

Building a Community that Stands - a study in the Book of Acts - Hannah Heather

Where have you seen God at work in your world this week? Share stories that encourage.

The Confrontation of Worlds

Acts is clear: following Jesus is an amazing thing that will satisfy your soul and give you a hope and a future. But it is also clear that following Jesus will result in conflict and persecution.

Theologian Jürgen Moltmann said "Peace with God means conflict with the world"

In Jesus' day he healed many, but many more despised him and they eventually killed him. Following Jesus is not an add-on, like a conservatory or patio to a house, it is the very foundation. Following Jesus reorients us but that results in tension: Kingdom of Light v dark systems of the world. Jesus said, "*This is war, and there is no neutral ground. If you're not on my side, you're the enemy; if you're not helping, you're making things worse.*" Matt 12v30 Msg. "There is no neutral ground in the universe, every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counter-claimed by satan." CS Lewis.

Following Jesus is the path to a flourishing life but it's not always palatable. Paul and Silas were accused of "*turning the world upside down*" Acts 17v6 NKJV. "Jesus is Lord" is an exclusive message. Acts 12v1 Herod killed and persecuted Christians but in Acts 12v24: "*.. the word of God continued to spread and flourish.*" Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,*" Matt 5v10-12. Why persecution? Because we have a righteousness that will offend the world and loyalty to Jesus will align us against evil. This is the conflict of the ages.

To be like that costs: our choices in finance, actions to others, sexual ethics. We need to see the world through the lens of Jesus. He said *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.* John 16v33.

We might not be physically persecuted but may face insults, bad-mouthing as we stand for Jesus. If there are no "benefits" of faith we can be inclined to give up, but if Jesus is truly central and our foundation for life we will stand firm. Hannah asked: **Where is your faith in Jesus putting you in conflict with the world? Where can we speak up?**

Increasingly there is cultural resistance in our society. Legitimate secularism is pushing faith out of the public space. If we follow Jesus we will run into increasing resistance.

Hannah showed a video of Farshid from Iran sharing his faith despite being persecuted, spending 5 years in prison (361 days in solitary confinement), being away from his children for 10-12 years. He wasn't "free under law but was free in Christ". He knew that suffering would be part of his faith and whilst confined God revealed himself to Farshid. There was confrontation of Light with darkness but God gave him special grace and he led others to the Lord.

Asked how we should pray for the persecuted Farshid said to pray for the dark wall to fall (after 44 years post revolution in Iran) and that Christian leaders would be prepared to harvest those coming to faith.

How can we rejoice when we face persecution?

1. Break the fear of human opinion. Jesus said, "*Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,*" Luke 6v26.
2. Trust that grace will come when you need it.

Why be glad in persecution?

1. Persecution will sharpen our image to be more like Christ. We take up our cross to follow him.
2. Get to experience the joy of faithfulness even when it costs us. Jesus is faithful to us. He is worth it!
3. We get to inherit the kingdom. We are people of light. The Light will cover the whole earth.

"All the darkness of the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle". Francis of Assisi.
God's word is not chained. 2Tim 2v9b

Pray for an area where Christians are being persecuted. (Refer to <https://www.elam.com/pray> ; <https://www.opendoors.org/> ; <https://www.csw.org.uk/>)

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