

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 (Matthew 24:3-14) – Suffering Church Sunday/Living in Babylon

SLIDE, DISCUSS: What level of discomfort would you be prepared to suffer for being a Christian?

- Difficulty finding work/active discrimination at work
- Dangerous to attend church
- Cut off from family
- Physical threats
- Death
- Truthfully, none of these

Do you know personally any Christian who has suffered any of these?

FEEDBACK ON 2ND QUESTION (PERSONAL FRIENDS)

Today, All Saints Sunday – in times gone past, All Saints' Day (All Souls 1st Nov – but now 2 merged into one). A day to celebrate community of faith – generations of faithful Christians that have gone before us, and our unity as believers.

Also a day to celebrate the worldwide church – the fact that there are saints meeting all round the world in their hundreds of millions. 10 million church services – 12 new every second.

As give thanks, also concern – hidden Christians, 'Suffering Church'. Many for whom it's dangerous to be a Christian. Yet they are our brothers and sisters. We are part of God's family – 'adopted', hence God's children, and we have this unity. 'If one part suffers, every part suffers.'

This time of year – Sunday to focus on the Suffering Church – tie in with All Saints this year.

Focus on Syria (special event – EXPAND).

But this passage 1 Thess 3 also sets broader context – think about whole church:

Quiz – SLIDE – DISCUSS AND ANSWERS – USE SLIDES

10 countries: N Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos, Uzbekistan (mostly Muslim, but important to note not all e.g. Laos and N Korea)

Thing is – not a new thing – Jesus promises it to apostles in Matt 24 – then back to 1 Thess 3 (p1187) – READ v3b-v4 – in case thinking 'just apostles' refer to 2 Tim 3:12 (15 years later: 'all')

- **SLIDE** – persecution facts
- **SLIDE** – daily trials

How survive – 3 things in passage:

Tell good news (SLIDE) – READ v6 – Paul needs good news stories.

Not all bad news in Suffering Church – **SLIDE** – EXPAND CHINA AND IRAN, PLUS RADIO

Not all doom and gloom – often great joy – supernatural grace

Share big love (SLIDE) – READ v12. Note order – first for fellow believers, then to everyone else. Really important. We need each other – if believers don't help, then who else will. Why prayer and gift for Syria. Make our love concrete – real actions to bring about real blessing.

But also to everyone else – overflows. Syrian Christians helping others – unconditional love. Story after story of how church reaches out even in midst of trial.

Keep strong hearts (SLIDE) – READ v13. Not so obvious, but just as important. 'Chin up' – don't lose heart. Not something we can achieve by ourselves – eyes on the prize – hence v13b. It will all be worth it.

Big contrast between W church and suffering church – emphasis on heaven. In W, focus been on building kingdom on earth – good intention, we pray it in Lord's prayer – swung so far that hardly ever talk about heaven – and sometimes make it out even to be a bad thing. 'Escapist'.

V different in Suffering Church – little chance of kingdom on earth, save for a few more believers and a bit more justice. Heaven is what sustains them – suffering only for this life. Maybe we need a bit more of that (next chapter focuses on this). Not just escapism – meant to get us excited! Look at images of heaven in bible – EXPAND: feast, wedding, jewelled city etc

WRAP UP:

- 3 points.
- Syria – give during offertory
- SILENCE – PRAY/CONSIDER GIFT