

**"How Long, O Lord?"**  
**(Psalm 119:81-88)**  
**Pastor Peter Yi**  
**July 9, 2017**

**(Psalm 119:81-88)**

<sup>81</sup> My soul faints with longing for your salvation,  
but I have put my hope in your word.  
<sup>82</sup> My eyes fail, looking for your promise;  
I say, "When will you comfort me?"  
<sup>83</sup> Though I am like a wineskin in the smoke,  
I do not forget your decrees.  
<sup>84</sup> How long must your servant wait?  
When will you punish my persecutors?  
<sup>85</sup> The arrogant dig pits to trap me,  
contrary to your law.  
<sup>86</sup> All your commands are trustworthy;  
help me, for I am being persecuted without cause.  
<sup>87</sup> They almost wiped me from the earth,  
but I have not forsaken your precepts.  
<sup>88</sup> In your unfailing love preserve my life,  
that I may obey the statutes of your mouth.

It's remarkable how much time we spend waiting. The all-knowing Google tells us that the average person will spend 5 years of their lives waiting in lines. Six months are spent waiting at traffic lights, but beyond that we spend a lot of our lives waiting for the next thing. We're waiting to reach the next level of schooling, to get married, to get a job, to get pregnant, to get out of debt, but there's another kind of waiting as well. And that's the waiting for deliverance or some kind of relief. It's a painful waiting. It's waiting for a sickness to go away, for our bodies to be healed. It's waiting for a broken relationship to be mended. It's waiting for a wandering child to come back home. It's waiting for the salvation of a friend that's been forever resistant to Christ. It's also the waiting that Christians go through for persecution to end. That's what I'd like to speak about today -- the persecution of Christians.

Persecution is not a fun subject to talk about, but something that's necessary for all Christians to know. It's important for Christians of all stripes, of all ages, to know what is going on in the world in regards to Christians who are being persecuted. For many of the children who are worshiping with us, this might be the first time you've heard a sermon like this. I don't want to shield you from this hard subject, because children also go through persecution.

Persecution is when a person, or a group of people, or even a government treats another group of people badly because of their faith. Persecution doesn't only happen to Christians. It can happen to almost any group of people, but for today, we are talking about persecution against Christians.

Today's passage is the prayer of one of God's people who is being persecuted and I won't be looking at the passage in detail, but the author is crying out to God for help because he is going through some very dark and deep, life threatening persecution.

Persecution against Christians occurs for several reasons.

Sometimes it occurs because wherever Christians are, they do good work. You might wonder, why in the world would people persecute Christians for doing good work? Here's an example. Many Christians around the world are involved in rescuing people from different forms of slavery. (Janelle) Slavery is a very greedy, money making business, which often times involves kidnapping, selling, and imprisoning people. When we hear the word slavery most of us probably think about the African slave trade that occurred in Europe and in America and since slavery was abolished in the 1800's, we may think that it's no longer a problem, but there are more people in some form of enslavement today than ever before. The selling and trafficking of people is alive and well.

So, almost exactly a year ago, two workers with a Christian group in Kenya called International Justice Mission (IJM) were murdered. Why? Because they were helping to rescue people who are enslaved and they were helping the Kenyan government find and put in prison those who are doing these things. So if I'm in the slave business I wouldn't be too happy if Christians are trying to shut my illegal money-making business down. That's an example of really bad persecution.

In many countries you have a very strong dominant religion like Hinduism in India or Islam in Muslim countries and the society and families are very against a person converting to Christianity. In fact in the Koran, the Islamic scriptures, it is written that those who leave Islam must be killed.

*I remember one story I read many years ago. There was this man in India named S-- Singh and he like most Indians, he was raised to be a Hindu. But as a teenager through missionaries, he became a Christian. His family, especially his father was not happy about that at all, so he said, you either leave Christianity and come back to Hinduism or you leave the home. His faith in Christ was so undeniable that he decided to leave home. Even though he left the home, he still lingered around the neighborhood, and from time to time he would meet his younger sister. On one occasion he met his sister and she had brought him food. And he was starving because he had not eaten in many days. So he thought that maybe my parents have softened up. He gladly accepted the food and ate it. But soon after he began to feel very sick and realized that the food was poisoned and he almost died. In many countries, even in the ones where our church is working and serving, it is illegal to convert people to Christianity.*

Many of these countries put in very unreasonable laws to prevent Christian churches from growing. For example in India, they are trying to make house churches illegal. Only churches that have an official church building are allowed to exist.

On the persecuted church website called Opendoors, the top ten countries where they persecute Christians are:

North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Eritrea.

