Introduction

“Let’s kill this white man. He brings the infamy and rotten behavior of the white man with all the evils of the West! Let’s do to him what we did to that other missionary last month,” cried the sheikh in the local dialect. That is when I realized that Jerald was in big trouble. They were going to kill him before my very eyes. I didn’t have time to warn him. I was stuck and didn’t know what to do, but silently I prayed for a miraculous divine intervention. But let me start from the very beginning.

On an island in ocean waters where pirates abound lives a dedicated group of believers in Isa (Jesus). The Island has no police, no vehicles, no hospitals, and no crime. Oh, and by the way, there is no water either. All water is either harvested rain water or ferried by dugout canoes from the mainland bore holes. On the island itself, all the boreholes have only yielded salty water. Hence the 100,000 people on the island depend entirely on Mother Nature to provide water. Another interesting thing about the island is that no outsiders are allowed to stay there. Visitors can come and go as tourists, but cannot live there. Everyone knows everyone on the island and somehow they are all related to each other. The 100 percent Sunni Muslim populace takes pride in their religious heritage and guards it jealously.
A month before Jerald arrived, an American missionary masquerading as a relief and development consultant conducted a survey to determine how to help the island inhabitants. After being cautiously accepted he was relating quite well with the inhabitants until one day he was caught showing the Jesus film on his battery powered lap top. His lap top was confiscated and destroyed, his camera was thrown into the ocean, and then he was beheaded as an example of what would happen to any kaffir (foreigner) coming to spoil the island’s Islamic heritage.

This was all unknown to Jerald as he joined me on a trip to the island to visit the believers there. As soon as the island elders saw him, they asked us to go to one of the Madrasa classrooms. There they discussed how to behead this white man who had the audacity to come to the island. “The nerve of these Christians, don’t they ever learn? This one [Jerald] will die like a filthy pig; for all Americans eat pig, which we all know is haram [unclean food], and they are as filthy as pigs. Look at their language, alcohol, and immorality.” On and on they continued talking in the local dialect. I could only pray and hope for divine intervention.

That was when God instantly answered my prayer. One of the Ustadhs, the Masjid Secretary to the largest mosque on the island, spoke up.

“If this man is sent as a servant of Allah (SWT) to teach us and we murder him, we invite Allah’s wrath on ourselves and our children. Let’s do a proper evaluation before we make any hasty decisions. After all, didn’t Muhammad (ASA) work with non-Muslim believers so long as they worshipped the one true God?”

This made a lot of sense, so all agreed. Turning to me they asked who Jerald was. I boldly declared that Jerald was a servant of Allah with a message to declare to the island’s inhabitants.

To prove the verity of my claims, the wise old patriarch and sheikh of the island picked up an Arabic Qur’an. He thrust it at Jerald and asked me to tell him to share a thought from it. I obliged and told Jerald to share from the Qur’an. Since many understood English (but were speaking in the local dialect) I couldn’t alert Jerald that this sharing was a major test—probably the biggest test he had ever faced. It was a matter of life and death. If he passed the test he would live to tell the story, but if he failed the test he would be beheaded and I would have to convey the news of his death to his dear wife and family, so I kept praying.

Jerald nonchalantly picked up the tattered old Arabic Qur’an. He turned it from side to side. Then he started in English and I translated in the local dialect. The conversation went something like this.
“My fellow believers in Allah—the only one and true God, it is a privilege for me to share from this noble book—God’s word to mankind. But before doing so, I want to castigate you. How can you allow God’s book to be so tattered and ragged with the covers fallen off? Is that how you take care of God’s Book? Do you do the same with your property, let’s say your bank book, your passports, your identity cards, certificates, diplomas, or marriage certificates? If you take good care of your personal property, why not do even better for God’s sacred writings? You should be ashamed of yourselves!”

The people looked at one another in dismay. What was this man saying? He was actually right. I held my breath. What was Jerald doing? Was he insulting his hosts? Was that wisdom or folly? If he only knew that his life was hanging in the balance, but Jerald continued unconcerned with their reaction.

“Let’s turn to sura Al Baqara and ayah 24.” He opened the Qur’an and proceeded to read in perfect Arabic. Then he went on to read several more verses and expound on them. His message was to encourage all of us to be diligent in our faith. He made a clear distinction between being religious and being spiritual. One was a pattern of habit with a lifeless form practiced over time, while the other was a dynamic vibrant life of faith with eternal rewards.

The sheikhs looked around the group. Truly this was a servant of Allah sent to give a critical message to them. Their Qur’anic recitations, 5 salats a day, fasting, alms, zakat and all were truly lifeless. Only a dynamic relationship with the living and only true God would be of any use to any of them.

After the homily, Jerald turned to me and asked me to ask them to react to what he had shared. Each one took turns to express appreciation to this stranger that had come to pass God’s tidings to them. They had taken God’s rebuke via his servant Jerald very well. They wanted him to pray for them that they would live up to the standards he had espoused and would live a true life of faith.

Jerald consented. He led them first in reciting Al Fath, the complete first book of the noble Qur’an in Arabic with Jerald taking the lead. He then prayed for them and the island. He particularly prayed that the young people growing up in this wicked generation would not be polluted by the evils espoused by the Western media.

The sheikhs asked if he could return again and speak in the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan? He would come as a guest of the island. Could they slaughter a bull for him to celebrate God’s goodness in sending his servant to warn them? Could he stay over for the night?

The questions came on and on, but unfortunately we had to decline most
of the requests since we needed to get back to the mainland before dark. There is no electricity in that place and the canoes and motor boats had no lights on them. We dared not cross the ocean to the mainland in the darkness in the shark infested waters.

Jerald survived. We made it out on time and arrived back to the coastal city in one piece. Only then did I share with Jerald what had transpired. In Jerald’s modest humility he only thanked the good Lord for continuing to be faithful to him. I learned my lesson, too: “Trust the Lord your God with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths” (Prov 3:5). God had just done that for Jerald, and I knew that God would do the same for me. This incident has always encouraged me when I am faced with the challenges of life, for our God is faithful and totally reliable.

Truly, Allah Aqbar! (God is great).

Postscript: As a result of that incident the work has grown on the island. The man who wanted to lynch Jerald is now the chairman of a group of believers on that island. There are now more than 250 people who believe in Isa. Jerald never had the time to return to see the fruit of his labor. But I have no doubt that in eternity he will meet many from the island and other places who will be in heaven due to his work. I honor Jerald for being used of the Lord to encourage and direct creative ministries in the field.