



Jesus Freaks



Stories of Those
Who Stood for Jesus:

The Ultimate Jesus Freaks.

MARTYRS

dc Talk
and the Voice of the Martyrs



BETHANY HOUSE PUBLISHERS
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

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Jesus Freaks: Martyrs

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11400 HAMPSHIRE AVE. S. / BLOOMINGTON, MN 55438

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PHOTOS OF DC TALK ON THE INSIDE COVER BY LOUIS DELUCA
DESIGN BY THURBER CREATIVE SERVICES, TULSA, OKLAHOMA

OVER 1.4 MILLION IN PRINT

THIS EDITION PUBLISHED 2014
ISBN 978-0-7642-1202-4

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Library of Congress has catalogued the original edition as follows:

Jesus freaks : stories of those who stood for Jesus : the ultimate Jesus freaks / by DC Talk and the Voice of the Martyrs.
p. cm.

Folded map on p.[3] of cover.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57778-072-8 (pbk. with flaps)

1. Persecution—History. 2. Christian martyrs—History. I. DC Talk (Musical group) II. Voice of the Martyrs (Organization)
BR1604.2 .J47 1999
272'.9—dc21

00688038



mar·tyr (mär' ter) n. [< from the Greek word for "witness"]

- 1) One who chooses to suffer death rather than to deny Jesus Christ or His work.
- 2) One who bears testimony to the truth of what he has seen or heard or knows, as in a witness in a court of justice.
- 3) One who sacrifices something very important to further the kingdom of God.
- 4) One who endures severe or constant suffering for their Christian witness.
- 5) A Jesus Freak.

It is said that there are more Christian martyrs today than there were in 100 AD – in the days of the Roman Empire. According to a study done at Regent University, there were close to 156,000 Christians martyred around the world in 1998. An estimated 164,000 will be martyred in 1999.



Yes, I
in God

...



Yes, I Believe in God

She was 17 years old. He stood glaring at her, his weapon before her face.

“Do you believe in God?”

She paused. It was a life-or-death question. “Yes, I believe in God.”

“Why?” asked her executioner. But he never gave her the chance to respond.

The teenage girl lay dead at his feet.

This scene could have happened in the Roman coliseum. It could have happened in the Middle Ages. And it could have happened in any number of countries around the world today. People are being imprisoned, tortured, and killed every day because they refuse to deny the name of Jesus.

This particular story, though, did not happen in ancient times, nor in Vietnam, Pakistan, or Romania. It happened at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, on April 20, 1999.

Do you believe in Jesus?

Why?

He knelt praying in the middle of the night in a garden where He and His friends often went. He had told His friends, “Pray that you don’t fall into temptation.” His prayer was, “Father, if You are willing, let this cup pass from Me. But if this must happen, I will obey Your will.” And then He

...



prayed more earnestly. His sweat became as great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Soon soldiers came to take Him. He was betrayed by a best friend into their hands. The gospel of John tells us that the guards asked for "Jesus of Nazareth." When He answered, "I am He," they were knocked to the ground by the power of His confession. Peter, another friend, tried to rescue Him by attacking one of the high priest's servants and cutting off his ear. But Jesus rebuked Peter for his action, healed the servant's ear, and submitted Himself to the soldiers. He could have easily escaped, but He chose to be obedient to His Father's will.

He was taken before the high priest, where He was questioned and beaten. Then He was sent before the local governor to be tried. The priests demanded that He be crucified because He had declared He was God. He was questioned again, but the governor could find no guilt in Him. Still, the others called for His crucifixion. The governor sent Him out to be whipped, hoping to appease the priests.

The rest of the morning He was whipped and beaten beyond recognition. A robe was placed over His bleeding back, left until the lacerations dried to the cloth, and then it was ripped from His shoulders, reopening all of the wounds. Then they draped it over Him to begin the process again. They mocked Him as king of the Jews and made a crown of one-inch thorns, forcing it onto His head until the blood covered His face.

