

# IDOP for the Persecuted Church

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, November 7, 2021

---

## COMMUNION

Communion is the Christ-ordained means whereby His people are to remember His sacrifice until He Returns...

**1) The Wafer Symbolizes the BODY of Christ – Broken for Us**

**2) The Juice Symbolizes the BLOOD of Christ – Shed for Us All**

### **1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NIV)**

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

# IDOP for the Persecuted Church

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, November 7, 2021

---

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have much to cover in a relatively short amount of time.

## SETTING THE STAGE

Today is the International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians. This occasion provides for us the opportunity to consider our brothers and sisters in the faith who face affliction for the cause of Christ. Though this sermon will conclude with a time of prayer, I have chosen to offer the following for our time of corporate instruction...

**NOTE 1** – We do well to consider the persecution and even martyrdom were assured by Christ for His people. Beyond the fact that Christ Himself was killed by those who opposed His message, consider His words to believers in all generations...

### **John 15:18–20a (NIV)**

18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 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. 20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

### **Matthew 5:10–12 (Emphasis Mine)**

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you **when** people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

### **Matthew 24:9 AND Mark 13:12–13a**

9 “. . . you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” . . . 12 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me.”

**NOTE** – These sentiments are echoed by the apostle Paul (i.e., a figure who often faced opposition & pers.)...

### **2 Timothy 3:12**

12 . . . everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

**KEY** – Delving a bit deeper...

## DELVING DEEPER

### 1) The NT Record

The New Testament chronicles the persecution of the Apostolic or Early Church. We could speak at length on this topic—and to some degree we have spoken at length in a recent sermon series! Please allow me to note the following (i.e., albeit briefly)...

**Acts 4** – Peter and John were forbidden by the Sanhedrin to proclaim the gospel and threatened (v. 18, 21).

**Acts 5** – The apostles were jailed by the religious elite (v. 18), flogged (v. 40) and ordered to cease-and-desist.

**Acts 6–7** – Stephen was tried before the Sanhedrin and ultimately stoned for preaching the message of Jesus...

#### **Acts 7:54–58a, 59**

54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. . . . 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

**Acts 8a** – His death led to rampant persecution against the church in Jerusalem (i.e., scattering believers) (v. 1).

**Acts 8b** – Then Paul began to “destroy the church” (i.e., rounding up and imprisoning followers of Christ) (v. 3).

**Acts 12** – Herein we read of the martyrdom of the apostle James and the imprisonment of the apostle Peter...

#### **Acts 12:1b–3a**

1 . . . King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

**Acts 13–28** – This large segment of the Book of Acts chronicles the exploits and sufferings of the apostle Paul...

**KEY** – Consider the words of Paul re: his own experiences of affliction in the Lord...

#### **2 Corinthians 11:21a–28** (Contrasting Himself w/ False Apostles & Teachers)

21 Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

**Q.** Did you know that he wrote 4 of his epistles from **prison**? Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon!

## 2) The Historical Record

Moreover, the historical record testifies to the adversity and affliction experienced by the people of God throughout space and time. I will not linger long on this point since I purpose to share an historical record in the latter moments of this sermon. However...

**FYI 1** – Did you know that it is estimated that 70 million Christians have been martyred throughout history? Did you know that more than half were martyred in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century under fascistic, totalitarian governments? Did you know that so far in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, approximately 100–160k Christians have been killed each year? (Source: Gordon-Conwell). This being said...

## 3) The Contemporary Record

We do to remember that persecution and martyrdom are not relics of the distant past. Rather, they are ongoing realities for the Church (i.e., with many suffering in our own day and age). The global Church recognizes an International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted because many within the Church are still being persecuted! In fact...

**QUOTE** – “Around the world, more than 340 million Christians live in places where they experience high levels of persecution, just for following Jesus. That’s 1 in 8 believers, worldwide.” (Source: Open Doors USA).

