

Day 45 Why the Hate?

Matthew 5:10-11 (NTE) *Blessings on people who are persecuted because of God's way! The kingdom of heaven belongs to you. 11 Blessings on you, when people slander you and persecute you, and say all kinds of wicked things about you falsely because of me!*

Persecution because of Jesus has happened in the past, it is happening today and will continue to happen until Jesus returns. We have enjoyed seasons in our lives, where we did not feel the pressure of the enemy breathing down our necks, but we have also seen an increase of hostility towards Christ and His church. Have you ever wondered how there is tolerance for practically any kind of belief or belief system, yet when Christ is mentioned, resistance seems to be galvanized? In the public square there is very little tolerance (although tolerance is being championed) for God, the Bible and Jesus. You can call yourself anything, change who and what you identify yourself as, and you will be applauded and supported. Say anything about Christ that might sound offensive to any group, and cancel culture will pounce on you like a hungry lion on a vulnerable gazelle.

Why the hostility? Why, in any film or television show, are Christ followers portrayed as the most ignorant, hateful, bigoted, weak minded and wimpish group you can imagine. Most any other religion is painted as valid, amicable, understandable, kind, and even wise. **Jesus, however, seems to offend. Jesus stirs up emotions in others, even those who say they don't believe there is a God. Why the anger, why the blatant and open hatred?** If Jesus is seen as only a good teacher who had some nice things to say, why the opposition? Jesus said, ***"love your neighbor as yourself;"*** that's good right? Jesus said, ***"Bless and do not curse. Treat others as you want to be treated. Repay evil with good. Do good to your enemy. If your enemy is hungry, feed him. Forgive and give to those in need."*** There is a whole lot more, but all those things are good; so why the animosity?

If Christ is love personified, should He not be received and celebrated? Yet, He was nailed to the cross. They released a murderer while they shouted for Jesus to be crucified! Jesus will make you uncomfortable, Jesus will make you mad and Jesus will offend you. Jesus is not deliberately offensive, but when His Light exposes darkness, there will always be a reaction or a response. ***"And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. 20 All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed."*** (John 3:19-21 NLT) There is no in-between with Christ. You cannot have a little bit of Jesus and a whole lot of something else. Jesus is either Lord or He's not. Because of Christ's holiness and purity, it exposes the wickedness in the human heart and that causes people to stumble. **Every religion cannot be equally true, just like you cannot dial any phone number and reach whoever you want. You have to have the right number to reach the right person.** Jesus said, if you want the Father, He (Jesus) is the Door. He is the Door, the Way, the Truth and the only Path to eternal Life. That is an exclusive and a potentially offensive statement. **If you do not go through the Door, which is Christ, you cannot come to the Father. By making this statement, Jesus excludes everything and everyone else.** I cannot come to the Father through my own goodness or good works. There is no other mediator, not Buddha, not Muhammad, not Hinduism, or any other religious act or action. It is only through Christ and by Christ! These words are offensive and divisive, and people respond accordingly.

We face rejection and persecution because, if we are true followers of Christ, then we are part of God's house, God's temple that is being built. If the world rejected the Foundation of God's building, they will also reject the building. Peter writes and says, ***"You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of***

God's temple. **He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor. 5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.** What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. **6 As the Scriptures say, 'I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.'** **7 Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.'** **8 And, 'He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.'** **They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them."** **1 Peter 2:4-25 (NLT)**

It is impossible to reject Christ and to accept His people. It is not so much that people reject you for being you, people reject you for identifying with Christ. How do we know that's true? Because everybody is encouraged to be themselves and find their truth, whatever that truth might be. **People do not reject me, they reject the Jesus in me. People do not reject you, they reject the Jesus in you!** Before you and I ever came on the scene, Jesus was hated. So when you experience disapproval and are being ostracized or even hated for the sake of Jesus, remember they hated Him first. **"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. 19 The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you."** **(John 15:18-19 NLT)**

None of us wants to be hated! We all have a need for acceptance, validation and love. However, as Christ followers we cannot accept lifestyles and behaviors that are contrary to the way of the cross. Jesus said that we will be hated because of Him. **"Everyone will hate you because of me. But if you remain faithful until the end, you will be saved."** **(Matthew 10:22 CEV)** We should not find it surprising, as if something strange is happening to us when we are hated for the sake of Christ.

