

Our Persecuted Brethren 1

The Persecuted Church

By Albert N. Martin

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Bible Text: Hebrews 13:3

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Trinity Baptist Church

160 Changebridge Road

Montville, NJ 07045

Website: www.trinitymontville.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tbcnj

This message is an exposition of Hebrews 13:3 dealing with the biblical warrant for concern for and involvement with our brethren in various parts of the world who are suffering intense persecution for the sake of Christ. At the conclusion of this message information will be given relative to some helpful and reliable sources of information pertaining to our persecuted brethren.

Now may I urge you to turn with me in your Bibles to the letter to the Hebrews, the book of Hebrews and chapter 13. And I shall read in your hearing the first six verses of Hebrews 13.

Let love of the brethren continue. Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; them that are ill-treated, as being yourselves also in the body. Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Be ye free from the love of money; content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: What shall man do unto me?¹

Let's pray.

Our Father, how we thank you and praise you that you have given us this blessed book as a lamp unto our feet and a light to our pathway. We pray that as we open it, as I seek to expound it and your gathered people to receive it with understanding, with faith and with obedience, we acknowledge that together we are utterly dependent upon the present, active, powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit. Oh, Lord, do not withhold his presence or his ministry, but grant him to each of us in great power. Oh, Lord, hear us and answer us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Our text for this morning is Hebrews 13 and verse three.

¹ Hebrews 13:1-6.

Remember them that are in bonds, or as many of your translations will render it, remember those in prison, as bound with them, them that are ill treated, that is, remember them that are ill treated as being yourselves also in the body.

Now these words do not come to us in the text of the book of Hebrews in isolation, but they come to us within both a broader, more general context of the entire book as well as the more limited context of the immediate surroundings of the verse itself. And if we are to rightly understand the text, if we are rightly to know how to apply the text, it is vital for us to have some understanding of both that remote and more general context as well as the more immediate context of verse three. And so bear with me as I take a few minutes, first of all, then, to set before you the broad context of the entire epistle to the Hebrews.

This letter that we call the book of Hebrews was written approximately 35 years after the death, the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. And after our Lord ascended to the right hand of the Father, in keeping with his promise, he sent forth the Holy Spirit upon his disciples. And when the Spirit was poured out upon them in the upper room, they went forth preaching the wonderful salvation that was procured by the saving activity of Jesus of Nazareth. And that proclamation of God's salvation in Christ was immediately embraced by many who were the natural seed of Abraham. In fact, on the day of Pentecost there were 3000 Jews or proselytes to the Jewish faith who came to faith in the Lord Jesus as their Redeemer.

Now these were a people who had great pride in their religious heritage, especially in the fact that God had revealed his truth through Moses, the father of their nation, and through the prophets. And they loved their temple, their priesthood, their sacrificial system of which God himself had been the architect. And when the message of salvation in Jesus came to these Jews, it declared to them that all of the prophets spoke of Jesus and of the salvation procured by his death and resurrection and that all of the activities of all of the priests through all the ages and all of the sacrifices ordained of God that all of these were pointing forward to Jesus, to his work as God's great and final high priest and to his sacrifice as the once for all sacrifice for is. And because all of these things were now fulfilled in Jesus, the priesthood was no longer needed. The sacrifices were no longer needed. God had given his final word and his final saving activity in the Lord Jesus. And when many believed this message and embraced Christ as the fulfillment of all of these things in the Jewish religion, there was soon a violent backlash against these believers. They thought, that is the unbelieving Jews, that these who now said, "In Jesus we have our final priest, we no longer need the priest there at Jerusalem, in Jesus we have the final sacrifice. We no longer need the daily sacrifice, the annual sacrifice or atonement," these Jews thought that these Christians who had been Jews were attacking Moses, that they were attacking the temple, that they were attacking the priesthood and the sacrifices. And there was this letting loose of violent opposition. Do you remember Saul of Tarsus? He was one such Jew who was violent and passionate in seeking to attack these who were declaring that all that was part and parcel of the Jewish religion had found its fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. And under that pressure there were not a few of these professed

Jewish believers who were turning back from their attachment to Christ. And because they were suffering persecution of various kinds, they were apostatizing. That is they were going back, giving up their death grip upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Many others were being tempted to do this. And this is where the letter to the Hebrews comes in.

Whoever the human author was, he was God's instrument to give this Spirit inspired appeal to these Jewish believers, professed disciples of Christ in order to urge them to cling to Christ in the death grip of persevering faith and not to go back to the types and the shadows of their previous Jewish religion. And the writer to the Hebrews does this by what I call the push and pull method, the draw and the drive method.

Now what do I mean by that? Well, simply this. If you have ever watched a horse race and once in a while there is a stubborn horse that doesn't want to get into the gate. And there you see the pull and the push method. You will see some men out in front of him. They have got a hold of the rope that goes to his bridle and they are pulling. And there are some other very courageous guys that are behind the horse pushing on his rump. So you have the pull and the push to get him in the gate.

