

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them - those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also.” Hebrews 13:3

Sunday 13 November is the **International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church**. Every year, an average of 160,000 Christians worldwide die as martyrs for Christ.

This year Christian brothers and sisters have been persecuted for their faith in Christ: in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Burma, Red China, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Laos, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” 2 Timothy 3:12

Perhaps we will never suffer the vicious and violent persecution which Christians in Zimbabwe and Northern Nigeria are suffering at this time, but if we remain faithful to the Lord, then there will be times when we will be misunderstood, slandered, discriminated against, threatened and abused.

Jesus said: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet, because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you.”* John 15:18 -19

When the Lord warned His disciples of coming persecution (Matthew 16:21-26; 26:31-35), they responded with disbelief. Because they did not believe Christ’s warning, they did not *“watch and pray.”* As a result, they denied the Lord and ran away (Matthew 26:40-46; 56; 60-75).

The Apostle Paul strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to remain true to the Faith by teaching: ***“We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God.”*** Acts 14:22

Jesus taught that many believers would forsake Him (Matthew 24:9-10) when trouble or persecution comes because of their superficial commitment. Those with no roots in God's Word would quickly fall away (Matthew 13:21).

In response to the clear warnings of these Scriptures, and in the light of the increasing hostility towards Christianity in so many circles, it would be wise for every Christian to study what God's Word has to say about persecution.

"And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." Revelation 12:11

Christians can overcome satan by the Blood of Christ's Atonement, and by the Word of God, not only the Word known and memorised in their heart and mind, but their living testimony of applying the Word of God to every area of life. Jesus taught that we should not be afraid of those who can only kill the body and after that can do no more. But the Lord Jesus told us Whom we should fear. We must fear God, Who after the killing of the body has power to throw both body and soul into hell forever (Luke 12:4 -5).

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to Salvation for everyone who believes." Romans 1:16

You Can Change the World Through Prayer and Action

In the daily battles of life, one can be tempted to give in to depression or fatigue as we see sin and compromise increasing. Yet, there is hope: God is sovereign. Nothing is inevitable except what God has decreed. And there is great power in prayer. Nothing is beyond the reach of prayer - except that which is outside of the Will of God.

Christians are not doomed to defeat, but called to victory. If God can actually change us, then He can use us to change some part of this world. Christians can change the course of human

history by prayer and obedience to God. The Bible is full of example of believers *“who through faith conquered kingdoms...”*

Hebrews 11:33 and recent history confirms the power of prayer:

Shortly after I was converted to Christ early in 1977, I remember a missionary from Overseas Missionary Fellowship urging us to pray for God to open the doors to **Red China**. Even as we prayed my heart was filled with unbelief - how could a Communist country like China ever be open to the Gospel again? Yet, we have seen Mao Tse Tung die, his little “

Red Book

” discredited and the doors to China have gradually opened since. Not that China is at all free - the brutal massacres of thousands of unarmed civilians in Peking’s Tianamen Square have shown that Communism is still in control in China.

Brutal slave labour camps, and ongoing harassments and persecution of the House Church movement make it clear that the battle for the soul of China is still raging. But whereas in the past people questioned if the church had even survived the *“Cultural Revolution”* and vicious persecution in China, now we know that there are over 100 million Christians in China.

When I first started praying for **Mozambique** in 1981, it was firmly closed to the Gospel. And many of my friends thought I was foolish to try to enter Marxist Mozambique on my motorbike, loaded with one thousand Gospels and New Testaments in Portuguese and the

Jesus

film. Yet, God opened the doors time and again and we managed to deliver many tons of Bibles and relief aid and show Christian films throughout that war torn Marxist country, which is now open to the Gospel.

As the persecution of Christians in **Angola** intensified under the Marxist dictator, Agestino Neto, we prayed for God to intervene. Shortly after Neto declared that: “

Within 20 years there will not be a Christian or a Bible left in Angola! I have destroyed the Bible!”

he died in mysterious circumstances on an operating table in Moscow. Today the church is flourishing and thriving in Angola and we have delivered many thousands of Bibles to believers there.

When I first saw the **Berlin Wall** in March 1988, and the many crosses in memory of those who had been shot in the back, whilst fleeing socialism, I wept. I prayed, as had so many others, that

God would break down that evil system even as he had demolished the walls of Jericho. Yet, how amazed I was when our prayers were answered in 1989, and millions poured across the border for the first look at the other half of their city and country.

When my wife, Lenora, and I visited **Romania** for Easter services in 1989, we experienced the oppression of Communism and witnessed the tyranny of Ceaucescu. Along with millions of others we prayed. And before the year had ended, we saw the dictator Ceaucescu executed, Communist symbols smashed and God's Word openly proclaimed in the public squares of Romania.

Albania had declared itself to be the first fully atheistic state in the world in 1966. Yet, in answer to prayer, the Communist government of Albania was forced to re-open many churches in 1990. Oppression continued but tens of thousands packed the few open churches each week until the Communist regime was overthrown.

When my father-in-law, Rev. Bill Bathman, and I drove into Albania, in 1993, we were inundated with ministry opportunities and people hungry to hear about the God Whom they had been forbidden to even whisper about for all those decades of Communism.

