

2019 International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

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Preacher: Voice of the Martyrs

[0:00] We're thankful to be, what a fun journey we've had through our time and marriage, getting to be a part of the museum.

If you don't know about Museum of the Bible, if you're ever in D.C., you should go. It's a half a billion dollar project located two blocks off of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. It's a 430,000 square foot museum dedicated to the Bible.

So if you have a chance, the Green family from Oklahoma City was blessed to see them on board this project, and they're a very generous family. When we had an opportunity, we were actually living in Oklahoma City, and I would commute to Washington, D.C.

I spent way too many miles in the air in a single year, but we knew God was shifting seasons and had an opportunity to actually a God thing got called by a friend of mine who worked with VOM. And we're from Skytook. I'm from Skytook. My wife's from Bigsby. Don't hold that against either one of us, but it was a real privilege. So when we started doing our research, you know, I found out that Tom Holland was on the board for Voice of the Martyrs.

[1:23] And I was like, I love Spider-Man, and I think that he does a great job. And then I met Tom and realized it wasn't the same guy, but our Tom Holland has fought crime, right?

And I'm just saying, if you think about it, have you ever seen Tom Holland and Spider-Man together at the same time? Okay, so it's plausible. It's plausible that he could be Spider-Man.

Now, it's actually a privilege to get to work alongside you, Tom. Um, Mike, as I've been preparing for weeks for this thing, um, Mike puts a lot of work into this.

This is hard. This is hard to get up and the prep time that it takes. And my wife, we've been calling it a sermon. This isn't a sermon. This is just me getting up and talking. Mike's actually done sermons. So I want to applaud you for the work that you put into all of the sermons that you do for us, brother. And then my last, I just want to honor these people. So I have some of my teams in the back. You guys know one of them. And Kayla, yeah, she's mad now. It's good. Kayla McNeil is my project coordinator. So Kayla's on our team. So Kayla, yay.

[2:29] Yeah, you guys know her. And then I think she came just to be with Kayla to heckle me this morning. But we have our social media specialist came. Her name is Megan Conley. So she came from Nashville to join the team.

So actually what's fun today is while we're here praying, Megan actually, she's like, I'm going to be on my computer a little bit. And she will be because we're actually facilitating a 24-hour prayer meeting on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter right now that we expect hundreds of thousands of people to be impacted by today.

So you guys get to join that chorus of really people around the world praying for persecuted Christians. You know, I've been a little nervous getting up here to speak. I had an opportunity many years ago to speak in South Korea.

And they have a really interesting tradition at their church. So I think, actually, I think we walked from this side. You go to the stage and they consider the pulpit holy. They consider preaching of the Word of God a really holy thing.

And so before you got on stage, you had to take your shoes off. So you take off your shoes and get up. And they had slippers. And you put slippers on and get onto the stage. So all of us that were on the stage had to do that thing.

[3:38] Well, Highland Park takes this to a different level. What I understand is that lightning struck above the pulpit one time. Is that true? Okay. So if you guys see me quickly ask Mike to come on

stage, it's because the hair on my arm is starting to stand up and I've said something wrong.

So, okay. Hey, let's stand. We're going to read our three main scripture verses this morning. You'll see them on the screen here. So we're going to start. Our first one is John 3.16.

For God so... Join me and let's say these together. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3.16. And then the next one. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am always to the end of the age. Matthew 28.19-20. And then our last one.

Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated since you are also...

[4:48] Hebrews 13.3. God, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen. You can be seated.

This is actually kind of cool because John 3.16 is exactly where Mike would be today. Right? So it's neat how that worked out. So that's where we thought we'd start.

You can still talk about John 3.16 next week though. Please feel free. I give you that. Isn't this a great gift from God that he gave us? He gave us eternal life even though we don't deserve it.

So really we have to start there in our Christian life, right? That's where we should begin. This is one of the very first verses that they teach kids. All of our kids have gone through Awanas, and this is the first verse that you have to know.

But it does lead us to a second verse or a second series of verses that are important. So if God's given us this gift and we are Christians, we should go and be a part of his great commission.

