

Preparing the Apostolic Evangelists, Part III

Call to Worship: Psalm 99

1st Scripture: Matthew 10:1-23

2nd Scripture: Matthew 10:24-33

Introduction

This morning we are continuing to move forward in our study of the instructions that our Lord had given to His twelve Apostles, as He was preparing to send them out to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Last time, we found that our Lord would be sending them out as sheep among wolves, and that they would face great persecutions, being brought before governors and counsels and kings, to bear witness to Christ. And ultimately, they would be hated by all for the sake of His Name. Their ministry would be conducted in a context of great opposition, but they were not to fear this opposition, recognizing that the Holy Spirit would provide them with boldness and the words that they ought to speak when brought before authorities (and to stand trial). And furthermore, the Lord would return in judgment against the Jews, before they had even finished making their way into all of the cities of Israel.

No doubt, overall, this portion of our Lord's instructions would have deeply impacted His Apostles, as they certainly, up to this point, would not have grasped the severe challenges which lie ahead for them, as they seek to conduct their ministry unto their Lord. And so, this morning then, we continue on with this theme, as our Lord further elaborates upon all that He had just stated, and which we have considered last time.

I. Preparing the Apostolic Evangelists, Part III

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” (Vs. 24-25).

Again, as our Lord had just informed them of the sobering reality that they would be as sheep among wolves, and that they would face severe persecutions and be hated by all, He

further validates this reality by presenting a logical argument to them. The Apostles have already witnessed the contention that had existed between the religious leaders and the Lord Jesus Christ. They were not unaware of the intentions of the religious authorities to harm and dispose of Him. They had also witnessed a large group of people attempting to throw the Lord off of a cliff, for claiming that an Old Testament Messianic text was being fulfilled by Him. Tension was already in the air, and this was only the beginning. Soon they would see Him taken captive at the Mount of Olives, brought before rulers and authorities, and ultimately handed over to the Gentiles to be mocked, whipped, beaten and crucified. In other words, the very things that the Lord had just spoken about, concerning the nature of their own upcoming trials and sufferings, would be experienced by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, first. He would be as a sheep among its shearers, silently submitting Himself to the wicked, abusive acts and hatred of His enemies, amongst a crowd of onlookers shouting, “Crucify Him!”

And so, here, our Lord says, in essence, “If they do these things to your teacher, rest assured, they will also do such things to you. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant his master.” If they are willing to do such things to the greater teacher, the very foundation of all that is embraced and taught by His students, do not think for a moment that they will not do the very same things to the lesser students. The disciples are trained and molded by the teacher, to embrace and live by the same principles which shaped the life of the teacher. Everything which they hated about the teacher will be the very foundational principles which govern the lives of His disciples. “It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” If they have called the Lord “Beelzebub,” a name of insult/mockery for satan, believed to mean “lord of the flies/dung heap,” how much more will they address those of His own household in the same way. And so, the main point that our Lord is trying to get across here then, is that His Apostles can anticipate such harsh treatments and opposition throughout the course of their ministry, because He Himself has received, and will continue to receive, such harsh treatment Himself. The general response to the Gospel which the Lord preached, will be similar to the response which His disciples receive, when they preach the same Gospel. This

reality, in itself even, solidified the fact that He would be sending them out as sheep among wolves.

That said, while they were to anticipate such consistent opposition; while they were to be prepared for it (as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves); while they were to remain alert at all times, they did not have to be afraid. Being alert and being fearful or anxious are two different realities, which sadly, at times, can become conflated. There is a balance that the Lord is putting forth here, desiring His disciples to be focused and prepared at all times, while not being anxious, obsessive and fretful. He has already sought to encourage them by informing them that the Holy Spirit would give them the courage and the words to speak when they stand before authorities. He has also assured them that He will return in judgment, specifically upon the rebellious Jews, before His Apostles even finished traveling through every city in Israel. And now, He adds these words of encouragement: “Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known” (vs. 26).

