

Come, My Fond Flutt'ring Heart

Jane Taylor (1783–1824)

Come, my fond flutt'ring heart,
Come, thou must now be free;
Thou and the world must part,
However hard it be.
My weeping passions own 'tis just,
Yet cling still closer to the dust,
Yet cling still closer to the dust.

Ye tempting sweets, forbear,
Ye dearest idols, fall,
My heart ye can not share,
For Jesus must have all;
'Tis bitter pain—'tis cruel smart,
But O! you must consent my heart,
But O! you must consent my heart.

Ye gay, enchanting throng,
Ye golden dreams, farewell!
Earth hath prevailed too long,
Now I must break the spell;
Go, cherished joys of earlier years,
Jesus, forgive these parting tears,
Jesus, forgive these parting tears.

Welcome, thou bleeding cross,
Welcome, thou way to God;
My former gains were loss,
My path was follies' road;
At last my heart is undeceived,
The world is giv'n, and God received,
The world is giv'n, and God received.



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ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Missionary Martyrs: Are We Paying Too High a Price to Evangelize the World? Part Three

Jeff Straub

During these past two weeks I have been writing about the deaths of Charles Wesco and John Chau, men who perished in violent ways doing mission work. In the first essay, I praised their dedication to follow Christ into dangerous situations. Last week I addressed the issue of peril in gospel advance. We must take great risk to do great work for God. So much of Christian expansion has come at the cost of lives lost. Coincidentally, the day after last week's essay was the 84th anniversary of the execution of John and Betty Stam, Moody Bible Institute graduates who were beheaded in China for being Christian missionaries. Only their infant daughter, who had been left in the building where the family spent the night before their execution, survived and was smuggled out of China. Gospel advance is risky, dangerous work.

This week I wish to consider the issue of doing Christian work that violates the laws of the land. Apparently, John Chau broke Indian law by breaching a five-kilometer (about 3 miles) restricted zone surrounding the island. North Sentinel Island is part of the Andaman Islands and has been under a Restricted Area Permit policy of the Indian government meant to preserve the way of life of the primitive tribe, estimated at less than four hundred inhabitants. These people would likely be highly susceptible to a variety of diseases from which their isolation gave them no natural immunity.

Chau, the twenty-six-year-old American missionary, has been widely criticized for his breach of the island in late November and his subsequent death. Some criticized him for his cavalier attitude toward these people by breaking Indian law and endangering them unnecessarily by exposing them to potential diseases. While it may be true that Chau did not adhere to Indian law, it does not seem to be the case that he was cavalier in terms of risking the lives of the locals. He self-quarantined with the hopes of preventing the introduction of diseases that might harm the local population. It might be argued that Chau's precautions were insufficient (and I do not know), but he did take precautions and he did prepare himself for a number of possible outcomes, including his own death at the hands of the islanders.

The merits of what John Chau did will likely be debated for the foreseeable future, and this is a positive outcome of his unfortunate death. The need of gospel workers in difficult places in the Lord's vineyard has been brought to the forefront of Christian conversation yet again. It is impossible to assess his motives. This is up to God. We can, however, ponder his actions, especially the "breaking" Indian law to preach the gospel. Was Chau justified in contravening local or national laws to carry forward the gospel to this unreached people? Aren't Christians supposed to "obey every ordinance of man" (1 Pet 2:13)?

This has been a challenging issue for believers since the first century. At issue is the Christian's duty to obey laws that directly *prohibit* the proclamation of the gospel. Is a Christian justified in ignoring or breaking these laws for the sake of gospel advance? This is a difficult question to answer. However, there are clear biblical texts that should help guide our thinking when making these decisions.

First, we need to realize that the Great Commission is embedded in a passage that begins by emphasizing the universal authority of the Great Commissioner—Jesus Christ. "All *authority* has been given to me (by the Father)" (Mt 28:19). Therefore, Jesus told the disciples to go into *all* the world proclaiming the good news. Christians, then, are under obligation to disseminate the gospel to all people, which would include (at least theoretically) the North Sentinelese islanders. To do this in today's world seems to mean breaking Indian law. Missionary John Chau sensed this obligation, dedicating himself, come what may, death included, to take the gospel to these unreached people in obedience to that commission.

Chau's obedience seems to be in keeping with what the disciples did in the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus. Some of them were arrested for preaching the good news about the resurrection and were specifically forbidden from further proclaiming that message. They were threatened with more severe punishment, when released, if they continued their public declaration of the resurrection (Acts 5:17–42). How did they answer? "We need to obey God rather than men" (v. 29). In declaring this commitment, they knew what the likely outcome would be—greater punishment. Nevertheless, gospel advance was a divine mandate which trumped civil law—and they said so.

However, before Christians rush headlong into the jaws of death preaching the gospel, it might be prudent to ponder the manner in which the message should be proclaimed. Does the law *need* to be broken to preach the gospel? And who should make this decision? In reality, when Christians break or ignore a country's laws, they certainly should expect repercussions. Perhaps another question should be asked: can believers faithfully disseminate the Word of God *and* keep the law? Is there a way to do both?

In Chau's case, as with the disciples of Acts 5, it seems that there was little other alternative to giving the North Sentinelese the gospel than by entering the restricted zone and attempting to make contact, contra Indian law. Was there another way? Who gets to make these decisions? This was a decision that Chau made, apparently in consultation with his mission partner.

To be sure, Christians should think long and hard about the possible blowback from violating a nation's sovereignty by preaching the gospel. North Korea is a case in point. In recent months, several Christians were released after being arrested for violating the Hermit Kingdom's restrictive laws. Or consider the case of the evangelical pastor, Andrew Brunson, who spent two years under house arrest in Turkey for allegedly participating in a plot to overthrow the government. Many believe he was arrested for preaching the gospel. Expect repercussions, but carry out the commission with all diligence.

Certainly, Christians need to be known as "law-keepers" rather than "law-breakers." But the mandate to carry forth the message of Jesus Christ does not end at the border of a closed country. Wisdom, prayer, and counsel all factor in to decisions to contravene the laws of a hostile country. Understand also, that one missionary's infraction may result in more restrictive laws or greater threats of penalty or violence on other would-be violators. There are no easy answers to this issue. May God grant the courage to communicate Him to a lost and dying world, and the wisdom to perceive the best way it should be done. May God raise up a new generation of stout-hearted, committed believers willing to take risks to bring the message of Christ to the lost. Soli Deo Gloria!



This essay is by Jeff Straub, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