We should be surprised if we live our lives and there is no opposition. **If you find no opposition it simply means you are going with the current. There is no effort to be made in swimming downstream with everybody else, but change direction, and you will find the push of the current.** There is a wide current of culture that wants to squeeze us into its mold. It will force you to bow down, it will attempt to change your language, it will reassign your identity and attempt to create in you an appetite for things in complete opposition to a Holy God. **The predominant Culture of our day is attempting to redefine what is good and what is bad.** They will call that which, in God's eyes is evil; they will call it good. If we attempt to live righteously, they will call that evil. Good can only be defined by God because He is the only One Who is perfectly good and just! **"We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous. 13 So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you."** **(1 John 3:12-13 NLT)**

Doing what is righteous will sometimes produce the hatred. No one that has ever lived was more righteous and pure than Christ, yet He suffered greatly, so we suffer because we are not greater than Jesus. To think we will not suffer for His sake, is to say that we are better or greater than Jesus. We might be called names or even suffer loss; "Bible thumper, weirdo, Jesus freak, science denier, idiot, dummy, hater." No matter what name or insult you are being called, it is all pressure to make you bow to the culture of the day. They called Jesus names. **"Disciples are not better than their teacher, and slaves are not better than their master. 25 It is enough for disciples to be like their teacher and for slaves to be like their master. If people call the head of the family Satan, what will they say about the rest of the family?"** **(Matthew 10:24-25 CEV)**

This might not feel like a reason to rejoice, but Jesus said we must rejoice when we experience this kind of persecution. **The growing hate against us is an indicator that what our hearts long for is around the corner.** The good news in all of this hate, pressure and even persecution, is two fold. First, it shows that we belong to Christ; we are His living stones being built into God's spiritual house. Christ is our identity! Secondly, the more the hate grows, the closer we are to receiving what has been promised. All this animosity is birth pains, which means our redemption is closer and closer than before. ***"But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come. 9 'Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers. 10 And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other.' (Matthew 24:8-10 NLT)***

Why all the hate? Because what we have been expecting is almost here. So, live out the Culture of the Kingdom. Be unafraid to give God all the glory. Be bold in your witness for Him, regardless of the cost. Pray for the Kingdom to come and His will to be done! Live righteously and holy, and be the salt and light that we were called to.

Reflection and Prayer:

- Take a moment and pray through today's list. (Source: opendoorsusa.org)

9 - NIGERIA: More Christians are murdered for their faith in Nigeria than in any other country.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - President Muhammadu Buhari**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 206,153,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 95,358,000 (46.3%)**
- **MAIN RELIGIONS - Islam and Christianity**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA?

Violent attacks from Islamic extremist groups (Boko Haram, Hausa- Fulani Muslim militant herdsman, ISIS affiliate ISWAP) are common in the north and Middle Belt of Nigeria—and they're becoming more common farther south. Militants often murder Christians or destroy their property and means of livelihood. Men and boys are particularly vulnerable to being killed. The women and children they leave behind are often displaced to informal camps, face sexual violence, and are even at risk of abduction and forced marriage.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for the Lord's grace and comfort for believers who are displaced, have lost loved ones and their homes, and are struggling with trauma.
- Ask the Lord to be near to abducted believers. Pray for their release or rescue.
- Pray for President Muhammadu Buhari and his government— pray they will take decisive actions to protect all citizens.
- Pray that Open Doors' partners will strengthen the church to testify and share the gospel in very difficult circumstances.

10 - INDIA: This is the third year since 2019 that India has ranked in the top 10 of the World Watch List.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Religious nationalism**
- **LEADER - Prime Minister Narendra Modi**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 1,383,198,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 67,356,000 (4.9%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Hinduism**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN INDIA?