Or you may have seen a situation in some movie or in some other circumstance where a car is stuck in the mud. And maybe someone has attached a winch to the front bumper and the winch is pulling and then people are behind and pushing. Well, this is exactly what the writer to the Hebrews does to try to persuade these professing Jewish Christians not to go back. He uses the draw, the pull and the push and the drive method. And in order to draw them on to continue to cling to Christ, he sets forth the better things that are to be had in Christ. And the word better is used no fewer than 13 times in the book of Hebrews, eight or nine of which refer explicitly to the better things of the new covenant, a better sacrifice, a better priesthood, a better inheritance, better promises. The writer is saying to these people, "Don't go back. Better things are here. Why do you want to leave the better for this?"

But recognizing that some would not be drawn by the better, he is behind them in the pushing. And do you know how he pushes them and seeks to drive them? With some of the most sober warnings to be found anywhere in the Word of God and he says again and again in the light of the better things, there is to be more intense and frightening judgment for those who go back. So he is seeking to draw them by the better and drive them by the threats. One or the other is not sufficient. He draws and he drives. He seeks to pull and he pushes. He pulls with the better things and he drives with the sober warnings of the greater and more horrible things that will come upon those who turn back from their faith in Christ.

Now that is the larger context of the book of Hebrews. And you will see when I try responsibly to expound this text why it is important to understand that.

Now we come to the more immediate context. Now that the writer has completed his drawing and his pushing, his pull and push method of seeking to deal with these professing Christians, in chapter 13 assuming that the great majority of them are true

believers and that they are committed to cling to Christ in the death grip of persevering faith, he is now free to give some general exhortations that are not in any way immediately related to the danger of apostasy. Up until now that one passion has driven him in the entire structure and substance of the book, but now that he is done with that he is free in his spirit to give what we would call generic pastoral exhortations. And the first grouping of them is verses one to six and within that grouping the first sub group is verses one to three. And I want you to look at these verses now and we try to understand the immediate context of verse three.

Here we have in verse one what I am calling the foundational imperative.

“Let love of the brethren continue.”²

Assuming that love of the brethren has been implanted in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and it is always implanted where there is regenerating grace, he says, “Let this love of the brethren continue.”

Now I know some of you sit with your Greek testaments and you are ready to tell me that the word is not *αγαπη* (ag-ah'-pay), but the word is *φιλαδελφια* (fil-ad-el-fee'-ah). I know that. I have studied the text in the Greek as well. But I do not believe that there is any sharp, hard distinction to be made between the two. Here he is saying the brotherly love, let it remain. Let it continue to continue. By a present imperative he says to these people, having settled them afresh in their commitment to hold to Christ in the death grip of faith as their first responsibility growing out of that settled recommitment and affirmation of the death grip of faith in Christ:

“Let brotherly love continue.”³

That is the foundational imperative. But it is as though some of them say, “But, Mr. Writer to the Hebrews, whoever you are, what does that mean in the specifics?”

So he says, “All right, I will answer you.”

And he gives two specific applications of that foundational imperative and they come to us in verses two and three. Specific application number one:

“Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”⁴

That is brotherly love in relationship to gospel made strangers. I use the term gospel made strangers because what he was talking about is people who would have been part of what is described in Acts eight where the believers were scattered and believers were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. And he is saying, “When believers come among

² Hebrews 13:1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hebrews 13:2.

you who have been uprooted and disjointed from family and home and work and provision, show love to them. Don't wait till you get to know them for six weeks. Run the risk. Open your heart. Open your home."

Or they may have been those itinerant preachers. You remember 3 John. Gaius was notable for taking in these itinerant preachers and providing for them and sending them on their way with a full wallet and a full knapsack of food and other provisions. So he is talking about love of the brethren manifesting itself in this disposition of ministering to strangers, but then, secondly, the second specific application is brotherly love in relationship to gospel made sufferers, verse three.

"Remember them that are in bonds."⁵

Those who are in prison because of their attachment to Jesus. And remember those that are being ill treated, receiving abusive treatment because of their attachment to Jesus. So that is the structure of the immediate context. You have the foundational imperative and you will see again why it was essential for me as a responsible expositor of the Word to take the time to do this when my come to application is going to be critical. There is the foundational imperative.

"Let love of the brethren continue."⁶

Here are two specific applications of the imperative: brotherly love in relationship to gospel made strangers and brotherly love in relation to gospel made sufferers.

Now for you kids, let me try to illustrate exactly what the writer is doing. Here is a young man going off to camp and his father takes him aside and says, "Now, son," and here is his foundational imperative. "While you are at camp be a good boy." There is the foundational imperative. Then he says, secondly, "Don't forget to say your prayers." And, thirdly, he says, "Remember to obey your counselors."

