

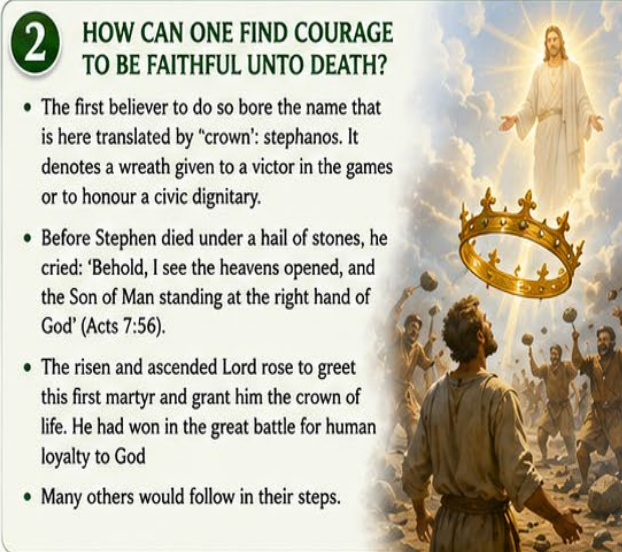
THE EVILS CHRISTIANS FACE

1 SCRIPTURE IS VERY CLEAR ON THE EXISTENCE OF THE DEVIL.



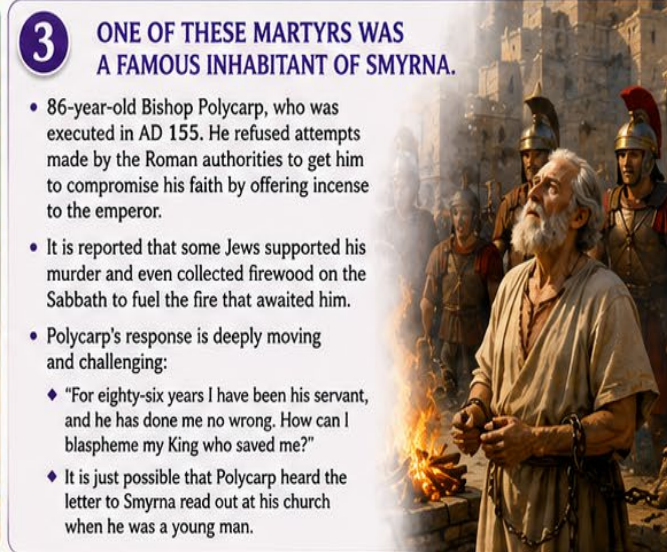
- Jesus and his apostles spoke of the devil as an evil and dangerous reality,
- a Dark Power, who is the Ruler of the World (John 14), the Prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2.2).
- The temptation in Genesis 3 is attributed to a serpent — which then becomes a symbol of Satan in the book of Revelation

2 HOW CAN ONE FIND COURAGE TO BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH?



- The first believer to do so bore the name that is here translated by "crown": stephanos. It denotes a wreath given to a victor in the games or to honour a civic dignitary.
- Before Stephen died under a hail of stones, he cried: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56).
- The risen and ascended Lord rose to greet this first martyr and grant him the crown of life. He had won in the great battle for human loyalty to God
- Many others would follow in their steps.

3 ONE OF THESE MARTYRS WAS A FAMOUS INHABITANT OF SMYRNA.



- 86-year-old Bishop Polycarp, who was executed in AD 155. He refused attempts made by the Roman authorities to get him to compromise his faith by offering incense to the emperor.
- It is reported that some Jews supported his murder and even collected firewood on the Sabbath to fuel the fire that awaited him.
- Polycarp's response is deeply moving and challenging:
 - ♦ "For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"
 - ♦ It is just possible that Polycarp heard the letter to Smyrna read out at his church when he was a young man.

4 Somewhere in the world, our brothers and sisters, who are about to die for their faith in Christ and who will be with him today.

It has been calculated that **every six minutes** someone dies for their faith in Christ.



5 THE OPEN DOORS ORGANISATION RECKONED



- in 2022 that **360 million** Christians were living in countries where persecution was "significant" and
- that "roughly **5,600** Christians were murdered,
- more than **6,000** detained or imprisoned, and
- another **4,000-plus** were kidnapped.
- In addition, more than **5,000** churches and other religious facilities were destroyed'.

6 JOHN LENNOX ONCE MET A SIBERIAN BELIEVER WHO HAD BEEN INCARCERATED FOR SEVEN YEARS IN THE SOVIET GULAG FOR THE 'CRIME' OF TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.



- After telling him about some of the privations he had endured and the awful things he had seen,
- He, a man short in stature, suddenly looked up at me towering above him and said: "You couldn't have faced that, could you?"
- John was embarrassed and felt very small.
- He then said with an unforgettable smile: 'Neither could I.
- ♦ I was so fearful by nature that I would faint at the sight of my own blood if I cut myself when shaving.
- ♦ Yet the Lord brought me through the most awful of circumstances.
- ♦ For I discovered that the Lord does not help us to face such situations theoretically in advance.
- ♦ It is only when we are actually directly faced with the situations themselves that he will draw near to help, as he promised:

"Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Matthew 10:17-20