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Life In Christ

Would you still love Jesus if you faced the possibility of intense persecution everyday?

The church in Iran continues to grow despite intense persecution, demonstrating love for Jesus through radical obedience and the sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit. In recent years, the Iranian church has multiplied exponentially becoming one of the most open Muslim populations to the Gospel in the Middle East. This growth occurred in a context of severe difficulty. A book caled Captive in Iran, tells the true story of Maryam Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh, two young Iranian women who became Christians and spread the gospel throughout Tehran. For years they distributed thousands of New Testaments, led Bible studies, and cared for the poor—all illegal acts in the Islamic Republic. Their underground ministry eventually drew the attention of Iranian security forces. In early 2009, their apartment was raided, their Bibles confiscated, and they were arrested. Their formal charge was simply “Christianity”—because they were converts and actively shared their faith.

They were first detained in the filthy, overcrowded Vozara

Detention Center, where they immediately began sharing Jesus' love with women who had never heard it. After days of hunger, interrogations, and threats, they were moved to the notorious Evin Prison—known for torture, secret trials, and executions. Many expected them to break. Instead, prison became an unexpected ministry, shaped by the Holy Spirit's unmistakable presence.

Inside Evin, the Spirit worked in surprising ways. Despite fear and exhaustion, they experienced a supernatural peace. During interrogations they spoke with courage and clarity they knew wasn't their own. They prayed for women battling addiction, trauma, and deep wounds; many whispered requests for prayer, and some experienced healing or answered prayers, returning in tears to say, "Your God heard me."

Even several guards were moved. One young guard risked punishment to ask for prayer, admitting she felt "imprisoned in a different way." Others, softened by their peace and kindness, treated them gently or brought food and water. Prisoners began calling them "the Christian girls," a title that became its own witness. They soon realized their imprisonment was not a setback, but a divine assignment—to bring hope to the forgotten.

Throughout their months in Evin, the Holy Spirit gave them endurance, discernment, and compassion. They held small Bible studies, comforted anxious women before court

hearings, and boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God—even to interrogators. Their witness stirred curiosity and spiritual hunger in one of Iran’s darkest places.

Meanwhile, international pressure grew. After 259 days, officials unexpectedly released them—something even prison staff never imagined for two outspoken Christian converts. Maryam and Marziyeh walked out thin and exhausted, but spiritually unbroken. Far from silencing them, prison deepened their faith and expanded their ministry, enabling them to share their story with the world.

Their lives showed how God’s Spirit can bring light into the darkest places, sustain His people in suffering, and use ordinary believers to reveal hope where hope should not exist. They were empowered with the Holy Spirit and experienced perseverance, courage, and the unquenchable love of Christ shining within a prison notorious for crushing souls—yet unable to crush theirs.

In the passage read today, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples, to those who love him.

By the time we reach this passage, the disciples have spent three years living with Jesus. He has been their teacher, friend, and constant guide. So when He begins to speak of leaving, their hearts are troubled. They don’t want Him to go, and they’re struggling to picture their future without His familiar presence. They are afraid. They don’t know the

full effect of what's going to happen. They hear Jesus saying that he is leaving them, to prepare a place for them, which is frightening. Jesus is comforting His disciples saying in John 14:1–4 ““Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”” Then Jesus continues saying that He is the way to the Father, as the disciples are confused, not knowing where He is going, John 14:6–7 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”” Continuing that if you have seen Jesus you have seen the Father and that if you believe in Jesus, you will do the works he has been doing.

But Jesus tells them, if you love me, keep my commands, which his commands are all centred on love. He will send the Holy Spirit, an advocate, to be with them forever. Advocate, also known as comforter.

This is not the first time the Holy Spirit is found in Scripture. The Spirit has been there since the beginning of time. The Spirit, also known as the breath of life or the

wind of God, we read about in Genesis 1:1–2 “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” or in Genesis 2:7 in the creation of humans it says, “then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”

It is the Wind of God in Providence: Exodus 15:8 “At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.” Exodus 15:10 “You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.”

The Spirit Guides and Empowers: Exodus 35:30–33 “Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft.”

or in Judges 3:10 “The spirit of the Lord came upon him [Othniel, the first judge of Israel after Joshua], and he judged Israel; he went out to war, and the Lord gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.”

or in Judges 6:34 “But the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him.”

Ezekiel 3:12 “Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the Lord rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling;” Ezekiel 3:14 “The spirit lifted me up and bore me away; I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon me.”

The Spirit is Messianic Hope

As we hear in Isaiah 42:1 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.” or Joel 2:28–29 “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.” which of course was fulfilled in Pentecost. Now the Holy Spirit is available for all those who believe.

Pentecost gave the church its power. Pentecost is Christ released within the heart of His church.

Are you filled with the Spirit? Examine yourself. There is a great difference between you possessing the Spirit and the Spirit possessing you. Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is not a once-and-

for-all experience. It is a continual surrender. 1 John 3:24 “All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us,” very similar to what Jesus continues to say after the passage read today.

As we heard the story of Marziyeh and Maryam, the Holy Spirit was with them throughout their journey.

