Suffering For Righteousness' Sake

By Lois J. Stucky

Ever larger grows the white-robed throng in Heaven, who *"were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held"* (Rev. 6:9). Many around the world who are being slain today for the Word of God are men who are leaders in the Church. We honor them as heroes of the faith and rightfully so. They courageously choose to obey God rather than to compromise and deny the Lord. *"They loved not their lives unto the death"* (Rev. 12:11).

Often when they are snatched away by wicked men, there is a flock of God's people left who may scatter or hopefully, courageously carry on the best they can without the shepherd or with one willing to step into a place of risk to lead them onward. And if in a church the shepherd is sorely missed, what of the homes, where many pastors were devoted husbands and fathers, helping to bring up a family in the ways of the Lord? The wives and children, suffering from deep grief, may also face a struggle to ward off bitterness and hatred against those who took from them the one who is dearest on earth to them, the one whose love and wisdom and care were great sources of security and joy to them. The wife, perhaps an unskilled worker, must seek support for the bereft family.

Then there are the many who are not yet martyred, but are lying in prisons, suffering almost beyond ability to think, too weakened by severe beatings and hunger to even pray for themselves. Seemingly they are alone in this hour of suffering, except for the tempter and his tormenting thoughts of doubt and bewilderment. Satan is a liar and the father of lies and takes advantage of moments of weakness. While one lies so seemingly forsaken, it may be the very moment a loving wife or friend is pleading tearfully with guards for just a few minutes to see him, to leave a little extra food and clean clothes. How sadly must that one turn back from the hardhearted refusal, and return home with a heart broken once more by disappointment.

And what of those who are yet free to serve Christ, but they have a death threat hanging over their head? Day by day they courageously carry on, not knowing when might come a sudden gunshot or the swift flash of a dagger, bringing their earthly life to an end and leaving a dear family without their fatherly care. Actually, those who live under a death threat may be in a better spiritual condition than most of us. Think: how would you and I live today and tomorrow if such were our lot, or if we knew our beloved companion was in that perilous situation? Would we not walk more carefully with God, and cling more closely to Him and His Word? Might we not value more highly our time and opportunities and our relationships? There would be little that would be casual and careless.

Nor ought we to be casual and careless in thinking of these very real situations in our world today. The writer of Hebrews tells us: *"Remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated – since you yourselves are in the body also"* (13:3 NKJ). While there may be little we can do in a tangible way, we can pray! How do we pray? We might start out by calling from our heart, *"Our Father which art in heaven..."* (Matt. 6:9). When we pray *"**Our** Father…"* we

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identify with them. It is Jesus who teaches to us pray, not "**My** Father" but ***"Our Father…"*** Whether we pray for Christians in North Korea or China or Africa or South America or the Middle East, or wherever – we know that our Father in Heaven is their Father in Heaven. All who are in Christ Jesus are together in the family of God, under His Fatherhood.

We become more fervent in prayer when we think of the persecuted as brothers and sisters in Christ, in the family of God with us, and not some stranger far away. The Bible tells us, *"A brother is born for adversity"* (Prov. 17:17). God expects us in His family to help our brothers and sisters in adversity. John the Apostle wrote, *"This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also"* (1 John 4:21).

When we pray *"Our **Father**…"* it suggests to us the One we have come to love, who is the giver of life, the sustainer, the loving provider, the leader, the one who teaches and trains and chastens, the one who calms fears, who comforts, who fixes the broken, and – who can name all our dear Father God is to His children? As we commit the persecuted into the hands of *"Our Father which art in Heaven…"* although He allows great suffering at times, we can be sure His eye is upon them and His ear is open to their cry, and to our cry for them. He never leaves nor forsakes. His grace is sufficient for them to endure to the end.

Claim the promise for them: *"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13). And again, *"My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Cor. 12:9). Pray that like the apostle Paul, they will learn to glory in their infirmities that the power of God will rest upon them. Pray they will be those overcomers which Jesus spoke of in Revelation, chapters two and three.

Perhaps, friends, you feel as I do, unworthy to pray in this way for our persecuted brothers and sisters. I must take stock of myself. How can I pray for others to be overcomers unless I am one myself? Christ's call to be overcomers is to all Christians. We who know little of overt persecution are being tried in other ways. At this point in time, our adversary might be mostly our own self-life which prefers ease and pleasure and our will to be done.

