Suffering for the Sake of the Gospel

The resurgence of MARTYRDOM as central to Christian Witness

Biblical teaching on Persecution

- The underlying biblical reasons given for persecution consist of an antipathy of evil toward the good (Romans 8:6-8);
- Wicked men opposing God and rejecting his divine precepts (Rom 3:10-18).
- Jesus indicated that since the world hated him, it will hate his disciples (John 15:18-19), and declared that if they persecuted him, they will also persecute his disciples (v. 20).
- The Bible's climactic teaching about the believer and persecution: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

But I tell you:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"

(Matthew 5:43-44)

Early Christians' response to suffering and persecution

Rejoicing

"So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." (Acts 5:41)

Suffering for Christ

"... for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:16)

"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake"

(Philippians 1:29)

Dying for Jesus's sake

"For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." (2 Corinthians 4:11)

Strength in weakness

Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10)

- ▶ Peter and John were brought before the Council (Acts 4)
- >The Apostles were arrested (Acts 5)
- >Stephen was arrested (Acts 6) and then stoned to death (Acts 7).
- Saul (who later became Paul) ravages the Church (Acts 8)
- Saul turns to Christ and then has to flee Damascus for his life (Acts 9)
 - James is killed and Peter imprisoned (Acts 12).

Paul Boasts About His Sufferings

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. (2 Cor. 11:23-26)

- Paul, after all he mentions above he spent his last few years under Roman guard and was beheaded during the reign of Nero while in Rome.
- James, early church writings tell us, was crucified upside down because he didn't deem himself worthy to die in the same manner as the Lord Jesus.
- All of the Apostles were martyred except for the Apostle John was banished to the Island of Patmos. There were many martyrs throughout history. Second century Church father Tertullian has been credited with saying, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." In many ways he is right. We shouldn't expect to be exempt from this.

Present day Christian's response to suffering and persecution

In developing world

- >Accept as their lot
- Trust God to be with them in suffering
- ► Believe it must be "God's will"
- ➤ Endure pain and suffering as an expected consequence of their Faith

In developed world

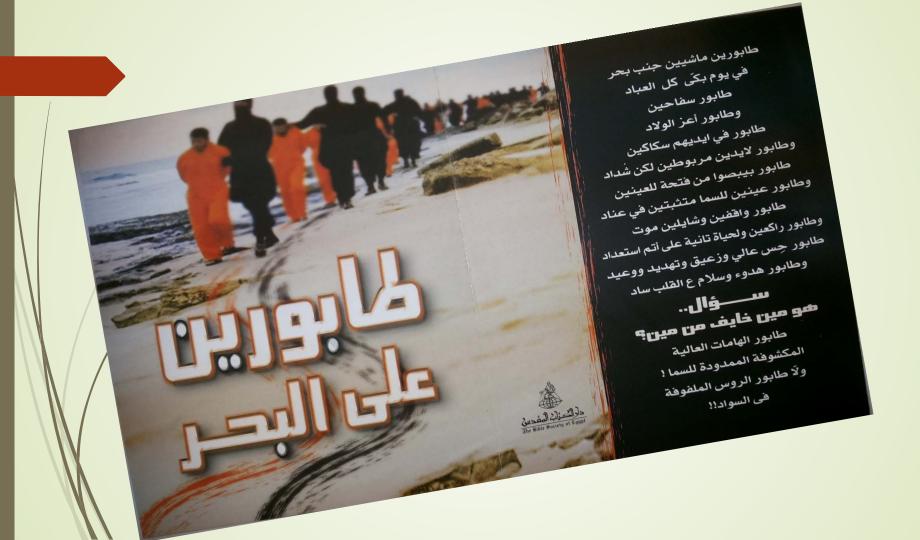
- > Fear suffering
- >Avoid suffering at all costs
- Expect that, as believers, God will protect them from suffering
- > If suffering comes they doubt God's love
- ➤ Demand their human rights

The rediscovery of martyrdom as part of the Christian life

Sunday February 15, 2015

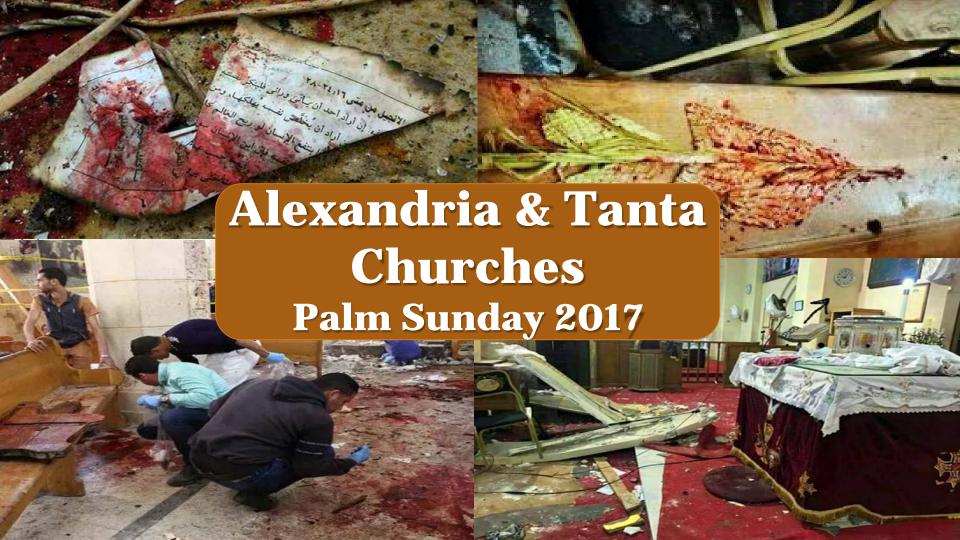
A historic day for Egyptian Christians





Martyrdom in Egypt Today











I'm not angry at the one who did this,

Recalling Paul's sufferings

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. (2 Cor. 11:23-26)

CONCLUSIONS

- While we should do all we can to fight for freedom of religion for **all people** worldwide, we need, at the same time, to make sure that we are teaching **Christians** what the Scripture says about suffering and persecution.
- This is best summarized by Jesus as:
 - "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).
- They need to accept it knowing that "...our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