What has he done? He has given the foundational imperative, be a good boy. He says, "Well, dad, what does that mean while I am at camp?" What that means is, look at the text, don't forget something. Don't forget to say your prayers. And it means you remember something. Remember to obey your counselors.

Now, do you see that? The foundational imperative: be a good boy. What does that mean while you are at camp? It means don't forget to say your prayers and remember to obey your counselors.

Now that is what the writer to the Hebrews is doing. We do it all the time without even thinking about it. And because the Scriptures are the Word of God in the words of men, we should not be surprised to find that pattern of unfolding of the will and purpose of God for us in the Word of God.

⁵ Hebrews 13:3.

⁶ Hebrews 13:1.

Now, with that larger context having been sketched in briefly, the more immediate context, now we come to the text itself and I want to expound it this morning and, God willing, apply it more fully next Lord's Day morning under this Puritan sounding title. I set at my desk and said, "Lord, won't you please help me to come up with a more racy, contemporary, nice little catchy titles?" And the Lord hasn't answered my prayer yet. So you are going to have to deal with a Puritan sounding title. We are going to look at the text as the divine warrant for an active concern for the persecuted Church around the world.

This is really another one of those issues in the now concerning series. For several years I have had a burden to preach on this text. And I have not felt I had a handle on it or the time was right, but now we are coming to it having dealt with now concerning the use of our tongues. Now concerning our involvement with God's persecuted saints. And this text is the watershed text and may God help me to expound it and apply it and may the Spirit by his own presence and power write it upon our hearts.

Now let's look at the text under these headings. Number one, the activity commanded; secondly, the objects of this activity identified; thirdly the disposition with which we are to engage in this activity; and, fourthly, two specific ways in which we can engage in this activity.

Number one, the activity commanded. The activity commanded with a present imperative verb which points to an action commanded as a constant duty. When there is a present imperative verb it is saying, "Do this and do it continually." And the writer says to these who are clinging to Christ in the death grip of persevering faith, remember. I am laying upon you a responsibility to remember. And immediately the writer knows that when this letter is read, people would understand he is calling them to a gospel activity of the mind. You don't remember with your feet. You don't remember with your fingers. You remember with your noggin. He is calling them to a mental activity. He is saying, "Remember them that are in bonds." It means simply to call to call to mind—but now follow me closely—call to mind with a view to performing the activity appropriate to that which we call to mind. In other words, it is not a naked, bare, mental activity.

If I say to you, "Did you remember your anniversary?" I am not asking you do you simply remember the certain date on the calendar when you got married? I am asking you: Did you remember, i.e., call it to mind with a view to performing an appropriate activity to what you remember. You got a card at least or you took your wife out to eat or you had some flowers. If you barely, quote, remembered, oh, yeah, I haven't forgotten, June 30th, 1956. But, you see, remembering has the connotation and that is the way it is used in the Scripture.

For example, the thief upon the cross in Luke 23:42. He is hanging there, a few hours from death. And though he had begun with his fellow criminal to mock and to jeer the Lord Jesus for the Scripture tells us that they both cast this into his teeth, during those hours upon the cross, the Spirit of God illuminated the mind of this man. He came to see

his sinfulness. We are indeed here justly. This man has done nothing amiss. He came to see the sinlessness of Jesus. He came to see that he was a King though hanging on the cross. And he says, "Remember me when you come in or into your kingdom."

What did he mean? Did he mean, "Lord, just call to mind who I was, my name, my face? No. Remember me. Call me to mind with an activity appropriate to that calling to mind. Receive me into your kingdom."

And Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

In Hebrews 2:8 you have a similar use. What is man that you are mindful of him, quoting from the Psalms. The verb there, what is man that you remember him, or the son of man that you visit him? In Hebrew parallelism there is the amplification of the thought of the original line. What is man that you are mindful of him, that you think about him? Or the son of man that you visit him? It is a thinking of God upon his creatures that results in the appropriate activity of his providing for them.

Now this is what the writer to the Hebrews says. Remember those in prison. That is, call them to mind with a disposition of readiness to respond to them in a manner commensurate with that calling to mind. And that verb is used again and again in this way in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint. You find it in Genesis 8:1, 9:15, Exodus 28, remember the sabbath day. What does God mean? Just remember that this day follows Saturday? No. Remember, call it to mind with a view to responding appropriately to that which you have called to mind. This is God's day marked out for God and to be given over holy to him. It is not the bare calling to mind, but a calling to mind with a view to performing appropriate action.

All right? That is the activity commanded. Now, consider, secondly, the objects of that activity identified. The Scripture here makes it plain that it is not something what is to be called to mind, but who. Look at the text.