Below I share a portion of an article printed years ago in Herald of His Coming that speaks as a reminder that in our living or in our dying, Christ is to be all in all. Putting sacrifice and self-denial into following our precious Christ of the cross now helps prepare us for making even the supreme sacrifice for Christ should that come to us.

The Slain Bride
By S. A. Duncan

"A vision seemed to pass before my astonished gaze. I seemed to be caught away to the time after the saints had been taken up to be with the Lord….I seemed to hear the words, *'Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready'* (Rev. 19:7). At once I knew the hour had come when the Lord was to present His Bride *'faultless before the throne of His glory'* (Jude 24).

"My attention seemed riveted upon the person of the Lord Jesus whose manner was different

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from what I would have expected. He, the Leader of a glorious throng, the Son of man, the Son of God, stood with bowed head, the very personification of meekness and lowliness, as if He knew not what He had done to draw forth the marvelous acclaims of glory and majesty bursting from the lips of that redeemed company….

"The song of the Bride rang out rapturously: Thou art worthy *'to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing,'* as if she had to assure Him again and again of the glory that belongs to Him (Rev. 5:12).

"In the presence of that vision of Christ, I felt that we, the redeemed of the Lord, know absolutely nothing of meekness and humility – the graces which are His crown.

"Presently He seemed to be standing before the throne of the Father, presenting His spotless Bride, saying, 'I have died for the world, but these have died for Me.' And from the expression of holy delight that shown from His countenance, He seemed to glory in their sacrifice rather than in His own. He seemed far more ready to honor His Bride than to receive honor Himself.

"What made the early martyrs God's invincibles but that they *'loved not their lives unto the death'* (Rev. 12:11), and were willing to stand in difficult places and hazard life, health, home, and all things that they might win for the Lamb slain, the reward of His sufferings?

"God's conquering saints today are they who are willing to suffer any shame or criticism and injustice, and though *'killed all day long, and counted as sheep for the slaughter'* (Psa. 44:22), are absolutely irresistible, invincible. That they might win Him honor and glory and praise, they died for Him, they drank the cup that He drank, they were baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized, and *'without the camp'* they suffered and bled with Him.

"This invincible spirit can only come to us, as it came to Paul, by the fullest renunciation of self, and the putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Christ may be our life and to die is for us heavenly gain….

"Scriptural self-righteousness is simply living for self, instead of laying down our lives for our beloved Lord. *'Blessed are the poor in spirit'* (Matt. 5:3), so poor, so helpless there is no self-exalting, self-defending, self-justifying spirit in them, and they are nothing in themselves for Christ is all-in-all.

"Everything that tries us is an opportunity to die with Him…So when the fiery trials come to us as they did to Job – a holy type of God's suffering, tried and purified saints – instead of getting under our cross and being crushed by it, we should let ourselves be lifted up upon it, and be made conformable to His death, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him, for there is no glory without suffering, and if there be no cross there is no crown."

Praise God –

*** For all saints through the centuries who have taken up their cross and followed Christ, and that through them the Gospel has been triumphantly spread to the uttermost parts of the earth! Thank God for those today who risk their lives to complete the task set**

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before the Church (Matt. 28:19-20).

Please Pray –

*** That God will use this issue of Herald of His Coming to help all readers to more faithfully and fervently pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, and serve them in any way He leads.**

*** That He will pour of His grace upon those who are suffering and dying for His sake this hour, and upon their families who face great difficulties because of the imprisonment or death of their loved one.**

*** That God will move upon authorities in lands where persecution against Christians is strong and is officially sanctioned, that the leaders will have a change of heart.**

*** For God to intervene on behalf of Christian young ladies who are kidnapped and forced to marry a man of non-Christian religion and then kept virtual prisoners, that they will have grace and faith to remain true to Christ and will find release.**

*** For those bereft of loved ones through martyrdom, that God will grant grace to them to forgive those responsible, and that God will provide for their material needs. Claim for them the promise that God makes all things work together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).**

*** That God will use Herald of His Coming continually to comfort and encourage any readers who suffer persecution for their faith, and to help all readers to joyfully bear the disgrace of Christ.**

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