[5:50] So if you go, yeah, go ahead and switch to that next one. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And I like this, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

So it's not just go and make disciples. There's actually that now they're going to teach them. And that's what we're going to talk about, these believers who are doing this today. So we are commanded to make disciples and observe Christ's command.

Now, that should apply to us in Bartlesville, right? We should do that to our neighbors that we're around, that are in the community every day, and also around the U.S.

But what's cool is that we also have an opportunity to be a part of that great commission effort around the world with those advancing the gospel in the hardest place in the earth for Christianity. And we're going to talk about how we can do that today by reading Hebrews 13.3. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them and those who are mistreated since you also are in the body.

[6:58] If I'm honest with you all, we've been Christians for many years. I was saved in second grade. My wife was saved in junior high. This was an area of Christianity that we were blind to.

Some of you have always known about VOM. We didn't know much about VOM or even talking about persecuted Christians. So this has changed our walk, changed our lives.

And it's just having awareness of this part of the body of Christ. You know, today's International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, but it's a little bit of a misnomer.

There is no persecuted church. There is one church, right? There are Christians who live in harder places than us that are being persecuted for their faith, but we are one church.

And we should lift them up. Consider this idea. If you had a brother or sister that was a Christian living in Iran, living in Pakistan, how would you support them?

[8:01] Now, some of you, if you don't like your brother or sister, this one's not for you. Just tune out. My kids can't talk about this. Actually, if your brother or sister's in this room, and just don't look at them, some of you will go, good, I'm glad that, actually, I'm glad Emma's in nursery today.

That's good for us. One big way is prayer. You would pray for them, right? Actually, we're going to talk about the main idea, and support's a piece of it, but prayer is the biggest component.

All day long, whenever we ask these Christians, these believers on the ground, what's the one thing you need, the first thing that they say is prayer, every time. Above all else, they want prayer.

So we gave you, actually, to this end, we gave you all, everyone that walked in, got a global prayer guide. If you didn't get one, we'd love to give you one. Thanks to Tom for actually supported this effort today, and bought a kit for the church.

The other thing that's in here, that this journey shouldn't end today. So inside, there's a card, and if you just pull it out, we're happy to take these up from you today, or you can pop them in the mail, so find me, or Kayla, or Megan, and we'd love to take this.

[9:15] If you don't get the magazine, we'd love for you to get the magazine for free. So there's just a card in there that you'll just fill out your name, and we'll start sending you the magazine. But this is a great way to continue to pray for Christians.

We love doing it. People love days, so we love praying today, but we want you to pray all through the year, and this is a great way to do that. All of us as Christians are striving, or we're striving to be more Christ-like every day.

That should be the goal. Every day, we learn something new. What I love about learning these stories of these persecuted Christians is their lives should be like mirrors to us.

And as we look at them, we look and see if we have those same characteristics in us. And we're going to talk about that this morning. Our main idea, I wanted to do a handout. I wanted to be like Mike, like the old Gatorade slogan.

I wanted to be like Mike, so I did a handout for you guys. The main idea for the day is you can be a part of God's great commission right where you are by praying for and supporting your persecuted Christian family and observing Christ's commands modeled by these exemplary men and women of faith.

[10:30] So it's going to be a little different today. You're not going to hear from me the whole time. We're going to spend some time in prayer. So here's the way this is going to go. We're going to talk about our Christian brothers and sisters in three different countries today.

And then we're going to talk about a principle from their Christian walk that we could use more in our lives. Actually, if I could say it a different way, that I can use more in my life. We will pray for those believers, and then we're going to prayerfully examine our lives and using the biblical principle from the story to see how we could be more Christ-like.

Ultimately, these types of things, if we really look at their stories, they should encourage us to share Christ where we are. We want to pray for them, and by praying for them, we're going to advance the gospel in these nations that they're in.

But we should be a bolder witness for Christ when we see these believers. We get testimony after testimony up at VOM of this happening. We had a 13-year-old girl write in, and she said, I felt called to lead a prayer group at my school, but I was nervous to start it.

