

Scripture Reading: Revelation 7:9-17... NIV

Sermon Title: “**Martyrdom**”

### **Martyrdom**

Tonight I am going to speak on a topic that I have actually never heard preached about before, but I feel is a topic that needs to be well known by every Christian, especially in these last days... and that topic is Martyrdom (순교자임). My title of the sermon is this...

Martyrdom – To know Jesus is to walk in His footsteps.

I pray that what I am about to share tonight may give you revelation with what you have just written. And I pray that your faith may be encouraged by what is shared.

### **Let's Pray**

#### **What is “Martyrdom?”**

The word “martyrdom” means: the suffering of death on account of adherence to a cause... and especially to one’s religious faith. To die as a martyr basically means to die for what you believe in.

#### **My History**

Martyrdom became an important topic for me during my years in college. It was during this time that I really began to grow with God, particularly in prayer. And as I grew with God, my responsibilities in my fellowship increased and I began discipling more and more students. As I got to know them more, I began to learn about their pasts and I discovered that nearly each of them had deep scars or sad stories. I remember at this initial time of growing with the Lord, I would pray alone in my room and tears would stream down my face as I would feel their pain through the Spirit. At this time God was teaching me how to pray. He was revealing to me His heart for His children. He was showing me just how much His heart breaks for this fallen world.

And this is something we must understand: Jesus feels all our hurts. He is with us always. “Surely I am with you always, even now to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20)” When Jesus appeared to the Saul on the road to Damascus, He said to Saul, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Jesus didn’t say, “Saul, Saul, why do you hurt and kill my people?” Instead Jesus basically said, “Saul, Saul, why do you hurt *me*?” Jesus feels our every hurt.

**Psalm 68:19 – “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens”**

Now, as God was revealing how much He hurts for this fallen world, it was hard for me to handle it. I found myself crying out to God, “Please God, just make the hurting stop! Make the hurting in the world stop!” I began to question God why He would allow such injustice and suffering. Why couldn’t He just end everything and let us all be with Him in heaven? And so I cried out to God. And He began to answer me.

God began opening my eyes to all the lost in this vast world. He opened my eyes first to China, and then to the rest of Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and other places in

the world that are in complete darkness. And then God opened my eyes to this Scripture...

Matthew 24:14 – And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

God had first been revealing to me His broken heart for the hurting and suffering around me, those few people I was discipling in my fellowship. Now God was revealing to me His broken heart for all billions of people in the world that have never heard of the name “Jesus.” I quickly understood that Jesus will not return until each one of God’s people has been able to hear the words of the Gospel. This Scripture is one of the clearest prophecies for us to follow as we wait for Christ’s return. So I understood that one way to speed His return is to spread the Gospel to as many people as possible.

Then God led me to another Scripture that must be fulfilled before He can return. And that Scripture is...

Revelation 6:9-11 – “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. 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?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.”

So we see from this Scripture that there is a number of martyrs that must be reached before God will return. And that these slain people of God were crying out in the same way, “How long, O God, until the hurting will stop? How long, O Lord, will injustice continue?”

### **Martyrdom should be expected...**

So what else does the Bible have to say about this topic? Honestly, much like fasting, there is not too much Scripture about martyrdom... but in the Scripture relating to the topic, God makes it clear that it is something that should be expected of people with faith. Pastor Dustin mentioned this Scripture during last Sunday’s message, but let’s look at it again.

Hebrews 11:33-40 – “Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. *Others* were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”

This whole chapter is dedicated to the men and women who lived by faith. And who does the whole list begin with?

Hebrews 11:4 – By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith, he still speaks, even though he is dead.

Did you realize that the first person in the Bible to do something notably good ended up being killed for it? Because Abel loved God and set God first in his life, he was murdered.

This is something I want you guys to understand: Martyrdom should be expected. About 165,000 Christians were killed for their faith last year. Jesus never skirted this issue. When the disciples wanted to know about the end times Jesus warned them about great evils that would come.

Matthew 24:9 – “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”

He also tells them...

John 16:2 – “A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.”

Jesus didn't make a big deal about it, He simply told us to expect it. When we say we are a soldier of God, that doesn't mean we just inherit the armor of God, but we also inherit the call of duty. And every soldier understands that their calling might lead to their death, but they are willing because they know they are serving a cause that is greater than them. Dying for Christ is not just for specific people, it is something that should be expected for every person that decides to live by true faith.

This is short testimony of a young high school girl in America that was killed during the Columbine high school shootings back in 1999...

