



COVENANT

Bible-Presbyterian Church

Preaching Christ for His Glory and His Kingdom

Order of Worship – 25 November 2018

Theme for the Year: "King Jesus Must Reign" (1 Corinthians 15:25)

Prelude	<i>The Lord Is in His Holy Temple</i>
Call to Worship	
*Opening Hymn	<i>72 - Glory Be to God the Father</i>
*Invocation & † <i>Gloria Patri</i>	
Scripture Reading	Psalm 84:1-12
Hymn	TP 42:1-5
Tithes & Offering	
*† <i>Doxology</i> & Offertory Prayer	
Scripture Reading	1 Timothy 3:14-16
Hymn	<i>537 - Not I, but Christ</i>
Confession of Faith & Pastoral Prayer	
Sermon	"The Pillar and Ground of Truth"
*Closing Hymn	<i>226 - Called Unto Holiness</i>
*Benediction & <i>Threefold Amen</i>	
Silent Prayer & Postlude	
Announcements	<i>*Congregation standing</i>

†Glory be to the Father, and to the Son:
And to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning,
Is now and ever shall be:
World without end. Amen.

††Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Covenant Bible-Presbyterian Church meets every Sunday at 10:00 am
at 47 Davis Road, Attadale, Western Australia

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The Martyrdoms of Haik Hovsepian and Mehdi Dibaj

We have read of the martyrdoms of many different people in history - William Tyndale, Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, etc.

These were ministers who were executed for their faith in Christ.

But many martyrs exist in our day - who have given their lives in the service of Christ.

2 such martyrs of note were Iranian Christian pastors Haik Hovsepian and Mehdi Dibaj.

Christianity in Iran

Christianity flourished in Iran since Pentecost. Acts 2:9 states there were Elamites and Medes who heard the gospel and believed.

And despite the Islamic conquest, there continued to be a Christian presence. The church was at times persecuted, but due to the relative ease and peace, and the establishment of a sacramental Christianity, the witness of the gospel declined.

When Protestant missionaries brought the gospel in the 18th and 19th centuries, they witnessed to the Persian Muslims.

In the 1970s, Protestant pastors started holding worship services in homes. Two such pastors were Haik Hovsepian and Mehdi Dibaj. This led to more Muslims converting to Christianity.

In 1979, the Islamic Revolution occurred, and Fundamentalist Shia Muslims clerics took control of the government, turning it into a theocracy.

There were heavy restrictions placed on Christians and the churches. It became illegal to distribute Christian literature in the Persian language, and any converts were under threat of execution.

While the Iranian Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion for Christians, it was and is illegal to sell Bibles.

The Iranian Bible Society was shut down in 1980 after the Islamic Revolution. Its Bibles were confiscated and destroyed.

Many Christians since then have lost their lives or have been imprisoned. But despite these impositions and threats, the churches have remained strong.

Hiak Hovsepian

When the government imposed regulations on the churches, several pastors spoke up, including Hiak Hovsepian.

He was an Iranian pastor of Armenian ethnic stock - who were Christians since the first century AD. He was involved in the Assemblies of God in Iran and was their presiding bishop.

The government forbade churches from allowing Muslims or Christian converts from Islam into their churches.

Along with this, other regulations were imposed.

Worship services could not be conducted in the Persian language, church members had to be issued identification cards and could only be granted entrance upon showing those cards, and membership lists

had to be turned over to the government.

New members could only be added with the approval of the government.

Their meetings could only be held on Sundays and not Friday (which was the meeting day of the Muslims).

Pastor Hovsepian, with a number of other pastors, refused to comply with these regulations.

He declared that never would he or his ministers bow down and comply with such inhumane and unjust demands and that their churches are open to all who wanted to come.

Because of his outspokenness, he was killed in January 1994.

But it was not merely his boldness on these issues that got him in trouble with the government. It was his support of fellow pastor Mehdi Dibaj.

Mehdi Dibaj

Unlike Haik Hovsepian, Mehdi Dibaj, was not an Armenian - he was an ethnic Persian. He grew up Muslim but converted to Christianity and became a pastor in the same denomination.

