

Study Notes based on Sunday morning 24 March 2019

Persecution - Matthew 10:17-23; Acts 7:54-60

1. Consider what Jesus had to say about persecution: Matthew 5:11-12; Matthew 10:17-23; John 15:20. If we don't experience persecution are we not 'doing it right'.
2. Read the Acts passage and consider Stephen, the first Christian martyr. What did he do/say that led to his death?
3. Consider the statement Graeme attributed to his parents' generation – 'what the church needs is a dose of persecution.'
4. Tertullian in the third century AD commented – 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.' How do we react to this expression? Is it always true?
5. Consider present day persecution. There were more Christian martyrs in the twentieth century than in all the previous centuries combined. It is claimed that 245 million Christians face some form of persecution today. How do you respond to the word Christophobia? In what ways is it manifested in our country? (Check out TheStopCampaign.org and download briefing paper for definitions and info re government led review).
6. What should we be praying for our persecuted brothers and sisters?
7. In the aftermath of the Christchurch killings, Archbishop Justin Welby declared that hatred of Muslims is blasphemy. "Hatred of Muslims denies and blasphemes Christ. Those who co-opt Christian language and history for hatred commit blasphemy." How do you respond?
8. Is it ever right to seek special privileges in society/or law for Christians? Thomas Helwys, around 1600 when nonconformists were being disadvantaged by the state, argued 'For men's religion to God is between God and themselves. The king shall not answer for it. Neither may the king be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.'
9. Graeme argued very strongly that the way to see church growth, and even the way we will attract opposition is to speak the gospel. Do you agree? Christians often quote Francis of Assisi – 'preach the gospel at all times and if necessary use words.' In the last few weeks there has been a backlash from some evangelicals which goes like this – 'preach the gospel at all times and of necessity use words.' What do you think?

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