Remember, call to mind with a readiness of an appropriate response to that calling to mind, them that are in bonds. That translation gives five words to translate two Greek words. You have the article and then you have the noun in the plural. Remember the prisoners. And some of you have translations and that is a good accurate translation. Remember the prisoners, those that are incarcerated by civil or religious authorities. It is the standard term used in the New Testament for prisoners, Matthew chapter 27:15-16, Barabbas was a prisoner. Pilate was accustomed to release at the feast a prisoner, someone who was incarcerated by the Roman authority.

When Paul was in jail with Barnabas, Acts 16:25, speaks of the prisoners who heard them singing praises to God at midnight. And when Paul describes himself he says, "A prisoner of Jesus Christ. I am in jail by the authority of the Roman government, but I am here because I am Christ's captive."

And so the writer to Hebrews is telling these believers whom he is persuaded have dealt

with this issue of doubts about Jesus, in decision about clinging to Jesus, persuaded that they are now determined that they will cling to Christ and the better things of the new covenant and they themselves expose to opposition and possibly to persecution. But he says in the midst of that real situation, you are to remember those who are imprisoned.

Look at Hebrews 10:32 to 34. They would not be strangers to this reality. Hebrews 10:32.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were enlightened, ye endured a great conflict of sufferings; partly, being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, becoming partakers with them that were so used. For ye both had compassion on them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions.⁷

So they understood well what the writer meant when he said, “Remember the prisoners.” Some of them were almost prisoners. They had friends and associates who were prisoners. This was not some potential situation. This was an actual, existing situation and he says the object of this activity of remembering is, first of all, to be those who are in bonds, those who are prisoners for Jesus’ sake.

And then, secondly, they are to remember those who are ill treated for Jesus’ sake. Look at our text again. The verb remember carries its weight over to the second group people. Remember the prisoners as bound with them. Remember them that are ill treated.

That is the word that is found at the end of verse 37 of chapter 11.

“... in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated.”⁸

And when you read the context, this shows the fury of men against the people of God in an epoch of redemptive history in which they were cut asunder, in which they were driven among the caves, in which there was absolutely no limit to the brutality of people against men and women simply because of their attachment to Jehovah. And now that same venom is being let loose upon the people for no other reason than that they are attached to Jesus in the death grip of persevering faith. They have seen the better things in Jesus and they are not about to give them up to go back to the shadows of the old covenant. This is the very words used in that Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe what David experienced under the harassment of King Saul, 1 Kings 2:26 and Solomon in dealing with Abiathar says that you were willing to be with my father in the days of his affliction.

Think of what Saul did. He sought to impale him to the wall with a spear. He chased him among the wilderness of Judea like a cur dog. All of this was affliction. That is the word that is used here, ill treatment. It is the outcropping of the human heart in the face of

⁷ Hebrews 10:32-34.

⁸ Hebrews 11:37.

those who bear the image of Christ, fulfilling his Word. If they have hated me, they will hate you.

So who are the objects of this activity? They are identified as those who are prisoners for Jesus' sake and those who are ill treated for Jesus' sake. Now we come, thirdly, from the activity commanded, remember; the objects of the activity identified; thirdly, the disposition with which we are to engage in this activity.

Now you know what the word disposition means. It is a prevailing state or attitude of the soul. We say of someone he has a cheerful disposition. It is like a plastic surgeon did something cut the muscles that have to be working to make him go down this way, always this way, always smiling, always cheerful, always upbeat, cheerful disposition, perfect disposition. Someone else, we say he has got an ugly disposition. It is like someone cut the muscles you need to smile in this dude. I mean he is just smiley, beautiful sunny day. Isn't it a lovely day? Yeah, it will be raining tomorrow. So it rains tomorrow. You say, "Well, we need the rain." Yeah, but we are going to have it for six weeks. You see, he has got a dark, foreboding, ugly, negative disposition.

Well, what I am saying in using that word is this text sets before us the disposition, the prevailing attitude of the soul with which we are to engage in this activity of remembering. As we remember the prisoners for Christ's sake, as we remember the ill treated for Christ's sake, God is not content that we simply remember them in a way that we think appropriate. God says, "I am telling you the disposition with which you are to remember them." And let's look at that. With respect to those that are prisoners for Jesus' sake, what is the disposition to be? Look at the text.

"Remember them that are prisoners as prisoners with them."

And I submit that this is setting before us that we are to remember prisoners for Jesus' sake with a disposition of shared life and feeling. We are to remember them as bound with them. The NIV says, "as if you were their fellow prisoners."

And the Greek construction is interesting. The writer uses a perfect passive participle. The perfect action is past action that continues; passive, something is done to us, not by us. And what he is saying is you are to remember the prisoners as though when they went into prison you went with them and as they remain in prison, you are there with them as having been and remaining a prisoner with them. That is what he is saying, that is with a disposition of shared life and feeling.