And she said, but then I remembered reading the magazine, and I remember hearing these stories of people who were willing to give up their lives and be tortured for their faith, and thought to myself, if they can do that, why can't I start a prayer group?

[12:01] And every time I read it, I go, I can be better. I can do more where I am. And so that's my hope out of today. So we will invite you.

We're going to have three different times of prayer. We invite you to come down and get on your knees in front of the Lord and pray for these believers. That's what we're going to do today. If you're willing, we would love that. So we're going to start, and I think some of you may have seen this video last year.

If you have, we're going to look at it from a little different perspective. So if you've seen it, I want you to really watch the faces of these believers, but let's watch this video on our Christian family in Pakistan.

And please remember, we are praying for you. So it was actually just with Brother Fassel, who was blurred out in that.

We actually have to blur him out because the work he's doing is very, very dangerous. Fassel like a castle, he says. That's how you remember his name. That brother is just filled full of joy.

[13:17] And all his congregation, they're filled full of joy. And honest to goodness, what you saw there where it said, we're praying for you, today they prayed for you guys. They prayed for American Christians.

It really is a remarkable thing. It's a remarkable thing that they would do that. So he is, yeah, if you meet Fassel, yeah, you can't help but smile the whole time you're with him.

At all times. I've never seen him off. He's just, he's a neat guy. Great brother in the Lord. So the question for us is, have we had joy in all circumstances?

Here's what the Bible says. From Nehemiah 8, the last part of 8.10. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. Philippians 4.4 says, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I will say rejoice. It says it twice. 1 Thessalonians 5.16-18. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

[14 : 23] This is something that we fight with as we have medical issues, as we have issues with jobs, as we have just hard times come upon us here.

Do we have joy in all the circumstances? It doesn't say have joy as long as things are going okay. It says all the time. All circumstances. I heard an amen. We got one.

Okay? So let's take some, I'm going to invite Brother Holland up to lead us in prayer for Pakistan, but this could be a time, if you've struggled with having joy in the hard times, this is the time to give that to God and get better.

So I'm going to let, I'm going to let him lead us in prayer. Like we said, we open this up for you guys to come up and pray. Dan's going to play in the background, and we're just going to spend a little time. Jeremy asked me before we started, he said, do you want to say anything or just pray?

And I said, I'll just pray. And now I'm reneging on that. I hope I'm not in trouble. If you would like to come forward though and kneel now, it's a time to do it.

[15 : 34] You can obviously pray from there, but while you were coming, I was in Pakistan a few years ago at the VOM, and we ministered to a number of people, and they ministered to us.

But one was a Christian girl, a teenager, who worked for an Islamic man, who had an Islamic son in his early 20s, and he really fell in love with this girl.

He wanted to marry her. But he said, you have to convert to Islam. And she said, I can't do that. I cannot deny my Lord. This went on for some time.

Finally, the boy gave up, and in frustration, poured acid in her face, horribly disfiguring her, lost one eye, the other damaged.

When we went to see her, her house was five feet from the open sewer of Faisalabad, which was a huge city. We actually bought them a house, a meager house, but away from the sewer system.

[16 : 42] And I'll never forget this. We showed her pictures of persecuted young people from Africa, Asia, around the world, and she started crying. She said, I thought I was the only one.

I didn't know other people were persecuted. I thought it was just me, and I kept asking God, why just me? What have I done? It was quite a moving, moving time for all of us.

Let's pray for Pakistan. Most gracious God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, we bow our heads and we bow our hearts for this embattled nation, this nation that is largely held captive by the spirit demons of Islam, a few Hindus, and a few Christians, and yet the Christians there, as persecuted as they are, are salt and light.

They bring Christ to this imprisoned nation held in slavery to their religion.

Lord, we are praying from the comfort of the middle part of America in a beautiful building, but today, somewhere in Pakistan, a Christian lost his or her life because they would not say the words, I deny Christ.

[18 : 32] Lord, do we really come to grips with that thought? Mere words, I deny Christ, and they refuse to the point of death, and more will die tomorrow, and more will die Tuesday.