What is our Lord saying here? Ultimately, He is saying, “Don’t worry. In the end, no one is getting away with anything. Do not be afraid. Justice will come. Everything that has been covered; every deception and crafty way will be exposed. Whatever is hidden now; whatever is done under the table in this world; whatever people thought they were getting away with by dealing with you deceptively, and unjustly accusing and persecuting you, will be revealed and made known, when I return. There will be a day of reckoning, when everything will be laid bare and exposed. The shame which people have buried in this life, will meet them, in full, in the next.” This being the case, the Apostles could boldly proclaim all that our Lord has taught them, not fearing those who would seek to oppose them.

“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops” (vs. 27). Here, our Lord is simply saying, “Do not be afraid then. Everything I teach you privately, boldly proclaim it all, and to all, without fearing men. My Words are My Father’s Words. Bring them from the classroom out into the open. Proclaim them from the roof tops. Get them into as many ears as you possibly can, not allowing the threats or positions of men to hinder you to the slightest degree.” Verses 28-31- “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in

hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (vs. 28-31).

At best, even the strongest of men can only harm and kill the body, but they are incapable of touching the soul. But, God is able to cast both body and soul into hell forever. God can destroy both. And in using the term "destroy" here, the Lord does not mean "annihilate" (or cause to cease to exist), but rather, He can commit them to utter and eternal ruin, where there will never be the hope of experiencing the joy of blessed humanity ever again. They will cease to exist for the purpose for which they were created. Indeed, they will *exist*, but in unending torment, and in a state of no turning back, and utter ruin. What a healthy thing it is to fear God and not men, when considering this reality, especially since this life (in the here and now) is so short, and there is an eternity to go, beyond here, for all of us.

And so, the Lord exhorts His Apostles to be driven by a fear of God (who will ultimately recompense all of His enemies) and not men, whatever position they might temporarily fill in this life. And furthermore, looking at things from the positive standpoint, God cares for His people, and nothing will happen to them, which is not ordained by God for their good and His glory. God's care over this creation is so precise and focused, that even sparrows (which were virtually valueless; two were sold for a copper coin) do not fall to the ground apart from His will. Not a single bird dies on the watch of God, until His preordained will calls for it. Indeed, the Lord moves on to say that even the hairs of our heads are numbered. In other words, God's sovereign control over His creation is so fixed, universal and great, that not a single hair falls from the head of any of us, until the exact timing that He has ordained for that to take place, comes to pass. All of our hairs are numbered! That being the case, what could any man, in any position, do to God's people, which God has not ordained beforehand, even though their intentions may be evil, while His are good? The Lord brings home the point when He adds, "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." If God so cares for sparrows, and if God orders things in such a way, that not a hair falls from the head on His watch apart from His will, then how much more ought His children to find comfort in knowing that His care for them is perfect and never negligent. For, we are worth far more than many sparrows.

Sparrows and hairs (which are too numerous to count, and of little import) don't slip through the cracks of God's providence, how then will His people, whom He has gone to the extent of redeeming through the shed blood of His Son? And so, clearly, the Lord's Apostles then, had no reason to fear anything, even though they were being sent out as sheep among wolves, and even though they would face the hatred of all, for the sake of Christ's Name. Bringing the will, desire and power of God into the equation, really brings things into perspective, doesn't it? But sadly, for various reasons, it is too easy to lose sight of God, and when that happens, suddenly, everything else becomes much bigger.

Our Lord then concludes this section by adding a sobering, "Therefore," statement. "Therefore (in light of all that I have just said), whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven" (vs. 32). In the end, the Lord's Apostles (and all of His people for that matter) have to think "big picture." This life is so short. The worst that can happen in this life, for the Christian, is the killing of the body, which, by the way, will be raised again incorruptible. But, there is a final judgment to come, beyond this life, where we will stand before Christ (and God), and have to give an account. And from there, a road will be taken by all, into eternal condemnation and torment, or eternal blessing and glory. What Christ, the universal Judge of all mankind, then rules concerning our state, will be irrevocable. And so, the encouraging assurance given to His Apostles and to all who truly embrace Christ by faith, is this, "Whoever confesses Me before men (whoever is not ashamed to confess Me as Lord and to declare My Kingdom and My Gospel before men, in this lifetime), him I also will confess before My Father who is in heaven." I will take ownership of that individual as belonging to Me, as having been secured and purchased by My atoning sacrifice, so that, they will be welcomed into the presence of the Father forever, and without regret. I will confess them as My brothers, bringing them into My household, to enjoy fellowship with My Father. And My Father will receive them gladly, because they are in union with, and belong to Me.

