

4 July 2013

## Re: Letter from Street Preacher arrested by Wimbledon Police

I am writing to you because I was arrested on a London high street on Monday (1<sup>st</sup> July) for preaching from the Bible. I believe my arrest has great significance in light of the current passage of the Government's Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill.



I was arrested under Section 5 of the Public Order Act for using "homophobic" language which was deemed offensive. The language I used was not homophobic, as I was not promoting fear or hatred of homosexuals. I was simply explaining a passage in the Bible which speaks of sexual immorality and that people should abstain from it (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12). I did not speak solely about homosexuality as a form of sexual immorality but also about any kind of sex outside of marriage between one man and one woman, as well as lustful thoughts. All of these are considered mainstream Christian positions and have been taught and believed by Christians for thousands of years.

After being questioned by police officers on the street, I was taken to the local police station and arrived there at 4:50PM. Here I was searched, my property was removed from me and my camera was booked as evidence. I was then photographed, a sample of my DNA was taken and my fingerprints were taken. I was placed in a cell with a toilet but no toilet paper. The investigating officer offered me a £90 ticket which would ensure my immediate release and an assurance that I would be able to return to the country (I am a US citizen). He told me my solicitor was on the way to the station and I said I would like to wait to talk to him before making a decision.

Later in the evening, I met my solicitor and with him present I was interviewed by the investigating officer. I was advised that the interview was being recorded and that I could refuse to answer questions but that this may be held against me in court. The investigator asked me to give my account of what happened before asking specific questions. He asked me, among other things, whether I believed homosexuality was a sin. He also asked me: "If someone you knew as a homosexual came up to you and asked you for a favour, you'd quite happily offer them that favour would you?"

"It was unnerving to be questioned about my Christian beliefs and I was made to feel that my thoughts could be held against me. The two final questions were: "Do you believe you are 100 per cent right in what you did today?" (I answered yes) and: "If you were to go back there tomorrow, would you do the same thing again?" to which I also answered yes.

After the interview my solicitor had a conversation with the investigating officer outside of my hearing. When my solicitor returned, he told me that the investigating officer said my answers to the last two questions left him no choice but to seek prosecution. I was then advised by my solicitor that I would likely spend up to 24 hours in jail and that I would go before the magistrate the following day. He also advised me that while the magistrate could allow me to return to the United States, he could order me to stay in the United Kingdom until the completion of the trial, which could be three to four months. After that I

was escorted back to my cell. I was then given, upon request, a Bible to read – the very book whose teachings led to my arrest!

An hour or so later, the investigating officer entered my cell and told me the inspector had decided to release me with no further action. At midnight I was released from jail, after just over seven hours in custody. I asked the desk sergeant if I could donate Bibles to the station. He welcomed the offer and said I could leave them with the desk officer at the front of the station. My solicitor then drove me to my place of residence.

I felt I should write and inform you of these events, since it was very distressing to be arrested and interrogated for openly expressing my deeply held Christian beliefs. I began my message by assuring the people that mine was not a message of hate but of love.

I don't expect you to share my beliefs but think you will agree that I, and everybody else, should have the freedom to express those beliefs without fear of reprisals from the Government. My freedom was taken away from me simply because someone didn't like what I said. Now that your nation has begun down this slippery slope, where will it end? Will people one day be arrested for disagreeing with the political party in power? And what assurance will the people have that it will stop with speech? It did not stop with speech in 1930s Germany. Many of your countrymen sacrificed their lives to end the tyranny that began with the abandonment of free speech. Nations that do not learn from history are destined to repeat it.

For these reasons I urge you to do what you can to halt the Bill's progress before freedom of speech is not just shut down on the streets (as it was for me) but also in churches, universities, schools and homes.

Please be assured of my prayers for God's blessing on you in your important role as a public servant.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anthony Miano". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Tony Miano