

Persecuted For Jesus' Sake

Charlie (a fictitious name) came to us from a restricted communist country. With him was a teenage daughter. They stayed with us in Rome. Charlie was quietly spoken and as timid as a mouse. While chatting to us, he constantly surveyed the room and windows in case someone was watching or listening. He was so afraid of a possible informer. Charlie and his daughter had been given permission to come to Italy to visit us. He left behind a wife and other children. The government official remarked as he issued their exit visa: "You'll be back. We know, Christian husbands don't abandon their families. See you in three weeks."

It is hard for us to imagine such an oppressive regime. Charlie and his wife were forbidden to read the Bible to their children and to teach them the Gospel. Charlie was an agent for a para-church ministry that produced Scripture portions. He was discriminated against because of his faith. Their home was under constant surveillance. In their church meetings, informers were always present.

In the sermon today, we focus on Smyrna, a persecuted church in Turkey. People would be killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Whether in Africa or Asia, Christians around the world continue to be persecuted and oppressed. Here are some extracts of reports of what's happening today.

Christians arrested in Morocco

"... this week about 18 Moroccan Christian were arrested when the Moroccan authorities raided a Bible study in February 2010. Interrogations of detainees continued for 14 hours. A statement of the Interior Ministry claimed that the raid took place 'following information on the organization of a secret meeting to initiate people into Christianity, which would shake the faith of the Muslims and undermine the religious values of the Kingdom.'"

Christians expelled from their home in Laos

In Laos, harsh measures are taken against Christians to force them to renounce their faith. "About 100 officials, police and villagers forced 48 Christians during their Sunday morning service to an open field. Six of the 11 Christian households in the village have been destroyed and belongings from all 11 homes have been confiscated. ... local police are making all adults and children sleep on the ground in the woods. They cannot return to the village."

Christians continuously targeted in Kazakhstan

"On 17th January 2010 a Christian in Kazakhstan was fined 100 times the minimum monthly wage for hosting a worship service for women and children in her home. She will face criminal charges if she does not pay the fine. In recent weeks, several Christians in Uzbekistan have faced arrests and abuse because they belong to Churches that refuse to register with the State."

Are you prepared to stand up for your faith no matter what the cost?