

We Must Be Lions, Not Sheep

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Acts 4:18-20

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you."

Matthew 5:11-12

The 'prosperity gospel' has flourished in the Western world in recent years, promoting a life of happiness and tranquility, free from want and trouble, as a sign of God's blessing. This 'gospel' ignores the present-day persecution, imprisonment and martyrdom of faithful Christians worldwide.

Voice of the Martyrs, an organization founded by formerly-imprisoned missionaries to Romania, encourages and equips believers who live in areas where being a follower of Christ is socially discouraged or outlawed. Their website lists 23 countries that are hostile to Christians and 41 others where the practice of Christianity is restricted or illegal. Artur Pawlowski, a Canadian pastor, fears Canada might soon be added to this list.

Born in Poland during the Cold War, Pawlowski grew up in a town with World War II prison camp ruins; he remembers bullet holes in the walls of SS bunkers where he played as a child. His family emigrated first to Greece, then to Canada, in pursuit of freedom. He became a Canadian citizen in 2004 and almost immediately drew the attention of the Calgary government when he began a ministry of street preaching and feeding the homeless.

Since then, he has received 340 citations, been arrested 16 times and fought 100 court cases brought by the municipality. All of this is in direct contradiction of the Canadian Charter of Rights which expressly guarantees the fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion; of thought, belief, opinion and expression; of peaceful assembly; and of association.

He has risen to international prominence in the last two years for refusing to abide by social distancing, restrictions on gatherings and other so-called health measures required by local authorities, saying these are tactics of the Gestapo, not of a free society.

After settling in Calgary, Pawlowski found success as a businessman, complete with the status, wealth and accoutrements that the prosperity gospel often promotes. As he followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, he became involved with the Street Church of Calgary, ministering to drug addicts, prostitutes, and homeless people outside of government buildings and in downtown parks.

His first arrest in August 2006 earned him an overnight jail stay and charges of obstruction, trespassing and disturbing the peace for reading the Bible publicly; legal battles with the state nearly bankrupted him over the next ten years. Still, he felt called not only to keep ministering openly, but to stand in defiance of government encroachment on individual liberties guaranteed to all Canadian citizens—the very reason his family fled there from Poland.

This time of testing, while difficult, increased his reliance on God to provide for and keep him safe. Pawlowski now says it prepared him for 'something bigger': the Canadian response to the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. While most pastors complied with government orders to cease holding services and gathering to worship, the Street Church continued to meet in person and minister on the streets. Pawlowski was, by this time, accustomed to defying the rules of men to obey the commands of

God, and was unintimidated by threats of temporal consequences.

The arbitrary nature of the pandemic rules—allowing chain stores to remain open to hundreds of patrons, deeming liquor stores ‘essential’, all while prohibiting even small religious gatherings—compelled Pawlowski to resist the many attempts by the police to inspect or impede the ministry of Street Church.

A video recording of him expelling police from the church Passover service went viral during in April 2021; he yelled repeatedly “Gestapo is not allowed here. Get out of this property!” He has been arrested multiple times since then, served 51 days in prison (part of that in solitary confinement, part in a terrorist holding facility) and been under house arrest since last spring.

He is currently awaiting sentencing for preaching at the trucker convoy that blocked the US/Alberta border in Coutts last year in protest of vaccine mandates.

A 2013 YouTube documentary entitled “Street Advocate” details the birth of his son Nathaniel in 2000. His lungs and heart were not fully developed, properly situated or functioning, and doctors encouraged the Pawloskis to remove him from life support.

After days of asking God “why?”, Pawlowski suddenly understood Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

In that moment, he prayed for God to either heal or take his son. Hours later, the team of doctors reported that Nathaniel’s lungs and heart had inexplicably begun to function perfectly, even shifting into their proper places within his chest.

Pawlowski is not afraid of another possible jail term; he has

preached and led Bible studies for inmates each time he's been detained. He says God has never let him down: "I don't have to fear anything. My Jesus raises the dead."

He remains resolute, doing regular interviews with news outlets, exhorting others to peacefully resist the policies of totalitarianism that have become the 'new normal' in many countries in the Western world. He points to the solidarity movement, a peaceful but resolute protest of Communism in Poland, which spread to Central and Eastern Europe, eventually leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain.

"What kind of nation are we leaving to our children?" he asks. "We need to be lions, not sheep."

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