

# “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy”

## Adult Education Hour

Sunday, October 15, 2023

- I. Welcome
- II. Introduction
  - A. Who was Dietrich Bonhoeffer?
    - a. By way of introduction, I’m simply going to read to you the opening paragraph of his *Wikipedia* entry for some basic information about him.
      - i. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (4 February 1906 – 9 April 1945) was a German [Lutheran](#) pastor, theologian and anti-[Nazi](#) dissident who was a key founding member of the [Confessing Church](#). His writings on Christianity's role in the secular world have become widely influential; his 1937 book [The Cost of Discipleship](#) is described as a modern classic.<sup>[1]</sup> Apart from his theological writings, Bonhoeffer was known for his staunch resistance to the Nazi dictatorship, including vocal opposition to [Adolf Hitler's euthanasia](#) program and genocidal persecution of the Jews.<sup>[2]</sup> He was arrested in April 1943 by the [Gestapo](#) and imprisoned at [Tegel Prison](#) for one-and-a-half years. Later, he was transferred to [Flossenbürg concentration camp](#).
      - ii. Bonhoeffer was accused of being associated with the [20 July plot](#) to assassinate Hitler and was tried along with other accused plotters, including former members of the [Abwehr](#) (the German Military Intelligence Office). He was hanged on 9 April 1945 during the collapse of the Nazi regime.
  - B. Why take a couple of Sundays to reflect on Bonhoeffer’s life and witness?

- a. So, over the years, I have heard a story about the Church in Hitler's Germany. That story went something like this.
  - i. Christians were overrun by Hitler's political power in the 1930's.
  - ii. Leading up to World War II, Hitler's hatred of Christianity led to the oppression of the Christian church and the closing of churches.
  - iii. And the Church was one of the few institutions that resisted Hitler.
  - iv. It was a story very much of the good people and the bad people. And the church was the good people and Hitler and his supporters were bad people.
- b. But that story changed for me. I have through the years discovered. In college. In seminary and onward. It's a more complex story.
  - i. Why was it. That in Hitler's rise to power, that Christians and the Church were overwhelmed?
  - ii. It turns out, that the relationship between Christianity and Nazism far differently than what I had originally heard.
  - iii. One of the hard things about looking back at this time is that we know how it went so wrong and how it turned out.
  - iv. But at the time, Hitler was seen as a kind of bumbling idiot that the German aristocracy thought that they were going to be able to manage and control if they allowed him to become chancellor.
  - v. And so we often sort of find it hard then to go back beyond that period and try to think about the fact that Hitler was just another politician.
  - vi. And another way of saying this maybe is how we would have viewed the situation had we been Germans living in the early 1930's?

- vii. How would we have thought what would we have believed about the crowds that were so willing to give this man their loyalty?
  - c. What we may find is that Christianity in fact prepared the way for Hitler and that Christianity prepared the ground so that Hitler could build on almost 2 000 years of Christian tradition and practice to initially gain power.
    - i. He only turned on the Christian church when he realized it was not going to give him what he wanted, which was no criticism and complete obedience to his agenda.
- C. What we're going to do
- a. Look at life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer through the eyes of one of his biographers, Eric Metaxas. Journalist, radio commentator. And author. Books about Martin Luther, *Letter to the American Church*, and this book, Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy.
  - b. Four videos examining Bonhoeffer's life and thought.
  - c. Today.
    - i. "**What Is the Church?**" you will think about what the church should really look like, forgetting tradition, and looking at what Jesus taught His apostles. (20 minutes)
    - ii. "**Living in Christian Community**," you will learn about New Testament Christianity and what it looks like to live this out as a community of believers. (23 minutes)
  - d. Next Week
    - i. "**Religionless Christianity**," you will look at a negative religious faith—simply avoiding sin—as compared to the act of trusting and obeying God by putting your faith into action. (21 minutes)
    - ii. Session 4, "**Come and Die**," you will get a vision, through Bonhoeffer's life in prison and, ultimately, his death in prison, of what it looks like to take up Jesus' cross to live in communion with him. (23 minutes)

- e. After each video I'll leave you to respond and discuss in small groups.
- f. That's where we're headed.

### III. Prayer

- A. Prayer from Bonhoeffer himself. From his book, *Letters and Papers from Prison*.
- B. Let us pray: *Lord in me there is darkness but with you there is light. I am lonely but you do not leave me. I am feeble in heart but with you there is help. I am restless but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness but with you there is patience. I do not understand your ways but you know the way for me. Lord Jesus Christ you were poor and in distress a captive and forsaken as I am you know all man's troubles you abide with me when all men fail me is your will that I should know you and turn to you lord I hear your call and I follow. so help me. Amen*

### IV. Video Clip 1 (20 minutes)

- a. Small Group Discussion
  - i. According to Bonhoeffer and this video, what is the church? What is the church to do?

### V. Video Clip 2 (23 minutes)

- a. Small Group Discussion
  - i. What, according to Bonhoeffer, is living in Christian community about? Why is it important?

### VI. Closing