Lord, we pray for the spirit of God who is the spirit of joy, to embrace every believer in Pakistan to make sure they know they are not alone, that they're being prayed for.

Lord, in all my travels to some 40-plus countries where persecution reigns, I've never had any of them ask me for anything material. The only question they have is the church in America praying for us.

And what do we tell them? What do we tell them about that? Pray for the persecuted of Pakistan.

They are our brothers and they are our sisters, and they are in the center of your will, Father.

The very center of your will. They're the church of Smyrna in the 21st century. And Smyrna received no condemnation because they were all believers and there is no condemnation for those who are in the Lord.

[20 : 00] So, Father, I lift up Pakistan. I pray for the believers there. I pray for the unbelievers that they will see a great light, the light of Christ, and that they will follow the example of the Christian neighbors, the Christian people in that country who make bricks, who sew clothes all to try to eek out a living to eat one more day.

May we be committed to praying for them and for the joy that comes with knowing you. And I ask all this in the sweet and holy, precious name of Jesus.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Let's talk about Nigeria.

I want to read this to you and then I'm going to have Tom come back up and share it. We're going to share a couple of stories with you. So, this is actually in your global prayer guide. Nigeria is sharply divided along religious lines with a Muslim-dominated north and a majority Christian south.

Foreign missionary activity in the Muslim-majority north has declined significantly over the past 10 years as a result of the emergence of the Islamic militant group Boko Haram.

[21:36] Based in the north, Boko Haram is affiliated with Al-Qaeda and has also aligned itself with the self-proclaimed Islamic state or ISIS. Although Boko Haram appears to weaken in the northeast, it is believed to be the source of increasing attacks on Christian villages by a group of militant Fulani herdsman, a tribe known for its adherence to strict Islam.

So, it is, Nigeria is a very difficult place. We're going to talk about North Korea, which is always, they say that that's the toughest place on earth to be a Christian. Nigeria, it's hard to put a number to it because people are just being killed and displaced all over Nigeria.

And what they're trying to do is move them out of the country systematically, try to move them to the south. It was really remarkable that they, so we're going to talk about some attacks here in a moment, but in the middle belt of Nigeria now, they're seeing attacks which they haven't in the past. It would be like if you'd imagine if there was fighting and they were trying to get rid of Christians in northern, like in the panhandle, and then they're trying to drive them out down into Texas.

That's about the same, that's a good way to look at it. And while they were fighting in the north, they'd never been in Oklahoma City. That's kind of, if that gives you a little bit of the geographic idea.

[23:01] So I have not had the privilege to be with Nigerian Christians, but Tom has. So I wanted you to share a story from Nigeria if you would, sir. I should have checked with Jeremy.

That was half my talk. Nigeria, I've been there. Nigeria is an enigma.

We think of it, of course, as an indigenous country, and it's a large landmass in Africa, huge country. The truth is, Nigeria is made up of over 400 tribes.

They each speak their own language. There's some 1,500 dialects in the country. And as Jeremy said, most of the northern tribes are Islamic.

Most of the southern tribes call themselves Christians, but I always put quotation marks around that. Not all Islamic tribes are violent toward Christians, but some, and Jeremy mentioned too, are very violent among Christians, and thousands have been martyred for their faith, even launching attacks on churches during Sunday services.

[24:32] And a few years ago, we saw a video on that in here. I don't know if you remember or not. It was very moving. There's a problem, though, in Nigeria, beyond the tensions between the north and the south, between the Islamic fundamentalists and the churches, and they practice what is called syncretism, which is a blending of traditions, of theology, of mythology.

They incorporate tribal practices into their worship. And, of course, you don't blend anything with the worship of Christ. We don't do that.

We worship Christ. When I was in Nigeria, this is my story. When I was in Nigeria, I had a driver in an armored vehicle.

That's the only way you can get around. And I asked him whether he was Islamic or was he a Christian.

And he said, well, I'm Yoruba. That's a tribe, a large tribe. So he said, obviously, I'm Christian because I'm part of the Yoruba tribe. And I said, well, let's talk about that for just a moment.

