



## *Listen to the Truth*

*"You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

*November 22, 2015*

## Thought for the Week

Did you know?

Studying history and the origin of where things and groups of people came from fascinates many. Discovering that basketball started with peach baskets, a soccer style ball and was mainly used, as conditioning during the winter for other sports is very intriguing. Many also believe, when taken in view of our current circumstances, a look back at where we came from can be extremely enlightening. It was just this opinion that led to scouring the bookshelf to learn a bit more on the History of the early Church.

When you sit down to read the Bible there are obvious differences between culture today and culture in Jesus' time. Consider the early apostles and what they endured for sharing the gospel. A big question came to mind: Why would a group (Christians) who practice a way of life that promotes love, humility, acceptance, sacrifice and unity be persecuted and martyred?

We know and have grown up on the Sunday school answers but maybe we want to explore the context as to why the early Christian church suffered through what might usually be referred to as 'The Age of Martyrs'. There are thought to be 4 main reasons but there could be more that could help shed light on the subject.

**1) Their Distinct Lifestyle** - By simply living according to the teachings of Jesus, the Christian lifestyle was a constant unspoken condemnation of the popular pagan culture of the time. Every meal, feast, hospital, social activity was highly steeped in pagan gods worship so when Christians abstained from these things they were perceived as snobbish, rude and discourteous. Tertullian forbade a Christian from being a teacher because doing so would use textbooks that recognized pagan gods and festivals. So to be a Christian at this time meant divorcing oneself from the social and economic constructs. Your faith was on display in every aspect of your life.

**2) Accused of Atheism** - Because of this lifestyle and the belief in one God they were accused of atheism because everyone else

could not understand an imageless worship.

Their many gods were tied to things in this life and were made visible by icons. So when disaster struck, the Christians were to blame because they had not properly respected and worshipped that god.

**3) Slanders made against them** - One of the most infamous examples of Christian persecution was Emperor Nero lighting his garden with human torches. That came about because a fire broke out in Rome, leaving much of it in ashes. The rumor spread that Nero had caused it so he accused the Christians for it to cast blame away from himself. Charges of Cannibalism were also thrown at the early Christians because of the lack of public knowledge surrounding The Lord's Supper. 'Secrecy breeds distrust' and when Jesus' words about bread being his body and wine being his blood...the rumors flew.

**4) Emperor Worship** - With Roman rule came Roman peace in many disorderly places and eventually led to constructing temples celebrating the goddess Roma. The empire grew so big with so many different cultures represented that unification was an issue and the best solidifying force was a unified religion = Emperor Worship. It was practiced primarily as a test of political loyalty to burn some incense and publicly announce 'Caesar is Lord'. The early Christians would pray for the Emperor but not to him, which cast them as possible political usurpers. If they had been willing to conform to this one act then they might have been left alone to worship Christ to their hearts content.

So the question might not be why were they persecuted but instead why aren't we? Obviously, the social norm today is not a pagan polytheistic belief and most of us are not forced to claim our government as Lord. But, when taken in context, do we still live distinct lives? Is it obvious to others that there is a difference? Do we still succumb to the 'closed club' mentality and secret ourselves away in our church buildings? Have we compromised or kept quiet when we should have stood and fought for something?

*Happy Birthday- Nils (11/28)*

## Prayer for Peace - Lebanon

Creator God, we praise you and give thanks for the gifts and blessings of life shared in this sacred global community.

Open our hearts and minds to the fullness of your grace and peace.

We seek your forgiveness for our selfishness and pride, and for those choices that separate us from you and from one another.

The people of Lebanon, and all nations, seek just and lasting peace.

Bless all people as they learn to understand their importance in your plan for all creation to be at peace.

Bless and strengthen all who seek significant and dignified work and a means of supporting themselves and their families.

Guide all people in working toward a just and equal sharing of all Earth's plentiful resources.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, whose peace we seek for all creation. Amen.

# Stewardship Thought

*“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom does not belong to this world.’ (John 18:36)*

How often do we put all our time and energy into building a kingdom here on earth, forgetting that life here is short?

The real kingdom is in the next life. Yet, how much time and energy do we invest in working for that eternal kingdom?