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SERVING PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

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OPEN DOORS are a Christian charity and Our mandate is to “serve the persecuted church”and we do that by raising awareness, financial support and last but not least prayer.

Open Doors mission statement is to “ help people follow Jesus, all over the world, no matter the cost.”

OD began 68 years ago when Brother Andrew, a new believer from Holland answered the call on his life and started smuggling Bibles into eastern Europe in a blue Volkswagen... that was in 1955. These countries were communist and Brother Andrew has some miraculous stories to tell of how God protected him during his visits to these countries...He also wrote a book called “God’s Smuggler” which has sold 10 million copies around the world... So Open Doors started with one man’s obedience to God’s calling..

Today OD is represented in the **70 most dangerous countries in the world to be Christian..** we help with **practical needs** (food , shelter, medicine) especially during the past 2 years with Covid, we **supply Bibles** and other Christian literature ,we **train pastors and church leaders**, we run **discipleship courses**, provide **trauma therapy** and we pray. We basically support the persecuted church as best we can.

PAUSE

Can I be totally honest with you? If we can’t be honest in church where can we be?

When I started with OD I knew very little/ in fact I knew nothing really about the persecuted church... and I’d been a Christian for 30 years!

For me (and maybe for you) the persecuted church is **out of sight** and therefore **out of mind**.

Plus I had no first hand experience of being persecuted... We live in a western culture where **our freedom** to worship, to witness ,to meet together in church is rarely, if ever challenged...

But the more I read the testimonies/ watched the video clips of persecuted Christians ...the **more I realised the persecuted church is real...** not only is it real.. it is alive and growing rapidly ... that realisation challenged my faith.. More people are becoming Christians in persecuted countries than in countries like ours where we are free to share the gospel.. Why is that? Shouldn’t it be the other way round?

PAUSE

So my question is this- - Should persecution be a surprise us? Answer is NO! Persecution is 100% biblical.. there are stories of persecution running right through this book...in fact the

early church grew rapidly on the back of persecution.. it drove Christians out of Jerusalem literally into the rest of the world where they spread the gospel...

Jesus himself said in John 15:20b... “If they persecuted me, they **will** persecute you”... not they might or could... but they will.

Apostle Paul said.. “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12) ..we know Paul experienced persecution on all levels and was finally martyred in Rome.

But persecution is not just something that happened in the past... the fact is .. its alive and kicking in our world today..

PAUSE

Want us to look at a modern day example of persecution –

Play short video..this is Helens Story... so I'll let her tell it.

PAUSE

**That video is a great lead in for our text this evening. If you have your Bibles..
READ MATT 5 : 11-12 ..**

Jesus speaking...v11 Blessed are you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of things about you because you are my followers.

V12... Be happy about that! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way

These are 2 **very powerful** and **challenging** verses...

How can we be “blessed” and “happy “ in the midst of persecution?

With all due respect I can't answer that question ... but I know someone who can... So I'm going to ask Helen... who was “in a container that couldn't contain her” to help us understand.

Firstly let me define the word **Blessed**... All like a bit of Greek on a Sunday morning... so here's the original Greek definition..

Jesus used the term *blessed* in the framework of the Beatitudes to describe the **inner quality of well-being and prosperity—a deep, joy-filled contentment** that cannot be shaken by poverty, grief, famine, persecution, war, or any other trial or tragedy we face in life.

Q - How did Helen survive 32 months living in a container and being tortured...how did she come through that with her faith intact... **not only intact but stronger** for what she'd been through... what kept her going, what kept her singing her way to freedom...

A - Knowing she was blessed...she experienced that **deep, joy-filled contentment** that couldn't be shaken no matter what was thrown at her.

Remember during this time she preached the gospel, she sang, she worshipped, she prayed and she persevered.... She couldn't do that in her own strength.. it had to come from a "blessed assurance" that's only available through a deep anchored faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit...

Helen is an **inspiration** to my faith but she also **challenges** my faith... you and I have the same "blessing" that Helen has.. but are we outworking it the way she did...

That's the challenge... there's a boldness to her faith even in the face of persecution that I have yet to experience...

