

Will 21st-Century Society Honor Christian Conscience or Destroy Our Livelihoods?

“This [suffering] will be your opportunity to bear witness” (Luke 21:13, ESV).

Good luck building any Christian tribe on an invitation to suffer. Western Christians are, generally speaking, bad at suffering. You can’t major in suffering at Bible college or seminary. Preachers are reticent to speak on it because people don’t want to hear about it.

God Works Through Defeat

Instead, we’d rather believe that faith is a stick and God is a piñata and if we swing hard enough, health and wealth will come pouring down upon us. We don’t want to hear that we have to “walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” and so we keep buying books and listening to teachers who promise to give us a map showing us how to walk around the valley of the shadow of death. We don’t want to embrace suffering. We want to avoid it.

God’s will, we are wrongly told, involves blessing. Yet we fail to accept that suffering for Jesus is a blessing.

Who or what we fear determines what we do and how we live. What are you fearful of? Rejection, criticism, mockery, conflict, hatred, loneliness, unemployment, poverty, a loss of status?

Pastor Doug Wilson once quipped that “a great reformation and revival ... will happen the same way the early Christians conquered Rome. Their program of conquest consisted largely of two elements—gospel preaching and being eaten by lions—a strategy that has not yet captured the imagination of the

contemporary church.”

Thrown to the Critics

Today we are more likely to get thrown to the critics rather than the lions. A number of high-profile cases around the world will indicate whether 21st-century society will honor the Christian’s conscience or destroy the Christian’s livelihood. At this point, a favorable outcome only seems likely in the sense that we serve a God who works through hardship and defeat.

In the western United States, we’ve heard about the florist in Washington and the photographers in Albuquerque—all dealing with lawsuits after declining to participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies. Those of us on this side of the pond may be less familiar with England’s Peter and Hazelmary Bull. Due to their Christian convictions, the elderly owners of a small bed-and-breakfast in Cornwall will only allow married couples to rent rooms with double beds.

This policy became a problem five years ago when the Bulls turned away a gay couple who responded with legal action. The case is now headed to the British Supreme Court, but too late to save the Chymorvah Hotel. The Independent reports the guesthouse went up for sale after vandalism and death threats started taking a toll on Peter and Hazelmary.

Thrust into the spotlight of public scrutiny (and scorn), the Bulls appeared on British national television to face a furious line of questioning from a pair of morning talk show hosts. Watch as this dear grandmother puts most evangelicals to shame with her gracious but courageous responses:

A Chance to Bear Witness

Somehow the myth has gotten around that if something is difficult or if we encounter opposition, it must not be God’s will. God’s will, we are wrongly told, involves blessing. Yet we fail to accept that suffering for Jesus is a blessing.

Through Christ, God identified with us and suffered for us in order to save us. In turn, we identify with him and suffer for Him in hopes of glorifying Him and sharing His salvation with others. Jesus tells His disciples to expect this kind of opportunity in opposition. In Luke 21:12–13, He says, “They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness.”

Christians will have more and more chances to “bear witness” through hardship in the coming years, I am certain. I praise God that Peter and Hazelmary Bull have provided an example of what faithful witness looks like in our context today. As Hazelmary said, “God demands that our faith doesn’t end at the kitchen door. He means for your faith to run in every corner of your life.”

Please pray for this couple and for the millions who will hear about Jesus through their story. And get used to hearing a lot more stories like it as the jack-booting intolerance of tolerance marches on.

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