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"Do you believe in God?" they asked Cassie Bernall. The shooters knew full well that she did. The girl who had once indulged in the occult (as the killers now did) had moved into a realm of peace when she learned to center her heart on Christ. She became a church-goer and a worker among those who needed Christ. Often she brought her Bible to school.

She was reading it in the library when the killer pointed his gun at her. Did she believe in God? "Yes, I believe in God," she replied.

"Why?" asked the boy in the dark trench coat. Without waiting for an answer, he pulled the trigger.

The Sunday before her death, Cassie wrote these words after church:

Now I have given up on everything else. I have found it to be the only way to really know Christ and to experience the mighty power that brought Him back to life again, and to find out what it means to suffer and to die with him. So, whatever it takes I will be one who lives in the fresh newness of life of those who are alive from the dead.

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Filled with faith in God, this girl wanted to know Jesus completely. Her desire was for Him and nothing else. And to know Jesus completely is to live the life that He lived... laying down your life and your own ambitions and living and dying for God's will.

1 Peter 4:13 – “But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

It is actually in these moments of persecution and even death that we can feel and see God the clearest. You might remember that just before the first martyr for Jesus, Stephen, was killed for his faith, he looked up to heaven and was able to see Jesus standing by the throne of God. It was in his toughest time of persecution that he saw Jesus the clearest.

Paul expresses his yearning to know God in Philippians 3:10-11... let's turn to it...

Philippians 3:10-11 – “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

I believe that as we truly yearn for knowing more of Jesus, the desire to die for Him will grow naturally within us. We were created to be like Him.

### **Effects of Martyrdom**

So what are the effects of martyrdom? The original definition of the word “Martyr” meant, “Witness” or “Someone that would bear testimony.” Those that have died for God have become a powerful witness to their persecutors, to those who have watched or heard of their death, and even a witness to God Himself. You remember that Abel's innocent blood still cries out to God even today.

In the New Testament, the first person to die for faith in Jesus was Stephen. Before Stephen died, the Christian church was small and only located in Jerusalem. After he was stoned to death, the apostles and people of God were scattered throughout the land. This scattering led to the salvation of towns and cities all around the land.

Even here in Korea, the Christian church was founded by martyrs: first the missionaries that originally came and then many of the first Korean pastors were killed for their faith.

So to put it in brief, the effect of martyrdom is not just the person dying being able to experience Christ's life and love in a powerful way, but their death also provides a powerful witness to all who see or hear.

### **Stories**

I have three short stories of martyrs I would like to share with you before closing this message. These three stories were taken from the book, “The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs.”

Before I start reading, please turn your Bibles back to Revelation chapter 7.

### **China 1977 (Speak slowly)**

In Kiangsi, China, two Christian girls, Chui-Chin-Hsiu and Ho Hsiu Tzu, and their pastor, were sentenced to death. As on many such occasions in church history, the persecutors mocked and scorned them for being so foolish as to die for an unseen God. Then they promised the pastor that if he would shoot the girls they would release him. He accepted.

The girls waited patiently in their prison cells for the moment of their execution. They prayed quietly together. Soon guards came for them and led them out. A fellow-prisoner who watched the execution through the barred window of his prison cell, said that their faces were pale but beautiful beyond belief, infinitely sad but sweet. They were placed against a wall, and their pastor was brought forward by two guards. They placed him close in front of the girls and put a pistol into his hand.

The girls whispered to each other, then bowed respectfully to their pastor. One of them said:

Before being shot by you, we wish to thank you heartily for what you have meant to us. You baptized us, you taught us the way of eternal life, you gave us holy communion with the same hand in which you now have a gun. May God reward you for all that you have done for us. You also taught us that Christians are sometimes weak and commit terrible sins, but they can be forgiven again. When you regret what you are about to do to us, do not despair like Judas, but repent like Peter. God bless you, and remember that our last thought of you was not one of indignation against your failure. Everyone passes through hours of darkness. We die with gratitude.

They bowed again to their pastor, closed their eyes, and stood silently waiting.

The pastor had obviously hardened his heart—he raised the pistol and shot them. No sooner had they fallen to the ground, then the Communist guards put him against the wall for immediate execution. As they shot him, no one heard words of repentance, only the sound of screaming.

### **Indonesia 1999**

In January, a Bible camp was held at the Station Field Complex at Pattimura University on the island of Ambon. Just as the camp was closing, a raging Muslim mob raced toward it, attacking those who were preparing to leave and those still in the camp.