**FYI 2** – The ten countries where believers face the most extreme persecution are (in order)...

- |                         |                |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| 10. Eritrea (E. Africa) | 5. Sudan       |
| 9. Yemen                | 4. Pakistan    |
| 8. Iran                 | 3. Afghanistan |
| 7. Iraq                 | 2. Somalia     |
| 6. Syria                | 1. North Korea |

(Source: The Esther Project)

## 4) A Coming Persecution

Ultimately, Scripture speaks prophetically to a time of great suffering yet to come. In the days immediately preceding the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (i.e., during the rule and reign of the antichrist), hostility against those who profess faith in Christ will be most extreme...

### Revelation 6:9–11 (Emphasis Mine)

9 When he opened the fifth seal, 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. 10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our **blood**?” 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were **killed** just as they had been.

**FYI** – These figures correspond to those who will be killed for their refusal to worship the antichrist (cf. Rev. 20:4b, Emphasis Mine): “. . . 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.”

## PRINCIPLES & APPLICATIONS

Thus said...

**Q1. What lessons or overarching principles can we draw from such information?**

**Q2. What practical application(s) can we leave with when we dismiss from this place?**

### 1) Impacting Truth

Firstly, we must allow the truth of Scripture and the testimony of the ages to inform and impact our understanding of the Lord, our service to Him, and our relationship with this world. Many live under the delusion that Christians are always called to be prosperous, safe, secure, welcomed, and without worry in this world...

**KEY** – This is simply not true, and many are negatively impacted when given to this delusion!

**QUOTE** – “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” –Martin Luther

#### John 15:18–20a

18 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 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. 20 Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

### 2) A Matter of Perspective

Secondly, we must allow the suffering of the saints (i.e., past, present and future) to give us much-needed perspective. If figures like Daniel, Shadrach, Meschech and Abednego, Stephen, Peter, James, and Paul lived so excellently in the face of death, how can we not live excellently in our relative ease! How can we be so given to doubt, complaint and murmur in our “light-afflictions” when others remain so steadfast in the worst of human conditions?

**Q. Do you know how Paul viewed all of the afflictions he had endured?** Consider...

#### 2 Corinthians 4:17 (Emphasis Mine)

17 For our **light and momentary troubles** are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

**KEY** – Is this how we operate? Maybe it is time to grow up a bit and gain some much-needed perspective!

### 3) Follow the Leader(s)

Thirdly, let us aspire to the example set forth by those who suffered—and still suffer—well for the cause of Christ. Let us aspire to the faith, hopefulness and perseverance demonstrated by the iconic figures of both Scripture and history!

**FYI** – Hebrews 11 outlines an array of heroes of the faith. Hebrews 12 opens with the following...

### Hebrews 12:1–3

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

### 4) The Benefit(s) of Affliction

Fourthly, let us remember that persecution, adversity and affliction can be beneficial for the Church of Christ...

**NOTE 1** – This is true at the INDIVIDUAL level...

### James 1:2–4

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

**NOTE 2** – This is true at the CORPORATE level...

### Acts 8:1–3

1 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

**Q. “How is this a good thing?” you might ask...**

### Acts 8:4 (Emphasis Mine)

4 Those who had been scattered **preached** the word **wherever** they went. . . .

**KEY** – Per. forced the Church to move out of the confines of one city that it might become a global movement!

### 5) Heavenly Reward

Lastly, persecution drives us to the promise of heavenly reward. The reality of Christian persecution and martyrdom should serve to remind us that death is not an end for the Christian, but a glorious beginning. The last thing we should ever fear as believers is death, for it is an already-defeated foe (cf. 1 Cor. 15). We are of the sort that go to our executions with praise and indomitable hopefulness!

**KEY** – Our spiritual forebears went to their deaths singing, and such actions led many an executioner to faith! Suffering has a way of bringing out the best of Christ in us, stripping away the flesh and all worldly attachment (cf. Stephen of Acts 7b)! Keep your eyes on Christ and the reward He has with Him for those who believe...

