

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

November 6th was the International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church. We are not only to pray for them, but are to **Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Heb. 123:3).** Today’s letter will be a challenge. It is about the book *Letter to the American Church* by Eric Metaxas. These sobering words are on the cover *“The author of a best selling biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Metaxas reveals the haunting similarities between today’s American Church and the German Church of the 1930s. Echoing the German martyr’s prophetic call, he exhorts his fellow Christians to repent of their silence in the face of evil”.* Today’s letter is specifically for the church in America!

Hitler became the chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. His initial consolidation of power was non violent, but on the night of Nov 9, 1938 it turned violent. Some say it was a trial balloon to see how the church would react. That night is known as “Kristallnacht” (“Crystal Night” or the “Night of Broken Glass”) On that night Nazis torched synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools and businesses, and murdered close to 100 Jews. The only people punished for any crime on that night, however, were German soldiers who raped Jewish woman. Ironically, it was was not against the law to kill a Jew, but it was against the law for a German to have sex with a Jew. In the aftermath of Hitler’s “success” some 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps. After Kristallnacht, conditions for German Jews grew increasingly worse. Sadly, the church remained silent and Hitler had a green light to proceed with the holocaust.

Later a pastor named Niemoller lamented: *“First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the communists and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak out for me.”*

On Reformation Sunday, Nov. 6, 1932, 26 year old Dietrich Bonhoeffer was invited to speak. This was three months before Hitler came to power. Bonhoeffer knew the church was asleep and saw the handwriting on the wall. He spoke like an Old Testament prophet and his text was from Rev. 2:4-5: **“But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place, unless you repent”.** Sadly, his message fell on deaf ears!

In 1937 Bonhoeffer wrote his famous book on the *Cost of Discipleship* and charged the German church with peddling a watered down gospel with cheap grace. He wrote: *“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”*

The murder of six million Jews was not a secret, it was one of the biggest industries in Germany. Obviously the church was aware of it. The holocaust involved thousands of non-Jews rounding up the victims, transporting them to the death camps, confiscating their property, harvesting their gold teeth, making lamp shades out of their skin and fertilizer out of their bodies, etc. It was impossible to hide this from the church. The reaction of the church, however, was epitomized by the

story of one church playing the organ so loud that it drowned out the screams of Jewish people passing by in cattle cars on their way to be slaughtered.

The church in Jerusalem had a different approach to an anti Christian government. To put it simply, God said to preach and the government said not to preach. To Peter, the answer was obvious: **“We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29)**. The church in Jerusalem was letting their light shine!

There was a time, of course, when Peter and the others were afraid to preach. On the evening of our Lord’s resurrection **“the disciples were together, with the doors locked, for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19)**. The appearance of Christ in their midst emboldened them, but the primary source of their courage was the Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift my Father promised” (Acts 1:4). Jesus further promised them **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)**. The Holy Spirit emboldened them to put their light on a candlestick so that it would give light to everyone!

On the Day of Pentecost, as you know, that promise came true. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly preached the Gospel. Peter was the primary speaker and accused their rulers of nailing God’s anointed to a cross. **“But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24)**. On that happy occasion 3,000 repented and were baptized (Acts 2:41).

When ordered to keep silent, they prayed for boldness (Acts 4:29). When arrested for preaching an angel set them free and commanded them **“Go, stand in the temple courts”, he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life” (Acts 5:20)**. When flogged for speaking about Jesus **“the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name” (Acts 5:41)**.

Bonhoeffer said it like this: *Silence in the face of evil is itself evil*”.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce