

INTRODUCTION: - 1) Missions Conferences in Asia & Middle East; The persecuted church in the Middle East:

A Quote from A Group of Believers Being Persecuted in Syria:

"THE GRAVEYARD IS STILL EMPTY!" A MESSAGE FROM FARID So many brothers and sisters have been killed already that it seems our little group has the only empty graveyard in Syria. As of this writing, none of us have died yet. We rejoice by greeting one another with the words, "The graveyard is still empty!" We all know it will not stay empty, but meanwhile, we're grateful. Satan rampages through Syria, the lion fighting to annihilate the church. Torture and killing continues every day, and each month, we hear of new terrorist groups forming. All seem intent on outdoing one another in committing unspeakable evils. I think what followers of Christ in Syria fear most are the crucifixions. It's a horrifying prospect. Death on a cross is gruesome, and on top of that, crowds mock and torture the believers leading up to actually nailing them onto crosses. Some who face this are new in the faith, and I don't blame them for being frightened, but it would be an honor to die for Jesus in this way. Just think: the Lamb of God went to the cross in Jerusalem only two hundred miles from Damascus. Now, two thousand years later, the prospect hangs over our heads as a real possibility, just like it did for Jesus and His followers in the first century. But regardless of which of us end up literally crucified for Christ, the question is: Have we not died already? Paul—who was converted right here in Syria—proclaimed, "I am crucified with Christ." I consider Syrian believers fortunate to have a tangible reminder of this fact. Why? Because I used to think I lived a life of sacrifice, but that changed when the war broke out. Although Syria has so few believers that there was danger before, I did not really know what it means to sacrifice. What I thought was sacrifice was actually just inconvenience. Once we bought the graveyard, we gave up our right to live as we pleased. We consigned ourselves to a violent death—whether a sudden bullet in the brain, beheading, or a torturous crucifixion. Our lives rest in God's hands. There is remarkable freedom in having no expectations, no plans for tomorrow. The question I and many others start every day with is this: "Jesus, what do You have planned for me and my family?" Only today matters. Only how I live for Jesus counts. Everything else is superficial. When I hand over my life to my Lord, knowing each day may be my last one on this earth, I am more at peace than ever before. One of my heroes from the past is Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, the common language of the people in the fourth century AD. He was so driven to make each day count for Christ in order to complete the task God gave him that he lived with an unusual reminder of how precious each day is. He chained a skull to his ankle to help him remember he was always just one breath away from the end of his life. Jerome used to say, "Another hour has passed for which I must give an account to Christ." Is your life about Jesus and nothing else? When you may die at any moment, it has to be that way, but we're all called to live only for Him, no matter what. Although Paul once sacrificed Christians, he met Jesus, gave up all his "rights," and made himself a living sacrifice. Once you live like this, you grasp the most profound fulfillment possible in life. Pray for us in Syria, but please do not feel bad for us. We have never been more free. And even though we're willing to die, our graveyard is still empty.

Doyle, Tom. Killing Christians: Living the Faith Where It's Not Safe to Believe (pp. 40-42). Thomas Nelson

2) (Luke 7:17-28) What was Jesus' message to John the Baptist? What should we learn from it?

3) How should we live in light of the above?

I. WHAT JESUS WAS DOING - Jesus Raises a Widow's Son

Messengers from John the Baptist

Luke 7:18 Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things.

Luke 7:19 And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

Isa 61:1-2 "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; [2] To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn,

What about me? I'm stuck in this prison, this dark pit! I can't seem to get free!

Luke 7:20 When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?'" "

Luke 7:21 And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.

Luke 7:22 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

A - SEE WHAT THE LORD IS DOING!

When in the dungeon of depression or oppression, don't look at what the Lord is NOT doing, but what He IS DOING!

Consider how the Lord answers our prayers! Lord, give me humility! Increase my faith! A month later you're overcome by bills; lose your job; deserted by a close friend.... Make my son, my daughter a man/woman of God. Doesn't seem like what they're going through is that great!

But remember - WHAT THE LORD IS DOING! Maybe a prayer journal would be a help

So often we focus on what He is not doing and miss what He is doing and has done!

Luke 7:23 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

B - BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT IS NOT OFFENDED!

Not murmuring; not doubting!

Luke 7:24 When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?

C - THE LORD WON'T LET US KNOW EXATLY HOW WE'RE DOING UNTIL HEAVEN

Jesus could have given compliments of John, while his 2 disciples were there, but He doesn't!

The Lord won't let you (me) know what He thinks about our ministry/life until heaven!!!!

I think His generosity is going to be beyond compare! But now He holds back – **Just focus on the cross!**

Accolades and praise now cause us to rest on our laurels!

When severe trials come – **"Now people are going to see what the Lod has really made of me, on how you handle this event!"**

Everyone is going to see! You're going to see! Angels and demons will see what God has made of you!

So, how are you doing with a tendency to be offended with God?

Remember what Jesus said, **"BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT IS NOT OFFENDED!"**

Luke 7:25 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts.

Luke 7:26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.

Luke 7:27 This is he of whom it is written: 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER BEFORE YOUR FACE, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'

Joh 10:41 Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true."

Joh 10:42 And many believed in Him there.

D – JOHN DID NO MIRACLES, BUT ALL THE THINGS THAT JOHN SPOKE ABOUT JESUS WERE TRUE!

Everything that he said about Jesus was true!

That's what I want to do and that is what I can do!

I can't do a miracle, but I can talk about Jesus!

Talking about the person of Jesus Christ!

That the greatest thing one can do!

That's the thing I want to do!!!

E - WE CAN DO THAT TOO!

Luke 7:28 For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

For every believer, because of what Christ has done and our righteousness in Him, we, even the least in the present kingdom of God are greater than the greatest of anyone in the Old Covenant!

F – REJOICE IN WHAT CHRIST ACCOMPLISHED FOR US ON THE CROSS AND THROUGH HIS RESURRECTION!

II. CONCLUSION – My Prayer & My Hope as we go away today:

- A. Help me not to be offended with You!**
- B. Not to focus on what's not taking place and hasn't happened yet**
- C. But what is going on, what is happening presently and what Jesus has done and what it is that Jesus is doing**
- D. I want to understand that Jesus is working and getting me there, wherever "there" is, that I've been praying to You about. But that there are other things that have to happen first**
- E. Pressing in and loving You, choosing not to be offended with You.**
- F. I'm going to trust You! You are so trustworthy – You died on the cross for me!**
- G. I want to be like that one, who You said was the greatest – that he just talked about You and everything He said about You was true!**
- H. I want to talk about that to others, my friends, my kids, to all those I come into contact**
- I. To say to that fellow worker, even a stranger, hey, the Lord loves you! I'm praying for you!**
- J. I was so blessed today by the mercies of God! Talk about Jesus!**
- K. Find out; give thanks; give heart and talk about it to others!**
- L. Cause me to see what He is doing, day in and day out!**
- M. May He give you hope; fill You with His love**
- N. Know this, if you love Him and given your heart to Him, your sins are forgiven!**
- O. Rejoice in all that Christ has done for you on the cross and in His resurrection!**

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