

Parish of Ferndown

Study sheet for week commencing 29th June 2008

“Suffering Together for Kingdom Growth” – Acts 5:12-42

INTRODUCTION

Never before have Christians been persecuted so much for their faith. You might like to look at the web site of the Barnabas Fund, or Release International for examples of persecution that are happening daily. Here is just one mild example from “Release International.” You may like to read it out loud in your group.

“Concern is growing for the sick and elderly mother of an imprisoned pastor, after Chinese Olympic Games police kicked her, arrested her and imprisoned her. Seven officers based at an Olympic Games police station threw 75-year-old Shuang Shuying to the ground and kicked her. She was later arrested and jailed for two years. Observers say it was to punish her son, who is a human-rights activist and a prominent member of a Beijing underground church.

Police have had Pastor Hua Huiqi under surveillance for years. He has a long history of working to help persecuted Christians and the poor. The authorities have detained him for obstruction of justice – and it’s believed he could face up to three years in prison. Hua and his mother were walking near a 2008 Olympics hotel site when seven police threw them to the ground and started kicking them. The police took them to the Olympic Police station for questioning.

When Hua appealed to them to let his elderly mother go they beat him repeatedly. They poured cold water over him in the sub-zero temperatures, before taking him freezing and shivering to a detention centre. The next day the police called Hua’s wife to say they had sentenced her husband to a month behind bars. When Hua’s elderly mother went to a district office to ask about her son they arrested her, too. They charged her with wilfully damaging a car and a touch-screen computer – both charges she denies.

OPENING DISCUSSION

Would you dare to come to the small group you’re in, if the police were watching you, and a culture of arresting Christians on trumped up charges was rife in Ferndown? What would be going through your mind as you set off from home to come here?

BIBLE STUDY

Read Acts 5:12-42 in one go

1. Verses 12-17 set the scene for the arrest. What were the reactions to the disciples in these verses? Peter and the apostles never taught that shadows had power to heal – what was happening was that the faith people had, meant that even with their superstitious beliefs, God graciously healed those who reached out to him.

2. Verses 18-42 could be summarised as follows:-

“Jailed by religious rulers, freed by an Angel of the Lord, Arrested, tried, warned and beaten by religious rulers, released and then they Praised God!”

Why did the religious rulers initially arrest the apostles?

3. The Angel told the apostles to tell the “full message” of this new life. Why is it important to know the whole Gospel, and not just a few bits? What does false or shallow teaching and preaching lead to in churches?

4. What is the general rule of thumb for Christians in relation to human authorities? (Rom 13:1 and 1 Pet 2:13-14). But if the authorities actively oppose God’s Word, and try to prevent the Gospel being preached, what should we do? (v.29)

5. The Gamaliel principle (“don’t fight what’s happening because it might be of God – just let’s see what happens”) is useful up to a point. Can you think of areas of life where we need to be relaxed and see whether something is of God? And can you see limits to this approach (e.g. it could be very weak in pastoral ministry if leaders never intervened to make judgment on problems that arose, but were constantly saying, “let’s see”)

6. Through persecution the church often grows. How do you react to this thought? What inspires you about the Apostles and modern day Christians who face persecution?

APPLICATION & PRAYER

- How might you support and pray for Christians who are persecuted?
- In what ways are you finding it hard to stand up for your faith in Jesus?
- Pray for each other, and for the Persecuted Church