



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Calling the Church to Courage – Part 1

Guest(s): Eric Metaxas

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Can you believe it? We are already halfway through the month of November. Boy, time has been going by so fast and the holidays are almost upon us. Many parties and get-togethers are starting to kick off. And one special event that recently occurred here at the Family Talk Headquarters in Colorado Springs is where we are taking you in today's broadcast.

Now, the speaker you may be familiar with, his name is Eric Metaxas. Eric is a bestselling author, a speaker and a conservative radio talk show host. Some of his books you may know include *Bonhoeffer*, *Seven Men* and *Is Atheism Dead?* His latest book is entitled *Letter to the American Church*, which he'll be discussing today. Eric's articles have been published in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, and he has been featured as a cultural commentator on CNN and Fox News, just to name a few.

Eric Metaxas is also the host of *The Eric Metaxas Show*, which you can listen to on the radio or on your favorite digital platform. So now without further ado, here is Eric Metaxas and his presentation right here on Family Talk.

Eric Metaxas: Please be seated. Wow, what a blessing. Bob, thank you. Thank you so much. I am so honored to be here that I'm practically speechless, not literally, but practically speechless. I'm so honored to be here. There's so many extraordinary people here, but Dr. Dobson, it's very difficult to talk with you in the room. So if you don't mind leaving, I'd be much more comfortable. I feel very intimidated, but in all seriousness, when you respect somebody so much, I love you so much, I agree with you on everything. There's so much I want to talk about. The real reason I'm here is to talk about the subject of my book, *Letter to the American Church*.

Now, *Letter to the American Church*... First of all, who would be arrogant enough to write a book called *Letter to the American Church*? I'll be honest with you, I'm not that arrogant. I know the Lord called me to say something to the

church. How do I put this? I believe I'm led by the Spirit in what I do. I don't ever want to not be led by the Spirit in anything I do, but I have never in my life, this was my 14th book, never felt the Lord speaking to me that I must write this. The *Bonhoeffer* book that I wrote, which is my longest book, this is my shortest book, I have no doubt that the Lord called me to write that book, and I don't say that lightly. In other words, I am astonished in a sense. When you see God's hand rather clearly, it's an astonishing thing.

But I knew while I was writing the *Bonhoeffer* book and increasingly in the years after that, God ordained that I would write that book. And so it really has nothing to do with me. It's the story of Bonhoeffer. But I could see why the Lord had me write that book. But this book, *Letter to the American Church*, honestly, I have never felt this kind of compulsion that God is telling me to do something.

Now, when I'm talking about things that are mystical or mysterious or miraculous, I never do it lightly. So I wouldn't say that, "Oh, I had this impression." I really felt that the Lord wanted me to say a few things and I wanted to call the book *Faith Without Works is Dead* because to me, the particular sin of the evangelical church, because we see through a glass darkly and every culture, every denomination, whatever, we get some stuff really well and other stuff, not so much. And I feel that the American Church has drifted over the decades into not understanding that if I don't live out my faith, maybe I have no faith, that the Lord says in the word, "Faith without works is dead."

And somehow we've tricked ourselves into believing the lie that, "I just need to believe some ideas, some intellectual ideas in my head, and I need to check some theological boxes." And I'm saying by faith, and you say, "Well, yes, if it's real faith," but that enlightenment rationalistic version of faith is not the biblical view of faith. The biblical view of faith is that your faith will be lived out in works. If it's not, you don't really have faith. You're kidding yourself, but you're not fooling God. You're not fooling the devil.

And I realized Bonhoeffer wrote about this in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. He talks about cheap grace, right? You say, "Grace, grace," or, "Faith, faith." And he's like, "Yeah. And do you know what grace costs the Lord on the cross of Calvary? Do you understand the depth of what it is?" It's not a light thing, it's the heaviest thing imaginable. If you understand it, you're going to live utterly differently. You cannot help but live differently if you actually believe.

And it became clear to me over time that there were many Christians who somehow had this very shallow view of faith. So I was going to call it *Faith Without Works is Dead*, because I just thought that's kind of the headline here. It's a scary thing, but obviously I thought *Letter to The American Church* is just clearer that this is just something I think that the Lord would want to say to his people in love. Oh, I forgot to say, the book, *Letter to The American Church* is coming out as a documentary film in January. And yeah, TPUSA, Charlie Kirk, they've helped make this possible, big time. So it's coming out as a film in January, and we're going to premiere it at Jack Hibbs' church.