Again He was brought before the governor. This time he didn't ask the Pharisees and Sadducees, but he put it to the people, hoping they would show mercy on this innocent man. But the crowd called back, "Crucify Him! Crucify



Him!” The governor washed his hands of the matter and turned Jesus of Nazareth over to the Roman guards for execution.

Jesus bore the weight of His own cross upon the torn flesh of His back and shoulders as He stumbled up the hill outside of the city. He was then nailed to that cross, raised up for all to see, and left there to die. The book of Matthew tells us He could have called twelve legions of angels to free Himself, but He didn’t. He knew His sacrifice would pay the price for all mankind to be set free from sin and have the right to stand with God.

He was buried in a borrowed tomb, but didn’t stay there long. On the third day He was resurrected from the dead, the keys of hell and death in His hands. He had paved the way for us to be born again, to become children of God, and to live forever with Him.

Immediately following His death, His friends and disciples were greatly afraid and hid. But after His resurrection, Jesus came and visited them, comforting and encouraging them. After He ascended to heaven, on the day of Pentecost, He gave them the Holy Spirit. A new boldness rose up within them. Jerusalem saw them convert three thousand on the first day. Then they spread to the corners of the earth to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, no longer afraid. Every one of them except John was executed for proclaiming the name of Jesus. They never denied His name again.

Heroes. Brave men and women who lay down their lives for someone else.



The dying lieutenant turns to the young soldier for whom he has sacrificed his life. With his last breath he says, "Earn this."

The science officer exposes himself to excessive radiation to fix the ship, killing himself, but saving the lives of everyone else on board.

The oil driller on an asteroid headed for earth tears the air hose from the younger man's spacesuit, leaving him helpless and forcing him to stay behind on the shuttle. He then triggers the atomic bomb that splits the meteor, sacrificing his own life, but saving the world.

Our culture understands heroism. But we don't understand martyrs.

Most of the martyrs in this book could have saved their own lives if they had been willing to deny Jesus Christ. We wonder, "Why didn't they just say they weren't Christians and live?" or "Couldn't they just keep silent about their faith?"

Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay his life down for his friends."

In ways that aren't always obvious, these martyrs — these Jesus Freaks — have heroically laid down their lives for us.

Why Did They Have to Die?

Standing before King Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego proclaimed, "We do not need to defend ourselves to you. If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from the furnace. He will save us from your power, O king. But even if God

does not save us, we want you, O king, to know this: We will not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:16-18 NCV).

Live or die, they would not deny their faith.

In the last chapter of John, Jesus told Peter that he would die a martyr's death someday. When Peter saw John standing behind Jesus, he asked, "Master, what's going to happen to him?"

Jesus said, "If I want him to live until I come again, what's that to you? You — follow me." (John 21:22 THE MESSAGE.)

The purpose of this book is not to try to explain away the deaths of the martyrs, but to honor their conviction, commitment, and faith — and to build yours. Each of us must follow Jesus for ourselves. You may never have to face the decision of whether or not to die for your faith, but every day you face the decision of whether or not you will live for it.

What About the Persecutors?

Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44 NIV). On the cross He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34 NKJV).

As you read the stories in this book, you will also see a recurring theme: These men and women of God were more concerned with saving their torturers than their own lives. God has not called us to hate those who do evil, but to pray for them and bring them into His family as our brothers and sisters.



Seeing It God's Way

Some deaths seem senseless — but God sees things differently than we do. As Tertullian, a Christian historian said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Some have been tortured because they refused to betray those who worked with them.

Some have stood firm, knowing that if they gave in — even a little — it would undermine the faith of many.

Some refused to be quiet because they realized their responsibility to tell the godless men around them of God’s love so they too could be saved.

Some have simply been willing to lay down their lives for the One who laid down His life for them.