### 2 Corinthians 4:17–18

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

## POLYCARP

Allow me to close with an account from the annals of Church History concerning a martyr named Polycarp...

**NOTE 1** – Polycarp was a bishop of the early church, a disciple of the apostle John, a contemporary of Ignatius, and the teacher of Irenaeus. According to Irenaeus, Polycarp “was instructed by the apostles, and was brought into contact with many who had seen Christ.” He lived from the latter half of the first century [A.D. 69] to the mid-second century [A.D. 155]. Polycarp was martyred by the Romans, and his death was influential, even among the pagans” ([www.GotQuestions.org](http://www.GotQuestions.org)).

**NOTE 2** – Please consider the following record of his death in Christ. This account is the story (c. A.D. 160) of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the Bishop of the church in Smyrna (i.e., a city in Asia Minor devoted to Roman worship). The account is in the form of a letter from eye-witnesses to other churches in the area. It is the earliest chronicle of a martyrdom outside the New Testament...

**FYI** – It reads as follows...

The police and horsemen came with the young man at suppertime on the Friday [i.e., February 23, A.D. 155] with their usual weapons, as if coming out against a robber. That evening, they found him lying down in the upper room of a cottage. He could have escaped but he refused saying, “God’s will be done.” When he heard that they had come, he went down and spoke with them. They were amazed at his age and steadfastness, and some of them said. “Why did we go to so much trouble to capture a man like this?” Immediately he called for food and drink for them, and asked for an hour to pray uninterrupted. They agreed, and he stood and prayed, so full of the grace of God, that he could not stop for two hours. The men were astounded and many of them regretted coming to arrest such a godly and venerable an old man.

When he finished praying... they put him on a donkey, and took him into the city....

As Polycarp was being taken into the arena, a voice came to him from heaven: “Be strong, Polycarp and play the man!” No one saw who had spoken, but our brothers who were there heard the voice. When the crowd heard that Polycarp had been captured, there was an uproar. The Proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On hearing that he was, he tried to persuade him to apostatize, saying, “Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent, and say, ‘Down with the Atheists [those who rejected the Roman pantheon and Caesar as a god]!’” Polycarp looked grimly at the wicked heathen multitude in the stadium, and gesturing towards them, he said, “Down with the Atheists!” “Swear,” urged the Proconsul, “reproach Christ, and I will set you free.” “86 years have I have served him,” Polycarp declared, “and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”

“I have wild animals here,” the Proconsul said. “I will throw you to them if you do not repent.” “Call them,” Polycarp replied. “It is unthinkable for me to repent from what is good to turn to what is evil. I will be glad though to be changed from evil to righteousness.” “If you despise the animals, I will have you burned.” “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why are you waiting? Bring on whatever you want.”

It was all done in the time it takes to tell. The crowd collected wood and bundles of sticks from the shops and public baths. The Jews, as usual, were keen to help. When the pile was ready, Polycarp took off his outer clothes, undid his belt, and tried to take off his sandals – something he was not used to, as the faithful always raced to do it for him, each wanting to be the one to touch his skin – this is how good his life was. But when they went to fix him with nails, he said, “Leave me as I am, for he that gives me strength to endure the fire, will enable me not to struggle, without the help of your nails.”

So they simply bound him with his hands behind him like a distinguished ram chosen from a great flock for sacrifice. Ready to be an acceptable burnt-offering to God, he looked up to heaven, and said, “O Lord God Almighty, the Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of you, the God of angels, powers and every creature, and of all the righteous who live before you, I give you thanks that you count me worthy to be numbered among your martyrs, sharing the cup of Christ and the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, through the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day as an acceptable sacrifice, as you, the true God, have predestined, revealed to me, and now fulfilled. I praise you for all these things, I bless you and glorify you, along with the everlasting Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. To you, with him, through the Holy Ghost, be glory both now and forever. Amen.”