And so, up to this point, our Lord's instructions have included some sobering and painful realities concerning the ministry of His Apostles. They would be as sheep among wolves. They would be arrested, persecuted and delivered over to governors, kings and counsels. And they would be hated by all for the sake of Christ. But, in all of these things, they would not be alone.

Their sovereign God would be with them, directing every aspect of their path, until they make it home to glory, where they will receive their heavenly reward. And those who have opposed them (without repentance), will be justly recompensed in due time. It's never an enjoyable thing to undergo suffering and persecution, but to be able to do so, without fear, while casting your eyes on the certain, eternal prize, makes it much, much more bearable. You see the investment. You know the certain outcome. And you see things through the eyes of Christ, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured even the cross and despised the shame, and has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God!

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) Brethren, when we consider the offense of the Gospel, and how the unregenerate, natural man will respond to that offense, at the very least, we ought to be concerned when there is very little opposition against the church for a lengthy period of time. In other words, we would not be unwise to ask, "Why are we not facing the types of persecutions that our Lord says will come against those who are faithfully proclaiming the Gospel?"

Now, I realize that there are times of respite, and we certainly don't want to unnecessarily beg for persecution, but it really comes down to this. Can we say that we are really an effective light to the outside world, and enjoy very little resistance for any lengthy period of time? Isn't the devil constantly at work, with his minions, wherever the Gospel light is shining bright? If we are but confined to these four walls, and to our own homes and jobs and every day life activities, with very little concern for expanding the Kingdom of God, then it would make sense that persecution (at the hands of the world) would be minimal. Right? If we look and act and live like the world, with very little light shining forth from us, to expose the darkness, then it would make perfect sense that we should enjoy lengthy periods of time, being free from conflict and opposition from the outside world. But, we are not called unto a ministry of ease, are we? A ministry of ease is an ineffective ministry which does very little to expand the Kingdom of God. In short, brethren, we must be an offense (simply by proclaiming the truth), if the Kingdom of God is to expand through us. Strongholds must be torn down. False ideas must be exposed. Every thought must be taken captive to Christ. And so, at the very least, I want to encourage and

exhort us to consider the effectiveness of our outreach, as a church. And I want to encourage each and every one of us to consider the effectiveness of our outreach as an individual. And so, let us ask the question, honestly and prayerfully: Are we an offense? Are we experiencing even a fraction of what the Apostles had experienced in their own day? Are we faithfully proclaiming the Gospel of Christ, living with the Kingdom of God ever at the forefront of our minds? And if not, what types of changes do we have to make? How must we reorder our priorities, in keeping with the will of God, who has redeemed us by the death of His Beloved Son, so that we can effectively proclaim the glory of His Son, and the Kingdom of His Son?

2) While we know that God is “all sovereign,” in theory, brethren, trials, challenges and just the general busyness of life can often eclipse what we know theologically, leading us to fail to carry it over into our practical living. It’s like the neurons in our brain, which carry information from the brain to the rest of our bodies, which produces the actions we desire to do. If the brain is damaged because of a stroke or some other kind of trauma, we can remember how to move our body parts, without actually being able to move them, because the message from the brain is incapable of making it to those parts. Well, in the same way, we can speak of God as “all sovereign,” but when various trials come upon us, we can lose sight of the reality from a practical standpoint, leading us to respond in ways which are inconsistent with what we believe. There is a connection breakdown between what we know theologically, and applying what we know, practically. But, there is a way to help overcome this “lost connection” deficiency.

