

## Armenian Genocide

Crispo Jolian shares that one night in November 2009, “I heard Gerda Weissmann Klein speak at the University of Texas. A Holocaust survivor, Gerda’s 1957 memoir, ‘All But My Life’ chronicles her harrowing ordeal in labor camps and death marches during World War II.

During the Q&A, someone asked, “What do you say to Holocaust deniers?” She shrugged and said, “I really don’t have to say very much. I simply tell them to ask Germany, because Germany does not deny it.”

On April 24, 2015 just two days ago, we marked the hundredth anniversary of the Armenian genocide during which the Ottoman Government which is now modern-day Turkey, systematically exterminated 1.5 million Armenians. Males were massacred or forced to serve in the Army. Women, children and the elderly were forced on death marches into the Syrian Desert. Driven by military escorts, the Armenian women were deprived of food and water and subject to robbery, rape and massacre. The majority of the Armenian diaspora communities around the world came into being as a direct result of this genocide. To this day, Turkey denies that it ever happened. There are other governments in our world at this moment, including the United States that are complicit in this lie. They refuse to use the word genocide in reference to what took place. The wonderful news that just earlier this week before the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Germany, of all nations, officially recognized what happened in Armenia at that time, as a genocide. I think one of the most important things that you and I can do as the church in this present moment, is to look at what is taking place, especially in light of this hundredth anniversary. We need to begin to speak a truth into the lie that is being perpetrated into and even to this day, and that is to say, there was a genocide among the Armenian people that was horrific; that was torturous and evil. It is important that every nation in the world own that and speak about it in those terms.

In our second lesson today, we hear in First John three simple verses and really, it is going to be what I’m preaching on today... these three verses: God knows everything. God knows everything. These three words actually speak of the omniscience of God that God is all knowing that God knows everything. He’s one who knows in totality about every human being who has ever lived including ourselves, their souls and the real reasons for each of the decisions that they have made.

The pulpit commentary shares, “This is an awful thought for the omnipotent but a blessed and encouraging thought for those who confess their sins. He knows our sins; he knows them all for well. But he also knows our temptations, struggles, sorrow and love. Therefore, the reality that you and I need to embrace today is the reality that in God knowing everything. Not only does he know our sinfulness, not only does he know our faults and our brokenness even better than we know it ourselves, but he also knows our temptations. He knows our humanity. He knows our sorrows and our brokenness. This touches the heart of God.

In our Psalm today - Psalm 23, a Psalm that is beloved by so many people, we hear of the good Shepherd. One of the realities about our good Shepherd Jesus Christ is that his love and his grace surpasses ours, surpasses humanity in love, and compassion as well as knowledge. It is a beautiful Psalm isn’t it...the whole story of God leading us beside green pastures. I don’t know about you, but when I think of that beautiful imagery of being led beside green pastures, I think of God’s word. That

the very spirit of God would lead us through the Scriptures of God, feeding our soul as much as we want to eat, dwelling in those green pastures, being nursed spiritually by the word of God in a way that is beautiful and sustaining and a true blessing. It talks about the good Shepherd leading us beside still waters.

When I read that phrase besides the waters, I think of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The nourishment and the refreshment that you and I can receive by drinking deeply of the Holy Spirit of God each and every moment of our life and inviting the Holy Spirit especially into the darkest and most parched and needy parts of our souls. That we might experience deeply the love of the good Shepherd, the healing of the good Shepherd and the nourishment of the good Shepherd that only he can bring.

