

Paying the Price in Jericho

✖ When American missionary Karen Dunham gave her life to Christ years ago, she had no thoughts of traveling to Jericho, West Bank, to minister. Not even after God told her several years later to go to Jerusalem to pray at the Western Wall did she consider such an undertaking. Like most Americans, she saw the Palestinians as enemies and had no love for them whatsoever.

"I didn't even know what an Arab was," Dunham says. But she associated the people in that part of the world with bombs and terrorism.

An encounter with a Catholic priest at the New Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem helped change her perspective. "If you go to Jericho and feed the people, you can win the city for Christ," he told her.

"When he said it, the Spirit of God gripped me," Dunham says. "I had never thought about winning a whole city before, but the Spirit of God says, 'You can win the city if you'll go to Jericho and feed the people.'"

She knew God was telling her to feed her enemies. And she remembered that He had said of Israel in His Word, "It's a good land flowing with milk and honey."

"That means all of it," she says. "He didn't divide it up and say, 'This part's bad, and this part's bad.' He said, 'It's a good land flowing with milk and honey.'"

With that understanding, Dunham, a single mom and previously associate pastor at Solid Rock Christian Recovery Center in St. Petersburg, Florida, moved with her teenage son, Peter Blake Davis, to Jericho. Because the Palestinians were afraid of them, the only place they could find to rent a home was in a refugee camp. But after living in the area only a short

time, Dunham had a radical change of heart toward the people.

"I had to get out of my religious box," she says. "When I went to Jericho, I felt the Palestinians were my enemy, and I had never even prayed for here I am living in a refugee camp, and I realize they're real people. They may wear long dresses and have goats, but they cry and they bleed and their babies are hungry. And God loves these people."

PAYING THE PRICE

It was God's love expressed through Dunham that eventually began drawing people in the area to Christ. She reached out to them in practical ways by giving them food and clothing and by providing lessons in English to local children and to the Jericho police. Eventually she was able to begin offering Bible studies and showing Jesus videos. And she handed out gospel tracts with every item she gave away.

But her ministry came at a great price. From the moment she and her son set foot on Palestinian soil, they were persecuted by both Christians and Muslims.

"All my Zionist friends acted like I was called to the lepers," Dunham says. "I was cut off from the body of were kind of like outcasts because they thought I would become an enemy of Israel." Even the Christian pastors in Israel wanted nothing to do with her, she says-unless it was to criticize her and tell her what she was doing wrong.

The lack of support from fellow believers was painful. But even more disruptive to their daily lives was the persecution from Muslims in the area. Because of Dunham's presence, they shut off water to the entire community in the middle of summer, leaving Dunham and her son, as well as their own people, with nothing to drink and with no air conditioning.

"I felt like Joseph, being thrown in the pit," Dunham says. "I was in the refugee camp with my son, going without water, killing scorpions [in my house], and I really felt like I had

fallen off the face of the earth.

"Things got really hot," she continues. "I began to be talked about in the mosques because they thought I was going to steal their babies."

But that was just the beginning.

"I've been through seven fires," Dunham reports. "They've blown up my car, and they burned down my house. We've been totally robbed of everything. Our lives have been threatened."

The Muslims also threw a Molotov cocktail through her son's bedroom window. Thankfully, he wasn't home at the time.

In the midst of the persecution, God gave Dunham great favor with the local authorities. Early on, she says, the Israeli army became her mission board, encouraging her and letting her know that they support her work. "Israel is behind what you are doing," she says they told her. "They want us to feed these people."

Perhaps even more significant is that the governor of Jericho is behind her. About a year ago, she says, he called her into his office and said: "We had a meeting with the local politicians. We no longer consider it evangelism if you want to put one of those booklets [gospel tracts] in your rice and your clothing, and a Bible. We freely receive it."

According to Dunham, the "local politicians" included representatives from the terrorist groups Jihad, Hamas and Infata. One of them was a secret convert, and with his encouragement, they passed a law that made gospel tracts and Bibles legal in the city of Jericho.

Not only that, but the governor, along with other government officials, including the minister of health and the minister of welfare, have asked her to get involved in every area of government, she says. They want her input on how to transform the city.