We need to make it our regular practice, to do those things which would continuously and consistently cause us to be processing the reality of God’s sovereignty, so that, we are prepared to make good use of this truth when we come upon unexpected trials in our Christian walk. This would include regular, daily time in prayer and in the Word. We need to reflect upon; to saturate our minds and hearts with the reality of what this text teaches us, namely, that God is sovereign even over the minute matters of preserving sparrows and hairs, and that He actually cares about us far more than those things. God hasn’t forgotten. He cannot forget. God hasn’t lost sight of us. He cannot lose sight of us. God isn’t distant. He cannot be distant. Circumstances have changed, but God hasn’t, and indeed, He has further ordained the very circumstances which we are presently facing. And this is always the case.

Indeed, these two truths should blow our minds, compelling us to continually engage in a state of continual worship. God is so great, that He is infinitely beyond what we could ever comprehend. He transcends all things. And yet, at the same time, God is so close, that He is involved with every single fraction of a detail that pertains to our lives. He is imminent. Lay hold of these truths, brethren. Exercise them into your minds and hearts, regularly (daily), and you will be able to endure whatever comes your way, in keeping with the unchangeable, divine will of God! You lost a hair today? You saw it fall from your head? God ordained that. You're seventy years old, and you still have a large wave of hair upon your head? God ordained that. Now, carry that over into the far more important matters of life. Does God suddenly drop out of the equation, when dealing with big issues, when He gives such careful attention, as it were, to such small and seemingly insignificant issues? You are right where God wants you, right now, in this life. Praise and serve Him right there, and don't be afraid. Might it be very painful? Yes, of course. Is it always enjoyable? No, of course not. But, if you are a child of God, it is His certain investment, toward making you more and more like His Son, because He loves you. He loves you so much, that He is doing all that is necessary, and nothing more, to form you into what is most lovely, the image of His Son. To this end, we remain alert at all times, but we seek to put off all anxiety and fear. That's not always easy (believe me, I know), and God doesn't beat us up for our faults in this regard, but let us strive to remain confident in God's faithfulness, because He is faithful. And let us strive to put off fear, because we have nothing to fear in this life. If God is for us, who can be against us?

3) Finally, for those of you who are still unbelieving, this morning; for those of you who are still not in union with Christ by faith, consider the sobering, striking and fearful truth that springs out of our Lord's warning here, to His Apostles. "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Friend, there is no more frightful reality in all of Scripture than to consider the just and righteous reality of God's holy wrath toward sinners. Consider this for a moment. Outside of Christ; if you are not in Christ (who alone can remove the terrible blemish of sin from man's soul), then you are still a walking offense before your holy God. And to this end, God hates what you are because of your sin. To be sure, you have been made in His image, and to this end, you

are precious and valuable. But, you are deeply marred by your sin. You are as a poisoned well that has become so useless to the owner, that He would sooner fill it with dirt than take water from it anymore. And if you die in that state, your ruin will be permanent, and God will cast you into the fire of His everlasting wrath forever and ever. There will be no turning back beyond the grave. [Note: All will be revealed on the Day of Judgment, every secret sin exposed...etc]

Will you gamble with your very life for another day, indeed, for another hour or minute or second even? Will you leave here unfazed, unmoved, again, having no concern about the fact that if your very frail and unstable life should end today, you will be eternally damned? You are presently an enemy of your Creator. His wrath abides on you; it hangs above you at this very moment, and in His perfect time, He will snuff you out and you will be set on the course of eternal, conscious torment. As painful as it might be, your life will not be ruined if you fail out of school, lose your job, lose your friends, your family or even your spouse. But, if you die in your sin, your life will be forever ruined, and there will be no way back. It will be too late. You will dwell in a state of unending regret and torment. [Jesus came for sinners! The Gospel!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25

[Note: The false notion that hell's fire is kindled by the devil, when in fact, it is kindled by the wrath of God...or, that hell is satan's domain, when God created it for the very purpose of expressing His righteous wrath against the eternally damned]