- North Korea is number one again, as it has been since 2002.
- Worldwide, persecution of Christians has risen for the fourth year in a row, with Asia, particularly, showing a rapid rise.
- Pakistan rises to fourth in the list with levels of violence even greater than northern Nigeria.
- As Hindu nationalists batter the churches, India climbs to its highest ever ranking of 15.
- In Laos, Bangladesh, Vietnam and tiny Bhutan, things are getting more difficult for Christians.
- Buddhist nationalism returns Sri Lanka to the top 50.
- Islamic extremism fuels persecution in 14 out of the top 20 countries, and 35 of the top 50.
- Sudan rises to five as President Omar al-Bashir seeks to fulfil his 2011 boast, 'Now we can impose Sharia here.'
- Turkey rises to 37 as President Erdogan uses 2016's failed coup to purge opponents and push the country towards increasing Islamisation.
- Wars in the Middle East continue to catch Christians in the crossfire: war-torn Yemen returns to the top ten, while in Syria and Iraq Christians continue to be targeted by Islamic militants.
- And still, the church is growing.

(<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/trends.php> )

This is the world that has always been and still is today. Christians from the very beginning, from the persecution of our Lord, have in every generation, also been persecuted.

Here are some things we are to learn from this.

**First**, persecution is the normal Christian life, not an abnormal one. Persecution is the usual, not the unusual for the Christian. Here are some verses:

Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. (**John 15:20-21**)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (**1 Pet 4:12-13**)

This is the first thing to keep in mind. We will be persecuted. The life that we live is, often times, offensive to an ungodly world. Expect some sort of persecution at work, for holding onto Christian morals -- for refusing to drink, for refusing to lie and steal. Even for treating people in a way that others would not treat them.

**Second**, remember to pray for and support those who are being persecuted. How? We should pray for their deliverance.

...for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. (**Philippians 1:19**)

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I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.  
(Colossians 4:18)

But, that is not all we pray. We should pray that their persecution may serve as an opportunity for Gospel advancement.

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (**Ephesians 6:19–20**)

We should pray that our persecuted friends won't cave under the pressure of persecution, that God would sustain them.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (**Philippians 1:20**)

We should try to provide whatever form of aid that we can. The very first church ever was in Jerusalem and it was flourishing and doing well, but in just a few years persecution broke out in the city; we don't know exactly how it happened, but the persecution led to the church and its members suffering financially. It would be safe to assume that their suffering led to poverty. Who knows what it was – a tax on Christians, perhaps the loss of jobs, probably discrimination at the market place. Maybe their vendor licenses being revoked. So, wherever Paul traveled he took up an offering to help the believers in Jerusalem. So, we must do the same. We must come to the aid of the church in persecuted places. It is not right that we eat three times a day when in many places our brothers and sisters are not eating for days. Here's the example Scripture. Paul writes to the Corinthian church about the churches in Macedonia:

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. (**2 Corinthians 8:1–5**)

First, expect persecution, pray for those being persecuted and...**Third**, allow their lives to be an inspiration to take your life that much more seriously. Their lives are meant to be a challenge to our lives. I remember hearing this statement. I don't know if it was actually said by someone, but I like it nonetheless.

The church in the West prays for the relief from persecution in the East, but the church in the East prays for the persecution of the church in the West. Or something like that. What does that mean? We in the west, with our wealth and prosperity, look upon the church in the East with pity, that they don't live in a freedom of religion country, and are not able to drive nice cars like we do. And so, we pray that they would be released from their persecution so that they could be like us. And the persecuted church in the East looks at the comfy faith of the church in the West and it looks more like a thin veneer. And so, they pray that we would experience some persecution, to toughen us up, to give us a little more backbone. Again, I don't know if this was actually said, but I sense it is nonetheless, very true. So, the persecuted church in the East and even in our country must serve as inspiration to be even more faithful to Christ our Lord.

There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. (**Hebrews 11:35–38**)

Then just a couple verses later, the author writes,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (**Hebrews 12:1–3**)

Don't close your eyes and ears to the suffering church. Read every article, every testimony you can get your hands on. Allow these stories to cause you to pray for them and to grow in your faith.

**Finally**, if we ourselves are going through the suffering of persecution, we are called to wait—to wait in a way that honors God and never discredits or brings shame to Christ. We are to patiently, and faithfully, and prayerfully wait, as we call upon the Lord. This is what these verses in Psalm 119 are meant to be. They are a prayer of groaning and longing and waiting for God's deliverance. Sometimes the deliverance comes. And sometimes God, in his loving sovereignty, allows his people to endure and succumb to the persecution. He allows them to die for their faith, and to later receive the crown of righteousness in heaven.

We remember that the persecution is a normal occurrence. And then we pray that we won't cave. We pray that we'll still be able to advance the Gospel. And we pray that our lives will serve as an inspiration to others. And most of all we remember Jesus, who was persecuted, he was hated, and the greatest most awful injustice was placed on him.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (**Hebrews 12:3**)

Let's pray.