

Destined to die or ripe for renewal?

NATHAN VEALL

What would you say to someone who just doesn't seem to accept the reality of the situation they're in? In recent years we've had multiple examples of leaders in the public square who go on and on despite it being obvious to everyone that their time is up. Though they ultimately head toward failure, they never seem to wake up and smell the coffee. It's never a pretty sight.

What about the Church in our land today? If we take an honest look at the situation, isn't it fairly bleak? Fewer and fewer people identify as Christians. Regular churchgoing is at an historic low. Secularism

seems to dominate the collective thought, and Christians increasingly feel marginalised. Perhaps some might say to us that we should stop burying our heads in the sand; we should recognise the reality that we're destined to die; that talk of revival is poppycock; that we really ought to throw in the towel.

I think we all know better than to accept that kind of defeatism. But the question is, why?

The birth of a butterfly is a remarkable process. As the caterpillar enters the chrysalis (cocoon), things look pretty bleak. It stops moving; it's confined to a small space, the outer casing stiffens and everything is sealed up. At this point in the process (from the outside at least), it looks like the end of the road for the poor insect. And yet, just a short while later, new life comes. What may have appeared as destined to die, was actually ripe for renewal, because that's how the process works.



Though the church today may look (from the outside) like it's destined to die, I believe we're ripe for renewal; because that's how our God works. We believe in a God who works precisely when things seem most bleak.

Consider the history of our own country. Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, the Oxford Martyrs, were sent to be burned for their gospel convictions. Nevertheless, they had reason for hope, even at the point where they were literally destined to die. Famously, Latimer said (whilst at the stake) 'Be of good comfort, Master Ridley... we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.' Here we stand, today, with the gospel flame in England still burning.

Think of William Tyndale, who laboured for God's Word, and before his execution asked 'Lord, open the King of England's eyes'. Here we stand today, with the Bible in over 700 languages.

Think of the Wesleys, at a time when the church seemed to have lost all sense of true spirituality, and society around them desperately needed the gospel. Here we stand, today, on the other side of the Methodist Wesleyan revival.

Consider the early church, persecuted and totally without power in an empire that was as far from 'a

Christian country' as one can imagine. And yet, here we stand today, thousands of years later, knowing that 'the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church'.

Above all, consider Christ. Christ, who was abandoned by his friends, and left to die the death of a slave. Here we stand, today, in his resurrection life with a whole new kingdom to proclaim.

Just a quick sweep of Church history and a brief look at the gospel should tell us that when the situation within looks grim, and the world around us feels bleak, that is perhaps the very time when God is about to bring revival. Destined to die? I don't think so. Ripe for renewal? Why not!

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