Marziyeh speaks about some of the days in the prison: “One morning about five o’clock, I was awakened by someone shaking my legs. I had a strange, vibrant feeling that it was the Holy Spirit. This had happened before and made me very happy. Because Mahtab and Munis were still asleep, I sat on my pallet singing songs of praise to the Lord for the peace He had given me. By the time they woke up, I had already arranged our breakfast of boiled eggs on the soft [a plastic tray about the size of a newspaper, which we used in place of a table in the cell]. They were surprised and asked why I was up so early. I said, ‘I don’t know. I just feel as if the Holy Spirit is with me.’” As I told my story, my friend’s eyes lit up. “Do you know what day that was?” she said with excitement. “Pentecost!” I was completely astonished. It made me very happy to know that the Lord hadn’t forgotten about me and that the Holy Spirit had filled me with a new sense of His presence on that special day.”

or Maryam speaks of her time in prison that the presence

of the Holy Spirit had been her rock, the one assurance they always had that the Lord loved them, would never forsake them, and was using them for some great purpose. There were times, though, when she was so weary and exhausted that she allowed that assurance to slip. As she says, for several days during that period, I couldn't feel the Lord's presence. The loneliness that crept into my heart was frightening. I reached a point where I couldn't eat and felt an emptiness I'd never known before as a Christian. I prayed, walking around my tiny cell, asking the Lord to make Himself known in a special way. When Fereshteh woke up, I started singing hymns, and my voice filled the entire corridor. Fereshteh was afraid the sound would attract the guards. I expected the guards, too, but kept singing. I sang nonstop for hours. No more silence! No more following oppressive, inhuman rules! I sang at the top of my lungs until it was nearly dark. Finally, exhausted, I lay down in the middle of the floor and closed my eyes. And there it was. The Spirit of God flowing over me, embracing me, reassuring me. I knew that He had never left my side. I was now free from sadness and pressure, completely happy. "I'm amazed no guards came all day!" Fereshteh said. "You know your voice had to reach the men's corridor, and the guards there would complain to the guards in the women's section." She could feel the presence of God too. At dinnertime, the guard we called the Ghost came with our food and said, "You did whatever

you wanted today, and your voice carried all the way to the other side of the building.” “But I didn’t do anything,” Maryam said. “I just sang.” Though the Ghost was never very expressive, I thought she looked sad. “What’s happened?” I asked. “Why are you upset?” “I’m tired of working here,” the Ghost admitted. “I don’t think I’m cut out for it. Would you pray for me?” “I will be happy to.” And so I prayed for my captor, secure in the presence of the Lord that washed over me in waves, in the deepest recesses of the most feared ward of the most notorious prison in one of the most oppressed nations of the world. Surely I had never felt more blessed.

And then months later as the ladies left the prison the guard walking them to the gate, who they had seen multiple times but had spoken very little said, “Are you the two Christians?” “Yes, we are.” they said “I’ve heard a lot about you. I’m very happy that you are finally released.” She looked around to see if anyone was nearby. “Can I ask you a favor?” “Of course. What is it?” they said “I’ve heard that your prayers are always answered. I have a problem in my life. Could you pray for me, too, please?” “Absolutely. We will pray to Jesus that your problem will be solved.” A sentry led us to the main gate, opened it, and ushered us through.

This story illustrates how loving Jesus and obeying his commands, even in the face of intense worldly opposition,

is made possible through the continuous, intimate presence and power of the Holy Spirit, leading to an enduring peace and the fulfillment of God's work.

This past week I had a lady from the Divinity College approach me and said, the Holy Spirit led me last night to give this to you, at which point she handed me an envelope. She said, I don't know why, we hadn't talked about what was going on in my life, but after she asked how things were going for me and I explained what was going on with my uncle, she then understood why the Holy Spirit led her to give me this envelope. At the time, she had no idea of what was going on in my life. She didn't know that the night before I booked my flight to go with my dad to British Columbia to say goodbye to my uncle. When I opened the envelope it was something for my trip, it made complete sense to me.

Jesus promised he would ask the Father to send "another Helper, to be with us forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16). When persecution came, the church did not scatter in fear; instead, they were "inspired and ignited by the Holy Spirit". The Spirit empowered them to continue their work, reminding them of Jesus' teachings and providing guidance in the absence of traditional church structures. Jesus offered His disciples a unique "peace that the world cannot give". This is not a peace from the absence of problems, but the active presence of God, assuring us that

we are never alone. Through our obedience, we can experience an intimate relationship with God, fulfilling the promise: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

And so as we enter Advent next week, we do not wait as people who are empty.

We are reminded that the Spirit appeared to Mary who had been promised to bear the Messianic Son. As it says in Luke 1:35 "The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." We wait as people who are filled. The same Spirit who overshadowed Mary now overshadows us. We celebrate the coming of Immanuel, which means God with us. The Spirit who brought Christ into the world now brings Christ to life in our hearts. The Spirit who empowered Jesus now empowers His church.

As Clark Pinnock wrote, "As Jesus was conceived by the Spirit in Mary and empowered for mission in baptism, so the church is born and empowered by the Spirit. The Spirit who filled Jesus empowers the community of disciples to be the vehicle of God's saving activity. Jesus, who received the Spirit and ministered in power, communicated God's life to the church to carry on the mission. Like Jesus, the church must live not out of its own resources but by the

power of the indwelling Spirit, which breathes, strengthens, inspires, and guides.”

So let us step into this season with expectation—because the Holy Spirit is not only God with us, but God in us, God guiding us, God strengthening us, and God sending us into the world to shine His light, not just this time of year, but every day of our life. As Advent approaches, clear space in your heart for the Spirit, so that when Christ comes, He finds a people ready, listening and willing to obey. May you open yourself to the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed Mary - so that Christ may be formed in you as we await His coming again and may the Spirit empower us to live boldly, love deeply, and reflect Christ in a weary world.