

Victorious (final message in a five part series on the Lamb) by David Foster

Having traced the motif of the lamb through the OT we saw how the three ideas involving the lamb, sacrifice and blood go hand in hand. It is clear throughout Scripture that sin is forgiven through the shedding of blood. (Hebrews 9:22; 10:4ff) So also with the Lamb of God. It was necessary for Jesus to be slain as the perfect sin offering.

Let us read today's Scripture which describes a heavenly vision as revealed to the apostle John,

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus. (Revelation 12:1-17, NIV)

Once again as on previous occasions, we will explore this passage by considering four basic questions.

1. What does this teach us about God? One thing is unmistakably clear: God has an enemy. In fact, this chapter focuses on Satan the arch-enemy of God. It tells how he hates the LORD and his chosen people Israel through whom the Messiah would be born. The first phase of this war takes place in the heavenly realm of angels resulting in Satan being thrown out of heaven. Meanwhile, Satan's hatred towards God's

people has erupted at various times through Biblical history right up until now. You recall that during the time of Moses, Pharaoh issued a command to kill all new-born Israelite boys. A thousand years later Ahasueras, King of the Perians, issued an order to kill every Jewish person. Then again, six hundred years later when Jesus was born, Satan inspired King Herod to slaughter all male Jewish baby boys two years and younger. Closer to our time, Hitler devised a devilish plan to obliterate the Jewish people in what came to be called the Holocaust. Then in the last few years our world has seen more hatred and violence against Jewish people than at any time since the holocaust.

It is not uncommon to hear Muslim scholars and preachers quoting authoritative Hadith sources predicting the annihilation of Jewish people in the last days; *“The Last Hour would not come til the Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims kill them until the Jews hide themselves, and the stones and trees would speak up saying, ... There is a Jew hiding behind me, come and kill him.”* (Sahih Muslim, Book 40, #6985)

The genocidal hatred behind these words make sense in light of Biblical end-times prophecies of a massive multinational attack against Israel involving nations from Magog, Gog, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer and Beth Togarmah (Ezekiel 38) These name places correspond to modern day Turkey, Iran, Syria, Egypt and Sudan, all of them Islamic states.

Revelation 12 tells how Satan will unleash his intense rage on earth after being expelled from heaven. The dragon will renew his efforts to kill the Jews as well as the saints—non-Jewish people who came to believe in and obey the Messiah. Eventually, however, the people of God will conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.

2. What does this chapter teach us about God's (holy) people, more especially how they are protected by Jesus' blood in the spiritual war? We know that Satan, as the accuser of God's children constantly seeks to condemn us before God. But we can find protection from his slanderous accusations by affirming that we are under Christ's blood and humbly confessing our sin. In this way we experience ongoing forgiveness, including peace of mind, as it is written, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

3. What do you need to apply / obey? Have I asked God to search me? Do I have a contrite, humble heart? Have I confessed my sin? Furthermore, am I deeply conscious of being forgiven and saved? And does this inspire deep thankfulness and indebtedness, similar to how the Psalmist testified, “I was helpless and He saved me... For You, LORD, rescued me from death, my eyes from tears ... How can I repay the LORD for all the good He has done for me?” He answers by saying, “I will sacrifice a thank offering to You.” (Psalm 116:6-17, HCSB) Similarly, we read in Psalm 107 an exhortation to respond to God's “unfailing love and wonderful deeds.” The Psalmist enthusiastically urges, “Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.” (Psalm 107:2, NLT)

Do we share our “testimony” as if is only a duty or do we witness as an overflowing response to God's goodness? Are we so moved with grateful love that it dispels fear, as with the martyrs in Revelation 12? “They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” (verse 11)

We may be inclined to see such courage as a rare virtue of a handful of super-Christians. Who then, was the apostle John addressing when he said, “Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”? (1 John 3:16) Was he writing to an elite group of heroic believers? No, he was writing to Christians generally.

Several weeks ago we read the story about Jesus freeing a man who was tormented by demons. Jesus told this new believer not to join him and his band of 12 disciples but rather instructed him to go and tell his own people what great things the LORD had done for him. Although he might easily have

made an excuse that he was inadequate and untrained he simply went and did as Jesus asked.

