

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOOD PEOPLE SLEEP?
A Devotional Meditation from
Jeremiah 5:20-31; Matthew 5:13-20, 23:27-28; 1 Peter 5:5-11
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Chancellor Adolf Hitler and President Paul von Hindenburg, March 21, 1933. [Bundesarchiv Bild 183-S38324 / CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE, via Wikimedia Commons.](#)

Few people realize that when Adolf Hitler came to power, he did so while most of the German people had little knowledge, understanding, or interest in what was happening to their nation. In 1933, most Germans struggled simply to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads. They had endured more than a decade of impoverishment and shame due to the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. That treaty, imposed by the victorious Allies after World War I, had stripped Germany of its overseas possessions, reduced the size of its army, confiscated its navy, placed foreign occupying troops on German soil, and imposed a massive war

reparations bill that took 90 years to pay. Then came the Great Depression of the 1930s, leaving the nation utterly destitute and nearly ungovernable. Radicals on both the left and the right competed for the attention of the mass of ordinary Germans who simply wanted their children to grow up in peace. All the while, an increasingly desperate democratic government found no way of easing the economic uncertainty and restoring peace and stability.

Germany was ripe for revolution. The only question was whether the leaders of that revolution would be Communists or National Socialists – the German version of right-wing Fascism. Both staged uprisings, starting in 1919. In 1923, Hitler's Nazi Party tried to seize power in Munich, but were quickly overcome. Hitler himself was arrested, tried, and sentenced to prison for treason, and his party was left in shambles as other leaders fled the country. However, during his five years in prison, he consolidated his thoughts on the destiny of Germany in his infamous book, *Mein Kampf*. Upon his release, the Nazi Party resumed its work of undermining the institutions of the nation and creating the conditions to seize power.

The moment arrived in January 1933. The Nazis won a large number of seats in the Reichstag (Parliament) through their campaign promises of bringing prosperity and dignity back to the nation. Moreover, they were not above strong-arm tactics, intimidating both the opposition and the electorate. However, what helped the most was the fear of the Communists, who became the second largest party in the Reichstag. To prevent a Communist revolution, the democratic government leaders compromised to make Hitler the Chancellor of Germany, believing they could control him and his thuggish supporters.

Of course, they could not. Within months, the Nazis had silenced all opposition and taken full control of the nation.

All while Germany's people continued to toil on in their daily lives, taking little notice of what was happening to their nation. In years to come, the world would wonder how they could let such an evil person as Adolf Hitler come to power. In particular, the world would wonder how the German church could allow it. Pastor Martin Niemöller, who lived through that era, provided an answer in his famous poem:

First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up,
because I wasn't a Communist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up,
because I was a Protestant.
Then they came for me,
and by that time there was no one
left to speak up for me.

Niemöller was right, of course, but his explanation doesn't cover the root of the problem. By the time the Nazis started taking people away to concentration camps, the soul of the German nation had long been sick of an insidious creeping cancer. It's not so much that the good people turned bad, or the righteous became wicked overnight, but that they became so focused on the struggles of their daily lives that they lost sight of the growing peril around them. Before they knew it, the choice before them was either cooperate with the evil Nazi regime, or face a series of very unpleasant alternatives. The fact that most chose to look the other way and continue to live their daily lives indicates that the soul sickness had become terminal. The nation died in the flames of World War II, and although God in His mercy brought resurrection, it was in the midst of great sorrow that might otherwise have been avoided.

But how? Perhaps by more emphasis on pursuing righteousness rather than simply being good citizens. This is a common shortcoming among God's people in all ages. Listen to what He said to the people of Judah in the days of Jeremiah:

"Declare this in the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah, saying, 'Now hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear. Do you not fear Me?' declares the LORD. 'Do you not tremble in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, an eternal limit, and it will not cross over it. Though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they will not cross over it. But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and departed. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the LORD our God, Who gives rain in its season, both the autumn rain and the spring rain, Who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."

Your wrongdoings have turned these away, and your sins have kept good away from you. For wicked people are found among My people, they watch like fowls lying in wait; they set a trap, they catch people. Like a cage full of birds, so their

houses are full of deceit; therefore they have become great and rich. They are fat, they are sleek, they also excel in deeds of wickedness; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the orphan, so that they may be successful; and they do not defend the rights of the poor. Shall I not punish *them* for these *things*?' declares the LORD, 'Or shall I not avenge Myself on a nation such as this?'

"An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their *own* authority; and My people love it this way! But what will you do when the end comes?"

Jeremiah 5:20-31 NASB

Ancient Israel again provides an example for us in this age. That is why Messiah Yeshua taught that we are the salt of the earth: the preservative for a world suffering from the insidious, terminal cancer of sin. If the salt of righteousness is not in us, then how can we perform this essential function? If we do not know the commandments and standards of righteousness our God established and explained in His word, then how can we live according to them? And if we do not, then how can we remain vigilant against the creeping evil that threatens to overtake every generation?

The answer is to humble ourselves before our God, learn from Him, and live as expressions of our Creator in His creation. That is just what Peter tells us:

[All] of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT HE GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time, having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you. Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. So resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers and sisters who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, *and* establish *you*. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:5-11 NASB

Yes, evil is unavoidable, and suffering must come. Enduring such trials is how we grow into the righteous people God desires. However, the suffering should come because we are vigilant pursuers of righteousness, not because we have let it come through our own negligence. An appearance of righteousness is not enough. Unless we are practicing righteousness, we are what our Messiah called the religious leaders of His day: whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones. The choice before us is harder to make than you might think, because it must be made day by day. It is the difference between being a city set on a hill, offering refuge to all, or being simply good people seeking only to live our lives in peace and quiet, unaware of the darkness growing around us.