

by Mohan Nanjundan

Always in Triumphal Procession

Followers of Jesus will suffer but through his power they will see the triumph of love over hate, God over man, and life over death.

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

In January 1988, I moved from London to Bangalore, India, along with Mark and Nadine Templer and the rest of the Bangalore mission team, to start a ministry there, with God's help and guidance. Over the past two and a half years, as I've served as an evangelist, in Bangalore as well as Bombay, I have been convicted, inspired and called higher by our God's ceaseless ability to "always lead us in triumphal procession in Christ," despite every obstacle that Satan can offer. It has been a joy and an honor to watch and to help, as countless young Christians have faced trials and persecutions of many kinds, all the while learning to faithfully trust in God's promises of deliverance, strengthening, transformation and abundant fruit. Allow me at this time to boast to you in the Lord about some of my people.

Triumph of Love Over Hate

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father

in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous' (Matthew 5:43-45).

Perhaps nowhere in the world is hatred so prevalent as in India. The tales of bride burnings and widow burnings, inter-communal massacres of barbaric proportions and other sordid stories of violence are well known and well documented. What is less well known and less accepted is that these incidents are rooted in the deep selfishness and hatred of many, many individuals. "Being hated and hating one another" (Titus 3:3) describes well many relationships in India.

Sadly, this is often apparent within families. Take brother E. Lourdraj, from Bangalore, for example. Lourdraj (23 years old) was baptized in Bangalore in November 1988. At the time, he was a factory worker for the watch-making division of Hindustan Machine Tools, a major Indian manufacturer. Mark Templer, evangelist for the Bangalore church, met Lourdraj one day, while evangelizing. They struck up a friendship and soon after that, began to study the Bible together.

It became apparent that Lourdraj was going to have to repent of extreme hatred toward his father. Years earlier, his father betrayed his mother, illegally remarried and had been maintaining two families. Being in love



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with the second wife, he treated Lourdraj's mother with contempt and her children likewise. As a result, Lourdraj grew to deeply resent his father.

Repent he did, though, when he became a disciple, but the hatred worked both ways and Satan was still at work fueling the hatred of his father toward him. To complicate matters, Lourdraj's Hindu family had arranged a marriage for him with a girl named Manjalla. Manjalla's parents had agreed in exchange for the marriage to help one of Lourdraj's brothers to set up his own business (such "deals" are common here and brides' families pay grooms' families to get their daughters married off, as an unmarried woman is considered a financial burden and carries a social stigma with her). A lot was at stake!

If relationships were bad before they were at a new record low now. War broke out in the family, as they tried, through persuasion, threats and beatings, to get Lourdraj to give up his faith. In the meantime, Manjalla the fiancée was seized with self-pity and tried twice to commit suicide.

But the worst was yet to come. Convinced that Lourdraj was possessed by demons, his father and brothers arranged for a Hindu priest to come and exorcise him. Tying him down, the priest chanted mantras (Hindu ritual phrases) for several

hours. Then, taking a red-hot iron rod, one of his brothers branded him on the arm in three different places, supposedly to aid the "exorcism." "The hardest thing of all," Lourdraj said later, "was that my own brothers didn't seem to understand what I'd found in Christ, but rather tortured me."

God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Lourdraj stood his test faithfully, but his triumphal procession had only just begun!

When his family saw the strength of his convictions, they backed down. Lourdraj started to reach out to his dad, whose health was in rapid deterioration. His father died last September. Though considerably closer to him, Lourdraj was unable to persuade his father to accept Christ.



Lourdraj (right)

God, however, was still at work. When the time came for Lourdraj's dad's last will to be made known, the family was in for a surprise. Moved by the changes in his son's life, the ailing father had left everything he owned—houses, money and all other property—to our brother! The family was furious!

Lourdraj's treasure though, is in heaven and not on earth. Going back to his angry family, he told them he didn't want any of his newfound wealth and would happily give it all up to them. He only wanted them to accept him as he was—as a Christian! His blown-away mom accepted him back into her home. Things have never been better!

Despite all that was going on in Lourdraj's life in his first 15 months as a Christian, he helped eight men become Christians and is now a Bible Talk leader. Truly, God moves in a mysterious way.

Triumph of God Over Man

"For the Lord God Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27).

