**Developping a mind set for the end times Session 4**

**Preparing for Persecution.**

God plans for the Church to partner with Him through the end times. The Church can walk through these difficult days in joy, faith, miracles, supernatural protection & victory as well as persecution and martyrdom.

“We do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.” (Hebrews 10, 39).

**1) What does the Bible say about persecution?**

1a) The Bible is very clear that if you follow Christ, you should expect persecution.

***“Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, “***

***(2 Tim. 3, 12)***

1b) Jesus himself, the most loving man who ever lived, was executed on a cross.

11 of the 12 disciples were killed for their faith. The 12th, John, was banished to the remote island of Patmos towards the end of his life. The early Christians were imprisoned, whipped, beaten, imprisoned and fed to the lions as spectacles in the local amphitheatres across the roman world. Persecution continued throughout the ages, much perpetrated by the Church. In England, thousands of believers have been martyred, from the early days of the gospel right up until the 17th century.

**2) We are not called to be liked and respected by all**

2a) Many believe that if they are a Christian, people will like them and think of them as a good person. Jesus warned us against this. Only those who preach a false or a partial gospel will be liked by everyone.

***“Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.” (Luke 6, 26).***

2b) The true message of God has always been ignored, hated or rejected by the majority of those heard it.

***“Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. Rather, rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings” (1 Peter 4, 12)***

***“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother. (Matt. 10, 34).***

2c) Jesus calls his followers to come out of the world, to live, think and behave differently to the rest of the world.

 ***“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. Remember what I told you: “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also … If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” (John 15, 18-20)***

**3) Persecution in the world today**

3a) Persecution is not rooted in Christians unacceptable behavior. It is rooted in the hatred of the devil for God, and his ongoing warfare against God’s Kingdom, His people and values.

***1 Peter 5, 8 tells us; “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”.***

3b) **Open Doors** estimates that in 2021, 5,898 Christians were killed for their faith! That’s 16 per day!The publish the **“World Watch List”** every year which lists the top 50 countries in the world for persecuting Christians. The top 10 countries are; Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Eritrea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran and India. The world evangelical Alliance estimates that a further 200 million are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith.

**1 out of 6:** Christians in **Africa** that experience high levels of persecution.

**1 out of 3:** Christians in **Asia** that experience high levels of persecution.

**4) Persecution in the UK today**

4a) Compared to all the countries on the top 50 list, we experience very low levels of persecution in our nation, so much so that we can hardly really call it persecution. Up until today, you can’t be locked up for what you believe or be stopped from worshipping or preaching the gospel in a public place.

4b) Over the years, in our country, the Church has won a place of respect and influence by building schools and hospitals and housing for the poor in every town of the country, out of their own funds. Many of the freedoms and the social care system that we enjoy today were established or paid for by Christians in the past. Some paid for these freedoms with their lives.

**5) The space in which the Church can operate as church is being squeezed**

5a) That is slowly starting to change. The place within society in which the church can truly operate as church has been squeezed over the years and the influence that the church can bring to bear over the nation has been dramatically reduced.

5b) After the war, immigration brought to our country many of other religions. In 1961, there were 7 mosques and 50,000 Muslims. Today there are over 1500 mosques and around 3.4 million muslims.

5c) Today we live in a multi-cultural society where the rights of each group are protected by law. For the sake of peace and equality, religion has had to be withdrawn from most many areas of public life.

**6) Don’t expect the state to always be your friend**

6a) As the influence of the Church has diminished within society, laws which protected those values have been changed for laws that reflect other values. In this generation our nation has legislated to legalise abortion, to normalise working on a Sunday, to remove the unique status of marriage, to give equal rights to homosexuals and the right to choose one’s own gender.

6b) It is becoming increasingly hard to talk openly about some Biblical values without breaking the law, especially if you touch on issues that concern Muslims or Homosexuals.

6c) The areas of the Christian faith that are contentious in society are; i) The uniqueness of Christ; ii) The authority of God’s word; iii) The reality of sin; iv)

The judgment of God

**7) Don’t expect the law to be your defender**

7a) Peter Paul is an Indian pastorwho gave copies of the new testamen to some young people in a Muslim slum. When a mob of angry muslims broke into his house and trashed everything in it and beat him, the police arrested the pastor, rather than anyone in the mob, for “disturbing the public peace”. Could something like that happen in the UK in the near future?

7b) Paivi Rasanen, a Finnish MP and the former interior minister sent a tweet questioning the decision of the Finnish state church to partner the “Gay Pride” event held in Helsinki in 2019. Alongside her tweet, she sent a photo of some verses from the Bible from Romans1, 24-26 which described homosexual acts as shameful. The police arrested her for hate speech saying that her comments that were likely to cause intolerance, contempt and hatred towards homosexuals. They said that her statements violate the equality and dignity of homosexuals, and therefore go beyond the limits of freedom of speech and religion. The case was heard on 24th Jan 2022, and the judges are currently considering the verdict.

**8) Don’t expect the church to be on your side**

8a) In order to win a place of acceptance in society, the church makes certain compromises, one after another in order to adapt to the environment in which they are serving. Instead of separating themselves from the world, they face the danger of the frog that is slowly boiled alive, losing their spiritual sensitivity and life.

8b) The Church fights to keep its place of acceptance in society. It opposes those who would challenge society and fights those who refuse to make the compromises it has made to gain acceptance, calling them “dangerous zealots”, “Uneducated fundamentalists”, “Intolerant, unloving and judgmental”, “Cults”.

8c) Historically most of the persecution of God’s people has come from God’s own people. Jesus himself wasn’t arrested by the Romans but by the Pharisees. The early disciples were persecuted by Jewish believers. Until recent times, far more Christians were killed by the church than by any governing authority.

“The time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.” (John 16, 2)

**9) Choose Compromise or Persecution**

9a) In China, after the cultural revolution, the communist party established the “Three Self Patriotic Church”. After years of persecution, Chinese believers could now go to church in a church that was officially authorized (and regulated) by the government.

In exchange for freedom and persecution, people now had to accept a church that had limits placed upon it.

* The only people allowed to preach were pastors who had been trained in a theological college sanctioned by the communist party.
* Services and Sermons were monitored
* Pastors were not allowed to preach on politics or issues that could cause trouble
* They weren’t allowed to evangelise or give Bibles away to people who weren’t in the church.
* They weren’t allowed to say that those who didn’t go to church would go to hell. Under 18’s weren’t allowed to go to church or hear about the Christian faith.
* All those who went to church had to have their names and addresses registered.

9b) It has often been the leaders of the Three Self Churches that would tell the authorities who was going to the house church meetings and where they would meet!

9c) Today the government in China is shutting down the Three Self Churches. The very same pattern that is happening to the three self patriotic church in China takes place in the book of Revelation 17, 16, where the beast attacks and kills the harlot.

9d) Our trust and desire to obey God should be greater than our trust and desire to obey the state.

**10) Expect an increase in persecution as we move into the end times**

“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,” (Matt. 24, 9-10).