

Football Quarterback Penalized for Giving Glory to God

A high school quarterback was penalized recently for raising his right hand toward the sky to thank God after he scored a touchdown. The penalty may have cost his team the game. Football experts agreed that no penalty should have been called.

Will the player continue to praise God after touchdowns? "Without a doubt," he said.

In recent days we have noted that every Christian has a kingdom assignment, people we are called to influence for the gospel. We have seen the importance of understanding those we seek to serve and engaging them with God's love and word.

Now let's consider the courage necessary to stand for Jesus today.

When Paul came to Corinth, enemies of the gospel "opposed and reviled him" (Acts 18:6). In response, "the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you' (vs. 9-10). So "he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (v. 11). Your Father offers you the same assurance of his presence today (Matthew 28:20).

There is no doubt that opposition to the gospel is increasing in our day. There was a time when the church was central to society. Stores closed on Sunday; most people went to church, or at least said they did.

In recent decades, Christianity has moved from the cultural center to its periphery. Commerce is the same on Sunday as any

other day. Soccer practices regularly compete with worship services. But now we're seeing another shift: from peripheral to dangerous. Richard Dawkins calls religion "the root of all evil." Sam Harris proclaims that "science must destroy religion." (For more, see my "Respected to Irrelevant to Dangerous: Does Religion Poison Everything?")

We're seeing the result of this paradigm shift across our culture. Zoning laws increasingly work against churches. Employees are increasingly told they must keep silent about their faith at work. School officials are increasingly discriminating against Christian groups. With the advent of same-sex marriage, supporters of biblical marriage face unprecedented challenges to their religious liberty.

We may be entering a time when it is more difficult to stand for Jesus than ever before in American history. But God is still on His throne. And He still redeems and rewards the courage of His true followers.

During my first visit to Cuba, I told one of the pastors that I had been praying for persecution against his people to lessen. He asked me to stop. Seeing my puzzled expression, he explained that persecution was being used by God to purify the church and strengthen the resolve of true believers. Then he told me that many in Cuba were praying for persecution to increase against Christians in America, for the same reason.

When I started my doctoral dissertation, I wrote on an index card the words of Galatians 6:9, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up." That card got me through some tough days. When I went to East Malaysia as a summer missionary, my pastor gave me a devotional book inside which he had written the words, "The will of God never leads where the grace of God cannot sustain." That sentence got me through the jungles of Borneo.

Will you pay any price to serve Jesus today?