Perhaps the best commentary on this is 1 Corinthians 12:26. When one member of the body suffers, all suffer with it. You see, the writer to the Hebrews assumes that there is a pool of common human experience and that we can, if we desire to, step in to the felt experience of another and that is what he is saying, that these Hebrew Christians must, by the grace of God do. Remember the prisoners as having been and remaining imprisoned with them. Think and allow yourself to feel what it would be like to be ripped away from your husband, from your wife, from your children, from all of your normal surroundings,

the bed you have slept in for years, the chickens in the backyard, your neighbors, all of the rhythms of life that you enter into and work out hardly without a thought and {?} they are all radically changed. You are put into the company of the riff raff of this world.

Prison company is not notorious for being cultured. There may be some fellow believers with you, but there may be malefactors. There may be insurrectionists. There may be murderers and rapists. Can you feel what it would be like to be in that setting? You can if you want to. You can if you are determined not to have your mind filled with the next toy and with the next play thing and the next entertainment and the next diversion and a soul that bleeds out all of us energy in tracing its poise. You children, you can if you are willing. You teenagers, you young adults, we old duffers, we can if we will.

Remember them as having been and remaining bound together with them. That is the demand of brotherly love. What does it mean let brotherly love continue? That is what it means, love that seeks not its own, love that is willing to strip away, crass, inveterate self centeredness and become other sensitive and other centered in its energies.

And then with respect to the ill treated for Jesus' sake, what is our disposition to be? Look at the text. It is to be a disposition of shared humanity and vulnerability. Look at what the text says.

“Remember them that are ill treated as being yourselves also in the body.”

And the commentators go all over the place with this. Some say as being yourselves also in the body of Christ and therefore we are in this together. I don't think the concept of the body of Christ is here. It is far more crass. It is far more earthy. He is saying when you think of those who are ill treated, they got the clubs on Monday. They got the whips on Tuesday. They got the starvation treatment on Wednesday, clubs that touched nerves in the back and whips that stung nerves in the back and starvation that touched all of the systems that tell you when you are screaming hungry. Your fellow believers who are ill treated are in the body. Their ill treatment for Jesus' sake didn't suddenly make them disembodied spirits. It did not lift them above bodily appetites and bodily nerve endings and bodily susceptibilities. They sit among their own excrement and bodily discharges. That is what happens in abusive prison situations. They sit there, no one to speak a kind word. They are in the body.

And he says this. When you remember them who are ill treated, remember them as being yourselves in the body. Do you have a body with nerve endings, a body that feels pain and hunger and discomfort, a body that has its legitimate food appetites and appetites for legitimate sexual intimacy? In the body, husbands wrenched away from wives, wives and husbands.

This... own I want you to stop and think they are in the body as you are in the body. And when you remember them remember them as being also yourselves in the body. Let it be a remembrance with shared humanity. And I believe the other nuance is shared vulnerability. You are yet in the body. You haven't died and gone to heaven. You may

be in there tomorrow. You may be in there next week. How would you like to be remembered by your brothers and sisters, in a detached, cold platonic way? Oh, they are suffering for Jesus. They are to rejoice and be exceeding glad. That is what Jesus said. Remember. You saw your brethren, Hebrews 10. You saw them incarcerated. In the mercy and providence of God you weren't with them, but you may be. And you will be as you are in the body.

And you saw I have used the two terms shared humanity and vulnerability. You are yet with them in the body. And that is the disposition with which we are to engage in this activity of remembering them.

Well, I sought to set before you the activity commanded, remember; the objects of the activity, the imprisoned for Jesus' sake, the ill treated for Jesus' sake; the disposition with which we are to engage in this activity, with respect to the imprisoned, a disposition of shared life and feeling with respect to the ill treated a disposition of shared humanity and vulnerability.

Now then, the 54 dollar question... the 64 dollar question. I chopped 10 dollars off it. How do we do it? How in specific ways do we remember with a disposition ready to respond in an appropriate way? What are the appropriate ways to remember in the specific in the concrete? Well, John Owen in his magisterial commentary on the book of Hebrews—and it is magisterial. I don't use that term with many works, many books, but his commentary on the book of Hebrews is magisterial. One profound theologian who was the son of a profound theologian said, "My father learned all of his theology by reading Owen on Hebrews," a massive work. Owen suggests five ways, specific ways we can remember with that disposition by the grace of God and supports each one with Scripture and brings the analogy of Scripture to bear.

But some of them, not all of us could do. And what I want to do in the time that remains this morning, I want to set before you under heading number four two specific ways to engage in this activity of remembering the imprisoned of Jesus' sake and the ill treated for Jesus' sake, two ways open to every single one of us from the youngest to the oldest with out exception.

And those two ways you can distill into two words: exposure and engagement. All right. Number one, you can remember your imprisoned and ill treated brethren by deliberately exposing yourself to the available information concerning those brethren. And that is open to all of us.