In 1983, he was arrested and sentenced without trial. For 10 years, he was pressured by the imams to recant his faith.

During that time, he spent 2 years in solitary confinement and was subjected to mock executions.

The charges that were eventually made were that he had "insulted Islam, the prophet Muhammad and [the] Ayatollah Khomeini."

It was also charged that he was a spy for the West and he had been an apostate. Eventually all charges were

dropped except for the charge of apostasy.

He was pressured to recant his faith. But when he refused to do so, in 1993, he was sentenced to death for the crime of converting from Islam.

Death was the punishment for apostasy under Sharia law.

The Deaths of Pastors Haik Hovsepian and Mehdi Dibaj

When Haik Hovsepian, a fellow Iranian pastor, heard about this, he brought international attention to the death sentence.

And due to international pressure from various human rights groups, the Iranian government released Mehdi Dibaj in January 1994.

But while Pastor Dibaj was released, Pastor Hovsepian was abducted, tortured, and killed three days later.

At his funeral, Pastor Mehdi Dibaj gave a tearful tribute - "*When Jesus died on the cross, only Barabbas knew that Jesus had died for him. When Bishop Haik died, I know that he died for me. I know how Barabbas feels now, because I was set free, because someone died in my place.*"

But Pastor Mehdi Dibaj's freedom would be short-lived.

On June 24th he was returning from a conference to celebrate his daughter's birthday. He never arrived for the party.

On July 5th the authorities found his tortured and murdered body. It was said that the Islamic leadership in Iran could not allow such a Christian preacher to survive.

They were too afraid of the consequences for the destruction of their power base.

What is remarkable about these two men was their testimonies. Despite the persecution, they continued to press on in the faith and ministry.

In his 9 solitary years in prison, Pastor Mehdi Dibaj gained much comfort from the truth of God's sovereignty.

When he appeared before the Islamic judges, he delivered his testimony and defense.

The Testimony and Defense of Mehdi Dibaj

In the holy name of God who is our life and existence.

With all humility I express my gratitude to the Judge of all heaven and earth for this precious opportunity, and with brokenness I wait upon the Lord to deliver me from this court trial according to His promises.

I also beg the honored members of the court who are present to listen with patience to my defense and with respect for the Name of the Lord.

I am a Christian. As a sinner I believe Jesus has died for my sins on the cross and by His resurrection and victory over death, has made me righteous in the presence of the Holy God.

The true God speaks about this fact in His Holy Word, the Gospel (Injil). Jesus means Savior *"because He will save His people from their sins."*

Jesus paid the penalty of our sins by His own blood and gave us a new life so that we can live for the glory of God by the help of the Holy Spirit

and be like a dam against corruption, be a channel of blessing and healing, and be protected by the love of God.

In response to this kindness, He has asked me to deny myself and be His fully surrendered follower, and not to fear people even if they kill my body, but rather rely on the creator of life who has crowned me with the crown of mercy and compassion. He is the great protector of His beloved ones as well as their great reward.

I have been charged with "apostasy!" The invisible God who knows our hearts has given assurance to us, as Christians, that we are not among the apostates who will perish but among the believers who will have eternal life.

In Islamic Law (Sharia), an apostate is one who does not believe in God, the prophets or the resurrection of the dead, We Christians believe in all three!

They say *"You were a Muslim and you have become a Christian."* This is not so. For many years I had no religion.

After searching and studying I accepted God's call and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to receive eternal life.

People choose their religion but a Christian is chosen by Christ. He says, *"You have not chosen me but I have chosen you."*

Since when did He choose me? He chose me before the foundation of the world.

People say, *"You were a Muslim from your birth."*

God says, *"You were a Christian from the beginning."*

He states that He chose us thousands of years ago, even before the creation of the universe, so that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we may be His.

A Christian means one who belongs to Jesus Christ.

The eternal God who sees the end from the beginning and who has chosen me to belong to Him, knew from the beginning those whose heart would be drawn to Him and also those who would be willing to sell their faith and eternity for a pot of porridge.

I would rather have the whole world against me, but know that the Almighty God is with me. I would rather be called an apostate, but know that I have the approval of the God of glory, because man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart.

