**Prayer for the Persecuted Church**

**The Word**

Read together 1 John 3:13, 4:4, and 5:4

**The Big Idea**

Rather than trying to belong to the world, we are called to belong solely to God, and as we daily trust in him and cherish him above all else, we can experience freedom from the world’s grip on us. Christians around the world demonstrate this beautiful faith in the midst of many trials and persecutions.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Consider John’s comments about believers’ relationship with the world in 1 John 3:13, 4:4, 5:4. How can a Christian know whether or not they’re relationship with the world is too close or enmeshed? What are some key litmus tests they can use to examine themselves?

2. Consider the interview with Pastor Adrian DeVisser and his comments about persecution in the Asian context. What from his comments was most impactful to you?

3. As you consider the future health of the church in America, what do you see as the greatest challenges and opportunities ahead?

**Digging Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

 A. Christians are most persecuted religious group worldwide

B. Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

C. 250 million Christians are facing some form of persecution on a regular basis

-Social pressure, verbal harassment, discrimination in education and employment, ostracism by their families, loss of jobs or homes, imprisonment, and death

D. God is at work in big ways through his persecuted church

II. John’s perspective on our relationship with the world

A. 1 John 3:13

1. The “world” for John means human society organized independently of God, in opposition to God, under the control of the evil one (5:19)

 a. The world tempts us with its riches and pleasures

 b. The world threatens us when we don’t play along

2. “Do not be surprised” if the world hates you

a. Christians do not belong to the world and shouldn’t be surprised

b. The American church has too often tried desperately to belong to the world, but many Christians around the world accept that they don’t belong

B. 1 John 4:4

1. “Dear children, you are from God”

a. John reminds them of the miracle of new birth by which God’s Spirit gave them spiritual life and separated them from the world

2. “The one who is in you is greater than the one in the world”

a. As powerful as Satan is, the creator God who dwells in us by his Spirit is infinitely more powerful

C. 1 John 5:4

 1. Everyone born of God “overcomes” the world.

a. To overcome does not mean to belong to the world, or to withdraw from the world, or to dominate the world

b. Rather overcoming means remaining faithful to God no matter what the world throws our way

2. We overcome by “faith”

a. Faith says to God: “I trust you, God, no matter what, and I love you more than anything else.”

b. When we can say that, the power of the world over us has been broken because there’s nothing the world can take away that we need (we have God), and there’s nothing the world can offer that we need (we have God)

c. Faith is what the great men and women of Scripture show us, and it is what persecuted Christians around the world continue to show us