

“Making A Difference!”

Isaiah 43: 1-7 and Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+43:1-7)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=luke+3:15-17;21-22)

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

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Don't Audit Life! Show up and make the most of it now!

Several years ago I was fortunate enough to be invited into the home of a wonderful Christian family who live in Bethlehem. I will not mention their names because I do not want by any stretch of the imagination to place them in danger. They live in enough danger as it is. Getting to their home was a “James Bond” adventure. We went at night. We changed taxi cabs twice. Finally, he met us with his car and took us to his home. After being served refreshments, this mild mannered couple began to explain to their visiting American brothers and sisters in Christ what it was like to live under persecution.

He told of constantly being under surveillance by the Israeli police authorities. Since his business was dealing with tourists, he often took jewelry or wood carvings to the various embassies in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. He knew he was followed. His car was stopped and searched numerous times. He himself was almost always forced to submit to the humiliation of a strip search. If on the odd occasion, his car was stopped when his wife was with him. Then, she too was strip searched by 18 and 19 year old young men. These are not young radicals as the news media would have us believe. They are a middle aged couple. He is handicapped, a victim of childhood polio. Yet, he and his family are treated as dirt by the occupying army.

That evening the worst story was not told by him. When his wife spoke of her recent attempt to worship at the Church of the Nativity on Christmas Eve, we were all in tears. She began her 15 block journey to the Church over 3 hours before the worship was to begin. On each street corner check points were set up by the occupying army who was out in full force. She and her sister were ignored as they waited in each line. Then, they were frisked by the young men. Then they waited some more. They were called names. These decent, mild mannered Christian women were subjected to harassment at each street corner. Finally, ten blocks from the church and 3 hours into their journey, they begged a soldier to let them through so they could get to Christmas Eve worship on time. The soldier sneered and told them to come back next year. Their trip home was just as long and just as humiliating.

Christians around the world are experiencing this kind of treatment and worse. Yet, nothing seems to be done about it. Michael Horowitz of the Hudson Institute, an American Jew, received the 1997 Wilberforce Award. His dedication to spreading the message that worldwide acts of violence and targeted persecution against Christians are escalating at alarming rates is a signal flare to all of us who feel snug in our suburban safety. When asked why a Jew should work so long and hard on behalf of Christians, Horowitz suggests that...”No man, not me, or any of us, can honorably sit out more than one holocaust per lifetime. You get a grace period for just one, and after that you are on the hook. And, thus we are all on the hook for this one” When Michael Horowitz tries to get the press to listen to this issue, he gets shrugs. “I talked to a reporter for a major newspaper, who told me that my description of anti-Christian persecutions had to be wildly overdrawn, couldn't be true. I asked how he knew this to be so and he answered: ‘Well, I haven't read about it in my paper.’ Similar conversations with other reporters have provided insight into why, as Steve Forbes has written, ‘One of the most under-reported stories today is growing persecution of Christian minorities in a number of countries.’ Why it is so, and why we must change this reality, adds another profoundly significant dimension to our campaign.

The News Media ignore the reality of Christian's who are persecuted.

In short, today's media, whether from the right or the left, find it hard to believe that Christians can possibly be the persecuted rather than the persecutors. Remember that line from the *Washington Post* describing America's evangelical community? ‘Poor, uneducated and easily led’ was the definition the *Post's* reporter and editors blithely tossed off as self-evidently true. Or remember what Michael Novak has described as America's ‘moral-cultural’ sector...[has] been patronized as polyester bigots against whom a modern, thinking, caring culture must protect itself.’ After all, aren't Christians the people who burn people at stakes and might just do it again if given half the chance?

We could all float away on the rivers of ink used to cover the atrocities in Darfur, Africa - and rightly so, for the atrocities committed there shock the consciences of us all. The notion of covering a story where Christians are the deliberately chosen victims of the bad guys, however, just doesn't compute to most mainstream reporters or the editors who decide front-page make ups and assign lead stories for TV newscasts.

What does the American Church have to say?

It is one thing for the elite press reporters of the world to be silent. It is something else again when the Christian church is so slow to respond, seemingly uninterested and unconcerned by the systematic atrocities being visited upon Christian brothers and sisters worldwide.

- * How can we stand unmoved when, in the Sudan, an open-air market sells 6 year old Christian children for the price of a cow?
- * How can we stand unmoved when radical Muslim regime of the Sudan targets its own Christian villages for carpet bombing runs and siege tactics, finally confronting the Christian survivors with the ultimatum, "convert or starve"?
- * How can we stand unmoved when in Saudi Arabia the government pays bounties for identifying Bible study groups in order to arrest and torture those who attend?
- * How can we stand unmoved when the official line of the Chinese government sanctions the imprisonment and physical torture of Christians from any active lay member to Catholic bishops and Protestant clergy who are not a part of the state approved church?
- * How can we stand unmoved when our own ambassador to China responds to a question about the systematic persecution of Chinese house church Christians by saying: "What's a house church?"
- * How can we stand unmoved by the reality that when a tourist crosses the border from Hungary into Romania, he is asked three questions by customs officials? "Do you have any Bibles?" "Do you have any drugs?" "Do you have any porno?"
- * How can we stand unmoved when Christians are being persecuted and driven out of their Palestinian homeland?