[26:04] They speak very good English, by the way. The British were in there for years. And I said, what is it that made you a Christian? And he said, I was born into a Christian tribe.

And I said, have you ever been born again? And he said, what? I said, have you ever been born again or born from above?

And he was unfamiliar with that term. That's the problem with a lot of the tribes in the South that are referred to as Christian tribes.

And it reminded me millennia ago when Constantine declared in the Roman Empire, he was the emperor, from henceforth, everybody born into the Roman Empire is a Christian.

Now, you know, that might sound good to some people. Well, we just increased our church roles tremendously. But it was the darkest days of the Roman Empire.

[27:11] So you didn't no longer have to be born again. You just had to be born. And they lost all that sense of being born from above.

And this is one of the problems in Nigeria. It's a major problem as missionaries go in there and want to give the good news concerning Christ.

And they say, I'm already a Christian. Well, you've got to dig deeper into that. Now, let's be sure of this, though. There are true believers in Nigeria by the millions.

And they are a joy to be around and to work with and to worship with. They are strong in their faith. And they are facing an onslaught of deadly persecution that is almost unmatched in the world. Not quite. North Korea being one of those.

[28:16] Thousands have given their lives rather than to deny Christ. They'd rather die than to deny the Lord that saved them.

And it's an interesting pattern in Nigeria. After a church is attacked, people killed, perhaps the pastor executed, they come back together for three reasons.

those that survive come back and they pray for the families of those that were killed the previous Sunday. They pray for those who were wounded the previous Sunday.

and then they pray for those who attack them and pray that God would open their eyes to the truth concerning Christ Jesus.

It's amazing to behold. And this is the pattern among the true believers in Nigeria. of these men and women and young people need our prayers every day because they face attack and threats every single day.

[29:45] Thank you. Thanks, Tom. Last, whenever I started last year, the first story I really got to wrap my head around was of of a Nigerian Christian.

So this was the Fulani people that we're talking about. By the way, it's not the Fulani people. It's Islamic militants inside the Fulani. There's actually Fulani coming to know the Lord every day.

That's what's interesting in this whole landscape of what he's talking about. They don't hate those people. Neither should we. They don't hate the Fulani. They don't hate the Muslims. They love the Muslims and they want to see them come to Christ.

And so last summer there were a series of attacks throughout the world. In the world of Nigeria, they displaced 10,000 to 12,000 Christians, killed 200 to 500 of them.

And one of the stories that we got back was of this young man named Dalo. Dalo was burned over most of his body. I mean, honestly, if we're thinking about it, this young man's about Hope's age.

[30:49] He's Jack's age. We all have had kids this age. So he's in the hospital recovering shortly after the attacks.

Here's what he, one of our workers overheard him praying this, praying that God would heal him, that God would protect his family, and here's the one that just is like a knife in the gut for me all the time, and that God would forgive those who did this to him.

I'm not having that reaction right away, you guys. Honestly, if I'm thinking in my flesh, which I do all the time, that's a hard message.

What a testimony. What an example for us. It's just amazing. In Colossians, it says, put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

In Matthew, for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses, and then Jesus, as he's on the cross, out of Luke, Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[32:33] That wasn't, that wasn't to other Christians, that was, that was to the people who were murdering him. Have you had something, and I'm going to tell you guys, I've had something where I've not forgiven someone someone for something stupid?

Amen? Have you guys been there, or is it just me? No, we all, we all have, right? So what, what a great example from this young man. So as we pray, we're going to pray for Nigeria, and then I would encourage you to pray if there's some unresolved conflict in your life, that would, you would use this as a mirror to forgive someone else.

So I'm going to ask the McNeils, Cameron and Kayla are going to come up and lead us in this time of prayer. And again, we just invite you guys to come down and pray up front, pray where you are. Let's just spend, let's spend some time focusing on Nigeria and forgiveness.

Thank you. All right, let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, days like this, it's hard not to be emotional, but it's also hard not to feel almost helpless.

