

Six Pounds of Persecution

(A few weeks ago, I picked on poor, tiny Tinkerbelle in a Sunday morning message to illustrate the joy that comes in the aftermath of resurrection, but Tinkerbelle's plight invites another application even more obvious . . .)

Did you read about Tinkerbelle, the five-pound Chihuahua that simply got swept up and whisked away in 70 mph winds on Saturday, April 25, in Waterford Township, Michigan? On a happy note, Tinkerbelle came running out of the woods into which she was blown on Monday. There is a simple lesson to be drawn: If there is a chance you might be caught in 70 mph winds, either anchor yourself to something solid, or, at least, make sure you're packing more than five pounds.

Do you ever feel like the winds of cultural thought are pushing at least 70 mph against orthodox Christian beliefs? If so, are you packing more than a five-pound faith? I, along with many, get the sense that the culture is becoming increasingly hostile to the faith. On the other hand, much of the Christian response to this phenomenon gives me pause. There seems to be a broad-spread shock and resentment in conservative Christian circles that media seems biased against us, that we are smirked at in the fields of science and that we are angrily dismissed in debates about absolute moral truth. Why does this surprise anyone? Have we never heard Peter on the matter?

¹²Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. – 1 Peter 4:12-14

Painful trials do happen to believers throughout the world today, but not so much in our nation. In fact, we often articulate our gratitude for “the freedom to worship as we please.” Now, it seems that while we have been doing a great job of voicing our thanks to God for our freedom, we have been doing only a marginal job of taking advantage of that freedom to impact the worldviews of others.

Relative to those ancient generations where persecution was truly severe as well as to those places in the world today where persecution remains severe, how can we not confess that ours is a rather impure, non-fanatical, materialistic and tame approach to Christianity? And yet, while enduring shots to our self-images that are arguably not all that painful, not only do we seem surprised, we seem offended at the unfairness of it all, emotionally crippled by the attacks on our lack of sophistication and, at times, downright whiney.

I imagined myself in a conversation with Polycarp of Smyrna who was martyred for refusing to burn incense to the emperor of Rome. When burning him alive did not seem to be working, one of his executioners ran him through with a spear. Then, they burned his corpse. I was telling Polycarp how bad we have it today. With my head in my hands, I lamented:

- “Someone called me ‘a superstitious retro-thinker’ for my views on creation.”
- “I was called “anti-woman” for my views on the sanctity of life.”
- “I was called ‘intolerant’ for believing that Jesus alone is the Way to salvation.”
- “Finally, the press beat up our beauty queen for her views on gay marriage.”

I wiped the tears from my eyes and looked up, hoping to see the pity in Polycarp’s eyes. Instead, through my tears, I saw the old bishop desperately trying to set himself on fire with a *BIC* lighter so that he wouldn’t have to listen to me any longer.

Are we at a point that we are only “sort of persecuted” because we are living lives that are only “sort of set-apart” from the main? Biblically, there are only two ways of which I am aware for avoiding the world’s wrath. One is to pray for leaders and kings so that the church may live in peace. The other is to be invisible insofar as the authentic values and mission of God’s kingdom are concerned.

In the meantime, from Satan’s strategic vantage point, six pounds of persecution is surely enough to offset five pounds of faith and holiness.

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