

Is This Really a Good Idea?

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Well, on these Christmas times I like to have just a brief kind of devotional thing before we share in the food and fellowship and tonight I wanted to call something to your mind and to give you a perspective thinking about the Incarnation and the birth of our Lord Jesus and the humble circumstances of which our Brother Kevin read so well just a few moments ago.

Most Americans realize that our President is protected by an agency known as the Secret Service and according to its official website, secretservice.gov, the Secret Service and I quote,

"The Secret Service is recognized for the physical protection it provides to the nation's highest elected leaders, visiting foreign dignitaries, facilities and major events. In order to ensure a secure environment for protectees, the Secret Service integrates a variety of innovative technologies and maintains a highly skilled and motivated workforce."

Continuing the quote,

"Using advanced countermeasures, the Secret Service executes security operations that deter, minimize and decisively respond to identified threats and vulnerabilities. The protective environment is enhanced by specialized resources within the Secret Service, including: the Airspace Security Branch; the Counter Sniper Team; the Emergency Response Team; the Counter Surveillance Unit; the Counter Assault Team; the Hazardous Agent Mitigation and Medical Emergency Response Team; and the Magnetometer Operations Unit. Other specialized resources also serve to provide protection from threats, including chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials and explosive devices."

That is a formidable degree of protection to bring to the President and to other important people, isn't it? I mean, just the sound of those units is enough to intimidate you not to have any evil thoughts toward anyone.

Now, to be clear, I'm all in favor of the Secret Service. I'm all in favor of them using every possible device that they can to protect whoever our elected leaders might be. We

should protect them. It is our duty to protect them as representatives of our nation. The logic of the Secret Service reduced to its most fundamental premise is this: important people need increased security, and as the President is at the pinnacle of the most important people in our society, he deserves the highest security that we can provide to him. Fair enough.

Has it ever occurred to you that God advances his plan of redemption in a completely different way? Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus Christ is infinitely more important than any world leader could ever be? The eternal Son of God compared to a man of passing human flesh? The only Redeemer of mankind? And that when he came to earth, as we've sung about earlier this evening, when he came to earth, he was the only being in the universe who was capable of saving men from eternal hell. He was tasked with the fulfillment of God's eternal plan which was established before the beginning of time and yet what do we know about his birth? He was born in an obscure place, in a comparatively obscure time, to obscure parents in an obscure location, which may have been as simple as a cave. This supremely important person was a vulnerable infant kept in an animal trough. Is this really a good idea? Is this the way to do things? One wayward kick of a donkey and the whole plan goes down. One mortal illness contracted in the elements and the plan is undone.

Do you see the human vulnerability of what's at stake? Do you realize that someone far more important than a U. S. President had no security forces around him? That tells us an awful lot if we think about it. You know, the truth of the matter is that for as impressive as the resources of the Secret Service are and the resources that are brought to bear to protect the President when he is out and about, in one sense, it projects strength but why is all of that strength necessary? Because he's supremely vulnerable. We've had multiple Presidents assassinated, haven't we, over the course of our nation's history? We've had multiple men die in office that weren't assassinated. The truth of the matter is that all of this force of protection simply shows that this is a man of weak, vulnerable, human flesh and the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ needed none of that when he came, showed who was in supreme charge and who was really strong, who was really powerful. But according to human wisdom measured by the logic of the Secret Service, this was not a good idea, to have someone that important so vulnerable and unprotected.

Think about it further, though, as we kind of just walk down a brief path remembering the career of our Lord Jesus while he was here on earth, think about it further: this infant somehow survives the bad idea of having him born and vulnerable like that and he grows into a man; somehow he survives the threats of childhood and infant mortality and comes to maturity. What did he do? He started to teach. He started to attract disciples; a motley crew, a lot like you and me at the time. And even in that small circle of the 12 that were closest to him, what happened? One of them betrayed him. And Judas on the night before Christ was crucified, brings a Roman army to take him captive. Rather than being a world leader with forces protecting him, Jesus was instead faced with an army that was against him and he faced them alone, and they carried him off in weakness and in apparent defeat, although admittedly he spoke a word and they all fell at their feet for a moment before him. But rather than this great leader, for lack of a better term, having an army

around him, he has an army against him. Is this really a good idea? If this is the plan of God, is this a good idea? What mind conceives of such weakness being that which advanced the plan of God?