Finally the Valley of the shadow of death. That place that no human being really wants to go. Yet I, as well as I'm sure many of you can testify to the reality that, for those who came to that place with Jesus as their good Shepherd. That these are more than just words on a page, but speak of a powerful presence in a hospital room where somebody is dying and you feel, during your times of prayer and being with one another, the undeniable presence of the Good Shepherd-loving and caring and comforting and imparting grace through this and through that all the way to the very end. So this very Psalm speaks to us about the importance of remaining open to the Good Shepherd's presence and effect in our life. Being open to God's conviction of our sin and our brokenness and darkness as well as being open to his redemption in our lives as well. You see, that is one of the things that our world continues to struggle with. I think it's one of the reasons why they struggle with Jesus Christ the most is because if you're going to acknowledge Jesus Christ, one of the first things you need to acknowledge is that you are a sinner and that we have sinned. That one of the realities for our world unfortunately, is that we are a genocidal people. If you look through the history of humanity, there is genocide after genocide after genocide. We are unfortunately in our depravity, a people that love to kill one another among other things. Again, this speaks deeply of our need of God and in need of a Savior. Yet so many want to reject Jesus even at this glaring point of reality of the darkness of humanity. But let it not be said of us as his people. Let it not be said of us that we would be part of the lie of this world about what has really taken place. It is incumbent; it is the call of the church to be light in the midst of darkness. It is especially our call in this present moment to stand on the word of God in all humility to speak the truth in love. As much as this world, and even leaders our own country would not even want to use the word genocide in regard what happened with the Armenians, we need to with all humility. Yet with all boldness say, it is indeed a genocide. Millions of people were killed. This is evil and this is wrong. The Armenian apostolic church is actually the world's oldest national church. It's one of the most ancient Christian communities, which was founded by the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus in the first century. It was an early center of Christianity and vibrancy. Apostolic, persecuted yet in the midst of all of it, worshiping Christ, proclaiming Christ, lifting high the cross of Christ. Today, before you and before the world, I say let us proclaim that they are a witness to Jesus Christ. We praise God for their costly witness in the midst of the genocide that they experienced as a people. Even though the world as a whole still denies it, we say to them today, we recognize what happened to you. It was a horrible tragedy. It was a horrible genocide and we stand with you as brothers and sisters in Christ to acknowledge the reality of what has taken place.

Rafael Lemkin was explicitly moved by the Armenian annihilation. To coin the word genocide in 1943 and defined systemic and premeditated exterminations within legal parameters. You see Rafael was so moved about this story of the genocide that happened to the Armenians he studied it. He researched it

and he coined this term genocide and began to framework parameters of what a genocide looked like. How many people would be killed and what would be the effects of that looked like. It's from that that we have that today a very important thing to objectify what's going on. The Armenian genocide is the second most studied case of genocide after the Holocaust. So let me ask a question that some of you may be asking yourselves right now. "Father Joe, why are you talking about this? Psalm 23. Such a nice one. You could leave me with some really warm, fuzzy feelings to go home with today. I could have had a smile on my face and not even face this." Why would I even mention such things? Because I have to. I have to mention them. I specially have to mention them as a citizen of a country whose government won't even acknowledge it. We as the church have a responsibility to speak the truth in all humility and love, and to stand with Arminian brothers and sisters and say, "This is genocide. This is evil. We proclaim before the world that God knows everything. That whatever language you want to use, however you want to frame it, whatever you want to say or don't say, God knows the truth. God knows the reality of what was really going down at that moment and what occurred." God knows the story of the human heart better than anybody ever will. As much as our leaders want to use linguistic gymnastics to say so many different things, beloved I say to you, do not let their perverse complexity take you away from the simplicity of what is going on. God knows everything. You and I need to enter back into the simplicity of his Gospel and his word and begin to speak the truth and love into our world and to overcome evil with good. It begins with you and me. You and I need to repent of our own sinfulness our own brokenness. The ways in which we also hurt and injure one another. We need to repent of our own sinfulness and the ways in which we have been part of the brokenness of this world. Then we need to be open to God's spirit speaking through us. Again in all humility but also in truth to what we see going on and to support one another in this present moment.

It is no coincidence to me that this past Friday we observe the one-hundredth anniversary of the Armenian genocide that happened all those years ago. Because for me the reality is, we are also living in a present moment of genocide. Again, our world leaders don't even want to use that word. There is a battle over even the use of certain words, in that you frame certain groups and what you say about this, what you say about that. They're like captains on the Titanic rearranging deck chairs after they've hit an iceberg... right? They're majoring in the minors instead of focusing on being the leader that God has given them the authority to be in this moment and saving people's lives. That's why God gives authority to governments in the world, is to protect their people...ideally, imagine that! To provide for them, to care for them and provide for the protection and mutual hospitality and relationship between nations. But that is not what's going on right now. That is not what's occurring at this moment. Therefore, what's important for you and I as the church is to stand up, find our voice and speak it out. What I want to invite us into the reality of right now, I've been speaking this about this now for the past couple years in a number of different sermons, is the current reality of the genocide that is going on against Christians around the world right now literally being driven out of the holy land. That is what is taking place. If you don't believe me, go on the Internet do a search. Do some searches in the library, study the past 5 or 10 years, and see what's been going on in the Middle East. There have been literally hundreds of thousands of Christians either killed or forced into slavery or driven from their homes that are now rubble. It's because simply they are Christians. They are hated. So you and I need to begin to realize that we need to own what's going on in our present moment. You and I need to stand up in this present moment with the Christian genocide that is unfolding before our very eyes and to stand up and do something in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what do we do? I believe this battle is taking place on two different levels. You may or may not agree with me... that's okay. I'm going to share the two levels in which this battle is taking place and I would invite you along with me at this moment to pray and to engage in it however, we can.

