

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. [www.dtminc.org](http://www.dtminc.org) Today's Date: May 28, 2023

## A Time to Remember

by Dan Trygg

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20

“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand-against in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” Ephesians 6:12-13

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” John 15:20

Memorial Day was first observed as Decoration Day in 1868, to commemorate those Union Soldiers who had died in the Civil War. Later, it was expanded to include all those who have died while serving in the United States Armed Forces. Along with Armed Forces Day (second Saturday in May) and Veterans Day (November 11<sup>th</sup>), Memorial Day was a time to remember those who served, and especially those who died, in the cause of their country. **While it is good and fitting to remember these sacrifices of those who answered the call to serve their country, it is also a good time to consider the work and sacrifice of those who have served in the work of the gospel, and the ongoing impact of their efforts. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13).**

Dr. Todd Johnson, spokesperson for the Center of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary estimates that **over 70 million Christians have been martyred for their faith, since the time of Jesus. More than half of these perished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under hostile governments.** About one million died between 2001 and 2010, and about 900,000 in the decade following. This averages to about 100,000 Christians each year, but the numbers vary year by year. **Many of these deaths have been through secondary causes, such as grinding poverty, disease and starvation, due to legal regulations, economic prejudice and exclusions from opportunity and aid, that would be offered to other people, but is denied to them. Often they are victims of mass killings and genocide, because they are identified as “Christians”, whether they have been actively promoting their faith, or not. About two-thirds of the 2.3 billion Christians in today’s world live in dangerous neighborhoods, hostile to believers in Christ. It is estimated that 8-10% of those who die for their faith are martyred as a direct result of testifying for Christ or proclaiming the gospel.**

**Christian History magazine (Issue 109) claims that there is a global war being waged against Christians today.** Judging from the number of deaths and torture of believers in Jesus in recent times, we can only conclude that this is an apt description of what has been taking place around the world. **There have always been persecution and martyrdom following the expanse of the gospel, but the backlash has been particularly intense in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.** Over a million Christians were exterminated in Nazi Germany, and over 15 million Orthodox Christians were killed in Russia between 1917 and 1950. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, over 200,000 believers were killed in the Boxer Rebellion in China, and another 700,000 under the communist Chinese between 1950 and 1980. Over 300,000 Christians were killed by Idi Amin in Uganda between 1971 and 1979. Over 5.4 million Christians were killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1998 to 2007. **Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world today. It is estimated that Christians are dying at a rate of one believer every six minutes, on average.** The example of Nazi Germany is a sober reminder that **even a “Christian nation” can quickly turn against genuine believers, when evil people come to power.** The repressive history of the Roman Catholic Church, the Inquisition, the religious wars in Europe, even the intolerant and horrific treatment of other believers in Jesus here in America under the Puritans and others, are a grim reminder that **religious people with power can quickly become as dangerous and abusive to the fresh movements of God as the Sadducees and Pharisees that put Jesus to death.**

Open Doors, an international ministry organization estimates that **309 million Christians today live in countries where there they may suffer very high or extreme levels of persecution. That is 1 out of every 8 believers, worldwide.** Of these, some areas are more hostile to believers than others. Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and India are especially difficult places for Christians to live today. **Interestingly, these are also places where the church seems to be growing the fastest today.** The observation of Tertullian, a second-century church leader, continues to hold true. He said, **“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”** Ignatius of Antioch of Syria, another second-century church leader, when he was being sent to face martyrdom in Rome wrote, **“Now I begin to be a disciple of Christ. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of**

the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Jesus Christ.” **It is when Christians face mistreatment with grace and faith, with peace and calmness of heart, that unbelievers see something that they cannot understand. It is when the response of believers is not a response of the flesh, or from bitterness, accusation or retaliation, ...but love and forgiveness for even their persecutors..., that is when people see Jesus.**

