**Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church**

I. Introduction

 A. The reality of persecution around the world

1. The World Watch list’s top 7 most persecuted countries: North Korea, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Iran

2. Christians are the most persecuted religious group worldwide

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

4. Every month 200-300 Christians killed for their faith, over 200 churches and properties destroyed, 770 forms of violence are committed against Christians

B. The reality of God’s work in the midst of persecution

1. God working powerfully in the underground church in Iran

2. ISIS is creating a crisis for many Muslims who are leaving their faith

3. African refugees are re-evangelizing Europe

4. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

II. Stories from Turkey

 A. Mark

 1. The blessedness of persecution

 a. Read Matthew 5:11-12

b. These believers in Turkey clearly experienced that blessing. Their lives are marked by a profound joy

c. As we consider our lives in America, maybe we need to rethink the way we answer the question: What is a blessing? Some things we consider blessings may actually take us away from Jesus, and other things we consider painful might draw us closer to him.

 2. The power of the gospel

 a. Read Hebrews 4:12

b. These believers in Turkey experience and trust in the power of God’s word, without needing to add any thrills or human techniques

 c. The story of Arman

 d. Do we believe in the power of the gospel today?

 B. Ryan

 1. The peace Jesus alone brings

a. These persecuted believers have to choose between Jesus or the comforts of this world, and when they choose Jesus they find a deep peace that is not found anywhere else in the world

b. With all the freedom of options we have, we often choose Jesus and the world, and we try to live lives holding all those things together and we experience anxiety and fear

2. Ministry happens in a very relational, life-on-life way. Don’t wait for some big ministry to lots of people; just love and serve and minister to the actual people around you, and God will bless that.

IV. The first example of persecution in the early church (Acts 4)

A. Peter and John’s boldness before the religious leaders (4:8-13)

B. The believers’ prayer

 1. A recognition of God’s sovereign power over all things (4:24-28)

2. A prayer for God’s power to give the believers boldness (4:29)

3. A prayer for God’s power to work wonders in the world (4:30)

3. God’s powerful response (4:31)

V. A time of prayer for the persecuted church

A. Pray for physical protection and religious freedom

B. Pray for spiritual protection from discouragement

C. Pray for boldness in witness

D. Pray for God’s mighty hand to work wonders in His world and bring many to faith

**Discussion Questions**

1. What story or idea was most impactful from Sunday’s service?

2. On Sunday, Mark talked about the blessedness of persecution (read Matthew 5:11-12), and the experience of joy he witnessed in the Iranian believers. He suggested we may need to reconsider what we call a blessing in our lives? What did you think of that comment?

3. On Sunday, Ryan talked about the peace that these persecuted believers experience. He made some comments about why we in America don’t often experience that kind of peace. How did you respond to those comments? What is your own experience of peace like, and what factors play into that experience?

4. Consider the believers’ prayer for boldness in Acts 4:29. Where in your own life would you like to pray for greater boldness in sharing about or reflecting your Christian faith?