When those in the camp heard the shouts and chants of the mob, they hid wherever they could. Assistant Pastor Hendrick P.H. Pattiwael took his wife and young children and hid in a room in one of the buildings. But it was no use, the mob searched every building, forcing every Christian out into the open where they could vent their fury upon them.

When Pastor Pattiwael heard the mob shouting and racing through the building where he was hiding with his family, he came out of the room, leaving his wife and children in hiding, and convinced the Muslims that he was the only one there and led them away from the room.

Inside the room, Mrs. Pattiwael heard her husband cry out with a loud voice, “Jesus, help me!” Then she heard the mob leaving, and all was quiet. She waited in the room for several hours, and only came out when she was certain the mob had left the camp. But though she looked throughout the University grounds, she could not find her husband. It was not until several days later that she learned that the Muslim mob had beaten and stabbed her husband to death.

She learned of his death from the police, who came to where she was staying and took her to the home of her husband's family, where they had taken his body when it was found. There she saw her husband lying in a coffin, his body full of bruises and stab wounds in his chest, shoulders, arm, and abdomen—all speaking of a slow, torturous, death at the hands of the vicious mob, venting their hate on him for his faith in Jesus Christ, and for his refusal to bow to their Allah.

When Mrs. Pattiwael saw her husband's body she was shocked, and felt that God had not protected him. For some time she was bitterly disappointed that God had allowed such a thing to happen to him, and could not understand it. But it wasn't long before she somehow began to know within herself that her husband's sacrifice was precious in God's eyes. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

She remembered also that a few days before her husband's death he asked her, "Do you love Jesus?" She, of course, said she did. But then he went on to tell her that if she loved Jesus, but loved her husband or family more, then she was not worthy of God's kingdom. Then he said to her, as if he somehow knew what was soon to happen to him, "I am ready to die for Jesus."

Mrs. Pattiwael has come to believe that God gives His children the best, even during difficult times—and that He is absolutely in full control of our lives. When a Christian worker from the United States asked her what Christians in free countries should do, she said, "Seek God more earnestly, so they can stand [firm with Jesus Christ] in the midst of trouble."

## **Indonesia 1999**

In January, Christian children and teenagers attended a Bible camp at the Station Field Complex at Pattimura University on the island of Ambon. When the camp was over, cars were to take the laughing, rejoicing, children and young people back to their homes, but there were many of them and not enough cars. So Pastor Mecky Sainyakit and three other Christian men left for Wakal village to rent more transportation.

On their way to the village, they were stopped by a mob of Muslims, who pulled them from their car and attacked them. Pastor Mecky and one of the other men were stabbed to death—the other two men escaped. The raging mob then burned the bodies of the two Christian men they had just brutally murdered.

Back in the Bible camp at the University, the children and young people became frightened when they heard shouts of death and Muslim chants coming toward them. They rushed around trying to find hiding places, but when the mob reached the University they forced many of them out into the open. One of them was fifteen-year-old Roy Pontoh.

Roy was terribly frightened, trembling with fear, but not so frightened that he would renounce his faith in Jesus Christ when he was threatened with death by the mob. And when they told him that he must become a Muslim, a soldier of Allah, the teenager mustered all the courage he had and with a quivering voice declared, "I am a soldier of Christ."

Hearing those words, an enraged Muslim attacker swung a sword at Roy's stomach, knocking out of his hands a Bible that he held out in front of him. Then he swung his sword again, and sliced through Roy's stomach, ripping it open. Just before he died, Roy said one final word that had eternal meaning and truth in it: "Jesus."

The mob then dragged Roy's body away and threw it into a ditch, like it was the body of a dead animal. Four days later his family found his body, took it home, cleaned it, and gave Roy a Christian burial. Although often torn by grief, Roy's

Christian parents are proud that their young son's faith in Jesus Christ stood firm and strong.

Let's read Revelation 7:13-17...

Revelation 7:13-17 – “Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in the white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, ‘they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

Psalms 116:15 – “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”

My hope is that each and everyone of us here may be able to receive the honor of dying for Christ. If the desire to die for the Lord is not there yet, do not be discouraged. Rather, be blessed by those who have gone before us. Know that as you grow with the Lord, so will your surrender to Him. And as you become more like Him, so will your desires change to reflect His desires. The Lord will prepare you and use you for every good work He has planned.

Philippians 1:6 – “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

\*Pray\*