

Be Faithful to God's Word in the Face of the World's Opposition

Acts 4:13-22, Trinity Sunday III
June 8, 2008

Beloved of the Lord..... It is the command of our Almighty God, that we diligently hold faithful to God's sacred Word. In Revelation God tells us that if we add to His Word, God will add to us the terrible plagues written of in the Bible. Likewise if we take away from God's Word, God will take our name out of the Book of Life and the holy city of heaven above. When we were confirmed, we took a public and sacred vow before God and man to hold true to God's Word, to be faithful to God in all His teachings. We must hold fast to ALL the teachings of the Bible. Revelation 3:11 says, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." This means we are to hold true to the true teachings of Scripture so that no one steals heaven away from us. We are not to sacrifice one jot or tittle of God's holy law.

God especially holds pastors accountable for teaching the full truth of God's Word. For if he teaches falsely, not only does he lead his own soul to damnation, but also the many souls of those who follow him. The Bible is filled with passages which warn ministers to be faithful to God's Word. God tells young pastor Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." If pastor Timothy faithfully taught the Gospel, his own soul would be saved and also the souls of his people. On a similar note, in Titus 1:9 bishops, or pastors are instructed to be "sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." Tit 1:9 Not only must a pastor hold faithful to God's Word, but he must be able to apply the truth of God's Word to individuals who oppose the truth, for the salvation of their own souls.

Our lesson therefore today, is that we are all to be faithful to God's Word, even when this world threatens to punish us for speaking the truth. For wherever there is the Gospel faith in the heart, there is also a willingness to suffer all for the cause of Christ. We would rather suffer death than sacrifice even one precious Word from the lips of our Savior. May God help us to be faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of everlasting life.

I. Be faithful to God by being faithful to His Word.

After Peter and John had testified that the impotent man was healed by the holy name of Jesus, the priests and Sadducees were surprised. They had assumed the Peter and John were simple and stupid men, that they could easily threaten and intimidate. In the same way our world today thinks Christians unlearned folk. Do not be surprised if they call you foolish or even stupid for

believing in the six days of creation. They will likewise mock you if you take a stand against pre-marital sex or homosexuality. They will call you names like "homophobe" or "goody two shoes". They will say you are narrow-minded as if they are the enlightened ones, though they remain in darkness. Marvel not if the world hate you. But if you boldly speak His Word, it will make an impression upon them. When Peter and John boldly spoke of the name of Jesus, the priests "took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." We who believe have likewise been with Jesus, or rather Jesus has been with us through His Word and Sacraments. Even His Holy Spirit is upon us by faith through the Word. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life."

Our life is in Christ, being justified by faith alone. We live by the power of His Word. Therefore we are never to forsake or cut ourselves off from this life-giving Spirit filled Word. Peter and John held faithful to God's Word because they had been with Jesus by faith. Though Satan's henchmen met together, and counseled against the Lord's anointed, they couldn't deny the miracle. The once lame man literally stood there with Peter and John. Stand up stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross! But in order that the Gospel be spread no further, they threatened Peter and John. "They called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." Such arrogance this unbelieving world! Peter and John responded, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye!" This bold and straightforward answer smote the conscience of these evil men! Do you think you ought to be obeyed more than God? Does that sound right to you? Is your man-made word more holy or more sacred than God's Holy Word? You be the judge! So when we speak God's Word, we must appeal to the God-given conscience of every man. Speak in a way so that their own conscience condemns them.

But don't be surprised if they harden their hearts against the truth. Just because we speak God's Word, and the Holy Spirit works through the Word, God's Word can be resisted by the stubborn heart of man. Though the enemies of Christ were certainly condemned by their own conscience, they didn't repent. "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go." Let us here take note of the tools this world uses, namely threats and intimidation. If you stand up for the truth of God's Word, if you hold fast to all the doctrines of the Scripture, not only will the world threaten you, but they will hate and persecute you. Jesus said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." If people hate you simply because you are

speaking the truth of God's Word, "rejoice and be exceeding glad." You are doing the work of a prophet. You are obeying the first commandment, which is to love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, and mind. Great is your reward in heaven. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Though heaven is our home, let us remember there is a cost to discipleship on earth. There is a cross we must all bear if we hold fast to God's Word. Sometimes this cross is the enmity of family. If we love our family more than God, we commit idolatry. We must hold our Savior more dear, than family. We should love our Savior who redeemed us from death and hell more than we love our own mother or father, son or daughter, brother or sister. Jesus said, "a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Mt. 10 We need to be willing to suffer even death for the sacred and saving name of Christ. Faithfulness to God and His Word rises far above the earthly family God has given us.

II. If we are faithful, God will be glorified among men.

But how do we find the strength or the power to love God above all things? Where does the boldness of Peter and John come from, to stand up for the truth even at the threat of death? Our strength or power to love God above all things comes from the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. We love Him because He first loved us. Though we are miserable sinners, quite unworthy of His grace, Jesus reveals His eternal love for us in the Gospel Word which tells us "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Though all men by nature are at war, enemies with God by way of sin, God was moved by grace to save us from ourselves. In Christ, God came to this earth, to die on the cross for His own enemies. If you want to know or understand how great God's love for you is, ask yourself this question: if God permitted it, would you yourself be willing to suffer in hell forever, if it meant that your loved ones would be taken to heaven? Jesus answered YES to this question. That is the very reason He came to this earth, so that He could suffer as a Man damnation on the cross in your place. Jesus did not want you to suffer so. He came to give you by His own blood, everlasting life. This is why if you want to be forgiven of all your sins, faith alone in Him is necessary - for He through the cross has already bought and paid for all your sins. Faith alone in Him is all that God requires of you. Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation;

but is passed from death unto life."

Dear sinner, do you now see how much God loves you? Do you understand by faith in your soul all He has done for you? When we see this wonderful and infinite love of God toward us, we begin to look at the world, even our enemies in a different light. We begin to see that Christ came to save them too from their sins, and the same blood that God shed for us, was also shed for them. Why then does God want us to boldly speak the full truth of His Word to them?.....only so that they will be saved, as we have already been saved. God's love and mercy and compassion toward them, is no less than His love and mercy and compassion toward us - only they do not yet know it. But they need to know it, our enemies need to know it lest they be damned in their sins, as we almost were ourselves. That is why "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." For we have seen and heard our Lord Jesus Christ through the Gospel Word that brings with it the forgiveness of sins.

We then should not be discouraged in our work of bringing God's Word to others. God's Word bears fruit because God's own Spirit is in those words, working through those words, for they are God's holy Words, and not man. When Peter and John boldly preached God's Word to the people, the Bible says, "all men glorified God for that which was done!" They couldn't deny the miracle which was done in the name of Jesus! But more importantly all men glorified God because they had come to know that Jesus had saved them from their sins by His own body and blood on the cross! That is what it means to glorify God! We praise the holy name of Jesus, because Jesus literally paid for our sins with His holy and precious blood! May we then understand God's true and real purpose for us, while we are yet on earth, we are to be faithful to His Word, in all its truth and purity, so that the Gospel can prevail in the heart of our neighbor, our friend, our relative, and even our enemies. "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Amen.

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