**The True North Strong and Still Free**

**By: Jeremy Diestelkamp**

I have preached for the East End church in Toronto, Canada, for eleven years and have preached on and off for an additional twelve years. The work in Canada, as in many places, has its challenges due to increased secularization and a general turn away from religion; but the work here is also very rewarding. The congregation in Toronto has almost doubled in size in the past five years due in large part to legal immigration and the hard work we have done evangelizing in the community. Our YouTube channel is watched by people around the world. We certainly will not compete with the many denominational channels out there, but having almost 5,000 subscribers is not insignificant. This internet presence, along with numerous private classes being held throughout the week, makes us optimistic about the furtherance of the Gospel here in Canada.

However, in spite of all of this, over the past year I have had to field questions from concerned brethren in America about the level of government persecution against those who preach the Gospel and worship in Canada. Knowing that there might be some confusion, I thought that I would try to allay some of these concerns.

To begin with, Canada is still a free and democratic society whose government is elected every two to four years in fair elections run by a non-partisan, arm's length, election board. Neither side of the political aisle has accused the other of cheating; and, although not everybody always likes the election results, very few complain about the electoral process.

Next, neither the federal nor the provincial governments actively persecute churches or religious organizations for what they teach and preach. There is a human rights tribunal in Canada that does hear cases about hate speech; but churches are not being dragged before these tribunals for teaching against abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, or any other issue. An exception to this might be if someone is actively calling for the harm of someone else, but I have not heard of many churches doing this. I can and do preach on any biblical topic I choose without fear of being arrested, killed, or censored; and we live-stream these lessons online without any negative feedback from the government. During the pandemic, you might have heard of a preacher or a church that faced repercussions for failing to adhere to government mandates surrounding masks and meeting size, but these enforcement actions were taken against both churches and secular organizations that violated these mandates. The government up here was strict about the rules, but the rules were applied fairly. The government didn't single out churches for enforcement. When the government did overstep, our courts reined in those edicts, ruling on the side of religious freedom to worship, albeit with temporary and reasonable restrictions for health and safety in place.

Finally, even though our society in Canada is socially liberal and secular, groups can and do engage publicly in evangelism. You can still find people on the street corners trying to teach people about Jesus. We still hand out material door to door and talk to people about the Gospel as we do so. In spite of some people's misgivings, many are still willing to discuss religion. It is rare that someone would face overt persecution for merely talking about Jesus. Are there instances of hate and violence? Yes, but this is true in every country. Satan is actively trying to suppress the teaching of the Gospel and will use any way he can to tempt people to stand up against its teaching. But here in Canada, we still can and do freely spread the good news about Jesus.

Even if none of this were true and Canada *was* a dangerous place to teach the Gospel, the Gospel would still need to be preached in Canada. Paul told the Thessalonians: "*Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know*" (1 Thess. 3:1-4). Paul would later tell Timothy: "*But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra — what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (2 Tim. 3:10-12). Fear of persecution should never be an excuse to not spread the Gospel or to not send preachers to spread the Gospel. Persecution should be seen as an opportunity to go out and teach all the more. Might precautions need to be taken? Sure! But Paul stood in the Areopagus and preached the Gospel. He stood before Felix and preached the Gospel. He stood before Festus and preached the Gospel. And he stood before Agrippa and preached the Gospel. This preaching was not before friendly audiences. Paul could have easily been harmed for preaching Jesus, but Paul did it anyway, for his attitude was: "*…woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!*" (1 Cor. 9:16). This should be our attitude, too, no matter where we are.

Canada is a beautiful country to visit, but it needs men to move here to preach the pure message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There are two congregations in Ontario that lack preachers as of this writing: one on the other side of Toronto and one about 90 minutes away in Peterborough. Both are good groups of Christians, and both would be profitable works. There are also many major cities in Canada without faithful churches in them. If you would like more information about this or would like to inquire about working with the congregations up here that need preachers, email me. I would be more than happy to talk with you. "*…*"*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest*" (Matt. 9:37).

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