

The Joys of Persecution

by Pastor Marty

All who know me know I am partial to science fiction and fantasy. These have become our modern version of myths and parables, and as such, they sometimes reveal wisdom and truth about our world. In one science fiction show that I followed, a wise character made two statements that showed exception insight into coming events. In the first, he said, “The avalanche has already started; it is too late for the pebbles to vote.” His cryptic response was an indication of a seemingly minor event that would have a ripple effect and eventually bring about changes on a cosmic level. The second instance involved a change that was neither minor nor expected except by a small remnant who had learned to look beyond the immediate ramifications. In response to this action, he only said, “And so it begins.” However, these four small words revealed more than any speech or argument could express; he knew what people were capable of becoming, and he knew where it would lead. This one pivotal action led to new recommendations for more inclusive and less offensive terminology (political correctness), limitations on speech and personal freedom (greater safety for the greater good of the population), propaganda (the reinterpretation of history and current events), persecution of dissidents (silencing any voices of terrorism, bigotry, and hate), broadening of military power (fines and arrests for those who did not conform to the new rules or who took a stand against tyranny), and eventually a political war.

We must learn to see the innocuous and pivotal events for what they really mean.

Had the war remained only between the leaders of the opposing factions, that would have been bad enough; however, it never does. It became a civil war, evolved into a global war, and eventually spread throughout the galaxy. It was at that point that the true source behind it was revealed: it was a cosmic war between forces of light and darkness—forces that had little concern for the billions who died at the hands of their own friends and families. The most amazing thing in all of this, however, was that even those who were fighting, killing, and dying for darkness were convinced they were doing what was right. Murder was now justice, torture was now education, terrorism was now activism, and there was no acceptance if there was not complete and total affirmation and approval of the message. Even those who did not like the laws were vehemently defending the laws, for the laws defined what was right and wrong; all morality and ethics, all personal and religious beliefs, all logic and reason had to bow to the laws and decrees of those in authority, who had power to enforce the laws.

When the law defines right, all morals, reason, and religious beliefs must submit.

What made this specific plot excellent for three entire seasons is that the viewer saw the progression happening but knew that the main characters could do nothing about it. The new administration recognized that if they tried to make all the changes at once, nobody would have gone along with it; therefore, they started with very small changes the majority would accept. As the old saying goes, the water had to

be heated slowly so that the frog would remain docile until it was too late. During the first season, even the viewer did not know what would happen next, for the changes were so minimal as to be negligible. Those first changes seemed innocent enough that only a few voices cried out against them—voices quickly labeled as extremists. The new progressive government could never have succeeded, however, if they had not had the support of the mainstream media. Every voice of objection was described in terms of hate, every claim of abuse or corruption was identified as political, and every opposing argument was reframed in extremes to elicit sympathy and abhorrence. It was then relatively easy to put supporters in every level of power, both in politics and in education. By the time it became obvious, it was too late.

Almost any argument can be framed in terms to elicit sympathy or abhorrence.

When God sent Nathan to King David concerning his sin, the prophet knew he could not immediately confront David about his sin; instead, he told him a story to open his heart to the truth. There is an aspect of Revelation that empowers the hearer to respond. The prophets repeatedly and continually told stories to the people of Israel to awaken their consciences and turn their hearts back to him; life came to them as they heard and responded. Jesus spoke in parables, for He knew that those who sought and received understanding were empowered by it. (At some future point, I might discuss the relationship between Jesus explaining His parables to His disciples and His rebuking them for lack of faith and hardness of heart). The apostle Paul told us not to be ignorant of the

schemes—strategies, practices, processes, modus operandi—of the enemy. My discussion up to this point, contrary to what some may think, has it not been about an old television show; it has been an opportunity for revelation and empowerment. If our eyes are not open to see—to have vision—we will surely perish.

Without vision—of God's holiness and of our present danger—we will surely perish.

This newsletter is about persecution but not just about persecution overseas; it is about real and present persecution for everyone who seeks to do what is right. I recently read a statement by Pastor Martin Niemöller, spoken during the rise of the Nazi regime. He said,

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.

This speech is a warning of the danger we face today. The Church in the United States (and in many other countries as well) is often described as a sleeping giant. It is time to awaken and stand for the truth. Although Jesus will return at some point and make everything right, we all will be held accountable for the suffering and destruction that took place around us if we are not doing everything we can to prevent it. The passage about the sheep and the goats (Matt 25) clearly reveals that Christians are held responsible for what we do and do not do.

The Church will be held responsible for what we do until Jesus finally returns.

