



Luke 12:4-7

Whom Will You Fear? God or Men?

4 " And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

5 "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

7 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

In one sense Siham Qandah's nightmare began 36 years ago, when she was born into a Christian family living in Jordan, an Islamic country. But that nightmare became particularly acute in November 1994 when her husband, an officer in the Jordanian Army was killed while serving on a UN peacekeeping operation. A widow with hardly any savings and two small children, a daughter aged 7 and son aged 5, she expected to be able to receive an army widow's pension and a stipend from the UN. Soon after she applied however, the army produced a document indicating that her husband Jibreen had converted to Islam in 1991. This came as a shock to her, as her husband had never discussed any conversion to Islam with her or any members of his family, and had continued to attend church. In fact, he had even been buried in a Christian cemetery, something that was absolutely forbidden for Muslims.

The conversion document itself had the necessary two witness signatures by two Muslim men, but where her husband's signature was supposed to be there was only an X. To this day she refuses to believe it is authentic. Even a Civil Court in its ruling acknowledged "no one was aware of his conversion to Islam". This document however, put her into a terrible bind, because under Muslim Sharia law, Christians cannot inherit from Muslims, all of her late husband's assets were instantly closed off to her. However, because Sharia law also maintains that the children of Muslim men are legally Muslims, her children could inherit their father's estate. They would need a Muslim guardian however, to administer that estate. So in desperation, Siham turned to her brother, who had apostatized many years previously and become a Muslim asking him to become her children's guardian. Her brother agreed and was duly appointed in April 1995. Subsequently he rarely paid the money to Siham, leaving her with no income to support herself and her children.

Things became even worse though, in 1998 when Siham's brother sought custody of the children on the grounds that, legally, they were Muslims but that their mother continued to raise them as Christians, something also forbidden under Sharia law. In June 2001 the Civil Court in Irbid ruled in the brother's favor, a decision upheld through two appeals. Siham refused to hand over her children to her brother, and went into hiding with them, as leaving Jordan was impossible – international treaties ensure that if, for instance, she was to flee to a neighboring country, they would extradite her to Jordan immediately.

Siham's brother went to court again seeking that Mrs. Qandah be imprisoned until she hands over her children. Such an order was granted on 16th January 2003. An appeal was lodged but later denied. In March Siham's family discovered that her brother had embezzled \$20,000 from the account held for the children. A court case was started in Amman to remove custody from the brother on these grounds. That lawsuit has just been denied on the grounds that "because all withdrawals from the children's trust account have been duly authorized by a judge, as required." Now Siham is once again in danger of being imprisoned, and legally she is once again required to hand over her daughter Rawan now 15 and Son Fadi 14 to her brother.

It's a horrendous situation isn't it? But you know what's interesting? This nightmare could go away essentially overnight. All that Siham would have to do is convert to Islam herself. Essentially, that is what everything in Sharia law is aiming at producing anyway. Suddenly the system that has been essentially oppressing her all her life and reducing her to a social and legal status below that of Muslim criminals known as *Dhimmitude*, would be on *her side*.

Sounds simple doesn't it? Just deny Christ and you can finally have your children, your money, and as normal a life as a Muslim woman can lead. No more running, no more hiding, no more fear of prison or having your children handed over to a man who was willing to steal from them and leave them without food for years. What loving mother wouldn't see that as a compelling reason? It's a weighty argument.

In fact, the only argument against following that path, is that it involves forsaking your Lord and Savior, indicating to the entire world that you never were really a Christian at all for as the Apostle John wrote "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us." (1 John 2:19), and choosing to opt for an eternity in Hell.

Friends, Siham is making the right decision. She would rather endure tribulation in this life, than eternal misery in the next, she would rather run the risk of seeing her children taken away from her, than become a murderer of their souls by raising them in a false religion herself. And above all, she refuses to deny the one person who has never denied her, left her, failed her, or forsaken her – Jesus Christ. Therefore she has asked in letters to Christian groups, that although she is shaken by events, that she remain steadfast in her decision to remain a follower of Jesus to the end.

Jesus knew that following Him, in this life was not going to be easy, in fact he warned his disciples again and again, that it would inevitably involve pain and suffering and that they too must take up their cross and follow in the footsteps of their master. History has shown that Christ's warnings have always been 100% correct, and as Calvin put it: "there never was a period when men did not rise furiously against God, and endeavor to overwhelm the Gospel."