In any event, the point of the book is that the German church... Some of you know the story of Bonhoeffer, but if somebody says, "What is the story of Bonhoeffer?" The story of Bonhoeffer essentially is that the German church in the 30s, as the evil of Nazism was rising, most of the German church did not stand against it. Most of the German church, including good churches, good pastors, didn't understand that it was their obligation to speak the truth and to stand against that evil. And what were the excuses that the German pastors and German Christian leaders gave? Exactly the same excuses being given by evangelical churches and Christian leaders today. We don't want to get political. We just want to preach the gospel.

Here's the problem. That's not biblical, and if it's not biblical, do you know what it is? It's from the pit of hell. It's not going to like, "Oh, not biblical. So B minus." No, from the pit of hell, zero. It is the enemy of what God wants you to do. Now, if you have all these happy religious reasons for adopting the devil's theology, you're deceived. And so the Lord sends his prophets. In the Old Testament, he send prophets to speak to the people of God, to ask them to be the people of God because they thought they already were. And obviously, much of what Jesus was doing, imagine Jesus is talking to unbelievably religious people. He was not railing against pagans or against Hellenistic philosophies. He was railing, thundering against the most religiously sophisticated and religious people of his day, because that is deeply offensive to God.

When pagans are being pagans, the sinners are sinning, that's not really offensive to God in the way that it's offensive to God when you use his name and you quote him and you know the Scriptures back and forth and you don't do what he asks you to do, that's really offensive to the Lord. So it struck me that the German church... Now, my mother is from Germany, she's 89. She grew up in Nazi Germany. So this is a real personal thing for me when I wrote the Bonhoeffer story, because it's very tempting for us as Americans or anybody to say that, "Well, what happened in Nazi Germany, that's an outlier. That's just particularly German evil that'll ever happen again," right?

Well, if you think it's a unique thing like Daniel Goldhagen wrote his book, Hitler's Willing Executioners, that's effectively a racist view. In other words, if you think some ethnic group is more prone to evil, that's not biblical, okay? Biblically, every single ethnic group, every single group has precisely the same amount of original sin. Maybe the French have 5% more. You know what I'm saying. I don't know. So you can't say that what happened in Germany is a unique thing, so it can never happen again.

So whenever people say, "Never again, never again," why never again? What are you going to do so that that will never happen again? What happened in Germany happened to a sophisticated, rather Christian culture, and they had over time bought a few lies that enabled them to be fooled by the devil through the Nazis, into acquiescing with what the government said to do, right? They'd just be like, "Well, it's very simple. Romans 13." Well, Romans 13, I don't know about your Bible, but that's not the whole Bible. That's a chapter and you can

misinterpret it, but there are whole books. The Book of Esther is about not doing what the government tells you to do.

Anybody familiar with the book of Esther? Any Old Testament people here? It couldn't be clearer that the idea that whatever the government says, we're supposed to be good witnesses to what the government says. That's not biblical. You've got to have way more discernment than that. And the idea that you're not supposed to be political is also... I don't have time to get into it, but it is ridiculous. It's simply ridiculous because what does it mean? We're not supposed to make an idol of politics. Oh, well, what are you supposed to make an idol of? Nothing, right?

In other words, everything you do, every good thing, you could make an idol of. So we can make an idol of loving our spouse. Don't love your spouse more than you love God. Don't love your kids too much. In fact, don't love them at all because that could be an idol. Common sense tells you that you're supposed to love your country, you're supposed to be involved in this, you're supposed to be involved in that. And Americans more than anyone, we're not living in first century Rome. Patriots have died so that we could live out our faith in the ballot box politically, we can advocate like Michael Johnson, what a miracle from God.

But the bottom line is that we have unwittingly over time bought into a number of ideas and things, and I thought it's dramatically similar. It's horrifyingly similar to the German church. Let's put it this way. In 1933, Hitler took over in Germany. And again, to be clear, when we all say... Well, if you read my Bonhoeffer book or if you're familiar with that time in history, you think like, "Well, I would've seen it coming. We all know the Nazis are evil." Well, that's not true. In 1933, most Germans, including most German Christians, could never begin to see where the Nazis would be taking them. The Nazis, were not advertising. Yes, we're going to follow Satan, and we want to take you on a Satanic ride into hell. They were smart politicians. They were not advertising that.