Now I want to tell you a similar story of simple, though profound obedience by a new believer in Jesus Christ. The story of Salah Farah took place in Kenya three years ago. He was riding in a packed bus when Islamic militants stormed the bus, demanding that the Muslims split from the Christians so they could kill all the non-Muslims. Salah boldly spoke out refusing their demands and instead took a bullet that later killed him.

This amazing story of a heroism by a man who everyone assumed to be Muslim was reported on several world news channels, CBC, BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera. However, it was only when he died a month later that his story was deemed newsworthy. Salah was acclaimed as a heroic “Muslim” but what was it that really inspired him to be so brave?

Salah had been a Muslim most of his life but shortly before the attack he came to believe in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Even when the President of Kenya conferred on Salah the highest award for bravery – five weeks after he died – Salah was still being acclaimed as a Muslim. However, not long after his death various clues began surfacing, which reveal there was something else that inspired him to be so courageous.

A few days before the attack Salah had finished reading a book, *God's Apprentice*, by Keith Doctor, which explains what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. As Salah journeyed on the bus with his friend Bursa, he told him about the impact this book had on him. Bursa later recalled Salah sharing with him how Jesus courageously stood up for the weak and the oppressed.

Why was Salah so brave?

Several days after the hijacking, Bursa received a cartoon-style tract on his phone from Salah who was in hospital. Bursa saved it on his phone but only remembered to look at it after Salah had died. He read the story as told in the captions on the cartoon style poster. He then phoned the number at the bottom of the page to find out more. This is how Bursa met Joe* who had given him the book *God's Apprentice*. They discussed many things including that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. Bursa's earlier conversation with Salah on the bus had warmed Bursa's heart. Now he was ready to make a commitment to Jesus and five days later he was baptized. Having been a friend of Salah, it did not take Bursa long to make a plan with Joe to visit Salah's widow and five children. During their two-day visit, Joe and Bursa received a large unexpected sum of money as a gift via MPESA (telephonic transfer), which they gladly gave to Mrs Farah who was struggling to cope both emotionally and financially with the loss of her husband.

Friends of Salah

One memory she shared with these two Christian brothers involved a discussion Salah had with relatives the last evening before he left for Nairobi. He told them some new things he was learning about Jesus from a book that had deeply impressed him. The relatives suspected he was becoming a Christian and the conversation became very heated leading to a loud argument, when Salah even dared to show them the book. After they left he penned a handwritten note on page seven which reads in English, “Jesus you're my Saviour, I never knew but now I know. I'll follow you; let them kill me, I don't care, I'll follow you.”

Over the next few weeks local Islamists invited Salah's widow to join them in a fund raising project under the name “friends of Salah.” She didn't trust them but they kept on pushing their money making scheme and even published a photo on twitter “#herosalah” purportedly showing Mrs Farah receiving a cheque for 10,000 shillings. (Joe assures us this photo is not Mrs Farah.)

Persecuted for the Truth

Angered by her unwillingness to co-operate, the Islamists came to her home looking for the book that they heard her husband had read. She could not read English so she had already given it away to Joe and Bursa. The Islamists refused to believe her explanation and forcefully ransacked her home hoping to find it. They were unable to find the book, but they did find nearly 17,000 shillings, which they stole.

Shortly after Bursa returned to his hometown, he was murdered, along with one other person who was showing an interest in hearing from Joe about Jesus.

Salah – A true hero

Bursa's conversion was not the only "ripple" effect from Salah's testimony, Abdul's* story is yet another ripple. Abdul, who lives in a town not far from Salah, saw the news story telling how he courageously shielded Christians from being killed. He asked himself, "Why was Salah so brave?" Abdul became even more curious when, a month later, he heard that Salah had died from gunshots fired by the terrorists. Abdul explains how this question "wouldn't leave my mind. My concern was just to know what triggered Salah to do that? At the time I might have assumed that Salah did it out of compassion for others as a human being, but whenever I related it to the Islamic dogma, I'd always suspect that there must be a special reason why he did what he did. But I couldn't fathom what might have been in Salah's mind. I wished he could have been alive so I could look him up and ask him personally why he did it!" Not long after these questions began weighing heavily on his mind, Abdul read a poster nailed to a tree, titled, *Salah: A Hero* and phoned the number provided at the bottom. This is how he met two Christian evangelists who explained that Jesus was the one who inspired Salah.

