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John And Betty Stam Missionary Martyrs

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A Legacy of Faith: The Story of John and Betty Stam, Missionary Martyrs

The story of John and Betty Stam is one of the most profound and challenging narratives in modern Christian history. Their brief but impactful lives, culminating in a heroic death, continue to inspire countless believers around the world. The tale of these John and Betty Stam missionary martyrs is not merely a story of tragedy; it is a powerful testament to unshakeable faith, radical obedience, and the ultimate price of discipleship. In an age often characterized by comfort and convenience, the Stams' willingness to sacrifice everything for the Gospel stands as a stark and compelling reminder of the cost of following Christ. This article delves into their background, their mission, the dramatic events of their capture and execution, and the enduring legacy they left behind for the global church.

The Early Lives of John and Betty Stam

John Stam: A Heart for China from an Early Age

John Cornelius Stam was born on January 29, 1907, in Paterson, New Jersey. Raised in a devout Christian home, John felt a clear calling to missionary service, specifically to China, from a very young age. He was deeply influenced by the stories of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission. After completing his studies at Moody Bible Institute, he felt an even stronger conviction to join the very mission that had captured his imagination. He was accepted by the China Inland Mission (CIM) in 1931 and sailed for China, arriving in Shanghai in November of that year. His initial years were spent learning the Chinese language and culture in Anhui province, where his dedication and gentle spirit quickly endeared him to the local people.

Betty Scott Stam: A Legacy of Bold Faith

Elisabeth "Betty" Scott was born on February 22, 1906, in Zhejiang, China, to missionary parents serving with the Presbyterian mission. Growing up in China gave Betty a unique perspective on cross-cultural ministry. She was fluent in Chinese and possessed a deep, instinctual love for the Chinese people. After her family returned to the United States, Betty studied at Moody Bible Institute, where she and John met. Their courtship was built on a shared vision of serving Christ in China. Betty was known for her vibrant faith, her intense devotion to Scripture, and her poetic spirit. She often wrote about the beauty of surrendering all to God, a theme that would become profoundly prophetic. She joined the CIM and returned to China in 1932.

Marriage and Mission

John and Betty were married on October 25, 1932, in Shanghai. Their wedding was a simple affair, reflecting their focus on the work ahead rather than worldly grandeur. They were assigned to a remote region in Anhui province, where the gospel had only recently been introduced. The area was volatile. Political instability was rampant due to the growing power of the Communist Red Army, which was violently opposed to Western influence and Christianity. Despite the danger, John and Betty were resolute. They saw their presence not as a

political statement but as a spiritual mandate. In October 1933, Betty gave birth to their daughter, Helen Priscilla. Amidst the chaos, their little family of three represented a beacon of God's love in a hostile environment.

The Capture: A Test of Conviction

In early December 1934, the situation in Anhui deteriorated rapidly. Communist bandits, often led by radicalized peasants, were sweeping through the countryside, targeting Western missionaries as symbols of imperialism. On December 6, while John was away checking on another mission station, the village of Tsingteh was raided. Betty, clutching her infant daughter, was taken captive. When John returned and learned of her capture, he had the opportunity to escape into the mountains. However, he refused to abandon his wife and child. He intentionally followed the trail of the bandits and surrendered himself, demanding to be taken to his family. This act of self-sacrificial love is one of the most defining moments in the story of the John and Betty Stam missionary martyrs. The bandits, surprised by his boldness, obliged, and the family was reunited in captivity.

Imprisonment and Steadfastness

John and Betty spent several days in miserable conditions, tied up and marched through the cold, rugged terrain. Eyewitness accounts from locals who saw them during this time reported that they appeared calm, praying and singing hymns. They were not defiant in an aggressive way, but they were utterly unbroken in spirit. The bandits demanded money and a ransom, but John and Betty had very little material wealth. More importantly, they refused to deny their faith or denounce their missionary work. Their simple, steadfast refusal to compromise was a direct challenge to the authority of their captors. They had every reason to be terrified, yet their composure was a powerful sermon in itself. They spent their final hours encouraging each other with Scripture, fully aware of what was likely to come.