[34:01] But as Jeremy points out, we are in fact not helpless to help our brothers and sisters in Christ around this world. We know that we can consistently come to you in prayer.

We can consistently think about these believers that just live in these harsh conditions that we here in the U.S.

struggle to fully comprehend and understand the amount of persecution, the amount of faith that these brothers and sisters have to live for you, to be a light in these countries that seem so dark and lost, yet we know that your word is still finding a way to shine light, is still finding a way to reach lost people.

We pray for these Christians in Nigeria that as they are continually attacked, they are continually brought down, they are continually tried to be destroyed, yet we know that they are still furthering your kingdom, that your message is still getting out and not returning void as you promised.

We pray that you would continually give them strength, give them comfort, help resources be able to get to them and help them just know that no matter what they are going through, no matter how dark it can get, no matter how hard it may seem, that you are there with them.

[35:34] That we, as Christians around the world, as brothers and sisters, take time to remember to pray for them, that they would just feel your presence.

It's your name we pray. Dear Lord, we also want to lift up our hearts and the hearts of our brothers and sisters around the world.

We find ourselves denying forgiveness to others for silly little things, and our problems are nothing compared to our brothers and sisters who are losing loved ones, who are losing jobs, who are losing their homes.

I pray that you would help us to inspect our heart as they do theirs and I pray that you would help us to forgive those that have wronged us, Lord. You've given us instruction time and time again in your word that if we don't forgive those who trespass us, that you will not forgive us of our trespasses. And I pray that you would help us keep that at the front of our mind as we go throughout our day when somebody cuts us off in traffic, Lord. Maybe they're in a hurry to get somewhere important, so help us not to get mad and hold that against them.

[36:44] And we pray for the believers around the world who have all these terrible things done to them and yet the first thing they do is pray for the people who are wronging them. And they find the joy in their heart to lift up these people and pray that you'll soften their hearts too.

Lord, I pray that you will help us use their example in our lives every day. And we thank you for setting the example for us on the cross as you prayed for the people who were sacrificing you, who were trying to rid you of the world.

Lord, we thank you for coming and for saving us. In your name we pray. Amen. Amen. So our last focus country is North Korea.

I'm going to read this to you again from the Global Prayer Guide. To the communist government's secretive nature, little is known about the current status of Christians inside of North Korea.

Pyongyang, the capital, was known as the Jerusalem of the East in the early 1900s because of its 2,000 plus churches.

The communist government that's in place now depends on something called Juche, the North Korean religion that requires worship of subservience to the Kim family to maintain stability.

[38:09] And Christianity is considered subversive. Anyone discovered to be a Christian or in many cases discovered to have had contact with Christian ideas is considered an enemy of the state.

The gospel is still proclaimed in North Korea through various creative means including shortwave radio, and bold evangelists who risk their lives smuggling materials in the country.

Actually, one of the most interesting things I've seen in a long time is we actually have a sister mission in South Korea and one of the things that Voice of the Martyrs does is we literally bomb North Korea with Bibles.

We will send a balloon up that will go up to 25,000 feet and it will distribute Bibles around the country and it spreads them out so far that the soldiers can't get them all. So we've had to become creative with North Korea, but there are we hear very few stories of faith. What you're about to see is actually a very very rare story that actually includes China and North Korea. So let's watch this. We were recently with one of the people that Pastor Han led to the Lord. [39 : 47] This lady got smuggled out of North Korea into China and is now living in South Korea through really a series of miracles. This is a real story.

Pastor Han, Song Chul, Miss See You, I was just telling you about. They all made a decision to follow Christ at all costs. You know, it's easy to watch these stories and to be scared. Be scared it's going to happen to you. But that's not what this is meant to be. So if you go back to the verse that we started with, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life, we have something that's worth the price. Dalton Thomas, the author who's a missionary in the Middle East, said we're not all called to a martyr's death. Many of us are not, but we are called to have a martyr's mentality. When we count the cost like that, it gives us an eternal perspective. We're not here long, guys. In the grand scheme of eternity, we are but a vapor. [40 : 54] Out of the Gospel of Luke, starting in 25, it says, Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king going out to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and deliberate whether or not he is able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000?