Hitler would use God. He would talk about God. He would talk about morality. He would say things. He was not stupid. He knew that he needed the Christians, so he was very careful. Now, what's fascinating to me is that some people were onto him from the beginning and they tried to warn the others. Bonhoeffer was one of them, and for reasons I really can't go into, Bonhoeffer was a prophetic voice. He saw where the Nazis would take things was in an evil direction, but if you think that you would've seen it, trust me folks, most of us would not have seen it.

But Bonhoeffer saw it and he tried to wake up the church and the confessing church. There was a group of pastors in Germany that got this enough, that they wrote this thing called The Barman Declaration because basically what was happening was the German... I'm sorry, the Nazis being good totalitarians wanted to take over the totality of society, including the church. And obviously the reason we Christians understand that we need to be involved politically is

because we understand that if our voices are not in politics, if our values are not represented in politics, if we don't understand what real freedom is, then authoritarian government rises and rises and rises. And who is the enemy of authoritarian government? Authoritarian governments around the world, communists in particular, the number one enemy is people of faith because people of faith answer to a higher power. The state is not God, the state is not the top, they answer to a higher power.

So this tradition has existed, and we in America have no excuse because we have the separation of church and state. We have known from the beginning that the government has no right to tell us anything. We're the church of Jesus Christ, we are free. In fact, every American is free. You don't have to be a Christian. Your free, religious liberty is guaranteed, and we have the ability to be free in terms of what we think, what we believe, how we worship, whether we worship. We don't coerce people into going to this church or that church or not. We have this unique extraordinary thing in America.

And so they didn't have that in Germany. It's one of the reasons many of the German pastors were fooled because they had had this happy collaboration between church and state. The Kaiser was Christian, and all through Europe, you know this, if you know European history, when Tocqueville came here 50 years after the founding, he was astonished to see the churches rather than being wedded to the government, being utterly separated from the government and yet really being bulwarks of freedom, preaching freedom from the pulpits, an amazing thing. What we have in America is an astonishing, unique, exceptional thing in history. But the Germans didn't have that.

And so you can see how many pastors thought, "Well, we should go along with the government. The Kaiser was always good to us." All through Europe, you have the state and church allied in this uncomfortable way. We got that right in America. We understood that we needed genuinely to be free, but the Germans didn't get that. In any event, Bonhoeffer tried to wake up the German church and to let them know that where the Nazis mean to take us is evil. This is not just a different point of view. This is directly opposed to what scripture teaches, to what the church teaches. They're trying to take over the church, and if you allow the government to take over the church, you have allowed the church to be destroyed because the Nazis hardly had biblical values, but no state can enforce biblical values. The state is supposed to let us be free and allow us, we the people, freely to express our biblical values. But the Nazis were trying to do that, Bonhoeffer saw that.

And so in 1933, Hitler's trying to do this. So by 1934, they write The Barman Declaration. And really, to cut to the chase, there were about 18,000 Lutheran pastors in Germany at the time. By 1935, the pressure was so strong in the culture and from the Nazis, which we've seen so much in the last three years, the alliance of wicked authoritarian government with culture, that pressure was so strong that by 1935, of those 18,000 pastors, only 3,000 were standing

strong, standing with The Barman Declaration against the takeover of the church in Germany, only 3,000 were standing strong.

There were about 3,000 on the other end of the spectrum of those 18,000 that were utterly pro-Hitler, who obviously didn't understand the scriptures very much. Today, I would say that that's like the super woke church. I don't know, the Unitarians, pick a group, whatever you want, Episcopalians. I don't know. The point is that they're crazy, but the problem was not that group. The problem was, if you do the math, the 12,000 Lutheran pastors in the middle, who refused to really choose, who wouldn't stand with the 3,000 heroes, who said, "We will not bow, we will not bow to Caesar," and knew that they're risking their lives, risking everything. They were heroic, but there were 12,000 German pastors, many of whom were good men, who simply got it wrong and who simply believed that they could avoid being political, who actually believed they had this religious carve out. We don't need to take a position. We just want to preach the gospel.

Well, what dead religious pseudo gospel do you think you will be preaching if you do not speak out when Jews are being sent in box cars to death camps? Is that not a gospel related issue? Bonhoeffer said, unless you speak out for the Jews, you have no right to worship God in your churches. What are you doing? God calls you to call out evil. Now, of course, that's a very dramatic clear case of evil, and especially in retrospect. We all know, "Oh, the Nazis were evil." But the point is, at the time, many good Christians in Germany could not see it. They made excuses. "Well, who's to say? It's complicated." But you hear the exact same thing. We've been hearing it in this country, "The pendulum swings back and forth. Don't stick your neck out too much. Let some of those hotheads stick their necks out. Let Charlie Kirk or Jim Dobson or whoever, let Eric Metaxas... They're kind of hotheads. They're political. We're just going to preach the gospel." Well, that's what happened in Germany.

