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## A Secret Whispered



". . . And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire, the sound of a low whisper."

**1 Kings 19:11-12 (ESV)**

## The Glare

Pakistan is situated on the front lines between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Darkness. I visited there early in my career of serving the persecuted Church. Though I had traveled to many countries before visiting Pakistan, I dreaded the visit to come. It is one of the world's most fundamentalist Islamic countries - extremely oppressive towards Christian citizens.

Islamic radicals are woven into the cultural fabric of Pakistan. Some are recognizable by their beards and dress; others wear the suits of businessmen, generals, and government leaders. Pakistani Christians have to be very careful about what they say and do. One wrong move could provoke a beating or cost them their homes, jobs—or even their lives.

In fundamentalist countries like Pakistan, Christian girls are often abducted, raped, and forced to marry their rapists. The perpetrators are rarely punished. Many churches have been bombed, and pastors murdered, after being warned, "Shut up or else." Pakistan is one of the few countries in all my travels where I have felt vulnerable.

Once, in Islamabad, I was sitting at a stoplight in a state of jet lag, dreamily pondering the plight of Christians in Pakistan. I was thinking about how oppressed they are and how defenseless I was at that moment. I stared out the open window at the surrounding traffic that boxed us in and thought to myself, "If the radicals wanted to kill me here, it would be ridiculously easy." As I was dwelling on that idea, my eyes wandered from car to car.

Suddenly, I noticed a face contorted with rage staring back at me. The man, dressed in the trappings of an Islamic radical, was leaning out of a van 10 feet ahead, trying hard to get my attention. There was no mistaking his intent. His face screamed, "You, are not welcome here. If I could, I'd kill you right now!"

Our eyes met for an instant before I turned away, pretending to be oblivious. As I looked away, my host, Shahbaz, spotted him and whispered, "Do you see that guy who wants to kill you?" I let him

know that I hadn't missed "the killer" – I was just fine pretending to be oblivious!

Within seconds the traffic light changed. We turned to the right, and the van went straight, taking with it the hate-filled eyes that were still locked on me. Shahbaz relaxed when the incident was over. Later, we sat down to eat, and he said, "It's not safe for you to come here. It's fine this time, but security is notified every time an American comes here. You never know if you are being watched."

This was early in my career, a period when I was trying to understand Islam's hatred and mistreatment of Christians. I visited Pakistan to meet with persecuted Christians and work with Shahbaz, who had partnered with my organization for years.

That day, at the stoplight, I gained just a bit of understanding of the daily experience and mindset of a Christian living in Pakistan.

Walk through a dark alley at night on the wrong side of town, and you will get a taste of how Christians in Pakistan feel while walking through everyday life. You have an underlying feeling of vulnerability in the back of your mind, and you are keenly aware that there could be someone hiding in the shadows, waiting to harm you. Christians in Pakistan are cowed and beaten down, always looking over their shoulder and living life as second-class citizens. In some restaurants, Christians cannot eat with Muslims. In other restaurants, they have to use separate silverware. Pakistani society and press until recently referred to Christians as "garbage collectors."

Consider what that would do to your psyche over time. You may laugh at first and then feel angry, but over time it would sink in. You would start to think of yourself as a "garbage collector." You'd keep your head down, hoping to avoid abuse.

### **A Friend Martyred**

When I first met Shahbaz, he told me that one day he would be killed by Islamic extremists. As our relationship grew and I visited him in Pakistan, I saw that this statement was not meant to garner

sympathy or political support. It was a simple declaration of an obvious outcome.

Later, elevated to the government position of Pakistan's highest representative of religious minorities, Shahbaz stood up for persecuted Christians against the radicals. He had a target on his back.

Just a couple of months before his death, I met with him in Washington DC and took a few pictures with him. I keep that picture on my desk. His beaming face reminds me that the martyr often knows his end is coming. Shahbaz chose to walk in courage, spending his last days serving King and Kingdom with courage and selflessness.

As Shahbaz's time drew closer, he began to distance himself from others, knowing that his end would be violent. Just a few months later, I read that he had been gunned down by radical Islamists outside of his house.

### **More Alive Than Ever**

Since I am confronted with death on a daily basis, I probably dwell on it too much. In fact, I often talk to my kids about death, as I don't want them to be shielded from it. The Word tells us that there is much to learn from death: "Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies—so the living should take this to heart." (Ecclesiastes 7:2, NLT)

I am always trying to get my kids to understand that their physical bodies are shells that they walk around in. It is not really "them." Their bodies are vehicles, machines meant to carry them for a bit before it breaks. *They*, not their bodies, are going to live forever, somewhere.

