

To My Fellow Christian Conservatives: This Is No Time for a Pity Party

It is true that an ugly anti-Bible tide is rising in America. It is true that many conservative believers—in particular Christians—have been discriminated against, be it by the IRS or by the social media giants. And it is true that there is a growing hostility against our beliefs on university campuses and in places of business. I don't deny that for a moment. In fact, I have been documenting it for years.

But let's not wallow and complain as if we are helpless and defeated. Let's not throw a big "Woe is me" pity party. Such an attitude is unfitting for followers of Jesus the Lord.

To be clear, I believe we should continue to document abuses. We should continue to push back in the courts of law. We should continue to expose inequity. We should continue to confront intolerance. The last thing I'm advocating is retreat and defeat.

What I'm talking about here is our attitude. Do we have the attitude of overcomers or the attitude of complainers? Are we more focused on the very real opposition we are facing than on the (even more) real promises of God?

Earlier today, I was proofreading one of my chapters in a forthcoming book co-authored with New Testament scholar Craig Keener. The book is called *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-tribulation Rapture*, and it's due out next March.

For those unfamiliar with the concept of a "pre-tribulation rapture," it refers to a widely-held, contemporary-evangelical belief that Jesus will "rapture" the Church before a final

period of terrible suffering on the earth. That terrible period of time is called the Tribulation (or, at its worst, the Great Tribulation), a time of unprecedented pain and upheaval and wrath. It will be as if all hell breaks loose on the planet, and many Christians believe that Jesus will spare us from the worst of it, taking us safely to heaven until He returns in triumph.

There are many fine Christians who hold to this belief, including some of my dearest friends and co-workers. (Craig could say the same.) And so, it is not an area that we divide over. In fact, it's an area most of us hardly even debate.

But as I was responding to our editor today, reviewing my chapter on how we overcome, I was struck by the courageous mentality found throughout the New Testament writings. It is a mentality commonly found among persecuted Christians as well.

It's an outlook that says, "Whatever Satan or the world mean for evil, God will turn for good."

It's a mindset that thinks, "Go ahead and kill us. The faster you cut us down, the more quickly we will grow."

It's a mentality that says, "No matter what comes our way, no matter the cost of following Jesus, we are victorious in Him. We died with Him, and now we're risen with Him. Who can possibly hurt us?"

Both Craig and I have ministered among persecuted Christians in different parts of the world. Some of our friends or colleagues have been arrested and imprisoned. Others have been beaten or stoned. Some have been killed.

Yet among these precious brothers and sisters, you do not hear the voice of hopelessness. You do not witness the spirit of despair.

In the midst of the agony and mourning, there is a sense of

triumph. Sometimes there is downright joy.

In our new book, I tell the story of one my trips to India. (I've been there 25 times in the last 25 years.)

On one of those trips, I washed the feet of a martyr's widow whose husband I had commissioned to plant churches. (He was killed as a church planter.) To say it was deeply moving would be a massive understatement.

On that same trip, we also washed the feet of pastors who had been persecuted for preaching the gospel, one of them nearly beaten to death. He had won so many Hindus to the Lord that he was savagely attacked and lay in a coma for five days.

To make things even worse, in the hospital where he lay unconscious, a doctor had been bribed to kill him. But his family found out and rescued him, taking him out of the hospital while he was still in a coma, after which he gradually recovered at home.

Subsequently, he went back to the same area and began preaching again, winning to the Lord and baptizing the first man who had assaulted him, along with many others. He was then attacked once more and had to go into temporary hiding, but he was resolute in his desire to return and preach.

When I interviewed him through a translator, he showed no fear and considered it an honor to suffer for his Master, even bursting into song. We could learn something from this pastor!

I still remember vividly what happened on that day when we washed everyone's feet. (There were two martyrs' widows there, along with one of their teenage daughters, plus all the pastors.)

The music had been somber, and there were many tears being shed. But then, once we were done, the music suddenly changed, and in a moment, the men were jumping and dancing and leaping

and celebrating.

It is because they realized, "We have the privilege of being persecuted for righteousness! We have the honor of being treated like Jesus! What a high calling! What a joy!" It was really a sight to see.

Here in America, nothing that we have suffered for our righteous stands can be compared to what these precious believers have suffered. Yet they danced and sang and rejoiced because it was all for their Lord. And even though the Hindu government was against them, they knew their God was greater still.

Let us take hold of that joyful, overcoming spirit. It is the spirit of faith. It is the spirit of truth. It is the spirit that will prevail.