

I. Week 9, Spiritual Warfare, Suffering and the Persecuted Church

A. Historical snapshot, John G. Paton

i. New Hebrides Background

- a. Early 1600s, a chain of 80 islands were discovered in the South Pacific – between Hawaii and Australia.
- b. Called the New Hebrides. Today, the chain of islands is known as Vanuatu.
- c. As far as historians know, the first Christian witness to these islands were two missionaries from London – John Williams and James Harris who landed there in 1839. Within minutes of going ashore, these two men were killed and eaten by cannibals.
- d. Other missionaries went to other islands in the chain in the 1840s with some fruitful results. On one of the islands, Aneityum, over 3,500 of the native people were converted to Christ.

ii. Life at Home

- a. John G. Paton born near Dumfries Scotland in 1824.
- b. The first of 11 children. Reformed Presbyterian Church.
- c. His father had a deep and lasting impact on John Paton. He recalled time of family worship as a child with these words,
 - i. *How much my father's prayers at this time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Savior, and learned to know and love him as our divine friend. (21)*
- d. The impact of his father's faith was a powerful force in his life, as a motivation to him to serve and honor God.

iii. Call to Missions

- a. Even from the age of 12, Paton says that he had given his soul to God and was resolved to aim at being a missionary or a minister of the gospel.
- b. In his early 20s, he walked to Glasgow, Scotland, to begin studying at the divinity school there.
- c. While attending divinity school, he also served amongst low-income neighborhoods in Scotland very fruitfully.
- d. As he finished his studies, he began to feel a burden for the South Seas, *"I continually heard...the wail of the perishing Heathen in the South Seas; and I saw that few were caring for them, while I well knew that many would be ready to take up my work in Calton" (52).*
- e. At this, he received tremendous criticism from his Christian friends and co-workers. Many urged him to stay and continue his ministry.

Kaseru-mini Chief snatched a spade with which I had been working, and dexterously defended me from instant death. Life in such circum-stances led me to cling very near to the Lord Jesus; I knew not, for one brief hour, when or how attack might be made; and yet, with my trembling hand clasped in the hand once nailed on Calvary,

- f. God gave Paton boldness to confront them. He writes of one of these times, towards the end of his time on Tanna. The native people had surrounded Paton and his assistant, Abraham. They were chanting and yelling, urging each other to strike the first blow against him. He writes,
 - i. *My heart rose up to the Lord Jesus; I saw Him watching all the scene. My peace came back to me like a wave from God. I realized that I was immortal till my Master's work with me was done. The assurance came to me, as if a voice out of heaven had spoken, that not a musket would be fired to wound us, not a club prevail to strike us, not a spear leave the hand in which it was held vibrating to be thrown, not an arrow leave the bow, or a killing stone the fingers, without the permission of Jesus Christ, whose is all power in Heaven and on Earth. He rules all Nature, animate and inanimate, and restrains even the Savage of the South Seas (207).*
 - g. After 4 years, he was forced to leave. Some Christians criticized him for leaving, instead of staying and being killed. Nevertheless, he left Tanna with his life but little else.
- v. Mobilizing
- a. He returned and spent 4 years mobilizing in Australia and Great Britain, raising funds.
 - b. He would later say of this time, that the Lord was preparing him to kindle the heart of Australian Presbyterianism, to stir in their hearts a desire to reach the lost.
 - c. This is what happened, not only in Australia but also in his home country of Scotland.
 - d. As churches began to give more generously to the cause of missions and even to send out missionaries, here is what Paton observed:
 - i. *Nor did the dear old church thus cripple herself; on the contrary her zeal for Missions accompanied, if not caused, unwonted prosperity at home. New waves of liberality passed over the heart of her people. Debts that burdened many of the Churches...were swept away. Additional congregations were organized. (280)*
 - e. Churches that grew in zeal for missions experienced tremendous blessing in their own ministries at home.

- vi. Ministry on Aniwa
 - a. After mobilizing and traveling, he returned to a different island, Aniwa, in 1866 with his second wife Margaret.
 - b. Like Tanna, the people were violent and enslaved to the service of evil spirits and sacred men, village priests who held the power of the spirits. The people lived in fear of the spirits and were full of hatred and violence toward one another.
 - c. Yet, the islanders at Aniwa, unlike at Tanna, were receptive to the Word of God.
 - d. Over the next 15 years, they saw the entire island of Aniwa turn to Christ.
 - e. He trained native teachers who spread the Word to other tribes.
 - f. He published the New Testament in their language.
 - g. He taught them the Scriptures and trained them to leave their violent ways. Their culture was transformed.
 - h. Years later, he wrote of his time there: "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus, and by the grace of God, Aniwa now worships at the Savior's feet" (312).