Dwight L. Moody, the Billy Graham of the late 1800s, once conveyed this very point in a sermon:

*"Someday you will read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I*

*am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal. A body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever"*

On the morning of December 22, 1899, Moody's day arrived. He awoke and said slowly, to no one in particular, "Earth recedes - heaven opens before me!"

His son, Will, who was guarding his bedside, tried to calm him and tell him he was dreaming. His father's reply left him speechless:

*"No. This is no dream, Will. It is beautiful! It is like a trance! If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here! God is calling me, and I must go!"*

He died a short time later.

## Colleen

While writing this book, I too sat by a dying believer and, like Will Moody, I was also struck by their final moments on this earth.

I received news that an old friend, Colleen, would soon pass. She had fought cancer for five years and was in the last stage of her earthly journey. I gathered my family, including my young children, to say our final goodbyes.

We entered Colleen's home and saw that she was lying in a hospital bed at one end of the living room.

She had looked much healthier two weeks earlier, but the long battle with cancer and chemo had worn her down. She realized that the battle was over, so she decided to stop treatment and go home to be with the Lord.

Her decline in just two weeks was stunning. Her once vibrant frame was now ravaged by sickness. Frail with yellowed skin, she was breathing her last shallow breaths.

We gathered around her, taking turns to stroke her head and hands while we said our last goodbyes. Before leaving, we stopped to pray and then did something that doesn't often happen around the dying.

We sang together.

We sang a hymn to celebrate Colleen's life and the Lord's victory over death. We sang because we knew she wasn't dying but graduating. It was a beautiful experience. I was struck by the difference between Christians and the world when it comes to facing death.

Colleen passed away a few days later. Once again, I saw that the Christian who dies with hope and courage after a life well-lived stands out in this world like a candle in the blackest night. Regardless of whether they are lost to cancer or to martyrdom.

### **Life and the Church Adrift**

Having traveled to more than 65 countries over the last thirty years, I am regularly confronted by the difference between Western culture and other cultures. I am struck by how unmoored modern life in the West has become.

We are cut off from loved ones by our busyness, mobility, devices, wealth, and culture. We are cut off from the past without the traditions that give cultures order, boundaries, and a sense of continuity to life. We are cut off from God by our secular culture. We are cut off from hope by the media, which continually portrays the future as apocalyptic and dark.

Western culture is adrift, without paddle, rudder, or wind in a sea of meaninglessness. Random mass-murders, rampant divorce, drug epidemics, and rising suicides all signal that something is seriously off in the West. Is it any wonder that we are the world's leading consumer of antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs?

Your personal relationship with Christ can carry you personally across these dangerous waters. But, the Church floats adrift in this sea, feeling the effect of every ripple.

Even though our culture is becoming more anti-Christian, there is no real or heavy persecution directed towards us. We live our Christian lives without real cost, producing a weak and flaccid church.

### **Wounds and Scars**

Witness Lee, a protégé of the great Watchmen Nee (the great Chinese pastor of the early twentieth century), spoke to this point:

*The biggest problem today is that it is hard to find any wounds or scars in most Christians. Most of us do not have any wounds, scars, marks of death, or experiences of the cross.*

**The Crucified Christ**, page 12, by Witness Lee

We may not have any wounds or scars, but the persecuted church has them in abundance. I've heard their stories on a daily basis for the last fifteen years. It has been a supreme privilege to work with them. I am convicted by their examples of deep devotion to the Lord, all while paying a very high cost for their faith.

The Lord has used the persecuted Church to show me what my Christian life should, or could be. Their stories have brought to life numerous Biblical lessons which I am excited to share with you.

### **The Whisper**

For years, I wondered why the Lord called me to persecution ministry. I am more naturally wired towards evangelism; I love to speak on revival-related themes.

But, as you read in the introduction, there is no doubt that I was explicitly called into ministry to the persecuted.

It has not been an easy journey though; I am continually surrounded by and confronted with death and evil. Yet, as I served the persecuted and became more familiar with the martyrs, felt that they were each leaning over and whispering a message in my ear.

For years, I could never make out their message. Now, fifteen years

into ministering to the persecuted, I have finally discerned their message, and I feel privileged to share it with you.

I sincerely feel that this secret, whispered by those with “wounds and scars,” is the great secret to the Christian life. Their whisper will transform you and reveal where He is trying to take you on your life-journey.

So allow me to introduce you to those who have paid the ultimate price for their faith. I hope that, just as their stories have transformed me, they would leave their mark on you and lead you to the top of the mountain.