**My family is here in the United States because of religious persecution. On my mother’s side were Puritans, who fled from the oppression of the Church of England.** They settled in Massachusetts. In an interesting twist, one of my female forebears was **Mary Dyer**. She and her husband, William, came to Boston in 1635. They were influenced by followers of John Cotton, and a woman named Anne Hutchinson and her brother-in-law, Rev. John Wheelwright. These people preached that grace was freely offered by God, not something to be earned by works. This led to a major controversy among the Puritan leaders. **The Puritans who had come here for religious freedom became the persecutors of a new wave of gospel preaching.** Anne Hutchinson held meetings in her home to read and study the sermons of John Cotton and others. Eventually, Anne was banished from the colony, and the men were disarmed and also banished. They started a new settlement in what became Rhode Island. Mary Dyer returned to England for a few years, where she became a Quaker. When she returned to Boston, **she tried to share her new beliefs by having Bible studies and prayer meetings in her home.** She was arrested, and banished from the colony, upon pain of death should she return. After some time in Rhode Island, she was convinced that God was commissioning her to go back to Boston to take a stand for religious liberty. She was only 49 years old, when she was hanged at the Boston Commons. Thankfully for me, she left behind six living children, and I am descended from one of them.

**On my father’s side, there were born-again, Bible-believing Christians in Sweden, who were being persecuted by the state Lutheran church,** for meeting with other people for Bible study. The persecution was so heavy that my great-grandfather took his 16 year-old daughter by sleigh to a ship waiting to take her to America. He had made arrangements for her to be an indentured servant in North Dakota, until she had earned enough to pay her fare. As he stood with her on the dock, he laid his hands on her shoulders, and committed her to God, and asked Him to bless her and her descendants to the third and fourth generation. Her testimony was that during times of deep trial, she could almost feel his hands upon her shoulders, and remembered his words of faith. Of course, her story parallels that of the early Swedish Friends, who also came to America to escape religious persecution in Sweden. The Evangelical Covenant Church was birthed in Chicago in 1885. She joined another group of Swedish Lutheran refugees that became the Baptist General Conference.

**I have experienced only minor persecution for being a disciple of Christ. Mostly, it has been in the form of name calling and slander.** I have had things thrown at me, and have been threatened, and run off the road once, endured a few punches and kicks in my time for my service to Christ, but I have not experienced any serious bodily harm. **Again, the most hurtful abuse has been dished out by religious people, often people in power in church leadership.** I have been unfairly accused and judged by people, for things I had not done. In our society, it was not difficult to just go somewhere else. **Some of those we know, however, have experienced such serious persecution.** Some of our Ugandan and Eritrean friends have seen or know people who have been mistreated or threatened. Michael Arun recently shared about the persecution in northern India, where he is from, ...even relating an episode where someone had intended to kill him, but God intervened and drove him away.

**It is important to remember that Jesus told us that we can expect to be hated by others, because we are following Him. This should not take us by surprise.** Opposition, false reports, slander, and even mistreatment go with the territory, if we are going to follow Jesus. As the apostle Paul pointed out, this is because of the spiritual opposition that is against us. **Our battle is not with people. It is with spiritual entities who are set against us. Our battle is not with people, though it may be through people that this warfare comes into our lives.**

**If Christian History magazine is correct, there is a global war against Christians.** That is quite evident. **We are also seeing a rising tide of intolerance toward Bible-believing Christians in our society today.** We should not be surprised to find that this will result in growing hostility and maybe even reprisals against us. **We are not to be alarmed, or resentful.** This is to be expected. **What is important is our response to negative speech or actions taken against us. People will not see Jesus in a negative, angry response.** The kingdom of Jesus is not built by politics, law or even the popularity of the populace. **The kingdom of Jesus is revealed and demonstrated by those who are willing to lay their lives down for their fellow countrymen.** It is made visible by loving those who speak against us, and not returning insult for insult. **People will see Jesus when we stop living for this visible, material, political world and choose to invest in the lives of others in acts of practical service, so that we can gain an opportunity to share the good news with them.** The so-called “culture wars” are not our primary concern. It is a trap to pull us into ugly, angry confrontation. What do we have to do with judging outsiders? (1 Cor. 5:12) Our job is to share the love of Christ so that “outsiders” will want to become “insiders”, ...disciples of Christ. **Remember those who have laid their lives down in love. It is that kind of love that will change hearts. Win hearts! Is your love a “greater love”, a love that will reveal Jesus?**