But although that is the case, Christ wants you as well to make the right decision regarding following Him. So first, he warns against hypocrisy, and any attempt at a compromise where you would profess to be a follower of Christ while secretly playing the worldling, pointing out the sheer stupidity of it – *that all things will be revealed in the end, and your hypocrisy will be utterly profitless to you!*

Now addressing his disciples lovingly as His Friends, he is beginning to deal with the temptation to go beyond hypocrisy. The temptation to simply, either out of man fearing or man pleasing, leave the narrow path entirely. ***That is to succumb to pressure to apostatize.***

Usually of course, people apostatize out of fear, sometimes fear of what people think but usually fear of persecution.

Today, at this very moment, all around the world, governments are using every means at their disposal to persuade your brothers and sisters in Christ to renounce their faith. Men and women, are – even as I speak to you being oppressed, being imprisoned, being tortured, and being killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. And it is not just governments that do the persuading. In the Muslim world, parents will warn children who have been converted not to get baptized, or they will kill them themselves. This is not an idle threat. Again, Christ warned us that this too would be the case: "" Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' (Matthew 10:34-36)

Jesus in light of that tells you, don't be afraid. Yes they can hurt you, they may even kill you. But that is all they can do, and once they have done that all they have essentially done is to send your body to its rest, and your soul to its eternal reward in heaven. Even in that death, you are the victor! The sting of it is gone, because someday even your body will live again and body and soul will be reunited!

If you know that, if you are assured of that, you can persevere even when they threaten to take your children away or even to burn you at the stake, armed with that knowledge you will be as Paul put it: *"steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (1 Cor. 15:58)

So it is supremely foolish to fear men, because in doing so, you are striving to hold on to something slipping away from you moment by moment in any event – your life. And the cost of perhaps prolonging this life with its fleeting pleasures is much too high. Bishop Hooper on the eve of his execution by Bloody Queen Mary was urged by his friend Anthony Kingston to recant the Protestant Faith, "Life is sweet" he pointed out to Dr. Hooper.

"True it is," said the bishop, "that death is bitter, and life is sweet; but alas! consider that the death to come is more bitter, and the life to come is more sweet."

Don't fear men, Christ warns, **for they can only kill the body**, Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell;

Who is that? GOD! *Not the Devil*, never once are you counseled to fear him; in fact in regards to tribulation Christ told the church specifically not to fear Him: "10 "Do not **fear** any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the **devil** is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." The devil does not reign anywhere, neither on earth, nor in hell. Hell will be a place of torment for him too! Rather it is GOD who has the terrible power to make the final declaration:

"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting **fire** prepared for the **devil** and his angels: (Matt. 25:41)

Your lives, every part of them, are not in the hands of the Devil in any event. You'll remember that even in the story of Job, who was terribly afflicted by Satan, the Devil could do nothing to Him that

was not granted by God. Your life, Jesus tells you, is in the hands of your Father in heaven. Are you seriously afraid he doesn't understand or know your condition? HE sees even the Sparrows, he numbers even the hair on your heads, and everything that happens to them is according to his providential ordering. Now will the one who has appointed from the beginning of time the moment at which every Sparrow dies and every hair gets stuck in your comb, not keep his promise to ensure that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28)

And that promise includes even persecution! Many of Christ's children have been appointed for Martyrdom, does that strike you as somehow wrong? **Why?** That was the way 10 of the 12 Apostles called by Christ died! Are you somehow more worthy to die in your bed than say, Peter? At one time, you know, Christians rightly saw that being found *worthy to suffer for Christ* was an honor.

Jesus went to the cross of Calvary to pay the price for sins that would have sunk you lower than the grave, will you not die for Him when you know that such a death will enable you to enter into the eternal life he won for you?

Allow me to leave you with one application: The day may come when you will have to choose, even here in the USA between Christ or your job or children or life, I pray that you will make the right decision when you are in that crucible; but let us speak of here and now.

It is one thing to fear men killing you, another to fear men's opinions. Worse still to fear not being approved of... It often seems like men and women bolt from the visible church because they are afraid of missing out on some fleeting tid-bit dangled before them. [Trained DOG EXAMPLE] In that moment you are no better or brighter than beasts.

John 6:67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

69 "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."