- vii. Lessons Learned
 - a. Impact of his father
 - b. Local churches that prioritized missions prospered locally
 - c. Courage to face hostility rooted in a high view of God's sovereignty

B. Introduction

- i. Missions as the work of making disciples by preaching the gospel and planting churches, typically involving crossing cultural, ethnic, or linguistic barriers and typically by those sent out by the church for this task.
- ii. Last two weeks we have focused on crossing cultural barriers.
- iii. This is a key difference between local evangelism and missions.
- iv. We all have the same gospel message, but those who are sent out as missionaries have a wider cultural gap to cross than we do in sharing the gospel with our neighbors.
- v. Hence, we are not all missionaries.
- vi. But, we have all been entrusted with the same gospel.

C. Spiritual Warfare, Suffering, and Persecution

- i. We talked a little about Islam and Hinduism and Animism last week, and I'd just like to encourage you that, when you meet these people, which may happen more and more in the time to come, to have courage to speak with them about the gospel. Take the time to ask them what they believe, and then work up the courage to share, as best you can, what is distinctive about the Christian faith.

- ii. Last week, I met a Bengali man at the mall. He works in one of the cell phone booths. He's been here for 11 years, but he's never been to church. He wouldn't share with me about his religious background, but his home city, according to the Internet, is 80% Muslim and 17% Hindu.
- iii. We talked about contextualization last week, and how we should, following the apostle Paul's example, adjust how we present the gospel to different people, based on the needs and cultural background and religious background.
- iv. Gospel as Power of God – Romans 1:16.
- v. We should remember that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Two reflections on this point:
 - a. The power is in the gospel, not in our presentation of the gospel. We want to work hard to make sure that the gospel is understood, but we don't want to be afraid to share the gospel. We may blunder along and make mistakes, but as we seek to be sensitive to the other person and also to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can and should offer the hope of the gospel. We will improve and grow in how we present the gospel to different people, but one of the main ways that we do that is by practicing.
 - b. Gospel is the power unto salvation. Whether we realize it or not, salvation is a power encounter. When we share the gospel, there is a spiritual conflict going on. There are spiritual forces of evil that are opposed to the advance of the gospel, and so when we communicate the gospel, we are sharing the message that has the power to save people.

D. Spiritual Battle

- i. Colossians 1:14-15 - "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."
- ii. We are in a cosmic battle. The stakes are high.
- iii. Salvation for every person – whether they're a Muslim or a Hindu or one of our children – requires the sovereign power of God to redeem that person from the domain of darkness and transfer them to the kingdom of God.
- iv. We are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). We have changed sides in the spiritual battle.
- v. Ephesians 6:10-13 – our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers and principalities. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God.

- vi. Revelation 12 – woman and the dragon, dragon makes war on the rest of the woman’s offspring, those who keep the commandments of God (vs. 17)

E. Theology of Suffering

- i. We are in a spiritual battle.
- ii. Christ has won our victory, but he did so through the painful and shameful death of the cross.
- iii. Christ’s triumph through suffering is the model for NT Christianity.
- iv. Kingdom of God expands in the world as believers follow in Christ’s footsteps.
- v. Why? Over and over again, we are told that, because Christ suffered, we too must share in his suffering.
- vi. The pattern of death to life. Christ’s death is the basis for our suffering. Christ’s resurrection is the pattern for our victory.

- vii. This is how Paul and Peter and the early church thought about their sufferings.

- viii. Colossians 1:24
 - a. Fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions

- ix. I Peter 2:20-21
 - a. To this you have been called, because Christ suffered for you.

- x. 2 Timothy 2:8-12
 - a. Exhortation to Timothy to share in his sufferings for the gospel.
 - b. Remember Jesus Christ.
 - c. Risen from the dead – he actually died.
 - d. Therefore, I endure everything.

- xi. 2 Corinthians 4:8-12
 - a. Paul’s sufferings. Death is at work in us, but life in you.
 - b. Always carrying in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be in you.

- xii. Acts 5:41
 - a. Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

- xiii. John 15-16
 - a. John 15:2 – every branch that does bear fruit he prunes
 - b. John 15:18-21 – those who hated Christ will hate his followers. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.
 - c. John 16:33 – in this world, you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world.

- xiv. Contrast to Islam – there is no theology of suffering or defeat, Muhammad had political and military victory over his enemies in the 7th century
- xv. As disciples of Christ, path of suffering ought to be normative, not because suffering is somehow good in and of itself, not because our suffering earns us any special standing with God. But, because we are following a Savior who suffered.

