



Written by [Annalisa Pesek](#) on March 22, 2021

## Canadian Pastor Released From Jail: “I Am Not a Political Revolutionary. I Am Simply Here in Obedience With Jesus Christ”

*UPDATE: Since the writing of this article on the morning of March 22, Pastor James Coates of GraceLife Church in Parkland County, Edmonton, Alberta, has been released from Edmonton Remand Centre, where he was detained since February 16 for violating government-mandated COVID-19 regulations. Upon his leaving the jail, Pastor Coates offered this statement: “I am not a political revolutionary. I am simply here in obedience with Jesus Christ, it is this obedience that put me at odds with the law.”*

According to the [Edmonton Journal](#), Coates appeared virtually for a hearing at Stony Plain Provincial Court and pled guilty to “breaching a court undertaking to follow public health regulations.” Provincial Judge Jeffrey Champion denied the defense team’s proposal of “a joint submission with the Crown of a \$100 fine,” stating it was not “a fit sentence and that it was not a punishment in the public interest.” Instead, Champion issued a \$1,500 fine and credited Coates with time served. “Your decision could have been of danger to the health and safety of those in the community,” said the judge.

Consistent with the report below, all other charges against Coates were lifted, though the pastor does plan to challenge the constitutionality of health orders leading to a December ticket he received for permitting more than 15 percent of his congregation to attend services. The trial date is set for early May.

Canadian Pastor James Coates of Edmonton, Alberta, has paid a steep price for defying strict government-mandated COVID-19 lockdown orders by continuing to hold services for his 400-plus-member congregation at GraceLife Church near Edmonton.

Pastor Coates was jailed on February 16 and charged with multiple violations of the Canadian Crown’s Public Health Act. Coates is the father of two young sons, and his wife, Erin Coates, was prohibited from visiting her husband for two weeks after his arrest.

Coates was denied bail in early March for refusing, upon his release, to promise in a signed document



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to operate his church at limited capacity and follow social-distancing rules. He has remained incarcerated awaiting his May trial date.

Yet in a surprise turn of events last week, no doubt spurred by the tireless efforts of his team of lawyers at the [Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms \(JCCF\)](#) and media attention (albeit not enough), the Crown, or Alberta government, agreed to withdraw all charges but one violation of a health order. Coates is expected to be released from the Edmonton Remand Centre today, March 22, following a bail hearing that was scheduled for earlier this morning.

In his sermons leading up to his arrest, Coates bravely preached against the government's attempts to control the people's right to gather and worship. He conducted extensive research on the coronavirus, consulting with physicians and other medical professionals to understand how the disease works and who are the most vulnerable.

He publicly spoke out against the "Romans 13" argument that many pastors are using to justify their willingness to comply with the stringent regulations, which require churches across Canada to operate at 15-percent capacity. Pastor Coates called this obedience "pastoral malpractice."

"Do we have that authority, that we can tell people they can't worship? We refuse to tell people of this body they can't come. Our responsibility as shepherds is to open our doors. We are opening our doors to worship," preached Coates.

In addition to the message above, the sermon [here](#) offers a comprehensive understanding of Pastor Coates's argument for refusing to turn congregants away from the church.

On Thursday, March 16, in an informative, online exclusive interview with Canadian TV host Faytene Grasseschi, Erin Coates and John Carpay, president of the JCCF, discussed the pastor's arrest, his release, and what comes next for Grace Life Church.

"I'm feeling a wave of emotion," said Coates. "I'm excited and so grateful for the work of the JCCF lawyers.... I think people see the secondary cause of what we're doing is fighting for their freedom.... For us this is about the worship of Christ and His headship over His church. I think they see that we're fighting for their freedom and just how detrimental the lockdowns have been."

According to Carpay, at Coates's next hearing "it's likely a judge will accept joint submission by the Crown and the defense and that Coates will pay \$100 penalty for violating the health order." He continued, "The other health order will go on trial in May, and it won't be so much Pastor Coates on trial but the government's health orders themselves for violating our Charter rights and freedoms. The government is going to have to produce evidence in court to justify these health orders."

The most critical part, emphasized Carpay, is to get Coates "out of jail without him having to abide by the unconstitutional health orders that are violating his rights and freedoms. He could have been released earlier, but he was not willing to make that promise to abide by unconstitutional rules or regulations that violate his rights and freedoms."

Since Pastor Coates's arrest, GraceLife Church has seen a surge in service attendance. "[These events] have brought the light on our church and brought a lot of people who are missing human contact, who are wounded, and need the church.... It's brought those who know the Lord and who don't, which is exciting for us that they get to hear God's Word," said the pastor's wife.

"It shows that the people of GraceLife Church don't worship a man, they worship the Lord Jesus Christ. Even when my husband is out of the picture, there will be another one who will step up and lead God's



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sheep. Obviously, we want James back.... He misses them; they're a part of his life, it was getting increasingly more difficult not to be with the people he loves the most."

To other spiritual leaders across Canada, Coates had this message: "We know how this disease works now, who the most vulnerable are, and how we can work to protect them. People are really hurting; they need to worship God. They need to be together. Open your doors to pre-COVID restrictions, and if you're not quite there, wrestle with what's going on, as studies are starting to be released."

Reportedly one in 10 Canadians have reported dealing with depression in the last 10 months. More than 800,000 Canadians have lost their jobs and the country is now talking about a third lockdown. "People are struggling with suicidal thoughts. Opioid addiction is going up, drug addiction is going up. Our nation is really hurting. We hope not only to take care of God's people but that we have hope in the Lord Jesus to help you live life to get you through these hard times," said Erin Coates.

Carpay told Grasseschi he believes the tide is turning in terms of public opinion about COVID lockdowns. "Every court ruling from here on out will be setting a precedent for other provinces. Several lessons we take away from this is that if you fight a battle, you can win. If you don't fight a battle, you are guaranteed to lose. Coates is a hero because he chose to fight a battle that he was called to fight."

In a powerful final statement, Carpay strongly urged people to exercise their freedoms. "That's what pastor Coates did, he exercised his Charter freedoms of conscience, religion, association, and peaceful assembly. When the government cracked down on him and singled him out — there were restaurants who refused to shut down and they didn't go to jail — it took tremendous courage and Canadians need to look to that as an example." "Stand your ground, fight your battles. That's what turns things around."



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