**We shall not end our lives in the fire, but
make a change for a better life.**

Julius Palmer
Burned at the stake in England
1556

**This is the end. For me, the beginning
of life.**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Hung in Germany, 1945

**For to me, living is for Christ, and dying
is even better.**

Paul the Apostle
Beheaded in Rome, 65 AD

Heroic acts are often devastating, and there is a time for grief. But we must move on to discover the secret of the martyrs in this book. These believers were absolutely sure of eternal life. They were convinced that they were

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*not ending their lives but exchanging their lives on earth
for a life with their Lord in heaven.*

*Throughout history, many have died so you could
experience the faith and freedoms you enjoy today.*

*You too can choose to stand strong. God will honor you
and you will make a real difference in your world.*

Learn about these martyrs.

Be encouraged by their heroic lives.

And make your life count!



Here are their

...



stories:

**Remember the Lord's people
who are in jail and be concerned for them.
Don't forget those who are suffering,
but imagine that you are there
with them.**

Hebrews 13:3 CEV



The First Jesus Freak

Stephen
Jerusalem, Israel
34 AD

Across the courtroom, the young man on trial continued preaching. The jury fidgeted nervously as he told of their religious heritage and forefathers. What did Abraham and Moses have to do with this Jesus? Another young man in the audience, about the same age as the defendant, seemed not to be listening. His mind was already made up on the matter of this Jesus follower. The crowd of Jewish leaders, however, grew more agitated at every word from the young defendant.

Suddenly the preacher turned to the audience. "You stubborn and hardheaded people! You're always fighting against the Holy Spirit, just like your ancestors did. They killed the prophets who told about the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have turned against Him and killed Him. You have received the law of God, but you have not kept it."

When the crowd heard this, they were even more furious, but the defendant ignored their growing anger. His face glowed like that of an angel, and he stopped talking and pointed to the ceiling. "Look! I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

This was too much. Yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city to stone him. He continued preaching all the way.

The young man who had been in the audience, one Saul of Tarsus, followed after them. He stood a short distance away from the defendant, looking steadily at the sky as the



mob grew larger. The cries grew more heated now. A man handed Saul his coat, then stooped to pick up a stone as though waiting for a signal from Saul. Saul lowered his gaze, then looked directly into the man's eyes and nodded. It was time to silence the young preacher.

Stephen, the defendant, continued despite the crowd's jeers, because the Man he was telling them about was so important to him. He couldn't stop talking about Him. Several more men had now removed their coats, handed them to Saul, and began gathering rocks, many of them so large that the men had to lift them with two hands.

"This blasphemer must be dealt with!"

"He speaks against Moses!"

"We don't want to hear about your Jesus anymore!"

A rock sailed past Stephen's head. He stopped speaking long enough to duck it, dazed for a moment, then stood to continue. The second rock caught him near his temple, and he fell to his knees. Another hit his shoulder. Then there were too many to count.

"No more Jesus talk!"

"Let this be a lesson to all who would proclaim this Jesus!"

Another stone found its mark. Then another. He couldn't open his eyes for the sting of the blood. His clothes were torn by the blows and blood dripped freely from the tatters. He began to pray, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he scanned the crowd until his eyes locked with those of the young man who held a bundle of coats. "And Lord," he continued, "do not hold this sin against them."

When he said those words, Stephen died.





Slowly men gathered their coats from young Saul, who was soon alone with the body of the young preacher. Saul had come to Jerusalem to help silence this growing craze about Jesus of Nazareth. Despite his hatred, he could not shake the young man's words and how fearlessly he had faced death. He stood staring at the body of the first martyr for this Jesus. The glow that had so angered Saul was still on the young man's face. He had seen it as the smug pride of a heretic, but could it have been something else? He quenched the thought and turned away, more determined than ever to crush this Jesus movement.



Saul did not persecute men like Stephen for much longer. One day soon after, on his way to Damascus to imprison more believers, he saw Jesus. From that encounter he later became Paul, the first Christian missionary, who traveled everywhere proclaiming the name of Jesus. He eventually wrote a good part of the New Testament.