Then the fire was lit, and the flame blazed furiously. We who were privileged to witness it saw a great miracle, and this is why we have been preserved, to tell the story. The fire shaped itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, and formed a circle around the body of the martyr. Inside it, he looked not like flesh that is burnt, but like bread that is baked, or gold and silver glowing in a furnace. And we smelt a sweet scent, like frankincense or some such precious spices.

Eventually, when those wicked men saw that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they commanded an executioner to pierce him with a dagger. When he did this, such a great quantity of blood flowed that the fire was extinguished. The crowd were amazed at the difference between the unbelievers and the elect – of whom the great Polycarp was surely one, having in our own times been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, and bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna. For every word he spoke either has been or shall be accomplished.

When the Enemy saw the wonder of his martyrdom, his blameless life and now his crowning with immortality, he did his utmost to stop us keeping any memorial of him or taking possession of his holy body. He inspired Nicetes, the father of Herod, along with the Jews to ask the governor not to hand over his body for burial. “They might turn from worshipping the crucified one,” he said, “only to start worshipping this one.” They did not realize that it is impossible for us to abandon Christ who suffered for the salvation of the world, or to worship any other....

The centurion then, seeing the disturbance caused by the Jews, took the body and publicly burnt it. Later, we collected up his bones, more precious than jewels and better purified than gold, and put them in an appropriate place where, the Lord willing, we shall celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom each year with joy and rejoicing, both to remember those who have run their race and to prepare those yet to walk in their steps.

This is the story of the blessed Polycarp, the twelfth martyr in Smyrna, though he has a unique place memory of all people, being remembered even by all the heathen. He was not merely an illustrious teacher, but also a pre-eminent martyr, whose death all desire to imitate, being altogether consistent with the Gospel of Christ. Having overcome the unjust governor with patience and acquired the crown of immortality, he now, with the apostles and all the righteous, glorifies God the Father with joy, and blesses our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls, the Ruler of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.



**KEY** – You see herein the demonstration of the principles previously described...

- 1)** There are times when believers are called to suffer for their allegiance to Christ.
- 2–3)** The suffering of this Christian caused other believers to live for God (in life or death).
- 4)** We see herein the benefit suffering can have upon the Church of Christ and the heathen world.
- 5)** This ancient account testifies to the brevity of life v. the wonder of heavenly reward with Jesus (forever).

## **PRAYER**

As we close, the purpose of this International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians is to pray. (**PRAYER**)

## **CONCLUSION**

**NOTE 1** – Those who wish to give online may do so at [www.NewLifeBarre.org](http://www.NewLifeBarre.org). Those who wish to give in person can utilize the offering boxes located throughout the church facility. Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting the work of Christ.

**NOTE 2** – Ministry Schedule...

Prayer – Sunday at 8:45am  
 Sunday School – Sunday at 9:15am  
 CYC – Tuesday from 3–4pm and 4–5pm  
 Weekly Study – Thursday at 6:30–7:30pm  
 Women’s Ministry – 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday at 6:30pm  
 Men’s Breakfast – 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday at 9am  
 Potluck – Final Sunday of the Month

**NOTE 3** – Special Events Pt. 1...

We will host a church Clean-Up Day on Saturday, November 20, starting at 9am. All are welcome to join in!

**NOTE 4** – Special Events Pt. 2...

OCC is nearly upon us. We will host our OCC Service on Sunday, November 21. Feel free to bring in your packed-boxes before and/or on OCC Sunday. Shoeboxes are available downstairs, along with information on how to pack said boxes. Those with Q’s can see Ruth Dahlstrom.

### **Numbers 6:24–26**

24 The Lord bless you  
 and keep you;  
 25 the Lord make his face shine on you  
 and be gracious to you;  
 26 the Lord turn his face toward you  
 and give you peace.