To date (May 2019) Salah's remarkable story has been instrumental in drawing over two dozen Muslims to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior including his wife and children. Upon hearing Salah's courageous witness, we too admire him. The real reason behind his bravery was not reported in the mainstream media, making Salah an unsung hero here on earth. However, in heaven he's one of many martyrs whose sacrifice is greatly valued by the One to whom it matters most.

It is important that we not overlook the phrase "word of their testimony" with reference to the victorious martyrs in Revelation 12:11. They overcame the Devil by the "blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." Bear in mind that Salah actually wrote **words** voicing his own testimony on page seven of his personal copy of the book, *God's Apprentice*, "Jesus you're my Saviour, I never knew but now I know. I'll follow you; let them kill me, I don't care, I'll follow you."

We need to understand that Salah's story correlates with what is happening across the world. Anyone who keeps abreast of world reports on persecution realizes that the last 5 years have seen a marked increase of persecution against Christians, most notably a 14% increase during the last year (2018). In fact, many experts believe that persecution has reached levels unprecedented since the days of the early church. Salah's story of martyrdom is one among countless thousands, yet his story typifies what's happening on a larger scale worldwide. Salah is one among hundreds of thousands of Muslims who are turning to Christ in unprecedented numbers. Of note, is the fact that he was killed by Muslims. As a matter of fact, radical Muslims have killed not just Muslim converts but also countless thousands more Muslims whom they perceive as unacceptable.

Sadly, however, for Christians like ourselves who live in the west, Salah's death-defying encounter on a bus in Africa seems remote and somewhat irrelevant, partly because we have little reason to fear persecution, that is, until recently. With recent advances of LGBT activists (and transgender activists) we in the west are now seeing Christians punished for acting or speaking in accordance with their faith.

(Note: Jack Phillips faced years of persecution from LGBT activists. Large fines were also issued against Dr. Nicolas Meriwether in USA and Bill Whattcott in Canada in court battles sparked by transgender activists.)

For years Michael Brown, James Dobson and others have warned “that those who came out of the closet (meaning, radical gay activists) wanted to put us in the closet (meaning those of us who identify with conservative biblical values). And for years [we] have documented this, time and time again.” <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/mask-comes-off-the-lgbt-left-is-out-to-silence-christian-voices>

Similar pressure, intended to muzzle Christians, is also mounting in relation to offending Muslim “sensitivities”. As a result many Christians especially in the west are becoming very cautious, nervous, ashamed or even afraid of sharing the Gospel with Muslims. Admittedly, they sometimes read verses saying that they should witness unashamedly and boldly, but how many really hear or do what God instructs? One such Scripture reads, “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.” (2 Tim. 1:7-8, NIV)

4. This brings us to our final question, “Who are you going to tell the Good News of how to overcome the Dragon/Devil/ancient serpent – through the blood of the Lamb? Who would imagine that the Lamb could defeat the dragon? Not only so, but by doing this with his very life-blood! Jesus Christ paid for our sin on the cross, being raised triumphant from the grave. By this he crushed the head of the ancient serpent and God has exalted him to the highest position. Now he offers us the gift of eternal life.

Let's close by singing *O Church arise*, a song penned by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, highlighting our Lord's command to declare his liberating message of salvation around the world:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A98YQH8tLY> Let us also sing, *I pledge allegiance to the Lamb*, which honors the courageous testimony of martyrs: https://ca.video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-adk-adk_sbnt&hsimp=yhs-adk_sbnt&hspart=adk&p=video+songs+by+ray+boltz#id=5&vid=055d85099f854eea37a3e70dcf3b01db&action=click

Note: * Not their real names.

Endnote: Seven weeks ago ISIS inspired attacks in Srilanka killed 321 people. This demonstrates the accuracy of the work researchers do year after year in terms of compiling the “world watch list” which enumerates the 50 countries around the world where Christians suffer the most persecution. The 2019 report says, “While the violent excesses of ISIS and other Islamic militants have mostly disappeared from headlines from the Middle East, their loss of territory there means that fighters have dispersed to a larger number of countries ...” of which Srilanka is obviously one example.

The book, *God's Apprentice*, which was the turning point in Salah's spiritual journey, is available in kindle format. You can buy it [here](#).

Earlier sermons in this series can be found here: <http://sim.ca/david-foster/>

A fuller write up about Salah Farah's story is available here: https://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/salah_martyr.html