

Unimprisonable

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The 1977 epic *Star Wars* space opera film begins with an opening crawl describing a civil war between the Galactic Empire and star systems rebelling against its evil rule. In order to squash the rebellion once and for all, the Empire has built the Death Star, an armored space station the size of a small moon with the power to destroy an entire planet.

Princess Leia Organa, receiving schematics for the Death Star stolen by Rebel Alliance spies, sought to transport them to a safe place where they could be examined to find an exploitable weakness. But her starship was intercepted by Imperial forces under the command of Darth Vader. Before her ship was boarded and she was taken prisoner, she managed to load the plans into a droid, who escaped the ship and crash-landed on the nearby planet Tatooine.

Princess Leia was taken to the Death Star to face Wilhuff Tarkin, governor of the Outer Rim Territories and overseer of the battle station. Along with Emperor Palpatine and Darth Vader, Tarkin acted as a third member of an unofficial triumvirate that ruled the Empire. He was a strong proponent of strengthening the rule of the Empire over the galaxy by instilling fear through overwhelming displays of force.

In seeking to extract from an uncooperative Princess Leia the location of the primary base of the Rebel Alliance, Tarkin boasted of the planet-killing power of the Death Star and his belief that it would terrify the galaxy into submission to the

Empire's iron grip. Undaunted, Princess Leia told him:

"The more you tighten your grip, Tarkin, the more star systems will slip through your fingers."

Rebel fighter pilots from star systems that slipped through Tarkin's fingers later received the schematics to the battle station and found a fatal flaw in its design. They were able to take advantage of this vulnerability, and Tarkin, in the final battle, perished along with the technological terror in which he took pride.

While there are many examples in modern history of autocratic governments, it is particularly notable to observe that for more than a decade, a number of Western governments, long influenced by the Christian values of religious liberty and expression, have started to take on some of their characteristics, just as the Galactic Republic in the *Star Wars* movies was transformed over time into the tyrannical Empire by increasingly corrupt, power-hungry politicians and military leaders.

Managing speech and the flow of information has become of great importance to those leading such governments and societies. In a special address at the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2024 Annual Meeting, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, stated that the primary focus for the global business community over the next few years would be tackling disinformation and misinformation.

The WEF and its global partners view disinformation as false information deliberately propagated to deceive people into submitting to the political, commercial, or military goals of its promoters. They see misinformation as inaccurate information disseminated inadvertently and without the intent to deceive. Of course, they seek to establish themselves as the global authorities on what constitutes disinformation and misinformation.

Von der Leyen, referring to the *Digital Services Act (DSA)* enacted by the European Union in 2022, expressed the desire to continue working with multinational technology companies to regulate large online platforms in the kinds of content they promote and propagate, especially making use of well-trained artificial intelligence (AI) to facilitate this effort.

Though not using terror for tighter control over society in the same sense as Tarkin did in *Star Wars* with the Death Star, the global elites of the world are certainly seeking to build a superweapon of censorship to manage the attitudes and beliefs of people over a range of issues, such as so-called climate change, alleged global pandemics and “recommended” medical interventions, and mass migration.

An example of this can be found in the United Kingdom, where the government monitors social media postings of individuals for comments that go against its narratives regarding mass migration and arrests and imprisons people for making the “wrong” kinds of comments. Similar punishments for speech contrary to government narratives occur in other Western countries, such as France and Germany.

The challenges for Christians to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in this environment may be intimidating, but we need not be daunted by the powerful weapons of cancel culture and censorship arrayed against us.

Since the birth of the Church, followers of Jesus have endured numerous attempts by despotic governments to crush them through marginalization, censorship, imprisonment, and execution. But according to the promise of Jesus (Matthew 16:18), no matter how tightly they clinched their fists, believers always slipped through their fingers, the gospel continued to spread, and the Lord redeemed more people and added them to His Church. This continues to this day in communist, Islamic, Hindu, and even some Western countries.

This should encourage us not to be silent but to speak the truth of God's word confidently, because it cannot fail to accomplish the purpose He has established for it (Isaiah 55:6-11). That is, reconciling lost sinners to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ.

This assuredly comforted and encouraged the apostle Paul as he sat in a Roman prison awaiting execution for preaching the gospel. Recognizing that no amount of censorship or persecution could hinder the message of the cross, he wrote in his last letter to Timothy, a young pastor he mentored:

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but **the word of God is not imprisoned**. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." (2 Timothy 2:8-10)

Be not afraid to share the gospel message. No matter the sophisticated superweapons put forth to restrain it, it is unimprisonable and can still slip through the tightest grip to change hearts and save souls.

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