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The Christian Miracle of Martyrdom

“When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained” (Revelation 6:9).

Christians have an incomparable record of risking their lives to share their beliefs with dangerous people, even while knowing the probability that it will lead to their death. From all 12 Apostles to Patrick to Nate Saint, this is a unique phenomenon in the world—unique to the Church. Why is that? Why do Christians risk their lives to share the Gospel?

For starters, it is a command from Jesus to “*make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*” (Matt. 28:19-20a). And so in obedience, we follow Christ’s instructions to us by spreading the message of salvation and making disciples of all men. But is this all? Are we simply following orders. No. We emulate the love of Jesus—love for God and love for mankind.

Jesus perfectly lived out a devotion to the 1st and 2nd Commandments: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself*” (Lk. 10:27b). These commands are not equal or capable of being reorganized—the 1st Commandment is above all and it flows into the 2nd Commandment, meaning that love focused on God overflows with a selfless love for others. But what does this look like? Is this love for the lovable or the unlovable also? That was the question that the Lawyer asked Jesus in Luke 10: “*And who is my neighbor?*” (Lk. 10:29b). Jesus answered that it included, or even especially referred to, people despised, like the Samaritans. In this way, we are emulating Jesus, because “*He first loved us*” (1 Jn. 4:19). We are to love people when they are unlovable, before they have given us reason to love them and this is our motivation to go to them with the Gospel, as we shall see.

But is this the extent of what Jesus showed us? No. He not only loved despised people, but He even loved people who were God’s enemies! “*For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...while we were enemies*” (Rom. 5:6-10a), “*leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps*” (1 Peter 2:21b). Jesus laid down His life to share the truth with us. Emulating Jesus (and His Apostles, who emulated Him) is ultimately why Christians in every generation have risked their lives to share the Gospel with God’s enemies. We also were all once God’s enemies, and Jesus laid down His life as an act of selfless love while giving us the Gospel, even while being the Gospel (good news of God) Himself.

Believers risk their lives to share the Gospel because they are not apathetic to people in the desperate situation of living a trajectory leading to eternal death. They understand the value and urgency of the Good News of reconciliation through Jesus to people who have not heard it. They love God enough to love their enemies more than fearing death, because “*in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:31-39).

May we be compassionate and loving towards the lost, unlovable, enemies of God. May we not be apathetic towards them, recognizing that we were once just like them, but through the love of Christ and the love of Believers who were not apathetic to us (spending their time and energy to share the Gospel with us) we came to the knowledge of the truth and were reconciled back to God through His Son. Even so, Amen.

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