And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

We should count the cost, and we should consider Christ worthy enough for us to endure persecution, which, by the way, is a promise of the Bible. It doesn't say if you're persecuted.

[42 : 10] It says you will be persecuted. We will be persecuted at some point. Sometimes it's small, but for these believers it's big. But Christ is worthy. Christ is worthy of that. Young people want authenticity.

They're looking for something that's worth dying for, and we have something worth dying for. So we're going to spend time praying for North Korea and examine our hearts of, are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to pay that price in our lives?

Some of you in this room don't know the Lord, don't know Christ. I'd say come down and get to know him. Mike's here to talk to you. There's lots of people who will talk to you about that this morning.

But if maybe that's your prayer this morning, maybe your prayer should be, Christ is worth it, and I'm going to give my heart over to that. So I'm going to ask Mike to come up and lead us in prayer for North Korea.

Come forward if you would like to pray or remain where you're at.

[43 : 11] I hope that this has been something that the Lord has used to open your eyes. So Jeremy hit on something, something that I'm studying as part of a class with the younger generations of America that we are so concerned about not being in church.

And let me tell you that their greatest concern, something that's very important to them, is authenticity. And the biggest complaint they have against God's people is that they're hypocrites. Because we see things like this, and we understand the Bible says that these are our brothers and sisters in Christ, but let's be honest that too often we are more concerned with our own comfort than we are to make time to pray for other people, for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so I hope that this will move us all as a church to be more mindful of others and not so mindful of ourselves all the time.

Amen? To be thinking more about the church that we are a part of and our Lord who has given his life, who paid the ultimate price, the ultimate cost, so that we can have eternal life.

[44:27] So let's pray together. Lord, thank you for this day. God, we thank you for Jeremy and for his coming and for his providing us with information, Lord, that maybe some of us knew, maybe some of us were aware of, others of us are hearing it for the very first time and haven't really considered the fact that we are just a part of the body of Christ Christ. And that there are brothers and sisters who belong to our family, who belong to our body and their suffering in nations where being a Christian means losing your life, being woken up in the middle of the night and dragged away from your family and never to see them again.

Them not knowing what has happened to you, whether you're dead or in prison somewhere, but with the reality that they'll never see each other again in this life.

Lord, I pray for the Christians of North Korea. I pray that you would encourage them. I pray, God, that they would continue to give bold witness, that they would be unafraid as they seek to share your word with their friends and with their family, knowing, knowing, Lord, that whatever cost they may have to pay, even if that's their own life, that it will be well worth it in the end.

God, I pray that you would forgive us, the church in the West, the Church of the United States of America. We are so concerned with our own comfortability.

And we might think about churches, Christians who are suffering in Pakistan, Nigeria, and North Korea and other places once a year on this day, maybe a few times a month.

[46:26] But, Lord, certainly we are not praying for them like we should. And, God, our young people have noticed it within us that we tend to say one thing but then do another.

We pretend to care, but then the lives that we live would show that we don't. Lord, there are people all around us who do not know and have not heard the gospel.

And forgive us, Lord, that we've been too concerned with our own comfort than to risk whatever it might cost us to share it with them. For others, it's their life. In our country, it may be a friendship. Maybe it could be our job. But, Lord, it should pale in comparison to the wonderful opportunity that we have to maybe lead somebody to Christ, to see that the cost has been paid for their salvation, that you came, that you lived, that you died for us.

And so, Lord, if anything, I pray that today you would use this time to help us to get uncomfortable, but to realize in that, Lord, that there is a great joy that we're missing out on.

[47:38] And there is a great opportunity for us to be used by you to have an impact in this world that doesn't just impact Bartlesville or Oklahoma or the United States of America, but the entire world.

And so, God, I pray that we would all seek to do that very thing, to pay the cost, whatever it may be, at the very least to be praying every day for the persecuted church, that, Lord, the name of Jesus Christ would go, that people would hear and come to faith in Christ.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. . Thank you.