



May 2016

**History will decide whether it was an Arab Spring or a Christian Winter that started in the Middle East in 2011 - but at a point when every TV channel in the world was broadcasting images of one million people in Tahrir Square, chanting for freedom, I was seeing another part of the picture.**

In a dimly-lit building, in a remote Egyptian desert wadi, I was on a special mission to encourage church planters from across the region. As my eyes adjusted to the flickering candlelight, I was transfixed by the scene in front of me. On a slightly elevated podium, illuminated by a small spotlight, stood a white throne upholstered in purple velvet. On the wall behind it was a simple wooden cross. A small worship team were quietly playing in the background. I closed my eyes and thought of the chorus, 'Jesus, we enthrone you'. When I opened my eyes, there were around 50 people in front of me.



Suddenly, the doors behind me opened and in processed a group of ten missionary families. Each one was wearing a gold crown and holding a flag of the nation they were working in. As they reached the front of the church, they prostrated themselves at the foot of the throne, placing their crowns

before the cross, just like the scene in Revelation. I was overcome with emotion: God's presence was palpable in this moment of worship and surrender.

In the days that followed I heard remarkable stories: of security services not seeing hundreds of Bibles and training materials hidden in cars; of a man in white appearing to people in their dreams. Most amazing of all, I heard the story of an entire village coming to Christ - miles away from civilisation. Each person there had had this same 'Jesus dream' on the same night, at virtually the same time. But I also heard stories of the pressure that believers are under: secret church gatherings with worship in whispers; Christians who'd been martyred, through sharing the love of Christ.

### **Taking responsibility for God**

For secret believers in the Middle East and North Africa, persecution is normal – as it often is in the Bible. They read the disciples' stories in the book of Acts and see their experiences mirrored there. They read the words of our Saviour Himself, in the gospels, saying, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." Taking up the cross, as Jesus said, is an intrinsic part of being a follower. Sacrifice - self-sacrifice specifically - comes as part of the territory.

All this makes me ask myself: what is the real cost of living for Jesus, for me in my world? How can a faith that clearly costs its followers so much, cost me so little? Are we, in the 'free' world, just playing a game of thrones? The following comment by Rowan Williams in his book *Tokens of Trust* (p.28) has helped me think this through:

"As long as there are those who effectively and bravely take responsibility for God, the doors remain open and the possibility is there for others, perhaps very slowly, to find their way to a point where they can say, 'I believe... I want to live in the same world as them; I want to know what they know and drink from the same wells'"



This wisdom works both ways in the church: for those on the frontline and for those who are not. You and I need to take responsibility for God bravely here in our public square. Our brothers and sisters need to do the same where they are. Our common cause is to see the kingdom established. The cost? Well, we need to be willing to be willing. That's what the persecuted church has to teach us.

Here is a prayer that I've found helpful to pray each morning as I ask the Lord to help me be willing and brave. It's taken from the Northumbria Community's Celtic Prayer. Perhaps you could join me and make it your own.

**Eddie Lyle**



**President  
Open Doors UK & Ireland**



Most powerful Holy Spirit,  
come down  
upon us  
and subdue us.

From heaven,  
where the ordinary  
is made glorious,  
and glory seems  
but ordinary,

bathe us  
with the brilliance  
of your light  
like dew.