**Developing a mindset for the end times Session 8**

**Preparing for Martyrdom**

**1) Martyrdom will greatly increase in the end times.**

1a) The Bible is clear that persecution and martyrdom will increase greatly as we move into the time just before Jesus comes back.

1b) In the book of Revelation we see that all those who continue to worship Jesus and refuse to bow down to the Anti-Christ are killed. Probably millions of Christians

*“And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands” (Rev. 20, 4).*

1c) Jesus Himself prophesied that in the last days Christians would be hated by all nations, and that many would be persecuted and even put to death. *“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).*

**2) Martyrdom is a part of the Christian’s calling**

**2a)** In Nov. 2018 a young American called **John Chau** tried to take the gospel to a remote island in the Indian Ocean called the North Sentinel island. On that island lived a remote tribe that had never been contacted by outsiders. They were known to be violent to any outsiders, having killed a couple of fishermen had accidentally drifted onto the beach of the island some years before.

John Chau spent nearly 10 years training and preparing himself to go as a missionary there, yet was killed on the beach as he landed on the island. Was he right to go? Was he a hero or a fool? Read the full story at www.persecution.com/stories/john-chau

2b) Much of the preaching in the western churches focuses around how God wants to help us overcome our problems so that we can live a happy and fulfilled life. Yet that isn’t the whole gospel.

2c) Jesus told his disciples that unless they were ready to be martyrs they couldn’t even become one of his disciples. *“Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14, 26.See also Matt. 10, 38; Mark 8, 34).*

2d) When Jesus said, “come and die”, he wasn’t exaggerating. Of his **first 12 disciples** apart from Judas who betrayed him, all but one of the disciples were killed for their faith. The other one, John was sentenced to work in a labour camp.

In the first few generations of the church, thousands of Christians were imprisoned, whipped, beaten, imprisoned and fed to the lions as spectacles in the local amphitheatres across the roman world.

2e) The English word **“Martyr”** is taken from a Greek word which literally translated means “a witness”. When Jesus said in Acts 1, 8; “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth” – he literally said; “You shall be my martyrs …”

2f) The fact that the first Christians were willing to lay down the one life that they had for their faith convinced people in a way that their words never could that Jesus had overcome death.

2g) According to Open Doors, there was a 60% increase in the number of Christians being killed for their faith in 2021; **5,898 Christians were killed for their faith!**

**3) Are we called to upset people to the point where they will want to kill us?**

3a) **We are not called to deliberately upset people*.*** The apostle Paul said; *“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders” (1 Thess. 4, 11 & 12).*

3b) **If hide those parts of the gospel that might cause offense, we are not sharing the true gospel but a distorted gospel.**

3c) Our aim is not to win people’s approval but to share the full truth of gospel message in as loving and sensitive way as we can. *“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ”. (Gal. 1, 10).*

3d) We should aim to be like Jesus. Though loving, kind and good, he was also ruthlessly honest. He told people the truth even if it meant that people wouldn’t like him, or even if by saying that, He put himself in danger.

**4) The true gospel hs always been rejected by the majority**

4a) Jesus was killed for sharing the gospel. We should expect the same.

*‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15, 20).*

*“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)*

4b) **Persecution of Christians is not rooted in their unacceptable behavior. It is rooted in the hatred of the devil for God, and his ongoing warfare against God’s Kingdom, His people and His values.**

**5) The Honour of Martyrdom**

5a) Our focus should not be on this life and this world, but on God’s Kingdom.

*“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3, 2).*

5b) Jesus talked about living in such a way that we get a great **reward in heaven** (Luke 6, 23; Matt. 6, 1; etc). Earthly blessings last for a short time. Heavenly rewards last for eternity.

5c) Martyrs are afforded a special place of honour, right in the centre of the heavenly throne room. *“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” (Rev. 6, 9).*

5d) Martyrs will be awarded with the greatest honour that anyone can be given in heaven. ***“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15, 13).***

**6) To Protect or not to protect?**

6a) It is unbliblical to suggest that if we have enough faith, God will always protect us from persecution.

6b) When the gospel was first taken to Nagaland in N.E India, the local tribe were known to be fearsome warriors who killed any foreigners who went to their land. A missionary decided to take the gospel there, even though many believers tried to persuade him not to. The missionary replied that he believed that his God was stronger than the spears of the warriors.

When he went to that country, he was surrounded by men with spears who all threw their spears at him. But every spear missed. They tried again but were unable to spear the missionary. So they all sat down on the ground and listened to what the missionary had to say. That was the beginning of a great revival in that tribe.

6c) **Jim Elliot** was a young American missionary to sought to take the gospel to the Auca Indians in the Ecuadorian Amazon. After months of preparation, flying over the tribe with a plane and dropping gifts of sweets and colourful trinkets, they landed their plane near to the tribe and tried to walk to the village that they had flown over so many times. They were surrounded by tribesmen with spears, who threw their spears and killed the missionaries before they had chance to say even one word.

**7) Your life is in God’s hands**

7a) It's God's job to decide what is best for us and for His Kingdom. It's our job to trust and obey.

7b)Sometimes God protects. *"Through faith they shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword (Heb. 11, 34)*

7c) Sometimes He allows His people to die. *"They were put to death by stoning; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword" (Heb. 11, 37)*

You need faith to live for God and you need faith to die for God.

8) **He is no fool who gives his life**

8a) **When Jim Elliot was killed, his wife refused to be defeated**. She started to go on foot and to make contact with the tribe who had killed her husband. Because she was a woman they didn't kill her but gradually welcomed her, and over many months she learnt their language and shared the gospel of Jesus with these people who had killed her husband. She led many people from that tribe to faith in Christ, including those who had thrown the spears that killed her beloved husband.

8b) After Jim Elliot and his friends were killed, their families sent another plane over the area to see if they could find out what had happened. They found the first plane, and saw the bodies of the missionaries which they managed to retrieve.

In the pocket of Jim Elliot they found some words that he had written on a scrap of paper as he was flying towards the place where he died.

***"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose".***