



## Brought Before Kings

By Bob DeWaay

America's most visible pastor, Rick Warren, has been in the news recently because of a meeting with King Assad of Syria and for inviting likely, future presidential candidate Barack Obama to speak at his church. E. J. Dionne Jr. of the Washington Post wrote an editorial about Obama's visit in which he said, "That Obama received a standing ovation suggests that Warren is right to sense that growing numbers of Christians are tired of narrowly partisan politics and share his interest in 'the whole bird.' In their different spheres, Warren and Obama are both in the business of retailing hope."<sup>[1]</sup> But in either case, is this hope eternal?

Speaking before kings and secular authorities is nothing new to Warren. Rick Warren has been before the United Nations. Christians have been called before kings in the past. But what is unique about Warren's kingly audiences is his reason for being there. He consistently tells them the same thing—how he is going to help them solve the world's problems. That brings us to our question for today: Is this the Biblical message?

In Matthew 10 Jesus predicted that His disciples would be brought before kings and governors:

*But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:17-20 NASB)*

Though the occasion for the apostles to be brought before kings was persecution, Jesus told them another cause that had to do with His purposes: "For My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles." So whenever a disciple of Jesus Christ is brought before kings, it is to be for Jesus' sake as a testimony.

Jesus told them not to worry ahead of time what to say in such situations. The world is hostile to the gospel. Being brought before kings exposes us to people of great power and influence who have the power to harm us if they dislike what we say. But, on the other hand, they have the power to help us if they are pleased with our words. If we worried ahead of time about what to say, we might be tempted to speak words that would please or appease them. It is always dangerous to tell a king or other powerful authority what the person DOES NOT want to hear.

Perhaps the reason for the warning is this: If we think about it, we'll most likely NOT testify of Christ. The world and its authorities hate Jesus Christ: "*The world cannot hate you [some who were unbelieving], but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil*" (**John 7:7**). Jesus told His disciples: "*If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you*" (**John 15:18, 19**). So those called before kings are called before those who represent the authority of this world in its hostility to God. Facing such power would be good reason to worry ahead of time what to say. But we are told not to worry. Why? Because the Holy Spirit will give us the words.

When the Holy Spirit gives Jesus' followers words to testify, what does this look like? We do not have to guess because we have teaching from Jesus about the work of the Holy Spirit in believers and we have examples in the book of Acts of disciples called before kings. Jesus said, "*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me*" (**John 15:26**). Jesus reaffirmed this just before His ascension: "*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*" (**Acts 1:8**). A "witness" is one who testifies.<sup>[ii]</sup> The Holy Spirit gives disciples the courage and boldness to proclaim the person and work of Christ, and the terms of Messianic salvation.

The first incident of disciples called before rulers in Acts is found in chapter 4:

*And it came about on the next day, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; . . . Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."*

**(Acts 4:5, 8-12)**

The healing of a lame man provoked this incident. Notice the words the Holy Spirit gave Peter: Jesus Christ . . . whom you crucified [showing them their guilt] whom God raised . . . salvation in no one else. Had Peter thought about it before hand, he could have seen a great way to gain acceptance. He could have told the rulers that he was demonstrating a new way to relieve suffering among the poor and lame. He could have offered to set up a healing the lame program. If he had, they would have certainly been pleased with Peter. But rather Peter preached the gospel. The only reason the healing upset them was the gospel, not the fact of the healing. Their response shows this: *"And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"* **(Acts 4:18)**. They forbade preaching Christ, not healing the sick. As a result the disciples prayed for boldness to speak God's word **(Acts 4:29)** and continued to do so.

The pattern does not change throughout the rest of Acts. Peter had been called before the Jewish rulers; Paul was called before Gentile kings. In Acts 16, Paul spoke before King Agrippa. Among his topics were: the resurrection of the dead **(Acts 26:8)**, Paul's own conversion **(Acts 26:11-19)**, Paul's subsequent message of repentance **(Acts 26:20)**, and the resurrection of Christ **(Acts 26:23)**. Paul was accused of being out of his mind, but retorted, *"I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth"* **(Acts 26:25)**. Paul made a final appeal to Agrippa who said, *"In a short time*

*you will persuade me to become a Christian”* (verse 28). Paul, like Peter, testified about Jesus Christ.

Paul ended up in Rome as a prisoner. He told the Philippians what happened there:

*Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. (Philippians 1:12-14)*

The *praetorian guard* was likely the elite imperial guard in Rome that guarded the emperor. Thus the message of the gospel spread through the highest echelons of Rome.

Jesus’ teaching on this and the apostolic example are normative. The Biblical pattern is for disciples to testify about the gospel of Christ when they are called before kings. Christ does not send His followers before kings to tell kings that Christians are the best people to solve the social problems of their kingdoms. Jesus specifically said we are to testify about Him.

I have listened to dozens of Rick Warren’s interviews over the last three years, partly as research for my book.[\[iii\]](#) I noticed that they followed a predictable pattern, something like this: “I am Rick Warren; I have trained 400,000 leaders around the world, and have given away millions of dollars. I am going to mobilize these leaders and their churches to solve the biggest problems facing the world.” There are long and short versions of it; but the message stays essentially the same. The gospel itself rarely comes up unless someone directly asks him about it in an interview.

It would be very hard for any of us to stand before the greatest powers of the world and still preach the truth about Christ. But then Peter, who cowered in fear before a servant girl when Jesus was arrested, stood boldly before the rulers of his people later. The difference was the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us that the Holy Spirit

would give us the words to say. When He does, those words are the words of the gospel. God the Holy Spirit can turn the most timid among us into a bold preacher of the gospel.

If Pastor Warren represents the church of Jesus Christ when he speaks to kings, then he should be testifying about the person and work of Christ as would be true for any Christian. To fail to confess Christ in such situations is a tacit denial. The Washington Post reporter got the message that Obama and Warren are both “retailing hope” in their own ways. But is either proclaiming the hope of eternal life for those who have had their sins washed away by the blood of Jesus? Certainly not before kings.

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[i] Washington Post, Dec. 5, 2006 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/04/AR2006120401048.html>

[ii] In the Bible “witness, bear witness, testimony, testify” are translations of “martureo\_ and marturia” from which we get our English word “martyr.”

[iii] *Redefining Christianity*: [available here](#)

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