Take it a step further. What happens? He's tried and condemned under Pontius Pilate, even though Pilate sees his innocence. He is taken away. He is crucified in shame and in agony as those who crucified him mocked him, as his mother watched from a distance helpless to do anything to protect or help the infant that she once held in her arms. Secular and religious authorities both arrayed against him and he stands, as it were, between heaven and earth – he hangs, better stated – hangs between heaven and earth, suspended in mid air unable to do anything for himself, nailed to a wooden cross in the vilest, most wretched form of execution that has been known in the history of man. This is the Son of God? This is the Savior of the world? This is the idea? Is this really a good idea that power would be displayed in that kind of weakness?

Take it further. As it turns out as you watch this unfold over time, the plan is to preach this rejected and crucified man to the world as the only Savior of mankind, and a world that calculates and comes up with a force like the Secret Service to project power and security, is supposed to look on this one who was rejected and believe that he is the only Savior of mankind, the only one who can rescue them from eternal judgment. That's the message. Is this really a good idea? Are you kidding me?

You could go further and read in Scripture in 2 Corinthians 12, for example, how God makes it clear that his followers, including the great Apostle Paul, would know insults and weaknesses and distresses and persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake, and it would manifest and it would display to them their utter weakness and utter inability to do anything on their own, and God says that his power would be perfected in their weakness, his grace is sufficient. This is a good idea? At every point of redemptive history, you could say, there is this weakness being manifested as you look at certain points of emphasis. The birth in Bethlehem. The cross. Today's Gospel preaching. The lives that you and I live that supposedly are a fragrance and an aroma to the living Christ manifested in weakness. Is this a good idea?

In 1 Corinthians 1, the Apostle Paul addresses this principle of weakness that is inherent in the message of the Gospel, that is inherent in the life and ministry of Christ, and is inherent, really, in the very nature of the people of God. You know, it is not the wealthy and the powerful that are the primary instruments, the primary bearers of the message of the Gospel, is it? It's weaklings like you and me and this is how God intends to build his kingdom? How Christ intends to build his church? This is the idea?

In 1 Corinthians 1:26, the Apostle Paul says,

26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God.

The whole idea of God is contrary to human wisdom. The fact that we would look on these things, that the unsaved, carnal, unregenerate mind would look on these things and declare them foolish, is the very point. It is the very point that shows that the message of Christ, the Incarnation of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ, the preaching of the Gospel of a crucified Christ for the soul salvation of men, could not possibly have come from men because man would never come up with this. It is the very weakness of it that manifests the power of God; that manifests the wisdom of God; that shows that this does not originate from human thought, human ingenuity.

Paul went on in chapter 2, verse 1 of 1 Corinthians and said,

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Beloved, let me tell you something really vital for your spiritual health for that which you would teach your children for you to understand that would give security and stability to your faith and that which would help explain the philosophy of ministry at this small local church: we do not do things, better stated, God does not do things according to human wisdom. God contradicts human wisdom with the way that he operates. The world raises up a security army around its leader, God says, "I don't need that." Their security army actually shows that they are not in control of the situation. God shows he's in perfect control of the situation by having nothing around to protect his Christ. Nothing could penetrate. Jesus said, "There are 12 hours in a day. My day will be fulfilled. My time is appointed and Herod, that fox, cannot shorten it." The very weakness, beloved, manifests the sovereign power of God.

And so we look at what the message is that this crucified Messiah who was, by the way, raised from the dead, resurrected on the third day showing the supreme power of God, manifesting power even over death which the Secret Service did not list on their website as one of the things that is within their power, to raise the dead. You see, beloved, the world cannot claim credit for the Gospel and I love it that way, don't you? The Gospel is completely contrary to worldly wisdom. God deliberately manifested Christ in weakness. He deliberately chose weak and foolish things to advance his purposes so that it would be clear to everyone that the glory belongs to him alone; that God advances his kingdom solely by his power.

