

# The Privilege of Corporate Worship

Author and date unknown

*Sing His praises in the assembly of the faithful. Psalm 149:1b*

Our Open Doors colleague, Ron Boyd-MacMillan, shares the following insight from his teaching, “Why I Need to Encounter the Persecuted Church.”

It’s so easy to get fed up with church. For years I got very little out of church. The sermons were boring. The music was embarrassing. The fellowship was non-existent. The whole experience of worshipping with other people felt stale and pointless...Going to church in my country was an endurance test. Until I visited a persecuted church!

There were fifty of us squeezed into an upstairs room. The singing was hushed. The neighbors were hostile to the fellowship. Then a preacher stood up. An old man, with a wiry frame and wisps of hair springing from a mole on his chin. No sooner had he spoken a sentence than he broke down in tears. He kept saying, “I never thought I would have the privilege of preaching again.” Then he would laugh, and then cry again, great wails and sobs. Soon everyone was weeping with him. Except me. This went on for about half an hour, and I began to get very fed up with it all. He kept speaking a line, and my translator kept saying, “It’s the same verse, it’s the same verse.” All this man did was repeat the same scripture phrase, burst into tears, laugh, and then speak the very same phrase again. I thought, “What kind of hopeless service is this.”

But afterwards I met the old man, and when I heard his story I repented of my attitude. He was a preacher, ordained in the late 1950’s in China. He pastored a church for only six months before it was closed down. He was jailed, spending twenty years in prison. After he got out, he was very ill for a longtime, but finally, at age 77, had the strength to speak again. I had witnessed his first sermon in 31 years! No wonder he broke down. I tried to imagine what it must have been like, holding the Word of God inside for 31 years, not knowing whether you would ever again preach. Then suddenly being allowed to do so. How do you preach a sermon after a silence of 31 years? No wonder he was overcome.

He said, “I never thought I would get the privilege of speaking the Word to a gathered group of Christians with their Bibles open ever again. Through the long years of prison I thought that experience would never return. And when it came, as you saw, all I could do was choke out the verse that kept me going: Sing his praises in the assembly of the faithful (Ps149:1b).

I returned home with a transformed attitude. I began to walk to church with my Bible, praising Him for the opportunity. I went to the church early, walking the aisles and praying, thanking God for the building and the freedom to hold our service. When the preacher spoke, I thanked God that he had no fear. When the Bible was read, I thanked God for the men who took grave risks in the past to print and distribute this word in my language. When we sang a hymn, I sang out loudly, thanking God that I did not have to whisper in hushed tones.

Truly, what a privilege is corporate worship. The persecuted church rescued me from bitterness, and taught me to count my blessings I had taken for granted.

RESPONSE: Today I will thank God for the privilege and freedom of corporate worship in my church.

PRAYER: Thank You Lord for the freedom and blessing of praising You in my faith community.