The 12,000 said, "We're going to be on the fence. We're going to be neutral." But they didn't realize the devil owns that fence. They didn't know. They thought this was a safe Christian place to be. We're just going to preach the gospel. We're not going to be mean and divisive and political. We're just going to have our nice church. We're just going to do church. Well, that's not Christian faith. That is churchianity. That's dead religion, and that is the enemy of Jesus, of Nazareth. That's the enemy of Jesus, and it was the enemy of Jesus when Jesus was walking among us. Dead religion was the enemy, was a satanic thing disguised in nice religious trappings.

And so we have many pastors. You know who many of them are. Some of them are really bold about this, and others, they just say, "Well, I just want to have church. We want to have a nice church, and I don't want to be divisive." But God's message through Bonhoeffer was to the German church. "Do you see what is happening? You must speak about this." Bonhoeffer said, "The church is the conscience of the state." And Abraham Kuyper, the famous Dutch theologian, many years earlier, famously said that, "There is not one square inch

in all of creation over which Jesus Christ, who is sovereign does not say mine." We are not to keep our faith in a religious box, in a theological ecclesiastical box. We are to take our faith out into every sphere, and oftentimes that means being political. Of course it does.

And the idea that somehow we have in the church drunk the Kool-Aid that we're not supposed to be political, that's not biblical folks. It is not biblical. You're not supposed to make an idol of politics. Chuck Colson, my hero, would often say, "Jesus is not going to return on Air Force One," right? That's right. But that doesn't mean you don't understand that who is president is going to affect many, many lives, not just your lives and not just your family's lives, but the lives of strangers whom you're supposed to love in the name of Jesus by advocating for them, advocating for biblical values.

So the Nazis took over, and the key of course, was the Nazis said, "We just need the church to keep sleeping because eventually it'll be game over." It's Gulliver being tied down by the Lilliputians. The Lilliputians, if Gulliver wakes up, they're trying to tie down Gulliver, Gulliver will crush them, but if they can just keep him sleeping a little longer, a little longer, and keep tying him down, keep tying him down, keep tying him down, eventually it's over. He can't get up. It's over. There's no doubt that Hitler understood that with the German church. He said, "If the German church wakes up, we're in trouble, but if we can just keep them sleeping..." He had contempt for the Lutheran pastors. He had contempt for the church. He would not reveal that. He would just talk a nice game, talk a nice game. Just pretend like that religious stuff is just separate.

In other words, that's the devil's idea of the Christian faith. We keep ourselves in a little theological box. We do our little rituals. This is the official Communist Chinese position of the church. "Oh, we let you have church. You go into your little building, do your little weird little rituals. We have no problem with that, but when you come out, you bow to the secular authority of the atheistic state." Well, any church that can go along with that bargain is not the church of Jesus Christ. We are commanded by God to take our faith out of that building and into every single sphere, including the political, the values of God are meant to be brought to bear in every sphere, including and often, especially the political sphere.

Roger Marsh:

Well, what a thought-provoking presentation given by Eric Metaxas today here on Family Talk, and that was only part one. Just visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk and you can listen to it again or share the program with a friend or family member. Be sure to join us again tomorrow to hear part two of this dynamic presentation. Friends, thanks for remembering that Family Talk is a listener supported broadcast outreach, and we greatly appreciate your prayers and financial support.

We also love to hear from you as well. If you have any questions, comments, or prayer requests, please feel free to contact us by phone at 877-732-6825, that's 877-732-6825. Our trained customer care team is standing by ready to take your

call every day, Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM Mountain Standard Time. I'm Roger Marsh, and from all of us here at the JDFI, thank you for making us a part of your day. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Family Talk.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone. This is James Dobson inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline, or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife, we want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?

Roger Marsh: Hello everyone. Roger Marsh here for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. The news comes in all shapes, sizes, and formats these days, but how do you cut through all the noise and get to the heart of the matters that affect your family? We'll come to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and sign up for Dr. Dobson's monthly newsletter. You'll find clarity on tough issues, encouragement for daily life, and trusted principles to help you build strong, healthy, and connected families. Go to drjamesdobson.org and sign up today. That's drjamesdobson.org.