Hindu extremists believe that all Indians should be Hindus, and that the country should be rid of Christianity and Islam. To achieve this goal, they use extensive violence, particularly targeting Christians from a Hindu background. In their villages, Christians are accused of following a “foreign faith” and often physically attacked. If they don’t “re-convert,” their community may boycott them, with a devastating effect on their ability to earn income and buy food.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Praise God that many are coming to faith in India through miraculous healings and the witness of India’s Christians. Pray many more will come to know Jesus.
- Pray for protection for our brothers and sisters, especially new Christians and those in rural areas living in isolation.
- Ask God to continue to work through Open Doors’ partners to bring practical support. Pray for their wisdom and energy, particularly during the pandemic.

11 - IRAQ: In Iraq, Christian converts from Islam are not allowed to marry Christians— the law still considers them Muslim.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - President Barham Salih**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 41,503,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 175,000 (0.4%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ?

After years of violence, an uncertain peace has come to Iraq—but 2020 saw recurrent violent protests against the government. The instability is a catalyst for the ongoing persecution of Christians. Believers from a Muslim background often keep their faith secret, because of the pressure and threats they’re likely to receive from extended family members, clan leaders and the wider society. Additionally, Islamic extremists remain active in Iraq, attacking and kidnapping Christians.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for a breakthrough in Iraq and an end to the waves of violence. Ask God to instill peace in the hearts and lives of Christians.
- Pray that God would turn the hearts of Iraq’s leaders to Him. Pray for wisdom as they lead their country.
- Praise God for the amazing opportunities Christians have initiated to share the gospel. Pray for a holy thirst and hunger among the people of Iraq for God.

12 - SYRIA: Syria’s civil war marks its 10th year in March 2021.

- **SOURCE OF PERSECUTION - Islamic oppression**
- **LEADER - President Bashar al-Assad**
- **TOTAL POPULATION - 18,924,000**
- **CHRISTIAN POPULATION - 677,000 (3.6%)**
- **MAIN RELIGION - Islam**

WHAT IS LIFE LIKE FOR CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA?

Syria's ongoing civil war has turned the country into a breeding ground for the persecution of Christians. The economic crisis caused by COVID-19 has exacerbated the unrest, which was beginning to lessen until the pandemic hit. Many Christians are still internally displaced or remain as refugees in other countries as a result of war and rising Islamic extremism. In areas controlled by Islamic extremist groups, public expressions of Christianity are banned; most churches have been seized or destroyed.

PRAYER POINTS:

- Pray for displaced Syrian Christians to return to their homes and livelihoods. Ask God for continued restoration for those who have already returned.
- Pray that Syrian believers would be the light of hope in Syria, providing comfort to those suffering from trauma or from a lack of food and resources.
- Pray for the Word of God to saturate the land of Syria and that people will find new joy, strength and hope through Scripture.

42 - CAMEROON - The Islamic extremist group Boko Haram is active in northern Cameroon and has created a hostile environment for Christians. Christians have been kidnapped and killed, and churches were targeted and attacked. Because the government is often focused elsewhere, it's given an opening for Boko Haram to expand and continue attacks that target Christians. In Cameroon, it is also very difficult for Muslims who want to convert to Christianity.

43 - BHUTAN - In Bhutan, the government assumes that all citizens are Buddhist. Anyone who converts to Christianity is watched with suspicion, and efforts are usually made to bring them back to their former religion. Religious leaders, the local community and family often cooperate in this. No Christian church in Bhutan has official government recognition—all Christians who worship together are technically worshipping illegally.

44 - OMAN - All Omani citizens are assumed to be Muslim. Islam is the state religion, so the level of persecution for Christians in Oman depends on if they are migrant workers or Omani. Local converts from Islam are under the most pressure—their families and communities press them to return to Islam. Converts can be expelled from their families and lose their jobs and children. The government largely tolerates foreign Christian communities, but greatly restricts and monitors their gatherings.