

Sermon Series: Spurred on to Holiness (and Power) by Immersing Ourselves into the Life of Christ Through the Eyes of the Apostles – A Harmony of All Four Gospels

March 29, 2020

Sermon Title: Half-Penny Sparrows and God's Infinite Protective Love for You

Today's Scripture: See insert

Introduction: Last week I spoke from Psalm 62 that God is our refuge. This week I am speaking about the same absolute truth from Matthew 10. Do we fear Covid-19? How silly. BTW. It has a .1% fatality rate. Dr. Fauci says it is no worse than a bad flu. The hysteria is serving many purposes that are not God-pleasing. In today's sermon I will speak of our fear to proclaim truth in Jesus' name and how that fear can be overcome by faith.

Main point: The world hates God, and the world hates Christ-followers, but in the end God and we WIN!

Context:

1. Hardship and persecution are hallmarks of true discipleship. "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves,"
 - Philip Keller's famous little book "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23". You have to understand Psalm 23 before you can sense the fullness of this passage. Sheep are defenseless, fearful, easily panicked, targets of predators like wolves that love to shred flocks for the fun of it.
 - So for the disciples, expect to get bit. Expect to have your flesh torn into by enemies of Christ. Who are these wolves Jesus spoke of? EVERYONE WHO FELT THREATENED THAT THE GOSPEL WOULD TAKE AWAY THEIR POWER. Pharisees? How? Sadducees? How? Herod? Yes. How. The Romans. Yes. But last on the list. Any King was a threat to Caesar.
 - Who are the wolves today? ANYONE WHO FEELS THREATENED THAT THE GOSPEL WILL TAKE AWAY THEIR POWER.
 - NYT blaming Covid -19 on evangelical Christians for voting for Trump. Hostile?
 - It's any University Department head firing a professor for daring to question evolution or scientist who dares to show evidence of creation by design.
 - It's any atheist in a legislative body who pushes to forbid the name of Jesus at the end of a Christian prayer as has happened in MN. Mohammed, Buddha fine. Not Jesus.
 - It's any Planned Parenthood director or president who aims to destroy the lives of those leaving abortion clinics and revealing the truth like Abby Johnson is doing.
 - We could go on but in general up until now wolves have been few and far between in America. Not so for the church around the world that has had to suffer church burnings, home burnings, murder, intimidation. Just look at India, China, now Iran.

- This is not a motivating speech. To tell recruits that their flesh is going to be ripped into by blood thirsty wolves is hardly an incentive. Yet, it is. There are incentives unknown to humanity, such as going out in the power of Christ against overwhelming odds. Seeing Christ protect while his sheep at the same time slaying wolves by getting them sick, or killed or laid off or discredited. It is a genuine incentive to see one's faith grow in the midst of terror.

2. Knowing we will be persecuted, protect yourselves by being smart and blameless. *so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (ESV)*

- Snakes are known to be crafty and shrewd. First of all they usually don't get stepped on because they see their enemy coming and so they move away and find cover. Then if they are hunting their prey they sneak up on them much like Satan sneaks up on us from the side or from behind. I haven't yet seen a live trap to catch snakes.
- How does this apply to us? We don't go looking for a fight. We don't start a theological fight. We don't tell a non-Christian boss that his spending time after hours with his secretary is prelude to an affair.
- It means we look for traps. When a co-worker asks you how you feel about having to work with a fellow employee who is gay, you know it's a trap. Stay clear. Besides having a colleague who is gay is a good thing. You may be their path to heaven.
- Innocent as doves means give no cause by speech or behavior that would cast a negative view of Christ in the world. Never give the enemy a chance to accuse you of wrongdoing. Because they are watching every move and every word.

3. Identifying ourselves as Christ-followers exposes us to the world's hostility. *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.*

- A follower of Christ (disciple) is not immune to the world's hostility because he is only a student of the Master. The world will not hold a student to have greater honor than the teacher and be protected from persecution. No, they will receive equal hostility if not more, especially since He was perfect and we are not. We are exposed to a lot more criticism, especially among those who know us.
- "It is enough" or it is "sufficient" means simply this – all it takes for hostility from the world is to be just a little bit like Jesus. Our imitation of Christ in the area of purity of life and speech, integrity regarding work and honesty, is all it takes to get the wrath of foul-mouth Chuck, or dirty-minded Sally to get miffed at you for your lack of participation.
- If the world has so little respect for Jesus that they are willing to call him a devil-like demon god like Baal then certainly they will not hesitate to malign his people. The hatred in America's press for evangelical Christians is evidence of this pooling of hostility.
- George Yancey did a study to verify this hatred and quantify it. Let me quote: see notes

4. The enemies of Christ's motives will be revealed and fully punished. "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."
 - Their hostility towards Christ-followers stem from hidden motives that will be exposed and dealt with on Judgment Day. Accusing Christians of pride, intolerance, bigotry, self-righteousness, when there is none of that stems from the fact that they hate anything that limits their sinful desires. They think they can assuage their guilt by blasting away at the very people who remind them they are condemned and on their way to hell.
 - This gets real close to home when our own family members, children or grandchildren, start separating from us because they know deep down we are right and their lifestyles are wrong. Painful. But on Judgment Day all of that will be revealed. The source of their anger will all come out. God will make certain of that.

5. Here's how brave Jesus wants us to be – don't hold back from biblical truth. Tell everybody. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.
 - Rabbis would often whisper in a disciple's ear a truth and have them repeat it back in a form of rote learning. Jesus did that with the twelve. He taught them hard things like who is going to hell and who isn't.
 - We are to be without fear and brave enough to preach the hard truths to all who will listen no matter what sin they are actively pursuing.
 - Soft-sell evangelism never produces long term disciples.

6. A fear of men will shut our mouths, but an awe-filled fear of God will spark obedience. *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*
 - We need to keep saying to ourselves, "What's the worse this person, these people can do to me? Lose my job. Get harassed on Facebook? Eventually kill me.
 - Jesus says there are far worse things to fear than this. For the non-believer, he needs to fear the one that can torment his soul in hell forever. To the believer he needs to fear the God that has that power and is going to do that to Christ's enemies.

7. An Awareness of God's protective and loving care will give us courage. *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*
 - Do we really believe that every single robin, bluebird, sparrow flitting around our back yard are under God's watch-care and safety. They are. Do we really believe that God is so interested in us that he knows how many strands of hair were left in your hairbrush this morning and how many are left attached to your scalp? Then if we truly knew that, believed that felt that, then no threat against us has any fear power.
 - Compared to the God above any Illuminati is nothing but an ant under God's boot. And if the Illuminati who control trillions are ants how much smaller is every person in your life who wants to cause you harm and hurt you for your stand for truth.

Final thought: