

IDOP 2016

REMEMBERING 20 YEARS



DEVOTIONALS

Don't stand in silence

John Langlois

“Don't just stand there, do something!” said my mother after she had asked me to do some household chores. She was busy. She needed help. I was just standing there doing nothing. I wanted to do something else, not what she demanded of me.

Sometimes God must think the same about us, his children. He has made it very plain in His Word what he wants us to do as His disciples. He has commanded us to go into a hostile world to bear witness to him, in both word and deed. Sometimes our words are the best expression of our witness. At other times our deeds are more eloquent and persuasive. Usually it is both. In each case our words and our actions break the silence as we point others to the Master. Jesus has told us that the fields are white and ready to harvest and yet the labourers are few.

In Matthew 25: 31-46 we see clearly that active Christian service is not optional. When Jesus comes again He will judge us according to what we have done during our lifetime. Just as Jesus condemned the man

who had been given just one talent who hid it in the ground, in the same way He will condemn all those who “just stand there in silence” and do not obey his Great Commission. These verses show us that sometimes we are blind to the opportunities which stare us in the face. There are those all around us who are hungry or thirsty, whether physical or spiritual, like the woman at the well. We are commanded to give them food and drink, just as Jesus gave living water to the woman in Samaria. Do we minister to those who are in prison, or strangers, or those with other needs? Depending on what we do in our lifetime Jesus will categorise us either as sheep or goats. That sounds shocking to those of us who place our salvation on faith in Christ alone, without works. We believe quite rightly that when we put our trust in Christ and trust him for our salvation by His death on the cross our salvation is assured. Our salvation is indeed completely secure – but not our eternal reward. If our love for Christ is real it will demonstrate itself in sacrificial service. James tells us that faith without works is dead. Dead faith! Is almost a paradox.

Although we must not stand in silence, we certainly must stand on the firm foundation of Christ alone. When we are persecuted, like the seed falling on rocky ground in the parable of the sower, we will wither and die (Matthew 13: 20). The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they

have no firm foundation, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes, they quickly fall away. To witness effectively in persecution we must stand on the firm foundation of our Rock, Jesus Christ.

John Langlois

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In this World You Will Have Tribulation

Rev. Aiah Foday-Khabenje
(Text: John 15:18-16:2)

A common slogan in the church in Africa is: “Jesus is the answer”. However, it is not always clear what the question is. We may have various presuppositions, mostly about human flourishing and as portrayed by so called prosperity preachers. Our hitching ears tend to hear, what our hearts desire. In this reflection, I want to call our attention to the SIN, SHAME and SUFFERING question for which Jesus is the answer:

SIN - we may know or believe that Jesus died for our sins and the sins of the whole world (John 3:16). The just recompense for sin is death. Jesus Christ, like no other, laid down his life for the sins of humans, and any and all who by faith, trust him as Lord of their lives are saved from eternal damnation (Rom. 6:23).

That means even people committing heinous crimes and cruelty like ISIS can be saved and transformed to be followers of Jesus. St Paul was like an ISIS commando and no wonder he referred to himself as worst of sinners (1Tim 1:15). This statement was not just said in humility; Paul was known for heinous crimes before his encounter with Jesus. He was transformed from being a persecutor of the Church to the greatest activist and champion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A hardened criminal on the cross believed in Jesus and was granted eternal life in heaven with Jesus.

SHAME - The means to our salvation was the death of Jesus on the wooden cross, a symbol of shame. Shame was an immediate consequence of human failure. Adam and Eve felt ashamed when they disobeyed God (Gen. 3:7-10). Shame exposes our nakedness, our ugliness, our deceptive hearts, foolishness, and wickedness. Our sins are exposed for all to see. Sin alienates us from God in shame.

Christ bore our shame on the cross (Heb. 12:2). Crucifixion was reserved for the scum of society; slaves, hardened criminals, and enemies of the state. It was considered too horrible and degrading. The preferred means of execution was beheading. Cross was a vulgar word and not used in polite company. On the cross, Jesus experienced such a shame to cover the shame of humanity (1Cor 1:24). Jesus took on our shame of disobedience and reconciles us with God, the Father.

SUFFERING -The origin of human suffering is the fall; a consequence of SIN. Suffering and pain is evil and can no way be romanticized. It is natural to pray: "this is not my portion as a child of the most High God". However, when we go through suffering and persecution it does not mean it is as direct result of our sins.

Suffering is a harsh reality of our walk with Jesus. Jesus foretells that followers will be persecuted on this world (John 16:33; 2 Tim 3: 12). On the cross, Jesus personally experienced the full range of human suffering. Jesus still bears the scars of his wounds even in his resurrected and glorified body and have become his identifying marks (John 20:20-29).