The Martyrdom: Faithful Unto Death

On the morning of December 8, 1934, John and Betty Stam were led to a hillside outside the town of Miao Sheao. The bandits, frustrated by the lack of ransom and enraged by the missionaries' unyielding faith, decided to execute them. John was beheaded first. Betty was offered a final chance to renounce Christ and live. She refused. She knelt beside her husband's body, and she too was beheaded. Their bodies were left on the hillside as a warning to others. Miraculously, their infant daughter, Helen, was not killed. A Chinese Christian nurse who had been captured with them grabbed the baby and fled into the countryside. She managed to keep the child safe and eventually handed her over to other missionaries. The news of the Stams' death shocked the world, but it also ignited a wave of prayer and renewed commitment to missions.

The Enduring Legacy of the Stams

Inspiration for Missions

The story of the John and Betty Stam missionary martyrs did not end with their deaths. Their martyrdom became a catalyst for missionary fervor in the early 20th century. Their story was told in churches across the West, challenging young people to consider a life of radical service. The fact that they went to their deaths singing hymns and quoting Scripture gave them a near-legendary status. Their sacrifice reminded the global church that the Gospel still required everything. Many missionaries who served in China after the Stams cited their example as a source of strength and inspiration.

The Power of a Written Testimony

Just before her capture, Betty wrote a poem that has become synonymous with their story. The poem, titled **"My Reason"**, contains the famous lines: *"So this is what I am for... to live or die for Him."* This simple yet profound poem was found among her belongings after her death. It served as a prophetic declaration of her

faith. The poem and John's letters, filled with calm assurance and trust in God, were compiled and published in a book titled *The Triumph of John and Betty Stam*. This book has been read by millions and continues to be a source of spiritual strength, demonstrating that dying for Christ is not a tragedy but a victory.

Impact on Their Survivors

Their daughter, Helen Priscilla Stam, was raised by her grandparents in the United States. She grew up knowing that her parents loved God more than life itself. Later in life, Helen married a man named Robert A. Gesswein, and the couple entered ministry. Helen often spoke of her parents, not with bitterness, but with profound gratitude for the spiritual heritage they left her. The story of the Stam family is a powerful example of how faith can be passed down through generations, even in the face of unimaginable loss. The ultimate legacy of the John and Betty Stam missionary martyrs is not just their death, but the life of faith that it continues to produce.

Lessons for Today's Believers

The Cost of Discipleship

In a world where Christianity is often associated with comfort, prosperity, and safety, the Stams' story is a radical corrective. They remind us that following Christ is not a guarantee of a long, easy life. Jesus Himself said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The Stams took this command literally. Their story challenges modern believers to examine their own level of commitment. Are we willing to sacrifice comfort, reputation, or even our lives for the sake of the Gospel? The question is uncomfortable, but it is necessary.

Faith in the Face of Evil

John and Betty Stam did not die because they failed; they died because they refused to compromise. In a world that often demands we bend our convictions for safety, their example calls for a different kind of bravery. They faced evil not with weapons or political power, but with the love of Christ and the hope of resurrection. Their deaths were not a waste. They were a seed planted in the soil of China. The church in China today, which has grown tremendously despite persecution, owes a debt to the blood of martyrs like the Stams. Their faith is a testament to the truth that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

Conclusion

The story of John and Betty Stam is a beacon of light in a dark world. As missionary martyrs, they lived a life of purpose and died a death of profound meaning. They did not seek martyrdom, but they did not flee from it when it came. Their story is not ancient history; it is a living testimony that challenges, inspires, and transforms. The legacy of the **John And Betty Stam Missionary Martyrs** reminds us that the greatest love is to lay down one's life for one's friends, and for the One who died for all. Their short lives, cut down by hatred, have blossomed into an eternal impact that continues to call men and women to a deeper, more radical faith. They ran their race with endurance and won the crown of life.

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