

# 4 CORNERS



## TWO DOORS



**T**he month of July is always hot and humid in this part of Turkey, but today seemed hotter than usual. I was on my way back home from church, reflecting as I walked on how wonderful it was to be part of the world-wide church and to be privileged to meet week by week with my brethren in this land where to be a Christian is not always easy.

As usual the road was crowded – people jostling each other for space, street sellers calling out their wares, children pleading with you to buy trinkets off them, the odd beggar pulling at your heartstrings. It was with a sense of relief that I turned off into a side street that marked the threshold of ‘my’ neighbourhood. On these narrow cobbled streets the closeness of the buildings provides welcome shade. Here, the eyes that stare at me are those that know me to be the foreign teacher – eyes that, though still curious, have accepted

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► me as belonging to this neighbourhood, to this community.

I reached the gate of our building, ducking under the overhanging branches of a flowering tree. Two of my neighbours greeted me at the gate in typical Turkish fashion:

‘Where have you come from, my daughter?’

‘I have come from church, my big sister’.

‘May God accept your prayers. You didn’t forget to pray for our sister, did you?’

As I kissed them I considered that it must be hard never to know if your prayers were acceptable to God. What a wonderful thing it is to be able to pray to our Heavenly Father in Jesus’ name, knowing that for his sake we are totally accepted by him. But the issue would have to be addressed another time as they were obviously on their way out.

I progressed across the front yard and up the steps towards the door of the building. Another group of neighbours were in the side garden, drinking tea in the shade of the vine. They called to me to join them and I was soon sipping tea too, surrounded by the kindly faces of this dear family. I looked round at them all – Yasemin’s<sup>1</sup> mother with her gentle face framed by the traditional headscarf; Yasemin’s husband, Hasan, whose face was worn with sorrow, his own mother having passed away less than a week earlier; Yasemin herself, carefully watching the tea glasses lest any should need refilling; sister Zubedeh, a typical modern Turk, not afraid to break away from the traditional ways of dressing still adhered to by her mother.

The days of entertaining the mourners were over and the family was preparing

to return to work the next day. Hasan turned to me, his eyes still red with tears. ‘I had a dream the other night,’ he said. ‘I dreamt I died too. The noise of the mourners was so loud and they wouldn’t stop and leave me in peace. In my dream I came to the *hamam*<sup>2</sup> and to the point where there are the two doors, one for the men and the other for the women. But I knew that these were the doors of heaven and hell.’

With a sad smile he added, ‘I awoke before I found out which door I would go through. But it doesn’t matter. God knows which is my door, and that is enough.’

My reply was to tell him that we can know before we die which door we will go through. I spoke of the two roads and the two gates of Matthew 7, and of the fact that we must make sure we are on the right road now.

‘But’, said Yasemin’s mother, ‘Don’t you Christians believe that all Muslims will go to hell anyway and that we cannot get to heaven?’ I said that the way to heaven is open to all who will believe in the Lord Jesus and repent before God and that this included people from every country.

The conversation moved across many related topics until Zubedeh asked: ‘We believe in the four Holy Books, including your Injil. So why can’t you believe in the Qur’an?’ ‘The Injil tells me that there will be no further revelation than that contained therein’, I replied. ‘If you, as you say, believe that the Injil is the Word of God, you too could not, on this basis, believe in the Qur’an.’ There followed the classic response which Muslim children are taught even at school, namely that the Injil has been changed and corrupted. But how could the great God allow his Word to be changed?

Yasemin, gentle as ever and not wanting anyone to be upset by the way the conversation was developing, interjected at this point. ‘We all respect and love each other. We are all children of Adam and so we are all the same. Our backgrounds are different, that’s all’. Turning to me she said, ‘If you had been born a Muslim as we were, you would not have been able to think differently’. I replied, ‘If I read and studied different ways I would be able to change.’

The expression on her face will long stay with me. It was a mixture of fear and concern. She then said, ‘We will never change and you will never change, but we can still love each other.’

I felt very sad as we hugged each other before I went up to my flat. Is it really impossible for them to change? No, not impossible. The God who has preserved his Word over so many centuries is also the God who calls people of all backgrounds to himself. And who can resist when he is calling? ■

**(The author is an English teacher in Turkey)**

<sup>1</sup>Names have been changed

<sup>2</sup>Turkish baths