And how does God certify that truth to us tonight? How do you know that the Gospel is true as you sit here this evening? Well, it's not by worldly means and, beloved, it's not by worldly arguments either. We don't build a probability case for Christ and say, "Won't you please believe? He's knocking at the door of your heart begging for you to open up and let him in." What a distortion of truth that is. No, no, how does God certify the truth of these things to us? He certifies it to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; he certifies it to us by the authority of his inspired and inerrant word; he certifies it to us by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

How is it that we can know these things are true? Are you looking for truth in a confusing age that has smothered the Gospel not only in commercialism and sentimentalism but in a whole philosophy of ministry that deliberately caters to the minds of carnal unregenerate men? How can you find the truth in the midst of a world like that? How can you find forgiveness for your guilty soul and rest in the forgiveness of sin? Let me give you a really good idea: don't look for things that have the approval of men. Don't look for things that the wisdom of men would approve and applaud. Look for the things that have the approval of God as testified in his own word.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6-8, Paul says,

6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

You look for truth in the pure word of God, the pure milk of the word of God, that's where you find it. And as you read the word of God, you look, you listen, you pay attention for how it testifies to a crucified and risen Christ. And you look and you contemplate and you trace it back and you realize that in a human sense, in the realm of time, that this wisdom of God started in a manger with a babe born in completely unprotected circumstances, and his very vulnerability testifying to the certain purposes and the unconquerable power of an omnipotent God.

My friend, if you're here tonight looking for those things, looking for certainty in your confused and uncertain mind, looking for relief from your guilty and accusing conscience which knows that you have sinned against God and that your soul is not right for him, and you're looking for an answer that echoes and resonates with truth, that you can rest your eternity on, that you can stake your existence on, that you can stake all of your hope on and abandon everything else, and let one solitary hope be that which captures your heart, you look to Christ, the Christ who alone is revealed in Scripture, who alone is the Christ, who alone is the name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Look to the Christ who said, "Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him will have eternal life." And Christ says, "I, myself, will raise him up on the last day." You know,

we can't have it both ways, we can't have the approval and applause and praise of men and have Christ. You have to let go of one to have the other.

Beloved, Christ is certified to us by the wisdom of God, certified by the greatness of Scripture, the greatness of the resurrection, and the greatness of the Holy Spirit who certifies to your heart the truths of the things of which we speak. Praise God for a Gospel that is rooted in the wisdom and the power of God and not in the feeble, fainting wisdom and power of men.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we asked the question rhetorically as we reviewed the history of the life of our Lord Jesus and now we would answer the question, "Is this really a good idea?" O God, it was the best idea of them all. This was the wisdom produced in the intra-Trinitarian councils of the Godhead before time began. This is the purest, loftiest, most wondrous wisdom that human ears have ever heard and we praise you for your power and your omniscience which conceived of the plan and then brought it to pass. And Father, we thank you supremely tonight for the grace and the kindness and the mercy that imparted the knowledge of the Gospel to our own darkened hearts, and that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you shone a ray of understanding into our hearts that you fanned into a flame of repentance and faith. You awakened our dead souls and called us to life and gave us the power that we would come forth, repent and follow you. And now that we belong to you, O God, by your great keeping power, we know that you will keep us all the way to the end for he who began a good work in us will certainly perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. All of these things, all of this wisdom, all of the power, all of the promise, wrapped up in those swaddling clothes 2,000 years ago in a manger.

Lord Jesus, we bow before your supreme wisdom. We bow before your incalculable grace and mercy. We bow before you in wonder, praise and adoration and magnify your holy name. We magnify you for your grace. We magnify you for your presence. And we magnify you, Father, that our affections, our loyalties, our energies, our abilities, could be devoted to that which is true rather than perpetuating ourselves and those around us in the weak and feeble lives of men. Grant grace to each one that is here, Father, to those who belong to Christ to rejoice as we recall that holy night when Christ was born as Savior of the world. For those here, Father, perhaps some who are visiting who do not know you, awaken their hearts like you did ours and bring them to Christ that they might be saved forever and join with us in a glad hallelujah chorus around the throne of the crucified and risen Lord. In the name of our Lord Jesus we pray. Amen.

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