We have a Scriptural mandate to stand up and make a difference!

Why do I bring this issue up at this time? We just read Holy Scripture about Jesus' baptism by John. John was calling the people of Israel to a new ethical lifestyle. John was challenging the people to live according to God's values. In an authentic sense, John was saying to the people, "Stand up and be counted for God!" Jesus identified with John's mission and was baptized to begin His ministry on earth. Jesus stepped forward to begin to lead God's people:

- Who were willing to live by a different moral code;
- Who were willing to walk a different path; and
- Who were willing to stand up and march to a different drummer!

John himself was willing to stand up for God. John challenged the elitist and morally corrupt government of Herod. King Herod had murdered his brother so that he could marry his brother's wife. John stood up and said this action was morally reprehensible to God. Herod took offense and threw John in jail. John the Baptist knew there were consequences for standing up for God. But, John stood up and spoke out.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ we must stand up in solidarity with anyone who is being persecuted, especially our Christian brothers and sisters who are undergoing intense persecution because of their faith. We must stand up and speak out on their behalf. We must not wait in the shadows for others to step forward and make it easier for us. Like John the Baptist, we must stand and speak to our government officials. God is calling us to stand up and speak out on behalf of our family. If we stand, we can make a difference!

The “A”, “B”, “C”, of standing up for Christ!

Solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world will come when we take the time to become **A**wareness; make **B**ehavioral changes so that we can support; and **C**hallenge each other to a daily Christian lifestyle in support of all Christians everywhere!

Awareness

If the world's press will not tell the story of the persecution of our family, then we must take up the project: teaching and telling each other and the world. We must become aware. There is an interesting phenomenon in the modern media. Usually, one story will cause multiple stories. The media feeds upon itself. Back in the 1980's we saw this phenomena first hand. *USA Today* printed a story about our Golf course Worship service. Before any of us knew what was going on, CNN News was videoing it. Reporters from *The Free Press*, *Golf Magazines*, *The London Times*, even *Star* were interviewing us. Radio talk show hosts called from around the world. The media was feeding upon itself.

We need to raise the awareness! We need to fill in the gaps! We need to educate each other. Toward that end, I am asking that you to search the internet, pay attention to news reports, and listen for radio or television news stories on Christians who are persecuted. When you find a story, email it to us at the Chilson website. We will build an informational web page for all of us to become aware!

Awareness will not just educate us to the plight of others! It will also help us keep our lives in perspective. When I am aware of a six year old Christian child being sold into slavery, then my problems take on a different level of intensity. We have a tendency to think that we are the center of the universe. We often think that our problems are the most important problems for God. We need the awareness of the plight of others to help us get and keep a realistic perspective on our blessed life. Instead of negatively wanting more, we can positively give thanks to God by working on behalf of those persons who really are in trouble!

Behavior Changes!

There is nothing like a good crisis to raise our prayer life to a new height. We do not want to waste a crisis! God can bring much good out of a crisis if we allow the Spirit to work in our lives. So keep in prayer the members of Christ's family around this globe who live under daily harassment and persecution. The Bible teaches us that our intense and consistent prayers on behalf of our Christian brothers and sisters will be answered. Holy Scripture teaches us that the fervent prayers of God's people are effective.

And, let us also put feet to our prayers by writing, calling, and e-mailing our government officials. When you see an article that disturbs you: Send it to the Free Press! Send it to our government officials! Contact them and let them know of your concern! Put feet to your prayers for others and let Christ bless you with the knowledge that you are making a difference with each seed that you plant!

Challenge for living a daily Christ like life!

C. S. Lewis teaches that the small decisions in life set up the big decisions. Dave Ramsey teaches that making small steps in the right direction transforms your life! How we daily act in the little things sets up how we will act in the large matters of life. I have often wondered if I were confronted by the choice of renouncing Christ or dying a martyr's death, just what would I do. I hope I know! But, none of us truly know how we will react until faced with the situation. I do know that each daily decision I make helps move me toward greater depth of commitment or a shallow faith that will not stand up. I urge you to become involved with Christ this year so that your faith grows deeper, your courage grows stronger, and your willingness to celebrate Christ in your life is more and more public.

Let us not take our religious freedom for granted! Let us stand up and be counted on behalf of our brothers and sisters around the world. Let us engage life one step at a time making a difference for Christ!

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