It started with a seed placed in his heart by a young man full of faith, grace, and power — a Jesus Freak who could not stop telling people about Jesus, even if it meant his life.



Walled In

Wrunken

Roneses, Flanders

1500s

"I found one!" The Inquisitor held up the forbidden book as he called to his assistant. "Bring in the mayor and his family. Someone is studying the Bible in this house!"

In the 16th century, Philip II sent the Duke of Alba to Flanders to stamp out the Protestants who insisted on reading the Scriptures in their own language. Anyone found studying the Bible was hanged, drowned, torn in pieces, or burned alive at the stake.

The Inquisitors had found the Bible while inspecting the house of the Mayor of Brugge. One by one, family members were questioned, but everyone claimed they knew nothing about how the Bible got to their house.

Finally the officials asked the young maid-servant, Wrunken, who boldly declared, "I am reading it!"

The mayor, knowing the penalty for studying the Bible, tried to defend her, saying, "Oh, no, she only owns it. She doesn't ever read from it."

But Wrunken chose not to be defended by a lie. "This book is mine. I am reading from it, and it is more precious to me than anything!"

She was sentenced to die by suffocation. A place would be hollowed in the city wall, she would be tied in it, and the opening would be bricked over.



On the day of her execution, as she stood by the wall, an official tried to get her to change her mind, saying, “So young and beautiful — and yet to die.”

Wrunken replied, “My Savior died for me. I will also die for Him.”

As the bricks were laid higher and higher, she was warned again. “You will suffocate and die in here!”

“I will be with Jesus,” she answered.

Finally, the wall was finished, except for the one brick that would cover her face. For the last time, the official tried to persuade her. “Repent — just say the word and you will go free.”

But Wrunken refused, saying instead, “O Lord, forgive my murderers.”

The brick was put in place. Many years later, her bones were removed from the wall and buried in the cemetery of Brugge.



Wrunken trusted her life to Jesus, knowing that the end of her life on earth was not the end of her life.

So we always have courage. We know that while we live in this body, we are away from the Lord. We live by what we believe, not by what we can see... We really want to be away from this body and be at home with the Lord.

Our only goal is to please God whether we live here or there.

Paul the Apostle
Martyred in Rome, 65 AD
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-9 NCV)



No Longer Doubting

Thomas
Jerusalem, Israel
34 AD

Thomas knocked on the door of the upper room with the secret knock. It was immediately opened. He stepped inside and shut the door behind him. He was suddenly surrounded by his friends who were all talking at once. It was impossible to understand any of them!

"Thomas! Thomas! What Mary Magdalene said was true. He is alive!"

"Thomas, we've seen Him."

Thomas waved his hands, "Shhhh! I can't listen to you all at once! Peter, what has happened?"

"Thomas, we saw Jesus. He stood right here in this room with us. He talked to us."

Thomas frowned. "Peter, we've all been under a lot of stress. We haven't really slept since Jesus died. You must be imagining things."

"All of us imagining the same thing at the same time? I tell you, we saw Him! He walked right through the locked door."

"He walked through the locked door?" Thomas asked.

Everyone nodded.

"That explains it. It was a ghost! You didn't see Jesus, you saw a ghost."

"Thomas, we know we saw the Master! He showed us the wounds in His hands and His side. Our hearts could feel it was really Him."

■ ■ ■



Mary spoke up, "Oh, Thomas, if you'd have been here you'd know it was Him."

Thomas shook his head. "Did any of you touch Him? No. Then you can't know whether or not it was just a ghost. Believe what you want. But unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it."

A week later, Thomas was gathered with the rest of the disciples in the house with the doors locked. Suddenly Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace to you!"

Jesus focused His attention on Thomas. "Take your finger and examine My hands. Take your hand and stick it in My side. Don't be unbelieving. Believe."

Thomas fell to his knees. He didn't have to touch the wounds. He knew it was Jesus. He cried out, "My Master! My God!"