For Him who is God for all eternity nothing is impossible. All power in heaven and on earth is in His hands.

The Almighty God will raise up anyone He chooses and bring down others, accept some and reject others, send some to heaven and other to hell.

Now because God does whatever He desires, who can separate us from the love of God? Or who can destroy the relationship between the creator and the creature or defeat a life that is faithful to his Lord?

The faithful will be safe and secure under the shadow of the Almighty! Our refuge is the mercy seat of God who is exalted from the beginning.

I know in whom I have believed, and He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him to the end until I

reach the Kingdom of God, the place where the righteous shine like the sun, but where the evil doers will receive their punishment in the fire of hell.

They tell me, "Return!" But to whom can I return from the arms of my God? Is it right to accept what people are saying instead of obeying the Word of God?

It is now 45 years that I am walking with the God of miracles, and His kindness upon me is like a shadow and I owe Him much for His fatherly love and concern.

The love of Jesus has filled all my being and I feel the warmth of His love in every part of my body.

God, who is my glory and honor and protector, has put his seal of approval upon me through His unsparing blessings and miracles.

This test of faith is a clear example. The good and kind God reproves and punishes all those whom He loves. He tests them in preparation for heaven.

The God of Daniel, who protected his friends in the fiery furnace, has protected me for nine years in prison.

And all the bad happenings have turned out for our good and gain, so much so that I am filled to overflowing with joy and thankfulness.

The God of Job has tested my faith and commitment in order to increase my patience and faithfulness.

During these nine years he has freed me from all my responsibilities so that under the protection of His blessed Name, I would spend my time in prayer and study of His Word,

with a searching heart and with brokenness, and grow in the knowledge of my Lord.

I praise the Lord for this unique opportunity. God gave me space in my confinement, brought healing in my difficult hardships and His kindness revived me.

Oh what great blessings God has in store for those who fear Him!

They object to my evangelizing. But if one finds a blind person who is about to fall in a well and keeps silent then one has sinned.

It is our religious duty, as long as the door of God's mercy is open, to convince evil doers to turn from their sinful ways and find refuge in Him in order to be saved from the wrath of the Righteous God and from the coming dreadful punishment.

Jesus Christ says *"I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved."*

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the father except through me."

"Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Among the prophets of God, only Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and He is our living intercessor for ever.

He is our Savior and He is the (spiritual) Son of God. To know Him means to know eternal life.

I, a useless sinner, have believed in this beloved person and all His words and miracles recorded in the Gospel, and I have committed my life into His hands.

Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ.

Therefore I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honor of His Holy Name, but am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus, my Lord, and enter His kingdom sooner, the place where the elect of God enter everlasting life.

But the wicked enter into eternal damnation.

May the shadow of God's kindness and His hand of blessing and healing be and remain upon you for ever. Amen.

With Respect,
Your Christian prisoner,
Mehdi Dibaj

A Testimony to Believers and Unbelievers

These words were read by a columnist from the *London Times*. He was so moved by them that he printed them prominently in the newspaper.

Millions read it - believers and unbelievers.

What do these words serve to do? They are a testimony to the world of the preeminence of Christ in the midst of persecution.

They are also a testimony to Christians. The Banner of Truth Trust, in an article, encouraged its readers -

"Let us often read these words. They will put steel in our backbones. Let us often read these words to our congregations when we are speaking of God choosing us in the election of grace...Let us often quote these words when we are preaching on the

necessity God has given us of evangelizing and bearing testimony to Jesus Christ to all men without fear of the consequences...May [these words] never go out of print. May thus we honour the memory of a very brave Christian man."

Other Martyrdoms

Since then (and before that), many have died for their faith.

The underground church in Iran has also seen an unprecedented growth. Many are converted from Islam to Christ. And they lose their lives for it.

In 1989, Pastor Hossein Soodmand was executed for apostasy. He was born a Muslim, and 15 years before the revolution, he had already converted to Christianity.

Many people pled for his release to a governmental clemency group - an official organ of the state whose sole task is to fight for the people. But it was this advocacy group that insisted he be executed! He left behind a blind wife and 4 children.

