

## THE BIBLE VIEW

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### So Great a Heritage

*Bill Brinkworth*

Christians today, both in America and throughout the world, have so much to be thankful and grateful for. Our faith, Bible, doctrines, and our freedoms were obtained by 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.

It should be expected that Christians would face persecutions, as its leader, Jesus Christ the Son of God, also received much. His righteousness and exposure of false religion were so grievous to the followers of man-made worship, that it was they that made sure that the Saviour was beaten, ridiculed, mocked, and nailed to the 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*

Most of us today have no clue as to what Christians before us had to suffer for their beliefs. We get upset if someone makes a joke about our faith or even scoffs at us. Here are some reminders of the sacrifices made by early Christians for their beliefs 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 the unsaved, but the religious, that often initiated much of their persecution even before A. D. 30.
- Saul, who after he was saved was called Paul, participated in the killing of the first martyr for Christ, Stephen. He 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, as it cost Stephen.

- All of 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 he was saved and became 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

gives many of the barbarous atrocities done against believers. He reports that they were tortured, boiled in oil, cut in half, thrown to the lions, burnt alive, mocked, enslaved, and other unimaginable atrocities.

What crime were they killed for? 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 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’ that was persecuting them was the ‘one true church’” and their lives would have been spared. However, their faith meant everything to them, and they died for their convictions.

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

In a college’s collection of ancient Bibles is a Bible with fire-scorched pages. It was plucked out of the flames that burned its owner. He had refused to denounce his faith in Christ and in His Word, and was burnt to death because of

it. Today his Bible is preserved as a reminder of what Christ and His Word meant to some, and how many died for reading it or making it available for others to have.

With the freedom that most have today, professing Christians cannot even live for Christ; yet alone die for Him. It is very easy to attend a nearby church; yet there are countless excuses told for their not attending. Most households contain at least one copy of the Word of God; yet few have even 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 it.

What does your faith in Christ mean to you? Does His Word mean so much to you that you not only read it faithfully, but that you would not sway from its teaching, even if it cost you your life? Does the price Christ paid on the cross for our salvation mean so much to you that you are living for Him no matter what it may cost socially or monetarily; or does the slightest possibility of someone's thinking less of you make you hide the fact that you are even a Christian? Do the truths found in His Word mean so much to you that you share it with others no matter the cost in time, money, or others' opinions of you?

We are nearing an end of an era where many can share and live their faith in Christ with others without paying a high price. Because many have not stood up for the

beliefs and freedoms they had, the ungodly are taking those freedoms away from them.

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 in the near future. Will you be willing to pay the cost, no matter what it is, for your faith? 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 some one behind you  
Whose courage is sinking low;  
And, well, if your lips do quiver,  
Be encouraged, God loves you so.

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