and therefore openness. When we gather on Sundays we don't face the threat of soldiers or militants storming our service to kill or kidnap people because of Jesus. While some of us may face forms of backlash when we express our beliefs, it's nothing compared to the plight of so many believers around the world. The subtle belief that can creep in to our understanding of faith is that our freedom and being blessed in the world is correlated to faithfulness and God's blessing. In other words, we actually turn the Gospel in to a form of karma, you know, if you are good and go to church then you will live the good life. And if you are bad, believe the wrong things, and fight against God then life will be miserable and broken. Suffering has to be a sign of God's disfavor and success proof of God's blessing. I've heard it in preachers' mouths as their churches grew more and more massive. Has to be a sign that they are doing and preaching the right things, right?

Sadly, the answer is "no", and all we have to do is read a few stories about persecution in the Bible, from history, or even in our current moment and we will see that this form of the Gospel does not work in contexts where the government or other groups are violently opposed to belief in Jesus, the church, and the spread of the Gospel. We gather in a fairly comfortable space, decent lighting, great music, in a room properly heated for the morning. Our brothers and sisters around the world are meeting under trees, in caves, or in mud huts. And in so many cases, their gatherings are an act of insurrection against regimes who have deemed their faith illegal, so they meet in secret, singing quietly and listening to whispered sermons. Others are worshiping in prison, sometimes awaiting their final fate. And still others worship this morning with chairs next to them empty because the people they love have been martyred for their witness of Jesus.

We need the persecuted church, because they remind us that the Gospel does cost us everything, yet Jesus is so worth it! The mark of the true Gospel is not prosperity and blessing, it is faithfulness in all circumstances as the Holy Spirit empowers and Jesus gives His presence to His church. The importance of the persecuted church shows up in a couple ways in our story this week. The first and obvious way is in the life of Paul. He has been beaten to the point of probably not being able to carry himself up a flight of stairs, and this done by people whose desire was to end him. He is in chains, and will remain in chains for the rest of Acts. He knows his life is in danger, either because his Jewish countrymen will get a hold of him and take matters in their own hands, or because the Roman government will decide he is a threat to peace. And all of this because Paul believes in Jesus and is preaching the resurrection of Jesus. All Paul has to do is renounce Jesus or promise he will go silent and he could go on his way. While Jesus does come stand next to Paul and promise he will make it to Rome, the promise does not include a guarantee that he will get there in a limo with some bling. He will suffer at every step of the journey, and the promise does not guarantee his escape from Rome, just that he will make it there and be able to proclaim Jesus in the capital of the Roman Empire. We will learn that along the way Paul will also share Jesus with the three most powerful Roman leaders in Palestine. This story, and other tales from the persecuted church remind us that God is sovereign and Jesus is enough. We need the persecuted church.

But this story is also tied to the reason Paul came to Jerusalem. A significant purpose in Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey was to visit churches he'd already planted to encourage them. Yet, he also had a mission and invited them to join. The church in Jerusalem was suffering, as believers in this city were being marginalized, ostracized, jailed,

beaten, and even martyred well before Paul showed up. So he spent time raising awareness of their plight and inviting these churches to pray and give to support their brothers. While the churches in Asia and Greece did have some levels of persecution, generally they were free and many of them were growing like crazy. These churches needed to know about and care for the church in Jerusalem. They needed the persecuted church to remind them of the cost and glory of the Gospel. Yet, the persecuted church needed them to pray, support, give, and even send people to care. This story is a good reminder of what missionary and author Nik Ripken said, "There is not the free church and the suffering church. There is just the church."

## **Bible Reading for the Week**

### Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Proverbs 22	Proverbs 23	Proverbs 24	Proverbs 25	Proverbs 26	Proverbs 27	Proverbs 28

Reading from this past week: Acts 23:11-35

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 24:1-27

## **Family Worship**

Song - *O Lord My Rock and My Redeemer*

<https://youtu.be/TpELMk4-3n8>

### Gospel Project

Unit: The People Prepare

Story: Esther saved her people

Big Picture Question: How should we feel when we sin?

Answer: When we sin, we should feel sorry that we have disobeyed God and want to turn from our sin because we love Him.

Scripture: Esther

### New City Catechism

Question #5: What else did God create?

Answer: God created all things and all his creation was very good.

Verse: Genesis 1:31

### Scripture

Acts 23:11-35

- Some really amazing things happen in this section of Acts. What do you most like about the story?
- What does Jesus promise Paul? What is not promised? Why do both of these matter in the story?
- What are some ways that we as a church can have a greater understanding, appreciation, and love for the persecuted church?
- How does the sacrifice and suffering of believers around the world help us understand the nature of authentic Christian faith?

### Prayer

\*Pray for the political divide in our country, for our leaders, and for healing.

\*Pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who are being persecuted and suffering. Make sure you find the post with resources to help with this.