In **Nigeria**, where the 12 Northern states have declared Islamic Sharia Law, Muslims have burned down many hundreds of Christian churches and have killed thousands of believers in recent years. Yet, tens of thousands of Muslims are coming to Christ in Nigeria and the churches are dynamic.

In **Sudan**, I have had the privilege of ministering in many churches which have endured repeated aerial bombardments by the National Islamic Front government. We have flown far behind enemy lines to the Nuba Mountains - an island of Christianity in a sea of Islam. The Nuba church in Kauda was bombed 18 times in a 12 month period. We went there to encourage them, actually they encouraged us. We not only found the church building still standing, but the church was packed to overflowing for Sunday worship services! They were not going to allow 18 brutal air raids to keep them from their highest priority: to worship our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Episcopal Church of Sudan in Kotobi was attacked by helicopter gunships and burnt to the

ground, 23 August 1996. Five civilians died in the hail of bullets and shrapnel from these gunships. We had the privilege of conducting worship services in the charred remains of the building, and, after the church was rebuilt, conducting many seminars and services in this building which is a testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ is building His Church," *and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!*"

The birthplace of Christianity in Moruland, in Southern Sudan, is Lui Cathedral. In 1965 the cathedral was burned down by Muslim government forces who also destroyed the hospital and school buildings. Yet all these buildings were later rebuilt by the local Christians. Then again in the 1980's the Arab army swept over Lui and occupied the mission station putting an end to all education, medical and spiritual work for the second time.

When I first saw Lui, in May 1997, it had just been liberated from the Muslim government forces by the SPLA Resistance movement. The signs of the Arab occupation were everywhere trenches, gun emplacements, pill boxes, mine fields, the debris of war, a newly painted mosque and many vandalized graves. There were a shocking number of broken crosses in the graveyard by the cathedral. Rev. Jeffery Kayanga pointed out the huge tree Laro: *"The first Christian missionary, Dr. Kenneth Fraser, chose that tree to start the first Moru church under because it was the same tree under which the Arab slave traders had bought and sold our people as slaves."*

By the slave tree were the graves of the early missionaries and Christians and beyond the graves the remains of the church that they had established. The cathedral in Lui was restored, and soon packed to overflowing with thousands of enthusiastic Christians. The hospital was renovated and the school restored. Then the government of Sudan Air Force bombed this community on 10 separate occasions, severely damaging the church for a third time. Yet, Fraser Cathedral in Lui has been restored yet again. It is the church that will not die. A dynamic testimony to the vibrant faith and resilience of the persecuted Christians in Sudan. We have had many seminars and services in this church that has been bombed 10 times and rebuilt time and again.

This year, please remember the persecuted and pray for them at your church or school.

Pray for the courageous Karen Christians suffering under the Buddhist military dictatorship in **Burma**

. Pray for Christians suffering under the brutal Communist dictatorship in

North Korea

. Pray for the over 1,000 Christians imprisoned for their faith in

Eritrea.

Pray for the millions of Coptic Christians suffering under militant Islamic persecution in **Egypt.**

Pray for the many Christians in

India

suffering under vicious militant Hindu Nationalists. Pray for the Christians suffering violent Islamic Jihad in

Indonesia

. Pray for the Christians in

Laos

, who have been tortured, beaten and attacked by the Communist authorities. Pray for the courageous Christians in

Vietnam

, for healing, courage and grace as they suffer violence at the hands of the Communist authorities. Pray for Christians in

Turkey

,

Turkmenistan

and

Uzbekistan

, for strength to endure persistent discrimination and persecution. Pray for the Christians in

Zimbabwe

who have had hundreds of churches bulldozed and burned down by the Communist government.

Pray that the persecutors of the church may be exposed and opposed. Pray that the persecutors may be brought to repentance, or that they may be removed. Pray that the persecutors may fall into the traps that they have dug for others, that their declarations may come back to haunt them, and that their actions against God's people be exposed, confounded and confused.

"When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous, but terror to evil doers." Proverbs 21:15

Is your church planning to observe Sunday 13 November 2011 as a Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church?

If so, please visit www.idop.org and www.frontline.org.za websites for resources, information and prayer requests for the persecuted.

What Can We Do?

Be informed . *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...”* Hosea 4:6

Be interceding. *“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them...”* Hebrews 13:3

Be involved . *“Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”* Matthew 25:40

Read books on the persecuted ; such as: Foxes’s *Book of Martyrs*; *Tortured for Christ*; *Going Through - Even If the Door is Closed*; *Faith Under Fire in Sudan*; *In the Killing Fields of Mozambique*; *Holocaust in Rwanda*; *Slavery, Terrorism and Islam*.

View, or screen, films on the persecuted ; such as: *The End of the Spear*; *Sudan-The Hidden Holocaust*; *Terrorism and Persecution- Understanding Islamic Jihad*; *Behind the Sun* ; etc.

Mobilise your family, friends and congregation to pray for the persecuted.

Write letters to the editor of your local newspapers or magazines. Write to your elected representative, urging pressure on the persecutors and assistance to the persecuted.

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves...” Proverbs 31:8

Your partnership could make the difference.

“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them.” Hebrews 13: 3

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