We can do with them what that noble man did with Paul. And my mind went to this passage, 2 Timothy chapter one. I am not going to just quote it. I ask you to turn to it with me, if you would please. Paul is in prison and he writes in verse 15 of chapter one, 2 Timothy:

"This thou know, Timothy, that all that are in Asia turned away from me."

They want nothing to do with an imprisoned apostle. They knew he was in prison. They turned away and tried to act like he wasn't there. But their willful ignoring him didn't release him from prison, nor did it release them from their obligation to remember him. You can still your head in the sand. I am not going to read these letters that talk about boys and girls in the Sudan having their hands chopped off because they won't deny Christ, barely come into puberty, girls taken off and raped by Muslims. No, I am going to stick my head in the sand. I am going to ignore it, because if I start exposing myself to that, a lot of my toys are going to seem very tawdry and cheap. A lot of the things I live for are going to be exposed for what they are.

That is what these people did.

This you know, all that are in Asia turned away from me, of whom is Phygelus and Hermogenes. Thank God not all did. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphrous, for he oft refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. But now look what he did, for when he was in Rome he sought me diligently and he found me. He made a deliberate effort to go to his imprisoned brother. He sought me diligently and found me. The Lord grand unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day and how in many things he ministered at Ephesus, you know very well.

Here was a man who was aggressive in exposing himself to the first hand situation of his imprisoned brother. He remembered Paul as prisoner with a disposition of readiness to do what that remembrance demanded, seek him out find what his needs are and supply them as he was able to do so.

You and I can remember our imprisoned and ill treated brethren by deliberately exposing ourselves to the available information concerning such brethren. When the monthly flyer from open doors is made available at prayer meeting that gives the prayer requests for our suffering brethren around the world, a different request every two days, once in a while every three days, the one a couple of days ago had three days. And you can read what your brothers and sisters are experiencing as they are imprisoned and ill treated for Jesus' sake. And the monthly bulletin that highlights some specific area of the world or as this January one does, highlights the six places in the world that the most intense persecution... Pastor Smith is going to be taking those one a night every Lord's Day for the next six weeks and reading them, very brief, setting them before us. You can deliberately choose to expose yourself to this available information.

When those synopses are read before pastoral prayer generally on a Sunday night we are going to pray for United Arab Emirates. You don't pull down the shade on your mind. You say, "Lord, expand my heart and my mind to take in and to remember my imprisoned and my ill treated brethren."

Through the modern means of gathering and disseminating information there is no excuse to be ignorant, but willful indifference and determination can remain ignorant.

And, dear people, if we do, how in God's name can we say we are letting love of the brethren continue?

I thank God and I brag to my brethren continually at the undeniable evidences that love of the brethren within this family of God increases and continues to degrees I have not seen it in 40 years. And I bless God for that. But, my dear brothers, if it doesn't break out of the comfort of this loving family of God's people and touch continually our imprisoned and our ill treated brethren, something is wrong and it is my persuasion a love that is strong enough to reach that far is going to be much more intense close at hand. Do you follow me? I believe it with all my heart.

But then there is a second thing we can and must do. You can remember. I said two words: exposure and then engagement. You can remember your imprisoned and ill treated brethren by engaging in biblically framed intercessory prayer for them. What do I mean by biblically framed prayer? The kind of prayers we have been studying in the prayers of Paul that God would uphold them and strengthen them and deliver them from evil men, that God would empower them in every good work to do his will, biblically praying prayers for them, recognizing that God's way of advancing his cause in the earth is not by sticking his people in sterile vacuum tubes of insulation from trouble and persecution. No, no. But praying that in the midst of their imprisonment and in the midst of their ill treatment, they may manifest the grace and power of the gospel, reading the stories of those who have known great measures of ill treatment, what has broken down the hearts of some of the hardest Communist and Muslim oppressors of God's people once their joy and their love and their kindness in the midst of ill treatment, until people said, "Something is different about you. What is it?" And they told them it was Jesus.

We can, we must engage in biblically framed intercessory prayer for them, personally. And that is why I have found this open doors thing so helpful. In my devotional Bible that three fold thing sits in there. So easy to pull it out every morning and bring back requests before. Take a few minutes. It connects me with my brethren who are in prison, who are being ill treated. And, God willing, next Lord's Day morning I want to bring a second message growing out of this exposition on what I am going to call at this juncture the secondary benefits of our obedience to this text and what it does for us individually, what it does for us as a church. But we can personally pray. We can pray in our families. We are committed as elders to see to it that this becomes part, as it has been, of our regular corporate pastoral prayer in our public meetings. And there are, I believe, biblical reasons for that.

This, my brothers, my sisters, I believe, is, as I said at the outset, the watershed text that lays before us the biblical warrant for our active engagement of concern and prayer for our suffering brethren around the world.

