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## **Precious in the Sight of the Lord is the Death of His Saints**

Many persecuted Christians throughout history have been given the choice to escape persecution and death if they will “just” publicly deny Christ and accept the religion of their persecutors. More Christians face this choice today than ever before. Millions of these - often newly converted Christians - have chosen death rather than accept this “offer” and publicly deny their Savior (Hebrews 11:25).

The Bible says that the death of His children is precious to God (Psalm 116:15). These deaths, however, raise a lot of hard – even accusatory-of-God-sounding – questions in a lot of people. For example: God could have easily saved every one of these martyrs. Considering how much these Christians trusted in Him, shouldn't He have rewarded their trust and loving faithfulness by rescuing them?

Allowing this wholesale murder seems to many to show that He places very little value, or even notice, upon our deaths at all. An important side issue is that allowing our deaths in this way seems to be a very POOR “recruiting” strategy or “advertisement” to the lost for becoming a Christian. Why would anyone choose to serve a God Who is “just” going to let us be brutally murdered?

Actually though, this martyrdom of Christians constitutes a GOOD and powerful “advertisement” for the gospel. To begin with, if we could talk to any one of these martyrs who are in Heaven right now enjoying its never-ending indescribable riches and rewards, (Romans 8:18, I Corinthians 2:9) we couldn't find a single one who would complain about the immediate circumstances of how they got there.

Consider also...if God rescued every Christian from being martyred, then the word that no Christian was ever martyred would get out, wouldn't it? And so no Christian would be truly endangered by putting ourselves in a situation where we “could” suffer martyrdom, would we? And, if no one was actually jeopardized by actual martyrdom, then any “volunteering” for it, regardless of how sincere the offer was, would be an empty offer, wouldn't it? And with people knowing we will never have to “follow through” with what we potentially “volunteered” for, wouldn't at least some people start “volunteering” for martyrdom just to sound pious and sincere, and to “earn” merit in their group (like Ananias and Sapphira tried to do – Acts 5: 1-10)?

(In the same way, if no Christian ever got sick, or if every Christian was healed from every sickness and injury, or delivered from every problem, wouldn't people, in the two thousand years of gospel preaching throughout the world, have noticed this too? And wouldn't word spread everywhere that Christians are the healthiest, problem-free, best-provided-for people in the world?” Wouldn't many people then “become” Christians – in a mere “health insurance” or “entitlement” strategy – sort of like how many already seem to be “accepting” Christ as their Savior - not because they genuinely repent of their sins, but because it is socially respectable to claim it - and out of a calculated “just-in-case” strategy to have a handy “stay-out-of-Hell” “card” should it turn out they need one? Of course, God is never fooled by such self-serving attempts, but that doesn't mean people don't still attempt them. Isn't that what happened when many came to Jesus just for the free food they saw or heard about when He had recently fed 5,000 - John 6: 6-13, 26)?

Knowing all this, it seems inescapable – almost in a cold harsh cynical, but logical and realistic sense -- that God therefore “HAS” to permit many of His children to be martyred. But this is not cold harsh logic at all. This martyrdom accomplishes several wonderful things that only martyrdom can achieve. God,

by not “rescuing” us from being martyred, doesn’t take from us the opportunity to serve Him in this highest and most personal and private of ways. And by not taking this away from us, it enables us to show ourselves that we love our Savior more than life itself...that our love for Him is not mere empty easy words. (Hebrews 12:4) It also enables our persecutors to see how much we love our Lord...He loved us and suffered and gave His all for us (Galatians 2:20) and we willfully endure a similar type of loss for Him. Also, it helps our persecutors realize that our confidence in His love and the forgiveness that is ours, can be their’s too, if they will only accept Christ as we did (Giving rise to the expression, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” - Tertullian,\*). And it enables the Heavenly beings who are watching in on us, (Hebrews 12:1) to look in on the wonderful work God is doing in the world to redeem those who have been ensnared by Satan (II Corinthians 4:3,4).

Like when God pointed out Job to Satan (Job 1:8 and 2:3), one can almost hear the Lord speaking in hushed tones to heavenly beings looking down with Him upon the last dying moments of these Christians: “Look at my children,” He says to them: “See how they love Me so much that they give up their most precious possession – their very lives – for Me? They would rather suffer and die than betray Me.” (Heb. 11:35 - 40) How could the death of these saints NOT be precious in His sight?

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