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2 Introduction

- Persecution is not something new. All through Scripture, darkness has always hated the light and will do everything it can shut it down.
- As with the story of Cain & Abel in Genesis, the persecution of the righteous has a long and sad history.
- As the Apostle John says, Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. (1 John 3:12 NIV)
- This is true today, there is a conflict going on and it is between two groups of people—the righteous and the unrighteous.

3 Persecution

- In fact, there are probably several people here tonight who have had to face persecution of one type or another for their faith.
 - Lose friends . . .
 - Face the objection and the disapproval of relatives.
 - Face personal ridicule and demeaning slurs by people at work or through other associations.
 - Constantly, we're made fun of by the media and those who control "pop culture," where our values are mocked, scorned and where we ourselves are called bigots, closed-minded, and old fashioned.

4 But the Bible says, . . .

- Jesus tells his disciples . . .
 - "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:10 NIV)
 - "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt 5:11-12 NIV)
 - "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man." (Luke 6:22 NIV)
- The Bible also says, . . .
 - Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12 NIV)

5 Persecution is No Accident

- Persecution is what the world does to all the righteous. As Jesus says, . . .

- “Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” (John 15:20 NIV)
- “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19 NIV)
- Also, even persecution can come from those who say they’re Christian . . .
 - In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Tim 3:12-13 NIV)

6 **Do Not Be Surprised!**

- For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. (2 Cor 2:15-16 NIV)
- Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (1 John 3:13 NIV)
- Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Pet 4:12-14 NIV)

7 **Christian Persecution Today**

- According to Release International, The persecution facing Christians is among the largest human rights violation issues in today’s world.
- It is estimated that 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith.
- The most common forms of persecution of Christians are violence against people and property, exclusion from education and employment, and removal of access to housing, Bibles or food and water.
- This kind of persecution occurs in countries where Christians form a minority of the population or in countries where the government regards Christianity as a threat to their authority.

8 **2014 WorldWatchList**

- Just in the last few days, OpenDoors has released their 2014 WorldWatchList that is a ranking of 50 countries where persecution of Christians for religious reasons is most severe.

9 **The Top 10 Oppressive Countries**

- North Korea
- Somalia

- Syria
- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- Saudi Arabia
- Maldives
- Pakistan
- Iran
- Yemen

10 North Korea #1

- Type of Government: Communist dictatorship
- Leader: Kim Jong-Un
- Population: 24.5 Million
- According to recent reports about the labor camp systems, it is estimated that political prison camps house approximately 150,000 to 200,000 inmates.
- Of this number, it is estimated that 50,000 to 70,000 suffer daily in North Korea's prison camps.
- The God-like worship of the rulers leaves no room for any other religion. Any reverence not concentrated on the Kim dynasty will be seen as dangerous and state-threatening.

11 Somalia #2

- The main types of Christians in Somalia are Christian converts from a Muslim Background, also known as Muslim Background Believers (MBBs).
- In the country's very recent history, MBBs - or those accused of being MBBs - have often been killed on the spot when discovered.
- An Open Doors field researcher indicated that ordinary citizens - in collaboration with al-Shabaab - have been involved in the killing of Christians. The researcher stated that: "Believers have been betrayed into the hands of al-Shabaab by their neighbors..."
- Open Doors field reports indicate that Somali Christians have to hide their belief to get access to basic necessities, such as basic social services, education or justice.
- Church life is constrained and has to remain underground. Believers are organized in small community groups and meet in secret across the country.

12 Syria #3

- The face of persecution in Syria has changed. The main persecution engine in pre-civil war Syria was totalitarian paranoia.
- Today, the current predominant engine has become Islamic extremism.
- Open Doors has received reports of many Christians being abducted, physically harmed and killed.
- Within the context of the civil war, many churches have been damaged or destroyed, in many cases deliberately.
- At the beginning of 2013 there was 1.7 million Christians in Syria. At the end of 2013, that number was down to 1.3 million.

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16 **New Years Attack - Egypt**

- On January 1, 2011 after a New Year's service a car bomb exploded outside of a Christian Coptic church.
 - Some 97 people were injured and 23 people died.
- A couple of weeks ago, during a Christmas service a car bomb exploded in Bagdad, Iraq as parishioners were leaving the building.
 - At least 26 people were killed and 38 were wounded.

17 **Persecution in the Middle East**

- Due to persecution, the number of Christians in Turkey has dropped from 32% to 0.2% this century.
- In Syria they dropped from 40% to 10%.
- In Iran went from 15% to 2% and Iraq from 35% to 5%.

18 **Things will get Worse**

- Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. (Matt 24:4-8 NIV)
- "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matt 24:9-13 NIV)

- “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” (Matt 24:29 NIV)

19 End-time Event Chart

20 What We Can Do

- GET INVOLVED
 - A web site sponsored by The Voice of the Martyrs located at persecution.com.
 - It is an excellent source of information on what is going on in the world today.
 - It also provides ways on how to be a voice and stand up for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted around the world.

21 What We Can Do

- Pray
 - Ask God to strengthen our fellow saints with courage and great faith.
 - Ask God to deliver them from imprisonment and oppression.
 - Ask God to give them grace to love their enemies.
 - Ask God to supply and protect their families.
 - Ask God to further spread of the Gospel—regardless of the persecution.

22 What We Can Do

- Remember
 - We shouldn't just remember the suffering of the persecuted church once per year.
 - In our Cell Groups, we could easily highlight a country or region of the world in which to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - Even in our Celebration Services we could also highlight, if we find a volunteer, what is going on in the world so that we can pray and intercede for the needs that are present.

23 Living for God

- When we live for God with all our heart, we will be persecuted as the prince of this world has been condemned as well as all his followers.
- Nevertheless, as the Apostle Paul says, We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:7–9 NIV)

- So then let us not fear what man can do to us and live for God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—and support those who do!