Now I want to make two final words of application. I want to speak to those of you who sit here this morning strangers to the grace of God. You sat here and said, "This is the most weird thing I have ever heard." Do you know why? Because you are imprisoned. You are in prison. Yes, you are. You are imprisoned by the chains of your self centered

life. And it is a prison, a horrible prison. Your whole life is imprisoned by the bars of your self interest, your self will, your self determination. You are not free to love others. And you never will be until you are free by the Son of God who came to open the prison to them that are bound.

My dear unconverted friend, you don't know what it is to live until you are out of the prison of self centeredness and know the exquisite joy of living for God and for others. That is what you were made for. And until you know that, you are like a bird in a narrow cage who has never known what it is to spread his wings and split the air with his wings and know the exquisite joy of the open heavens. Jesus can open your cage, my friend, bring out of that wretched cage a self centeredness and self will and self determination and self preoccupation. Jesus can unplug your nose from navel to put it bluntly. That is what he can do. And enable you to love him and to love others. And I am so glad that while this text is telling me as a Christian, "Remember those in prison," I can preach to you a gospel to your prison that says Jesus can set you free. He can set you free. He can open the prison for those that are bound. And whom the Son sets free is free, indeed.

But then—and I hear some of you as God's people saying, "Oh, pastor, {?} and I saw so many areas {?} here and running there and just beginning to get hold of how to deal with my tongue and now I have got another duty. What am I going to do? I have got another duty that demands an enlargement of my narrow heart. What am I going to do?"

Well, you can get mad at me for preaching another duty. You can do that. You wouldn't be the first one. And you can pack your bag and say, "I am going not a church that doesn't constantly lay on your duty. I want to go where I get stroked and feel good." I hope you don't do that, because what the writer to the Hebrews does is what I want to do in closing. Having laid out the duty, I want you to look at this closing benediction in verse 20 of this chapter. And this is what you need. If that is what you are sitting here thinking, how can I enter in to those in prison as though I went into prison with them and that is where I am? How can I remember those being ill treated as myself in the body with that sanctified empathy?

Look at verses 20 and 21.

Now the God of peace who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus make you perfect in every good thing to do his will, working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.⁹

That is your answer right there.

Now let's spend just a few minutes on this. The God of peace who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep. What kind of power does it take to raise the dead man?

⁹ Hebrews 13:20-21.

Oh, that is power. Not perfume him, not embalm him, but raised him. That is the kind of power that the writer to the Hebrews says is operative for those to whom he wrote these words. Remember the prisoners as imprisoned with you. Remember the ill treated as yourselves in the body. This God who brought up again from the dead the Lord Jesus, the great shepherd make you perfect or complete in every good thing to do his will.

How in the world can I be made complete to do his will? I see his will for me is I have got to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them and those that are ill treated as being myself in the body. I know that that is well pleasing to him. That is his will. How in the world am I going to do it? Look what it says. Working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ.

You go to God and say, "God, left to myself I am going to want to stick my head in the sand, forget those kids with their chopped off hands and with their burned and scarred bodies and those traumatized precious young women raped and treated like dirt. Lord, I want to forget them all. I just can't take it. I just can't hack exposing my mind. But, Lord, you said I am to remember those that are imprisoned, those that are ill treated. Lord, I don't have the stuff for this. But you said you are the God who can make me perfect in every good thing to do your will working in me what is well pleasing through Jesus. Lord, deal with me in terms of the grace and the power of Jesus. Lord, grant me to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus who can take my natively timid, narrow, restricted heart and enlarge it to the place where I will count it a privilege to remember those in prison, to remember those ill treated, to have the capacity to have this sanctified empathy, to think what it must be like in the body. They are ill treated. They are imprisoned with all of the privations. I am with them. I am feeling with them. I am answering. I am taking a few minutes out of my day to pray for them, to read the information made available to me. Lord Jesus, by your power, by your grace, enable me that by the enabling grace that you give I may so enter into a life and pattern of obedience to this directive that I will be forced to give you glory and praise because I know I didn't have what it took to do it in myself. I don't have what it takes. I didn't have what it would take. Lord Jesus, you get the praise."

Does that make you want to get up and leave because you heard about your duty? I hope if anything it makes you want to get up and leave and go get alone with the Lord Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, this is what you are committed to doing."

One of the passages that I love to read periodically on a Lord's Day morning is John chapter 15 and the first 10 or 11 verses as I face a day when I must stand before you people and seek to lead you into worship, to lead you in your worship, to seek to be an instrument in God's hands to stir you up to praise without bullying you, to be your mouthpiece at the throne of grace, to open up the Scriptures, to apply the Scriptures, to make applications where they are needed and I say, "Oh, Lord Jesus. I can't do this." And then I read.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself so neither can you except you abide in me. If you abide in me and my Word abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit.”

