

June 21, 2020

Dear Brethren and Friends,

We are seeing greater worldwide persecution and hostility against individuals that call themselves Christians. The following are news headlines from the past several months:

"Gunmen Kill 27 in Predominantly Christian Villages in Mali,"

"10 Christians, Including a 3-Year-Old Girl, Killed by Extremists in Nigeria,"

"Militant Extremists Kill More Than 80 in Nigerian Village,"

"Gunmen Kill 58 in Attacks Aimed at Christians in Burkina Faso,"

"Christian Boy, 16, Stabbed and Stoned to Death for His Faith in Eastern India."

These attacks are from extremists in predominantly Muslim-controlled regions. The hatred towards Christianity in these countries is nothing new, but this disdain is not just from Muslim radicals. Earlier this year, Open Doors, an international organization tracking Christian persecution, released their annual report, assessing 50 countries where Christians are at risk. 260 million Christians live in these territories, where they are subjected to high levels of violence because of their beliefs. Based on their practices, we can assume most of those tortured are only Christian in name, but groups that target Christians to persecute don't care. The tide of persecution is rising, and we must do all that we can not to bring unnecessary persecution upon ourselves.

We know that persecution will take place upon true believers as well. Paul warned Timothy of this, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:12-13). Christ, being perfect, suffered for the message and purpose for why He appeared to mankind. We must have the resolve to stand strong before adversity because adversity is drawing closer to each of our doorsteps.

The protection given to the descendants of Israel, because of Abraham, is quickly being withdrawn. Religious freedoms and tolerances, once considered sacred, are quickly and subtly being dismantled. It isn't hard to imagine, based upon how rapidly our world has changed recently, that the true body of Christ will soon find itself in the crosshairs of oppression.

Are we prepared to stand up for the same values Christ died for? If we consider ourselves part of the body of Christ, then each of us must be grounded in an affirmative answer. After warning Timothy, Paul continued with encouragement. "But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:14-15).

Taking on the name of Christ, following Him and desiring to have Him live in us is the most important decision of our lives. We cannot steer through the flood of deception that is drowning the world unless Christ is in our sights. With His guidance, the temporary suffering we might face today will never outshine the magnificence of becoming a child in God's Family. Suffering is human and passing. Paul experienced this throughout his life and found strength in it. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I

am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). God promised favor to Abraham and his descendants, the blessings of which we have experienced. But those blessings were for physical nations and are passing like all flesh. We must look to the promise that doesn't fade—eternity in the Family of God.

Many who prepare themselves for war will say that you don't know yourself until the heat of battle. Do you cower or fight in the face of adversity? We have the ability to know how we will react to spiritual adversity through our faith in God. Strengthening our relationship with God is a preparatory act that will increase our belief and conviction. Bible study, prayer, fasting and meditation, over time, will lead us to a place of strength and resolve. With strong conviction, God will be at our side when adversity confronts us. Christ gives us this promise. "But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11).

We do not need to focus on those things out of our control. God gave us His truth through the words of His Son and His many prophets to draw strength from. In focusing on that lasting power, we will outlast the short-lived powers of this earth.

With Christian love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Robb Harris".

Robb Harris