

From Our Pastor January 27, 2018

Sabbath Greetings to Everyone!

In a well-attended press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, DC this past week, David Curry, CEO of Open Doors USA, announced the "World Watch List 2018." The World Watch List is an annual report on the global persecution of Christians ranking the top 50 countries where Christians are persecuted for their faith. Released at the beginning of each year, the list uses data from Open Doors field workers and external experts to quantify and analyze persecution worldwide.

Countries are ranked by the severity of persecution of Christians, calculated by analyzing the level of violent persecution plus the pressure experienced in five spheres of life. The pressure or intimidation is measured in five categories: Church life, family life, community experience, national life, and private life. The violence is arrived at by adding up the number of known violent acts committed against those admitting to being Christians.

Leading the list is the Tyrant kingdom of North Korea, where about 300,000 Christians live. According to the report, "The primary driver of persecution in North Korea is the state. For three generations, everything in the country focused on idolizing the leading Kim family. Christians are seen as hostile elements in society that have to be eradicated. Due to the constant indoctrination permeating the whole country, neighbors and even family members are highly watchful and report any suspicious religious activity to the authorities. "

The information in the report is shocking and portends ill for the future of religious freedom. According to the World Watch list 215 million Christians experience high levels of persecution in the countries on the World Watch List. This represents 1 in 12 Christians worldwide. During the World Watch List 2018 reporting period: 3,066 Christians were killed; 1,252 were abducted; 1,020 were raped or sexually harassed; and 793 churches were attacked.

Islamic Oppression fuels persecution in 8 of the top 10 countries, in fact a majority of the 50 nations on the list are Islamic. The spread of Radical Islam and Islamic oppression is one of the most widely recognized sources of persecution for Christians in the world today—and it continues to spread—aiming to bring many parts of the world under Sharia law. There is also growing persecution of Christians in some parts of Asia with Hindu nationalism (India, Nepal) and Buddhist nationalism (Myanmar, Sri Lanka) both gaining ground.

The biggest surprise in the report is number 11--India. India has 1.3 billion people and 65 million of them are Christian. Due to their British influence India was for decades a peaceful place for Christians, but that is changing. As Curry reports, "While the source of persecution for Christians in India depends on their location within the country, most

of it comes from Hindu radical groups. Because Hindu radicals view Christians as outsiders, they experience increased persecution. These radicals are intent on cleansing the nation of both Islam and Christianity, employing violence to this end. The government continues to look away when religious minorities are attacked, indicating violence may only increase."

Jesus Christ foretold that those who proclaim to follow His teachings would be persecuted. He said to the disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..." (John 15:18-20) When the coming World Government arrives, it will enforce persecution of the true followers of Jesus Christ. When the Apostle John saw a vision of this coming world monolith, it was pictured to him and he described it as a "beast." One purpose of this beast is to impose its approved religion on the world. "He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed." (Revelation 13:15)

We should pray for those around the world who are being persecuted, killed, injured, or are suffering as a result of wanting to follow the teachings in the Bible. While it may be taking place in "other nations" right now, the same type of persecution will be here soon enough.

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