THE FRUIT OF AFFLICTION

Dunham does not have any bitterness about the attacks she and her son, who goes by his middle name, Blake, have endured. In fact, she compares her situation to that of the biblical character Joseph, who said that in his affliction, God made him fruitful.

“When our house was burned down, it was great because God told us His vision was for the whole city, not just a single church in a refugee camp,” she says. “So now we have church in a public place, an Arabian wedding hall.

“And when it fills up, there might be close to 600 people in that many people come every week; there’s a couple hundred-maybe 300. But there are times when they all fill up and come. And they come from the refugee camps, Jihad comes, Hamas comes, Infata comes, and they want to hear the words of grace.

“What are we preaching? We’re preaching the gospel!” she continues. “Right now there is a move of God, it’s a sovereign move of God in Jericho....[The people] want to enter our kingdom, and they’re coming in. They’re coming in rapidly.”

Dunham says she has lost track of how many they’ve baptized. They don’t keep records or use the word “convert” because of the potential danger to new believers.

But “people are coming from all over” to her Living Bread International Church, she says. They are also watching her television program, Door of Hope that is broadcast from a cave on the Mount of Temptation and currently goes into 133 Arab nations.

“You know what happened?” Dunham asks with regard to the bombings and other persecution she’s endured. “We’ve been blown right into the glory of God!

“Eighty percent of our church is there because the Spirit of God showed up in a dream or a vision and told them to get down

to the church," she explains. "They're coming because of the Spirit of God."

One little girl told her recently, "Jesus came to me and told me to bring my mother, my father and my brothers," Dunham says. "The Father is building the church."

It has to be Him, she claims, because she couldn't do it in her flesh. "When God sent me there, I didn't know the language. He sent the most foolish thing. I didn't know anything about the culture. But I went because I do know one thing: I know the voice of My God, and God said, 'I'm going to do this now.'"

Dunham attributes the move of God in Jericho in part to the response she and Blake, had to the affliction. "What we've learned in our affliction is to worship," she says. "When our car was burning up, we said, 'Put on the worship music.' We went outside, lifted our hands [in praise].

"It took a few fires-it took a little bit of affliction-to catch on to what the Spirit of God wanted us to do, but when we started embracing it, and when we started counting it all joy, our spirits soared, and we were pushed into such a deep place in the Spirit, and I feel the atmosphere started changing. We started to see great miracles."

As proof, she offers, "I had every one of the police officers ask me for Jesus videos and Bibles." She has also seen many miracles of healing, including deaf ears being opened and leprous limbs being restored, and of salvation.

"The Arabs couldn't believe we didn't run," Dunham says, "and they have seen us in our affliction, stay." It hasn't been easy, she admits, but she was determined to remain because God told her to "ride out" the persecution.

"The Lord said, 'Karen, I want them to see by witness that you are willing to lay down your life for them.'"

Dunham, who wanted nothing to do with the church growing up has proved in the last five years that she is willing. And every attempt on her life has served only to increase her commitment to the work God gave her among the Palestinians. She now provides not only food, clothes and Bibles but also toys, furniture, soap and other supplies to poor families, nursing homes and hospitals throughout the West Bank and in Israel. She also runs a food-stamp program that helps feed around 5,000 families each month.

"What we're doing is, we're loving on these Arabs," she says.

Dunham's loving the Arabs has made her name a household word in Jericho, and now not even the Muslims want her to leave. One young mother from the Aqabat Jaber refugee camp told the San Francisco Chronicle, "My husband is a policeman, but he has received no wages for months. I don't know how we would survive without Karen."

Dunham believes the transformation God promised her through the Catholic priest has begun. And she has no doubt that one day Jericho will again be totally devoted to God.

"We're gonna see it in our lifetime that this great city will be called 'The City of Our Lord,'" she says. And she'll give up her own life, if necessary, to make it happen.

For more information on Karen Dunham's ministry, go to . If you would like to support this ministry, send tax-deductible gifts to Christian Life Missions, Attn: Living Bread International Church, P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL 32795-2248.