Are You Willing to Die for Jesus?

(by Ken Weliever)

From Pakistan to Egypt. From Kenya to Syria. And all across the Muslim world it has been an “open season on Christians.” Seventy-eight people professing Christianity were slaughtered [September 22, 2013] by twin suicide bombers at a church in Pakistan’s capital, Islamabad.

In a Kenyan shopping mall, a gang of Islamic extremists from Somalia murdered at least 68 workers and shoppers.  Reportedly they shouted for *“Muslims to get out-of-the-way so they could specifically kill Christians.”*

The Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters have targeted believers in Egypt. Many have fled Iraq and the West Bank where church buildings were bombed and Christians were threatened.

In Syria conditions are as bad or worse after attacks by militant groups linked to al-Qaeda such as Jabhat al-Nusra. *“If we stay in Syria, they will kill us. It is that simple,”* explained 36-year-old Rami Sammaan, after worshiping with his wife, Sally, and her mother, father and sister.

In America we enjoy the freedom of worship.  We assemble each Sunday in our respective church buildings free from fear of intrusion, attack, or deadly assault.  We can openly express our faith.  Follow our faith. And share our faith.

Yet, there is no guarantee that Christians will always enjoy this privilege.

**It raises the question, are you willing to die for Jesus?**

We casually read of first century Christians who suffered persecution.  Stephen was stoned to death.  James was slain by the sword.  Both Peter and Paul were imprisoned.   Secular history records the terrible atrocities committed against Christians by the Roman authorities. Christians were tortured. Mutilated. And maimed. Believers were burned at the stake.  Thrown to the lions. And crucified like Christ.

Jesus plainly told the disciples, ***“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.  For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it”*** (**Matthew 16:25-26**).

In the second century many Christians were martyred for their faith in Christ.  One of the early “church fathers,” Polycarp lived during this period.  He was born about AD 69. He became a Christian and was later appointed as one of the bishops in the church at Smyrna. For almost his entire life he escaped persecution.

However, at age 86 he was suddenly a target of the Roman government. Friends urged him to flee and go into hiding.  Polycarp refused.  When the soldiers came to his door, he let them in and said, *“God’s will be done.”*  Historians record that he was brought before the local proconsul, Statius Quadratus, who interrogated him in front of a curious crowd of bystanders.

By all accounts the aged saint seemed unfazed by the interrogation and the threats of being thrown to wild beasts or burned at the stake.  Polycarp just told Quadratus that while the proconsul’s fire lasts but a little while, the fires of judgment, *“reserved for the ungodly cannot be quenched.”*

*“Swear,”* urged the Proconsul, *“reproach Christ, and I will set you free.”*

*“86 years have I have served Him,”* Polycarp declared, *“and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”*

Quadratus then commanded Polycarp to be tied to the stake.  The fire was set.  And as the flames consumed him, this faithful disciple died praying to God.

As the fires of persecution burn around the world, how soon before they envelop the United States?  One day we may be faced with the decision to deny Christ or die.  In the meantime, let us be strong in the faith. Courageous. And loyal to the Lord.

And may we be fortified, assured and guided by God’s promise, ***“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*** (**Revelation 2:10**)

***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*** (***Matthew 5:10-12****)*

What Is Your Life?

(Selected)

**Life is a journey**: I will live it trustingly. ***“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death; I will fear no evil; for Thou are with me”*** (**Psalm 23:4**).

**Life is a task**: I will live it obediently. ***“We keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight”*** (**1 John 3:22**).

**Life is a mission**: I will live it helpfully. ***“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another”*** (**Ephesians 4:32**).

**Life is a contest**: I will live it earnestly. ***“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong”*** (**1 Corinthians 16:13**).

**Life is a battle**: I will live it courageously. ***“Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid; for the Lord thy God is with thee”*** (**Joshua 1:9**).

What Can the Righteous Do?

(Selected)

***“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”*** (**Psalm 11:3**). Certainly, most of us believe that we live in a time when the foundations of our society are being threatened and destroyed. Like the psalmist, we sometimes find ourselves at the point of despair. What can we do? We must work to preserve:

* **FAITH IN GOD** and His **WORD**. (**Hebrews 11:6**; **Romans 10:17**)
* The **HOME** as **GOD** purposed and ordained it. (**Genesis 2:24**; **Matthew 19:1-9**; **Romans 7:2-3**; **1 Corinthians 7:2-5**; **Hebrews 13:4**)
* **HONESTY**, industry, and integrity – where the word of a man is his BOND! (**Ecclesiastes 5:4-5**; **Romans 12:17-21**)
* **MORAL UPRIGHTNESS**. (**Romans 1:26-32**; **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**)

We are working to preserve these things. Join us in this great undertaking. We need you to help us stand for what is right!