

Persecuted Nepali Pastor Encourages Believers to Stand and Withstand

When a Christian brother we'll call "Bilal" died last spring in a small Nepali city, it was important to his family that his body be buried. For Nepali Christians, burial is not only a way to dispose of a body but also an "Ebenezer" (1 Sam. 7:12), a permanent landmark of a person's faith and God's faithfulness. But in Nepal, where 75 percent of the people are Hindus, cremation is the expected ritual following a death.

About 30,000 people live in the city where Bilal's family live, but there are only four or five Christian families. When Bilal died, radical Hindus tried to take his body for cremation, according to Hindu custom. Death, along with birth and marriage, is one of three significant milestones in Hindu culture. By cremating Bilal's body, the Hindus hoped to erase his Christian testimony. Cremation would be a message in their culture that Bilal hadn't *really* been a Christian, that in death he'd returned to Hinduism. Conversely, a grave would be a permanent testimony that this man had died a Christian.

Bilal's family refused to turn the body over to the Hindus; they wanted a Christian funeral and burial. The family was at home making funeral arrangements with their church's pastor, Pastor "Sabal," when they heard shouting outside the house. A large Hindu mob had gathered, shouting threats and demanding the body in order to perform Hindu last rights and cremation.

Sabal told the Hindus that Bilal was a Christian and that his family wanted a Christian funeral. The mob then became enraged, grabbing Sabal and two other Christians and beating them with sticks and their fists. The Christians tried to flee on their bicycles, but the mob continued to attack.

The Christians found refuge in the home of “Bima,” a Christian widow who motioned them inside her house despite the angry mob chasing them. Why would she invite attacks on her home by sheltering the Christians?

“I am the Lord’s servant,” she told VOM workers, “so I have to be strong. I will not fear, because he is with us. I thought that some of those people might make problems for me, but I have to be strong.”

The mob of angry Hindus backed off, and Christians on motorbikes came to remove Sabal and the others from danger. Sabal was treated for wounds he received in the beating and was later examined by our VOMedical director. While Sabal’s body healed quickly, he struggled emotionally. He couldn’t sleep for a week after the attack.

“I was praying for myself and I understood, when reading the Bible, I understood that I have to forgive,” Sabal said, “because the Lord says if you don’t forgive others you will not be forgiven. Those words were pricking my heart.” God helped Sabal forgive his attackers by reminding him of the forgiveness he had received.

“I have also done some wrong things, some mistakes, so the Lord is working [to forgive me],” he said. “So I have to forgive. The Lord was speaking to me, ‘Forgive them. They have to come to Me.’ The Lord was speaking to me. Then I said yes. I have to work with them so they will come to Christ.” A month after the attack, Sabal came to the point of fully forgiving those who had attacked and injured him.

He continues to minister in the same city, but after the attacks his congregation shrank by half. Many Christians left in fear, so Sabal preaches sermons designed to encourage believers to withstand the persecution he knows they’ll face.

“One day everyone has to die,” he tells his congregation. “The life here [on earth] is very short. Whatever they do to us

because we're Christian—what we will go through—even if we have to die, we'll die because we'll have a long life [in eternity with Christ].”

Some of the believers too fearful to attend church still ask Sabal to come to their homes and pray with them. He has faith that one day their courage will be strengthened and they will return to the church. “I believe they will come one day,” he said, “because they have tasted the Lord.”

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