

HOW THE MARTYRS LIVED

When we think of a martyr, we usually think about how they died and not how they lived. What is a martyr, and does it even matter how they lived? The definition of a martyr is simply anyone who dies for what they believe. Who then qualifies as a martyr? Some would say Lincoln was martyred. Every day, extremists die for what they believe, and the people involved would consider them martyrs.

History would call Martin Luther King Jr. a martyr because he was killed for what he believed. Do people even know why he was killed or what his life was really like? Before he was killed, he was preparing a sermon titled "Why America May Go to Hell." He was killed three days before this speech. After his death, FBI memos revealed that he may have had a history as a womanizer. Did he live the way he died? Many people die for what they believe or teach, but do we hold them up as martyrs?

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:58-60).

And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him (Acts 22:20).

In the Bible, the first martyr we read about is Stephen. Stephen spoke up for what he believed, and it angered the people who were listening. The Bible says he was a man richly blessed by God and full of faith. God gave him power to do great miracles and signs. In Acts 6, it says the Holy Spirit helped him speak with wisdom and that his words were so strong that no one could argue with him. His life was lived out in faith. He died the way he lived, acknowledging Jesus and forgiving even unto his last breath.

Andrew and Peter taught the cross, and they were both hung on the cross upside down. They lived lives devoted to Christ. Andrew was introduced to Jesus first, then went and told Peter. Andrew was the one who brought the boy with five loaves and two little fish to Jesus.

Peter denied Jesus three times. They had things that they needed the Master to teach them. They chose to change their ways and follow Jesus. Andrew and Peter were faithful until they died as men of faith. They lived the way they died, and they died on a cross, the very thing they taught others that Jesus had died on.

When we think of Anabaptist martyrs, the first one was Felix Manz. After Felix was baptized, he began preaching adult baptism. Ten days later, he was arrested, and they tried to change his mind. He escaped prison and continued preaching but was later

arrested and sentenced to death. Teaching re-baptism was outlawed at that time and punishable by drowning. His last words were, "Into thine hand, I commit my spirit." Interestingly, the punishment that Felix Manz received for teaching adult baptism was drowning in Zurich's Limmat River. They killed him with the very thing he was teaching: baptism. He lived the way he died, and he died for what he was teaching.

In February of 2015, twenty-one men were taken and killed by ISIS. All but one were young Coptic Christian migrant workers from Egypt. ISIS released a five-minute video of the men, one by one, being pushed to the ground and beheaded. Each man was asked to renounce his faith and follow Islam. In the video, they can be seen mouthing the words "Ya Rabbi Yasou" (O Lord Jesus). One by one, the men were tested, and one after the other, they remained faithful until the end. Twenty of the men were Christian converts, but the twenty-first man was not part of their group. Mathew Ayairga was not a Christian. When it was his turn, the ISIS extremists demanded that he follow Islam. He had just witnessed twenty faithful men declare their faith and trust in God. That devotion converted him to become follower of Christ. On camera, one of the terrorists asked Matthew, "Do you reject Christ?" His response was, "Their God is my God." This man became the twenty-first man to lay down his life for his new faith in Christ. All these men lived the way they died, and they died for living for Christ.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:8-11).

We may never face death for following Christ, we may never die a martyr's death, but would we know what we would do if faced with the choice? Would we deny Christ to save our life? Would we stand firm in our faith and call out to Christ and say, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit?" The only way to know if we would die a martyr's death is to think about how we are living today. If we are not willing to die to our sins, then we will not be willing to die for our faith! This is the one way we would know for sure if faced with the choice; we would make the right choice and stand up for Christ.

We remember how the martyrs lived and see that it affected them when they faced death. We may face health issues or a tragic end, and how we live today will affect how we face death. The way we live each day will affect our eternal destination. Let us die to our sins and stand up for Christ in every area of our life like the martyrs before us did.

~Will Taylor