F. Suffering and Global Missions

- i. As we think about the claiming territory for the kingdom, we must expect to face significant spiritual opposition. Especially as we go to places where the light of the gospel is not already shining, we need to realize that these are places where Satan has strongholds and we should not be surprised that it is difficult.
- ii. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 – “In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel... those who are perishing.”
- iii. The reality that most of the unreached parts of the world are unreached for a reason, reaching them is very difficult and dangerous.
- iv. This doesn't mean that we'll be martyred for our faith, although that is a possibility. Matthew 16:24-25, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”
- v. Balancing wisdom and risk for the missionary.
 - a. Paul fled from Damascus in a basket. Acts 9:23-25.
 - b. More often than not, Paul fled from persecution. Acts 14 (Lystra, Iconium). Acts 17 (Thessalonica).
 - c. Paul went up to Jerusalem, embracing the persecution. Acts 20:22-24.
 - d. Impossible to make a prescription about whether to embrace suffering or flee suffering.
- vi. For the new believer...
 - a. Do we believe the gospel enough to ask others to suffer for their faith, even to die for their faith?
 - b. Example of Hindu man on the plane ride home. His mother's desire for him was for him to pray more regularly at the Hindu temple. If he leaves Hinduism, it will break his mother's heart. Is the gospel worth it?
 - c. In Pakistan, many Christians are prohibited from participating in economic life and restricted to menial, low class positions.

- d. In Iran, the church is growing tremendously. But, Christians meet in homes and have very little freedom.
- e. Do we really believe the gospel?

G. Persecution and the Persecuted Church

- i. Summarize – (1) all believers are in a spiritual battle and (2) Christ’s death and resurrection is the model for our own suffering and ultimate victory.
- ii. Meaning of the word that is used in the NT for persecution is to pursue.
- iii. All persecution is a form of suffering. But not all suffering is persecution (sickness, temptation, etc.)
- iv. What is persecution? Should we define narrowly or broadly?
- v. There is a wide variety of hardships that Christians endure for the sake of Christ. But there is a danger in defining persecution as only the most extreme forms of opposition (torture, death, imprisonment). The vast majority of Christians today and throughout all history are not martyrs.
- vi. Martyrdom is like the tip of the iceberg. If we only emphasize those who give their lives for their faith, we miss the story of the majority of Christians who patiently endure.
- vii. Martyrdom serves two purposes
 - a. Unveils the fact that we are in a real spiritual battle
 - b. Inspires us to fight the battle
- viii. “Persecution is any hostility, experienced from the world, as a result of one’s identification with Christ, including hostile feelings, words, attitudes, and actions.” (Faith that Endures, 114)
- ix. The NT uses the word to describe a wide range of hostility, not only limited to extreme physical suffering.
 - f. Matthew 5:10-12 (revile you)
 - g. Hebrews 11:36 (mocking and flogging)
 - h. 2 Corinthians 12 (danger, travelling, shipwrecks, concern for church).
- x. The NT affirms that persecution is to be the universal experience of Christians.

- a. John 16:33 – in this world you will have tribulation
 - b. Acts 14:22 – through many trials and tribulations.
 - c. 2 Timothy 3:12 – all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
 - d. Letter of I Peter – do not be surprised at the fiery trial
- xi. Persecution is the consequence of spiritual battle, so it must be universal, as we are all part of the spiritual battle. Gal. 4:29
- xii. Saying that there is a persecuted church and a free church represents an artificial divide that is simply not there spiritually. Often this divide results in hostility. So-called persecuted Christians who languish in jail or are beaten are viewed as heroes. The terrible danger is that Western Christians, who do not regard themselves as part of the persecuted church, often fail to see themselves in a spiritual battle at all. And those who are not aware of the fight are losing it.
- xiii. Story from *Faith that Endures* pg. 118 about Chinese house church leaders confronting Western Christians.
- xiv. Persecution is complex. Seven strands of persecution (69-80)
- 1. Ideology (Marxism)
 - 2. Government (Adoniram Judson)
 - 3. Corrupt individuals (American missionary shot while jogging)
 - 4. Culture (hatred of Christian views, human sexuality, bigotry)
 - 5. Family (Nabeel Qureshi story)
 - 6. Church (upset status quo)
 - 7. Over-boldness (Western Christians tract-bombing)

H. Application

- i. Our hearts are “idol factories”
- ii. Idolize safety and comfort – major struggle for Americans. We need to listen to the example of believers in other areas, and we need to listen to the example of the apostles. Are we too comfortable in American culture?
- iii. Busyness?
- iv. Individualism?
- v. Idolize risk and radical faith. We need to be careful not to swing to the other end of the pendulum.
- vi. For most of us, God does not call us to die for him. He calls us to live for him.