God's purposes cannot be thwarted. His Kingdom will forcefully advance, with or without you and me, and certainly in spite of persecution. Lourdraj's story of amazing growth and effectiveness, in the face of adversity,

has been reproduced again and again in the lives of the Indian Christians, testifying to God's never-failing power to triumph over the deceitful schemes of wicked men. Or are you still not convinced? Then ask Sanjeevi Prasad, your zealous young brother of the New Delhi Church of Christ.

Sanjeevi's family—like mine—belong to the highest of the four Hindu castes, the caste of the Brahmins, who historically served as priests to the Hindus, and who today, because of their social background, form a disproportionately high segment of India's middle-upper class. It's bad news when a Brahmin converts to Christianity!



Corrina with Mo Adame

All of these still face continual harassment and persecution. All of them have come through victoriously, proving that God's purposes will not be thwarted, and that our God is always supremely capable of triumphing over man's wickedness.

Sanjeevi, a 21-year-old student in Delhi, was baptized on January 30. His family—again, like mine—is from Madras, in the south of India. Like all of our disciples, he was advised to write home and tell his family about his decision to be baptized into Christ. Two weeks later, after receiving Sanjeevi's letter, his irate mother showed up at church in New Delhi. Later, with other relatives in New Delhi, she gave him what they call "a good pasting." During that time she threatened to disown him from the family, as well as from his inheritance and have "those foreigners," Greg and Shelley Metten (leaders in the New Delhi church), expelled from India.

Seeing that her son had not yet been persuaded, she changed her tactics. The next day, she informed Sanjeevi that his grandmother was seriously ill in Madras, and that he needed to go back with her to visit Grandma. Sanjeevi telephoned his grandmother from the Metten's home. Her distinctly chipper reassurances of good health led Sanjeevi to conclude that it was probably God's will to remain in New Delhi at that time. Truly, our God "catches the wise in their craftiness" (I Corinthians 3:19).

The stories go on and on. Bharati, a sister in Bangalore, who at one stage was branded on the forehead with a red-hot iron by her brother, is now a fruitful member of the Madras planting. Nalini Rao, also from Bangalore, was once beaten so badly by her father, at the busiest bus stop in the city, that she had to be hospitalized. Today she's a Bible Talk leader with a fruitful ministry. Joyce Correa was locked up for months and repeatedly threatened and beaten by her family in Bombay. Today, she is an intern in New Delhi.

All of these faced and—in some cases, still face—continual harassment and persecution. All of them have come through victoriously, proving that God's purposes will not be thwarted, and that our God is always supremely capable of triumphing over man's wickedness.

The Triumph of Life Over Death

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24).

The challenge for us as disciples is to not hold back, come what may. To stand up to persecution is to fulfill our baptismal pledge to take up our cross daily for Jesus Christ. Sometimes, our very lives may be threatened, as Cor-

rina Gonsalves, a sister in Bombay discovered.

Corrina, of Catholic background, became a Christian in July 1987, the first in the Bombay congregation. At the time, she was severely ill, much so that in September, she had to be hospitalized in order to undergo open heart surgery. At around the same time, her family, reacting against her commitment to Christ, put severe restrictions on her movement, particularly after the operation. They went far as to lock her up, and physically beat her, even while she was recovering from the operation. Mainly involving one of her brothers, Brian, who has a history of violence and delinquent behavior. She was locked up for five months. Several times she sneaked away to meet Christians—often she was followed and beaten. Given her physical condition, sneaking away was tantamount to risking her life.

Whenever Terri Adame (women's leader of the Madras Church of Christ) and other sisters studied the Bible with Corrina, they were threatened while Mo Adame (Madras evangelist) and Jim Blough were physically assaulted. In time, however, our faithful God honored Corrina's zeal—the anger subsided, and Corrina, as soon as she had totally recovered, took a firm stand and left her family no choice but to relent. Today she is strong, and the Lord has blessed her in many ways, including a dating relationship with Merwyn Dias, one of our sharp young interns!

Leap for Joy

Lourdaj, Sanjeevi, Bharati, Nalini, Joyce, Corrina—I could go on and on. The stories have not ended, and we know that, as time goes on, they will only get more intense! My hope and prayer is that these words will have encouraged and strengthened you, especially those of you brothers and sisters around the globe who are struggling with Satan as you fight persecution. As Peter would admonish, "resist him, standing firm in the faith, knowing that your brothers (and sisters in India) are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (I Peter 5:9).

And beyond that, "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets" (Luke 6:23).

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