I love what Helen said... "The name of Jesus is medicine and the world desperately needs it".

PAUSE

I want to share a final story about a couple **who did count the cost of following Jesus..**

ARAV - INDIA **(ARAV & NEELA)**

In 2020, **Arav** a Christian in India, **was martyred for following Jesus...**

He had been a **part of** an **extremist group**, and had been **imprisoned for violent crimes**. But Arav began **seeking God** while he was **in prison**, and through a chain of events he became a Christian.

He became such a **strong Christian** that when he got out, he started **influencing his local area**.... There's a novel idea... he was **salt and light** in his community.

When he was **a criminal**, **nobody** would challenge **him**, but once they knew that he had **accepted Christ**, the **entire village started opposing him**.

He was **badly beaten**, and **chased** out of his **house** with his **wife and four small children**. That's when OD became involved..

Our partners asked Arav, ' why don't you **leave this place?**'

He said, 'Brother, God has **called me** to this place. **Even if I die, I will go and meet Jesus.**'

PAUSE

A few days after I started with Open Doors I received a gift and a card from Mike Gore our CEO..

In the card he welcomed me to OD and then he wrote this... "Hold loosely to the things of this world but always hold tightly to Jesus"... At the time I thought that's a strange thing to write to a new employee.... but the longer I work for OD the more sense it makes ...

Arav's priority was not wealth/prestige/comfortable living... it was JESUS... Jesus was his No 1 priority....And Arav knew his reward was not here on earth... it was in heaven with his Saviour.. and he wanted to take as many people with him as possible.

That's why Jesus could say in READ v 12... Be happy about persecution, Be very glad! For great is your reward in heaven.

PAUSE

But the story doesn't end there...

Arav was killed last year by members of the extremist group that he was once part of. Open Doors partners went to meet with Arav's wife Neela.

She came with her four children ... she was smiling, not looking at all afraid.

Our partners asked her, 'Do you want to go and live somewhere else?' in other words they offered to relocate her and the children.

She said, 'I will continue the work that my husband and I started. If they want to kill me, they can come and kill me. I don't bother about being killed, I'm bothered about the souls that God has given us in that village.'

Kind of puts life in perspective..

Arav and Neela are prime examples of Christians who didn't shrink back in the face of persecution..

I don't know about you...but here's a **boldness to their faith** that I rarely see or experience myself..

The question is 'what am I going to do about it'... or maybe a better one is "How much does Jesus really mean to me?"... Am I all in for Him?/ am I walking out my faith in a way that makes a difference to people in my world?.. Am I a soul winner like Neela?... Is my faith eternally focused?

APPLICATION

Open Doors serves and supports believers like Neela and her family, who are currently building the church in a hostile environment.

Our mission is not to stop persecution. Persecution has always existed and it always will. But we can help, and support, and partner with Christians who live under persecution. We can't do everything but we can all do something.

1 in 7 Christians around the world are currently suffering for the sake of the gospel and we can help them.. after all they are our brothers and sisters in Christ.. they are family.

There are 2 ways to partner with Open Doors

- 1) **Pray**...we have quarterly prayer guides available we can send you... it's so important...in fact it's critical to our ministry... see me after the service and I will give you a prayer guide...
- 2) **Become a Monthly Donor** ... We are inviting you to partner with Open Doors as we support the persecuted Church globally... as we help persecuted believers follow Jesus , no matter the cost... They are our brothers and sisters in Christ, they are family... and they need our help. Come and see me after the service and I'll explain how you can become a monthly donor and make a real difference in the lives of persecuted Christians all over the world.
- 3) I'd love to chat to you after the service at our stand down the back ...

Finally I just want to thank you for letting me share with you this morning... I really appreciate the opportunity you've given me... hopefully you now know a bit more

about the heart behind Open Doors, who we are and the people we help.. like Helen and Neela.

My prayer is that you have been inspired by the stories I've shared and challenged to live out your faith boldly... no matter the cost. Our family, neighbours, friends, work mates need to see a radical outworking of the gospel in our lives.. because that could change their lives for eternity...