

“CONFRONTING CAESAR”

***“You will be dragged before kings and governors for My sake . . . Do not be anxious how you are to speak . . . for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”
Matthew 10:18-20***

From the prophets of the Old Testament to the Apostles in the New, not to mention countless others who remain unnamed in history, God’s people have always been called on to speak the truth to “The Powers That Be,” no matter what the cost. Whether it was John the Baptist confronting King Herod, Peter and his fellow disciples going toe-to-toe with the Sanhedrin, or Christians enduring three centuries of persecutions by the Roman Empire because they refused to say “Caesar is Lord,” there will always be conflict and confrontation with those wrongly wielding their power through earthly government.

The 20th Century bore stark testimony to totalitarian regimes slaughtering millions of Christians who would not bow the knee to Hitler, Stalin, Mao or the many other dictators who viewed the State (and themselves) as gods. Though these dictators are now dead, the tentacles of their ideologies still continue to entwine cultures and nations in the 21st Century. In my opinion, if you thought the 20th Century was bad, “you ain’t seen nothing yet!”

There appears today to be a two pronged assault on the liberties and consciences of people around the world, especially those confessing, “Jesus is Lord:” Radical Islam and Socialistic State-ism. At first blush, these two ideologies would seem absolutely opposed to each other, yet they are both products of false belief and opposition to the pure Gospel of Christ. Neither can tolerate a free people; both must control the thoughts and actions of others. Both are willing to use whatever means necessary – lies, coercion, threats, imprisonment and violence – to achieve, and retain power. Between these two systems, Christians around the world are finding it increasingly difficult to adhere freely and openly to Christ and His Word.

I know that, for many of us, the danger seems remote, occurring in other times and places. Yet, who would’ve thought that things could change so radically and quickly here in America as they have the last five or six years? Seventeen trillion dollars plus of debt, nationalized health care (Obamacare) that is killing jobs and costing Americans so much more for healthcare, the NSA spying scandal and IRS targeting of conservative groups, the assault on religious liberty and conscience by the HHS, and the massive cover-ups of corruption, just to name a few, are leading to greater government intrusions into, and control over every aspect of our lives. We are moving quickly toward a time where those holding unapproved views could well be threatened with legal, economic, health care or employment consequences. If history is any guide, it is only a few more small steps toward governmental regulation of individual consciences and persecution of the Church’s public witness to Christ.

So, what do we do? Obviously, as Americans we exercise our rights to speak out, peacefully protest, vote, run for or elect people to office that will uphold our constitutional liberties and protect us against the goblins of the world who seek our harm.

As Christians, we pray for those in government (even the one’s we didn’t vote for), obey the law and continue to do good to our neighbor. We continue in God’s Word, gather in church with fellow Christians, witness for The Faith and share the Gospel of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.

But what if that’s not enough? What if they make laws that go against the Bible, or bind the consciences of Christians with threats and penalties? The above still stands – with the exception that laws contrary to God’s Word cannot be obeyed. At those points we must respectfully engage in “Civil Disobedience,” which is resistance to unjust laws in favor of following God’s Law, as Peter told the Council, “We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).” And we must be prepared to suffer for it.

As you know, when Jesus was arrested and led off for trial, Peter and the other disciples ran away. Peter denied three times that he even knew Christ. So, what changed? What made them able to stand up to authorities and proclaim the Gospel? What made them able to face suffering, persecution and death? The

Resurrection.

Clearly, Jesus' bodily resurrection from the grave changed everything. The resurrection proved that everything Jesus said and did was true. It proves that this life is not all there is; death is not the final victor; there is One who truly is over all earthly governments who is "the resurrection and the life," and because He lives, we too shall live. With the Holy Spirit's power, this Gospel changed the lives of the disciples, and countless others, giving them the courage to stand firm on the truth, resist ungodly authorities and laws and, if called upon to do so, lay down their lives for the sake of Christ.

What is true in the past is still true for us 21st century American Christians. Whether we face threats from radical Islam that would seek to force us to worship their false god, or threats from a secularized Socialist State that makes itself supreme, the Word of God and the death and resurrection of Christ will be our strength and support. Don't be afraid of standing up for Christ before "kings and governors," for our Lord has promised His Holy Spirit will use us to speak to them. In the face of danger and persecution, Christ will sustain and support those who trust in Him, and bring good from very bad situations. We may not see it this side of heaven, but we will see it.

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And though my skin be destroyed, this I know: That in my flesh I shall see God. I will behold Him and not another. How my heart yearns within me." Job 19:25-27

God bless you and give you courage for times such as these!

Pastor Lueke