Healing of pains happens at the cross of Jesus; forgiving those who have wronged us, loving our enemies, and offering our wounds to God. The Cross tells us that God in Christ is one with us in our suffering

(Phil. 1:12-14; 3:10-11). When we suffer, God doesn't stand off, aloof and unconcerned, unable or unwilling to get involved. Jesus did not just suffer and die for us but he did rise from the dead. In a way rose for us and gave us access to that resurrection power. By Christ's wounds at the Cross we are healed.

There should only be suffering and vicarious Christians, not innocent Bystanders!

Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher

Hebrews 10:32-35: "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded."

The author of the Letter to the Hebrew seeks to embolden his readers in times of suffering so that they are reminded of how God helped them in earlier times of suffering (verse 32).

What is truly interesting in this text, however, is that the Letter to the Hebrews designates all readers as such, as those who have "endured in the great contest in the face of suffering", independent of whether this occurred through suffering or through vicarious association with suffering! The author of the Letter to the Hebrews puts *the sufferers (A) and those demonstrating compassion (B)* on the same footing. In verses 33-34, the following is said about the cross: ABBA.

In verse 33, the readers are first of all addressed as those who in part have 'themselves' endured much suffering (A), but "at other times" also suffered because they in some cases "stood side by side with those who suffered" (B). There are, then, *direct sufferers* (A) and sufferers who are in that position because they *suffer alongside others* (B)!

In verse 34 the situation is reversed: To start with, it is mentioned that the readers have suffered with those in prison (B). Then it is mentioned that they themselves lost possessions (A).

That is precisely the objective of IDOP. Christians who suffer and Christians who stand side by side with those suffer seek to build a 'community' of suffering. Prayer occurs simultaneously in countries where there is Christian persecution and where there is no persecution of Christians. If we do this, then we "do not throw away our confidence," and this confidence "will be richly rewarded" (verse 35).

A Christian never lives without Christian persecution! Either he is persecuted or he suffers with the fate of those who are persecuted. And whoever suffers, suffers at the same time with others who perhaps suffer even more!

The possibility that someone simply ignores the suffering of another individual or church and then enjoys the fact that things are going well for him, without this turning into thankful involvement for the sake of others, is something which does not even come to mind to the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews! For Christians to suffer and for other Christians to not suffer side by side? Unthinkable! Christians who look away while others suffer? Inconceivable! And yet this is precisely what applies to the large majority of Christians!

The International Day of Pray (IDOP) is a good opportunity to end this situation here and now, to inform yourself about the global situation of

the body of Christ, and at least through prayer to have 'fellowship' with those who suffer.

Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher
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Remember their chains

Brian Stiller

"Remember their chains" comes from the Apostle Paul's reminder to Christians in Colossae, "remember my chains."

Why do we even need to be reminded? Not unlike Jesus' call to remember to visit those in prison. Prisons, shut us off from those society deems undesirable. Closing them off physically does the same to us: we stop thinking about them – "out of sight out of mind" really works.

It takes effort to remember one in prison, be they there for justifiable reasons or for because of their faith. Thus the brilliance of the IDOP – International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church – a vital moment to remember, pray and intercede for our brothers and sisters.

Persecution may for some be an inconvenience or insult, but for too many followers of Jesus, it does more than diminish acceptance in their community, it too often leads to physical intimidation and suffering.

The IDOP has for years, alerted us to the need to constructively think and pray. The IDOP for the Persecuted Church is a lifeline from us to those suffering anywhere from emotional and physical harassment even to death.

For the apostle, his request that he be remembered was more than a feel-nice “I miss you.” It was a call to pray, an exercise God calls us to use as we engage with the Spirit. So remarkable, isn’t it, that the sovereign Creator, God of all that is, King and Lord actually invites us to be part of his activity on this planet? Prayer is not passive, but engaging, as intercessors, persuasive, intense and focused, asking specifically for those we know or have been told about.

The IDOP is a timely and strategic resource, yes for us – so we know whom to pray for –but specifically for those who are in need of our prayer.

May this one-Sunday-a-year prayer for the persecuted become part of our praying consistently throughout the year.

. . . remembering those in chains, today, each day.

Brian C Stiller
Global Ambassador
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In the modern church calendar, the first two Sundays of November is set apart to remember and pray for the persecuted church, through the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP).

Organised by the Religious Liberty Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance, the IDOP is a time set apart for us to remember thousands of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world who suffer persecution, simply because they confess Jesus Christ as Lord.