

Martyrdom or Suicide?

By JESSY SAJU

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another." Matt 24:9-10

When we read about Apostles martyred in the days of Domitian Caesar, they are our heroes. When we read about thousands of those burnt for their faith during the inquisition, we blame the Catholics for their ignorance of the revelations God gave to protestant leaders. When we read about religious persecution in the Soviet Russia and Rumania, we take it as an opportunity to protest against the communists in India! When it was about the persecutions in Orissa, we question the tolerance of the so-called Hindus... When it reached Karnataka and, as it crosses over and spreads to Kerala, We do not plan on ending it all with a protest. We fear and tremble! Now we begin feeling the pinch of what persecution is... What will we do if (sorry! not 'if' but when) it reaches us?

We were in constant touch with our mission leaders in Orissa during the days of their persecution. We were worried about them and feared whether they would be able to withstand the onslaught. It was our prayer that they should never quit their faith. We thank God, that they showed extraordinary (I call it supernatural) strength and courage in their trials and they stood firm for the Lord. Even threat of life failed to weaken their loyalty to their LORD. All "ultimata" of the fanatics failed to take their faith away. They confessed that Jesus is their only God!

These poor Oriya believers are not learned... They never could theologically analyze the process of bearing the cross. They do not even know the Greek for persecution. They are simple believers, but even while facing death point-blank, they boldly confessed the authority of Jesus.

Think of what the response of many of our traditional believers in Kerala would be, if they were given a choice between a

bullet and their faith? I fear many of us would say... "After all faith is an issue of our heart... Isn't it brother..? God knows our heart, brother... True we need to confess Jesus... but ... our denial is only with our mouth... Our heart is with Jesus... He knows it... We will confess brother, later. We are ready to cry brother... like Peter. Now, it is a matter between life and death. How would my death benefit God?

I was thinking and praying. Suddenly, a strange thought flashed through my mind - What if my daughter, who is in Karnataka, faced a situation like this.

I went into something like a trance... In my inner eye, I saw some thing I dreaded... The fanatics have captured my daughter in the act of sharing gospel with the slum children... "Mom, they will kill me if I confess Jesus. They say I am free if I deny Jesus... What shall I do?"

What shall I say? I could not think of losing my child. Shall I say that it is just a matter of words... Be wise... You are a young girl... God wants you to live for many more years daughter... come on... it is only with your lips... Right?

I didn't say anything. What will happen if she denies Jesus? May be she can remain alive. However, she is now a betrayer. To save her life, she has betrayed Jesus, who gave her the very breath of life. She has betrayed her savior who gave His life to redeem her from her eternal death. She has just emulated Judas Iscariot.

How long can she live like Judas! Only for a few hours! That too, in shame and agony. Look At Judas. He is running to a point of no return! The only thing he could do was to hang himself.

If she doesn't deny Jesus, She will die... True, we'll lose our child in this world. But she would be honored by God! She would become like the many who "loved not their life even unto death."

"Daughter, do not give up. Do not deny Jesus like Judas. How long can you live the life of a betrayer? Stand firm for your convictions like John the Baptist. Better be beheaded like John, rather than commit suicide like Judas. Stand for the faith, daughter; Even if you die, you will be with Jesus forever."

I was aware it was all in a trance. Nonetheless, I was determined to tell the same to my children if something similar happened...

Friends, times are fast approaching when we would need to choose between life and death. When it is between faith and life... May God help us – me and you- to choose faith, even if it means death. If we choose life it is eternal death and if we choose death for the cause of Jesus, it is eternal life!

May God bless you.

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