In 2011, Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was executed for refusing to recant his faith.

In 2013, Pastor Saeed Abedini was arrested because he was helping to build the underground church in Iran. Thankfully, he was released in 2016.

Conclusion

While we have a great amount of ease in Western Australia, many around the world are facing great persecution.

We have a limited amount of time on this earth - but even in our places of employment, we are not steeled to preach this gospel boldly.

The God who pursued Hiak Hovsepian, Mehdi Dibaj, Hossein Soodmand, Youcef Nadarkhani, Saeed Abedini, and the Apostles, is the same God that called us into his kingdom - not to be passive but bold witnesses.

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas?*

*Since I must fight if I would reign,
Increase my courage, Lord!
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.*

~ Pastor



Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 59. Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath?

A. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week, ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Q. 60. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

A. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

Worship Service Roster

<i>Service</i>	<i>Next Week (25.11.18)</i>	<i>Next Week (2.12.18)</i>
Speaker	Mark Chen	Mark Chen
Worship Leader	Mark Chen	Mark Chen
Pianist	Eugene Lim	Ian Tay
Welcomers	Xuan Tee & Julian Poon	Putri Harapan & Dolphin Wai
Offering Stewards	Ken Chong*, Julian Poon* Johnny Orchard, John Tan	Jansen Ng*, David Pang* Ken Hong, David Lim
Ushers	Putri Harapan, Josephine Austin	Faith Chiu, Jerome Ng
Kitchen Duties	Aliza Chiu*, Jackie Hong May Poon	Eileen Tay*, Ken Hong Sarah Siew, Julian Poon
PA Duty	Ken Hong	Raymond Woo
<i>Prayer Meeting</i>	<i>30 November 2018</i>	<i>7 December 2018</i>
Facilitator	Mark Chen	Jimmy Orchard
Pianist	Eugene Lim	Nancy Lim

Announcements

1. A warm welcome to all worshippers. May God richly bless you. Please stay behind after the service for fellowship and tea.
2. We will be celebrating Lord's Supper next Lord's Day. Please bring a dish to share at the fellowship lunch.
3. Next week's message: "Laboring in God's Kingdom" (Colossians 1:24-29).
4. Next week's Junior Worship message: "Paul Is Called to Preach" (Acts 13:1-12). Speaker: John Tan.
5. Ladies Fellowship today, 12.15pm at church. Lunch and DVD "How People Change". Ladies of all ages welcome. Please see Wendy for more details.
6. Retirees' Bible Study. Tuesday, 27 November 2018, 10am-1.30pm. Screening of Christian movie: "The War Room". Potluck lunch after movie.
7. Christmas Day Service & Fellowship Lunch. Tuesday, 25 December 2018. Lunch after the service - please bring a dish to share.
8. Bible Conference 2019. Dates: 22-25 April 2019. Venue: Hotel Lord Forrest, Bunbury. Theme: Strength in Weakness. Speaker: Pastor Josh Williamson. Register by 31 December 2018 for early bird fees. Registration forms available at foyer. Any enquiries, please contact Micah Chiang or Vincent Chiu.

Appointments for the Week

TUE 10:00 am	Retirees' Bible Study
WED 10:00 am	Craft Group
FRI 7:30 pm	CBI & Prayer Meeting
SAT 4:30 pm	JF & TF
SUN 9:00 am	Sunday School
10:00 am	Worship Service

Last Lord's Day Tithes & Offering, & Attendance

General Fund - \$2,720.30 (*DD - \$1,043.00, #836 - \$100.00). Missions Fund - \$190.00 (*DD - 100.00). Building Fund - \$400.00 (*DD - \$300.00, #622 - \$100.00). Total Tithes & Offering - \$3,310.30. Attendance - 122.

**DD: direct deposit*

Elders: **Mark Chen (Pastor)** 6114 4242, 0415 932 373. **Jimmy Orchard** 0413 274 407.

Deacons: **Johnson Lim** 0402 145 682. **Jacob Woo** 0421 212 206. **Vincent Chiu** 0417 929 149.