

THE BIBLE VIEW

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Theme: Our Heritage

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So Great a Heritage

Bill Brinkworth

Christians today, both in America and throughout the world, have so much for which to be grateful. Our faith, Bible, doctrines, and freedoms were obtained at high prices paid by our Christian predecessors. It cost many of them their lives and much suffering, yet we take for granted what believers of the past had to pay dearly for and place little value on our heritage.

Christians should be expected to face persecution, as its leader, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, also received much. His righteousness and exposure of false religions were so grievous to the followers of man-made worship that they ensured the Saviour was beaten, ridiculed, mocked, and eventually nailed to a cross. If God allowed His Son not to escape the world's wrath and hatred for the things of God, Christians should also expect it.

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;...." John 15:19-20

We get upset if someone makes a joke about our faith or even scoffs at us. Most of us today have little understanding of what Christians before us suffered for their beliefs. Here are some reminders of the sacrifices and suffering early Christians faced for their faith and godly lifestyles:

- The first followers of Jesus ran for their lives as they were pursued (Acts 8) for believing and professing that Christ was risen (Acts 4:2-3) and was their Saviour. It was not unsaved, but the religious, that often initiated much of their persecutions even before A. D. 30.
- Saul, before he was saved, took part in the killing of the first martyr for Christ, Stephen. Saul, later renamed Paul, watched as the godly preacher was stoned to death.
- To believe Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Messiah cost many much in the early churches. It cost them their belongings, reputations, livelihoods, imprisonment, and even their lives.
- The apostles were persecuted for their beliefs, and most died because of them. Paul, who once led the slaughter against Christ's disciples (Acts 9:1, 2), faced imprisonment, beatings, stonings, and persecution (II Corinthians 11:25) after being saved and becoming a faithful follower of Christ's teachings.
- The persecution of Christ's followers continued after the death of the apostles. Foxe's Book of Martyrs describes many of the barbarous atrocities done against believers. He reports they were tortured, boiled in oil, cut in half, thrown to the lions, burnt alive,

mocked, enslaved, and other unimaginable atrocities.

For what crime were they killed? It was for the “crime” of believing, standing for, and following the teachings of God’s Word. In many cases, their demise could have been avoided by a simple, verbal recanting of what they believed. They did not even have to believe what they said. It would often have sufficed their tormentors if they had just said that “Jesus was not the Son of God,” that they did not believe in the Word of God, or that the false ‘church’ persecuting them was the ‘one true church,’” and their lives would have been spared. However, their faith meant everything to them, and many died for their convictions.

Millions of men, women, and children died for their faith in the past. The walls of Rome’s catacombs and other hidden places reveal how many lived and died in fear of being caught and tortured for their beliefs. Many had to worship in secret places for fear of being killed or imprisoned for attending a church service.

Landmark’s Baptist College’s collection of ancient Bibles has a Bible with fire-scorched pages. It was plucked out of the flames that burned its owner. He refused to denounce his faith in Christ and His Word, and the man was burnt to death. Today, his Bible is preserved as a reminder of what Christ and His Word meant to some and how many died for reading or living God’s way.

With the freedom that most have today, many professing Christians do not live for Christ, let alone die for Him. It is easy to attend a nearby church, yet countless excuses are given by those not attending.

Most households contain at least one copy of the Word of God. However, few have bothered to read it. Baptistries are now heated and always available, yet few follow the Lord in believer’s baptism. Although we are quickly losing our religious freedoms in the United States, it is still possible for a believer to obey the Lord’s command and tell others how to go to Heaven, yet few do.

What does your faith in Christ mean to you? Does God’s Word mean so much that you read it faithfully and would not sway from its teaching? Is the price Christ paid on the cross for our salvation so precious to you that you are determined to live for Him, no matter the cost socially or monetarily? Are the Bible’s truths so important to you that you share them with others no matter the cost in time, money, or others’ opinions?

We are nearing an era’s end when many lived their faith in Christ and shared it with others without paying a high price. However, because many have not stood up for their beliefs and freedoms, the ungodly are taking away those liberties.

For most of us, compared to what our predecessors have paid for their religious convictions, the cost to us has been minimal. That fact may change shortly. Will you be willing to pay the price for your faith, no matter what it is? Many say they will die for their faith, but for most of us, God only requires that we live for Him. Are you living boldly for Him today?

“You cannot win without sacrifice.” — Buxton

Soldier of the Cross

Isaac Watts, 1762

*Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own
His cause, or blush to speak His name?*

*Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?
While others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?
Are there no foes for me to face?*

*Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?*

*Sure, I must fight if I would reign:
Increase my courage, Lord;
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.*

History of Early Christians

Excerpts from Foxe's Book of Martyrs

- Stephen: "... He was cast out of the city and stoned to death."
- About two thousand Christians, with Nicanor, one of the seven deacons, suffered martyrdom during the "persecution that arose about Stephen."
- James, the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John: "... beheaded"
- Philip: "... He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified."
- Matthew: "... was slain by a halberd in the city of Nadabah."
- James, the Less: "... At the age of ninety-four he was beaten and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club."
- Matthias: "... He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded."
- Andrew: "... He was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground."
- Mark: "... Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands"
- Peter: "... Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was."
- Paul, the apostle: "... gave his neck to the sword."
- Jude: "He was crucified at Edessa ..."
- Bartholomew: "He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters."
- Thomas: "... preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear."
- Luke: "... and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece."

- Simon: “... preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, in which latter country he was crucified ...”
- John: “... banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. ... He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.”
- Barnabas: “... his death is supposed to have taken place about A.D. 73.”

“And yet, notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and watered plentifully with the blood of saints.”

“Sincerity is the salt of the sacrifice. Without it, the offering can never be acceptable to God.” — *Spurgeon*

Singing If You Can

Author Unknown

God never would send you the darkness
 If He felt you could bear the light;
 But you would not cling to His guiding hand
 If the way were always bright,
 And you would not care to walk by faith,
 Could you always walk by sight?

Then nestle your hand in your Father’s,
 And sing, if you can, as you go;
 Your song may cheer someone behind you
 Whose courage is sinking low;
 And, well, if your lips do quiver,
 Be encouraged; God loves you so.