One of the levels in which this battle is going on against the church, the body of Jesus Christ, particularly in the Middle East right now, but as well as throughout the world, is at spiritual level. There's a Scripture I don't have to time to go through right now, it's Daniel 10. You may want to write that down and look at that later on. In a particular scripture in Daniel 10, it tells the story of the Prophet Daniel with the people of Israel exiled in Babylon. God has called Daniel to a fast. He is praying and seeking God in the moment of trial for his people and seeking God's vision for Israel. He's in a fast and prayer for 21 days and in that particular time of fasting and prayer, it tells of an angel coming to Daniel and saying to Daniel, "Daniel, I heard your prayer from the very first day, but there was, if you will, a spirit of principality. A demon that prevented me from coming to you." Then thought of scholars is that this angel was Gabriel. It also talks in this particular text about the Archangel Michael who, if you look at the Scriptures, is an angel that's engaged in spiritual warfare. So basically, what this text talks about in that reality, what would Daniel was going through, was that there was a spiritual battle going on in the heavens over God's people of Israel at the present moment in Babylon. Guess what Babylon was referred to in that Scripture is in present-day; it's the country of Iraq. It is the country of Iraq. That the principality that was talked about in that Scripture was the Prince of Persia. Now for some of you right now, your eyes are kind of glazing over. You don't even know what I'm talking about. That's okay. For others of you this is resonating with you. This is speaking to you. For those of you who are being touched by this, I ask you to join me in prayer at this spiritual level, to bind these forces of wickedness and evil that are doing battle against God's people. We need a spiritual breakthrough. Jesus said in Matthew 18:18, write that Scripture down too, it is a very important Scripture. "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Again Matthew 18:18. He goes on to say, "Whatever two of or three of you asked of me in my name I will do it for you."

Again, this is a very important principle in prayer of binding and loosing. What you a nice very simply need to do as the people of God in this moment, as a people of prayer, we need to be binding evil, which means to wrap it up and immobilize it in the name of Jesus Christ. We need to loose the Holy Spirit of God to come in, to move among God's people, especially in the Middle East. So that's the spiritual level that's going on.

There is also the natural level. That would be Isis, in particular Al Qaeda and other groups as well. As you know, there's a very big debate among our leaders, about whether they're Muslim or not. Let me simply share my viewpoint, they are. They are part of the Islamic faith; are they the majority of it? I know, I have some really good Muslim friends and people I've grown up with that I count them as brothers. Very close. But these people that are part of Isis studied the Koran, they are Muslim. They worship Allah and it is the reason why they do what they do, through their own words. We need to at least respect that and understand where they're coming from.

So understanding that kind of base in the natural, what you and I need to begin to do, is pray also for our leaders. That they would begin to acknowledge the truth of what is going on even if they don't like it and begin to really address it. To begin to address it in a way that is truly multinational and working together rather than a fragmentation that is obvious to all of us right now. If it seems like all hell is

broken loose in the Middle East, guess what? It's because all hell has broken loose in the Middle East! I say to you, "Where is the church in this moment?" I know it's happening to the church in the Middle East. They're living in piles of rubble. They're searching for food and water. They're trying to obey the call of the Lord Jesus to be a witness in the present moment even though there are people around them trying to kill them simply because they love the Lord. Many of them are asking, "Where are you? Where am I? Where are our Western brothers and sisters in this moment of our greater need?" What we need to say to them is, "Here we are. We stand with you in prayer. We are lifting you up and interceding for you. We are praying for our leaders as well, that they might begin to acknowledge the true extent of what is going on. That there is a worldwide genocide that is happening in this present moment and we see it. We acknowledge it. We speak it and we stand against it. We will do everything in our power to stand with you and to quell this from going on anymore and to be a force for ending it."

Are you willing to do that? How easy it is to turn off the TV. To not read the stories anymore. To just try to drive it out of your mind. But you need to know something... they're coming here...if they're not already here. They're waiting for the right moment and we need to stand against this in this hour and do all that we can to fight it and oppose it in whatever way we are able. So, I want to encourage us in this moment and I want to lead us in a prayer. I just pray that this is just a beginning prayer. Some of us have been in this place of prayer for this for a number of years already. Some of you may just be beginning it. That's fine. I wanted to welcome you into this prayer because I feel it is a very desperate hour for us and for them. You and I need to pray into this and ask that God would use us and use this church to reach out to the Middle East in a way like never before, that we might begin to prevail. That these genocidal maniacs may be ceased once and for all, however God might choose to do that. That peace, peace, the peace of the Lord might begin to break out.

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