I am excited about this weekend, because, after the worship service, we will perform a couple of baptisms. Whether a person in new to Christianity or grew up in a Christian home, to become a Christian involves repentance and faith. It could involve a radical observable transformation like leaving a blatantly sinful lifestyle characterized by immorality, addictions, materialism, and hedonism. It could also involve a radical ideological and worldview shift, rejecting a false religion like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Mormonism. It could also involve a decision of the will, from within the frame of a Christian context, to reject legalism, religious ritualism, self-effort, or self-sufficiency and to embrace God's grace and gift to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In each and every case a faith commitment to Christ is worth celebrating.

In many counties around the world, baptism, "going public" with one's faith in Christ, is a functional declaration of war. It represents a shift of allegiance from secular, cultural, and religious norms to Jesus and to biblical beliefs and practices. The person being baptized does not have to have a fully developed systematic theology or have a complete knowledge of scriptural content. **Romans 10:9** says, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be

saved." **Verse 13** of the same chapter says, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." This section of Romans 10 provides a poignant summary in **verse 17**, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." This is why we preach the gospel… so that the lost might hear, repent, believe, and thus be saved and born again. Since the ordinance of baptism ("ordinance" because Christ commanded or ordained for it to be done to incorporate believers into the family of faith, as opposed to a "sacrament" something that makes you holy) is an external symbol of an internal commitment. When a person takes that step of obedience, it often becomes the beginning point of persecution.

Here in the West, I believe that Christians often lack resilience because we have, generally speaking, never experience "real persecution" for our Christian faith. This is largely because of Constitutional guarantees (even if not always appropriately protected). A "profession of faith," which IS important, can become too easy and robbed of significance when it costs us nothing to follow Jesus. When we can operate with relative societal freedom and ease as Christians, following Jesus, it DEMANDS a strong internal conviction and commitment to prioritize our times of personal devotions, corporate worship, and ministry outreach. Hardship tempers character and convictions.

Whether or not we like the music or the preaching, those factors should never be a reason for not being ABLAZE with a passion for Christ. When we understand WHO Christ is and what He has done for us, then we should want to arrive in advance with a focus to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, we should be expectant to encounter God, our Audience of One, and for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the truth of God's Word for application in our life circumstances. I hope that it will not take persecution to drive us to a deeper level of devotion, but if dire circumstances and personal desperation are what it takes, then it will ultimately be for our good. So, as we celebrate new baptisms this Sunday, may the Lord renew the excitement and convictions of our walks with Jesus that we expressed at our baptisms.

Blessings! Jeff