In prior newsletters, I have focused on principles and core underlying issues instead of specifics. This is because knowing how to view one specific issue will not necessarily explain how to view another specific issue, but if we understand and recognize the major core principles, we can apply them to all specifics. At this point, I have to deviate from my normal practice to discuss a specific recent event because if we do not understand what is truly at stake, we will remain silent until—as Pastor Niemöller said—they come for us. This week, a woman in Kentucky was put in jail because she refused to issue marriage licenses following the redefinition of marriage. I speak, of course, to the ruling by a human court that men and women of the same sex can marry. (I am not discussing homosexuality in this newsletter; my focus here is the judgment). In this instance, the clerk was a Christian who could not in good faith and with a clear conscience issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. There are some important things to note about this case: her name would be the authorizing signature on the license even if someone else in the office issued it; she stopped issuing all marriage licenses, not just to some couples; the couples could go to any other office in the county or to a church with no restriction; and lastly, the Supreme Court had stated that their decision would not infringe upon any person's religious freedom. Nevertheless, the court commanded her to issue licenses regardless of her religious beliefs, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case, and the court put her in jail indefinitely.

All people, regardless of their religious beliefs, must affirm our new definition.

As Christians, we should consider it very disturbing that people in our country can now be incarcerated for refusing to deny their religious convictions. We have already seen numerous instances where businesses are fined or even closed for not actively supporting this lifestyle. Even churches and individuals that believe same-sex marriage is acceptable should be deeply concerned about this. As mentioned previously, if we do nothing, there will be nobody left to act when the time comes for us to be forced against our will. Money is taken out of our paychecks to fund abortion whether we approve or not. Doctors and pharmacists are forced to provide abortive drugs against their wills. Nuns are required to provide both contraceptives and abortion coverage to their workers. Businesses have been targeted, fined, and forced to close for not actively participating in same-sex marriages. Some argue that people can believe as they wish in their personal life, but their religious beliefs cannot affect their work; however, we have already seen two brothers lose a television series for speaking against homosexuality in church. Now, refusing to actively support same-sex marriage will result in jail without bail or limit. If we believe that the laws will not continue to push forward, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we do not stand up against the tide of oppression, the tide will continue to rise.

Although there are many things in the Bible that Christians interpret differently, there are a few things that anybody who really knows Jesus must accept: denying Jesus is considered apostasy even if it means losing our life, God holds every one of us accountable for our own

personal actions, and obedience to God and His Word supersedes any human authority. Even if a specific church affirms and practices same-sex marriages, that church should fear what is now taking place, for their religious freedom is next on the chopping block. As is abundantly clear by now, the tide will not recede on its own. Still, there are a few arguments that have even deceived some Christians. One argument is that if Christians cannot actively support same-sex marriage for religious beliefs, they should then resign; however, that is not the answer. All that will do is create the perfect atmosphere for all Christians to be forced out of all public jobs and positions of authority in our society, leaving the way for those who will continually push the line further and further toward ungodliness. We have already seen Hollywood, universities, and our government filled with corruption because of a lack of godly integrity. Another deceptive argument is that Christians must keep their religious beliefs to their personal life and not let it affect their job; however, that means that all Christian doctors or nurses could eventually be forced to perform abortions, euthanasia, etc. If we let the light be removed from every position of public authority, then only darkness remains.

If we let light be removed from all areas of public authority, only night remains.

Up to this point, I have been advocating for Christians to stand up and join together against the tide of darkness and oppression. Even if we subconsciously want things to get worse so that Jesus will return to save us, we must recognize that we will be held responsible for the suffering that we could have prevented. Fatalism is deadly. We may recognize that we

are weak when it comes certain temptations, but once we believe we will not win, we begin to lose our will to fight—and if we stop fighting because we decide we cannot win, then we have lost. If we begin a marriage by making certain provisions for divorce, then divorce is always an option in our minds. However, if we believe that divorce is never an option, then we really do give the marriage everything we have. Jesus will certainly return, but we should fight for this world as if He is waiting for us to make it ready for Him. Nevertheless, we are in a battle, and we must prepare for persecution.

We are in a battle, and we have been promised tribulations and persecutions.

It is hard for us to conceive of a person looking forward to persecution and martyrdom. However, in the early Church, the greatest joy for Christians was to die for the Lord. They considered it the ultimate show of love for them to give their life for the One who died for them. History describes believers singing praise to God as they joyfully went to their deaths. I never imagined that persecution could bring joy until recently when I read what these early martyrs of the faith had written. When I first learned about this court case, I prayed for God to give mercy. However, when I heard that she had gone to jail, I experienced something very different: I envied her. I wished that I had a job where I could stand up for God in the face of persecution. I found myself knowing that she was experiencing more grace and joy than I could imagine. There is no longer an option for us: we must stand against the darkness, and we must face persecution; however, the joy it will bring us is beyond our ability to describe. Amen