

# Blessed are Those Who are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

Act 12:1-2 ESV About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword,

## 4 Things Jesus' Teaches About Persecution in the Beatitudes

Mat 5:10-12 ESV "**Blessed** are those who are **persecuted** for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**. 11 "**Blessed** are you when others **revile** you and **persecute** you and **utter all kinds of evil against you** falsely on my account. 12 **Rejoice and be glad**, for your **reward is great in heaven**, for so **they persecuted the prophets** who were before you.

- **Jesus knows something we don't** - Blessed, Blessed, Rejoice and be glad
- **Persecution comes in various forms** - for righteousness' sake (false accusation on Jesus' account)
- **Life here is NOT all there is** - there's is the kingdom, a great reward in heaven
- **If persecuted, you are in good company** -- Identify with the persecuted through the ages

**For those persecuted, Scripture provided a reference point for understanding God's perspective**  
**God is Sovereign - he is Lord, creator, and the one they could appeal to for help**

- Act 4:23-31 ESV When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, **they lifted their voices together to God** and said, "**Sovereign Lord**, who made the **heaven** and the **earth** and the sea and **everything** in them,

**Persecution was predicted - The spirit said "Gentiles would rage against the Lord"**

- 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, **said by the Holy Spirit**, "'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'--

**Powerful men can only do - what the hand of God and the plan of God allows (He is Sovereign)**

- 27 for **truly** in this city there were **gathered** together **against** your holy servant **Jesus**, whom you anointed, **both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel**, 28 to do whatever **your hand and your plan** had predestined to take place.

**Prayer -- Jesus WAS WITH THEM granting boldness, a fresh filling of the Spirit and great grace (v33)**

- 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and **grant to your servants to continue to speak your word** with all boldness, 30 while you **stretch out your hand to heal**, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.**

"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven", but there are also blessings this side of heaven  
God is able to save the persecutor

- Act 9:13-16 ESV But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. 14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, **for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.** 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

## The gospel is advanced

- Act 8:1 ESV And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and **they were all scattered** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- Act 8:4-5 ESV **Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.** 5 Philip went down to the city of **Samaria** and proclaimed to them the Christ.
- Act 11:19-21 ESV Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as **Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch**, speaking the word to no one except Jews. 20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, **who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.** 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.
- SEE STORY BELOW ABOUT IRAN

## The life of Jesus is manifest in us

- 2Co 4:7-12 ESV But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 **persecuted, but not forsaken**; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 **For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.** 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

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## The fastest growing church in the world today is in Iran

In 1979 a hard-line Islamic regime took over in Iran→ there were about 500 Christians

- Missionaries were kicked out ... .. evangelism outlawed ... ..Persian language Bibles were banned
- People were arrested & imprisoned, and some leaders and pastors were martyred
- Conversion from Islam is considered a crime punishable by death

The church grew in spite of this, and around the year 2000, there were between 5,000-10,000 converts.

In the last 20 years, more Iranians have become Christians than in the previous 13 centuries—with estimates of 1 million people now. That's an average of 50,000 per year for 20 years.

## The second fastest growing church in the world today is in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is ranked #3 (behind North Korea and Somalia) of countries where Christian persecution is most severe. And the gospel is spreading rapidly there because people from Iran are spilling over into their neighboring countries to share the hope of the gospel of Jesus.

Even while there is great risk to sharing Jesus, having Scriptures, and attending a house church, hundreds of thousands of Iranian Christians are still bravely taking that risk. **Why? Because they know that Jesus is alive and persecution is never the end of the story.**

## How is it happening -- this story is repeated over and over.

Alizadeh said, "Every one of us [in the house church] had a group of friends and family." "First we'd go to them." Steadily, their numbers increased. "Then we were praying about going to different cities." "We'd walk for the whole day, going to the shopping mall and, if a person seemed open, we'd share the gospel and give out tracts and videos." Whenever two or three people came to the Lord, Alizadeh's church would connect them with each other and help them begin to evangelize. Over the past 20 years, this church has planted about 25 other small groups in 12 cities. About 500 people have committed their lives to Jesus.