Jesus smiled, "So, you believe because you've seen with your own eyes. Good! But better blessings are in store for those who believe without seeing."

Thomas never doubted Jesus again!

Later, when the disciples traveled throughout the known world to preach the Gospel, Thomas was chosen to go to India and North Africa. Although he dreaded living among these savage tribes, God strengthened him, and he was able to convert many in these countries.

Around 70 AD, he went to Calamina, India, where the people worshipped an image of the sun. Through the power of God, Thomas destroyed the image and put a stop to their idolatry.



The sun god's priests were furious. They accused him before their king, who sentenced him to be tortured with red-hot metal plates and then thrown into a glowing furnace.

To the amazement of all, the fire did not hurt Thomas — he was still alive in the midst of the furnace! When the priests saw this, they were so angry, they threw spears and javelins into the furnace at him. One of the spears pierced his side. He fell there dead.



Real followers of God know Jesus. Though they may not have seen Him with their eyes, they have felt His power, love, and joy in their lives. He is the Living Word and is so real to them that they would never deny Him, no matter the cost.



"Employ Your Whole Power Upon Me!"

Probius

Roman Empire

circa 250 AD

Probius was whipped until the blood flowed, then laden with chains and thrown into prison. A few days later, he was brought out and commanded to sacrifice to the heathen gods. He knew that he would be tortured and killed if he refused. Still he courageously said:

"I come better prepared than before, for what I have suffered has only strengthened me in my resolution. Employ your whole power upon me, and you shall find that neither you, nor the Emperor, nor the gods you serve, nor even the devil, who is your father, shall compel me to worship idols."

Probius was sent back to further tortures and eventual death by the sword.



*You never know how much you really believe
anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of
life and death to you.*

C. S. Lewis



A Song for the Lord

John Denley

England

1555

One day, on the way to visit some friends, John Denley was stopped and searched by the authorities, who found his written confession of faith. Denley believed the Church was built upon the apostles and prophets, with Christ as its head, and that the present state church, the Church of England, was not part of this true Church. In his time, many of its teachings were not according to the Bible.

For this he was turned over to a local government official, who turned him over to the bishop for questioning. Denley would not back down from his statement of faith, so he was condemned to die and turned over to the sheriff.

Within six weeks, he was sent to the stake to be burned. When they lit the wood beneath him, Denley showed no fear. He cheerfully sang a psalm as the flames rose around him. One of his tormentors picked up a piece of wood and threw it at him, hitting him in the face. He hoped to anger or silence Denley, but Denley only responded, "Truly, you have spoiled a good old song." Then he spread his arms again and continued singing until he died.



*Jesus said that when we are mocked and persecuted
because we are His followers that we can be happy about it:*



“Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.”

Jesus

(MATTHEW 5:12 NLT)



from this day forward...

I will make a difference.
Jesus, I thank You that You suffered
 and died for me on the cross to pay for my sins.

Father, I thank You that You raised Jesus
 from the dead to be my living Lord and Savior.
 Holy Spirit, I thank You that You will lead me
 to do the right thing and change my world.

Today, Lord, I want to make You a promise.
I will not be ashamed of Your name
 or Your Gospel.

I will do what I can for those who are
 persecuted and pray for them.

I will look enemies in the eye and love
 them with Your love. I will pray for them and
 love them — no matter what the
 consequences.

I will follow Your voice wherever You lead
 me, unafraid, for I know You will be with me.

If I should stumble, if I fall, if I should
 deny Your name, if I should feel guilty that I
 did not pray or forgot to do something
 You've asked me to do,

I will not quit. I will not wallow
 in guilt. I will turn back to You, confess my sin,
 and do what You called me to do, because that is
 why You died for me.

I will stand with You
 and my brothers and sisters around the world,
 because no matter what happens, no
 matter what I face or how it looks, in the end, we
 will be victorious — we will inherit eternity and
 heaven with You. I can do nothing else, because

...I am a Jesus Freak.

 SIGNATURE

 DAY