And I say, “Oh, God, it is not my reputation as a man, as a preacher, as a pastor. Lord, it is your glory. You said you get more glory if there is much fruit. Lord, take me in all of my nothingness and make me the instrument through which the life and power of Jesus so works that you get much fruit and much glory.”

That is where we are all at, dear people. And I trust that as God’s people you will not be driven into unbelieving despair, that you will be driven to fresh actings of faith upon the living God who works in us that which is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ unto the praise of his glorious name.

Well, if anyone should ask you, how come in your church they are talking about the persecuted Church and they are praying for them? I hope you can sit down with Hebrews 13:3 and say, “Give me five minutes. I am going to tell you.”

See, the rest of you could preach my sermon in five minutes. I am long winded. I can’t do it. But I hop you would be able to work them through and say, “This is what the passage says. And we are committed to walk by our Bibles.”

God grant that it will be so. Let’s pray.

Our Father, there are some of us who feel very keenly our sin of omission that there were all together too many years when we did not reckon with this text. I ask your forgiveness for my sins as a pastor in not leading your people into a fuller understanding of their privilege and responsibility to remember your imprisoned saints and your ill treated saints. And to the extent that we have together glossed over this verse when we have read it in our own devotions and we have not taken steps to obey it, Father, forgive us. Wash us in the blood of your Son. And as you gently deal with us individually and corporately, we do believe that you have led us as a church into a new dimension of corporate gospel obedience. we pray that you would fix us in this course, that you would enlarge our hearts together and that we may by your grace be a people who remember the imprisoned ones and who remember the ill treated ones. We pray for those who have no capacity to let love of the brethren continue because they are wrapped up in self love. Oh, God, make them thirsty to know the exquisite liberty of being set free from the tyranny of the mastery of self, that they may know what it is to be the liberated sons and daughters of the living God. Seal then your Word to all of our hearts and to your name b the praise in Jesus’ name we ask. Amen.

If this exposition of Hebrews 13:3 has persuaded you that you have a biblical obligation to your persecuted brethren, I would like to recommend materials available from two proven and reliable sources which may prove helpful in fulfilling that obligation. The

first is the ministry of Open Doors and all of the literature of Open Doors, the words printed under the name Open Doors are these. Serving persecuted Christians world wide.

There are three resources from Open Doors that we have found especially helpful and have made available to our congregation. The first is their monthly newsletter called *Frontline Faith*. Ordinarily this newsletter will highlight some particular country or individuals who are undergoing intense persecution.

The second item from Open Doors is the monthly prayer bulletin called *Prayer Force Alert*. This one page, tri-fold item groups prayer requests by global regions with a brief request to be the focus of concern for two and sometimes for three days of the month. It is easily adapted for personal or family prayer times. Open doors is glad to send both the monthly newsletter and the prayer alert in bulk subscriptions to your church.

The third resource of great help from Open Doors is their weekly prayer update which can be obtained by phone or email.

You may contact Open Doors in the following ways. Their mailing address is Open Doors, Post Office Box 27001, Santa Ana, California 92799. Their telephone number is 1 888 524 2535. The web address is www.opendoorsusa.org.

The second major resource for information and related materials concerning our persecuted brethren is The Voice of the Martyrs. While Voice of the Martyrs has many helpful resources such as books and videos related to the persecuted Church, I would like to recommend several items that we have found especially helpful in seeking to incorporate these concerns into the spiritual bloodstream of our congregation. First is their annually updated global map which has a color coded index of the countries where persecution is more or less intense. This map is approximately 21 by 17 inches and can be framed and hung in a very prominent place as a constant reminder of our suffering brethren.

The second resources from Voice of the Martyrs which is very helpful is the annual country updates. These brief synopses can be used to focus a pastoral prayer on a different country each week, thereby keeping the circumstances and needs of our persecuted brethren before the minds and hearts of our people on a regular basis. And also it lets visitors to our congregations know that our church and its ministry is not mired in the narrow world of just our own immediate needs, concerns and ministries, but that part of our life as a church is involvement with our suffering brethren.

The third resource from Voice of the Martyrs is their monthly newsletter which is really a small magazine. It also contains a listing of the other materials such as books and videos related to our persecuted brethren.

You may contact the Voice of the Martyrs in the following ways. Their mailing address is Voice of the Martyrs, Post Office Box 443, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, 74005. Their ordinary telephone number is area code 918 337 8015. If you are ordering specific

materials they have a separate order line which is 1 800 747 0085. And then their regular email address is TheVoice@VOM-USA.org. Their website is www.persecution.com. And then they have a special children's website and that address is www.linkingup.com.

I trust that these suggestions will be helpful in implementing the mandate of Hebrews 13:3 in your life as an individual and if you are a leader in your church, that you will prayerfully and wisely use the stewardship of your influence to convey these concerns to the people under your care.