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The Gospel According to Matthew

Do You Want to be Saved? -and- Fear or Faith?

January 20, 2019

Sermon Text: John 5:1-6; 2 Tim 1:7

Scripture Reading: 1 Sam 17:32-51

This morning I want to speak to you about two vital subjects which are presented to us in the form of two questions:

1. Do you want to be saved?
2. Fear or faith? Which do you choose?

The Scriptures we will be looking at which deal with these two questions are:

Joh 5:1-6 After this there was a feast

of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. (3) In these lay a multitude of invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed. (5) One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

And -

2Ti 1:6-12 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, (7) **for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.** (8) Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, (9) who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages

began, (10) and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, (11) for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, (12) which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.

Do You Want to be Saved?

This past week I had a note from a mother who asked me if I could recommend to her some program or book or other resource to help her with her teen-aged son. The boy has begun to search the internet looking for pornography and she is very understandably concerned.

What would you tell her? Carefully monitor his online use? Restrict it? Install software that allows you to see the activity? Send him to a counselor? Initiate disciplinary sanctions? Educate him regarding the harm such sin causes?

To one degree or another, each of these steps could be good things to do. After all, how do we expect people battling with such sin to overcome if they are carrying a virtual porn shop right in their pocket on their iphone?

That is rather frightening to think about, and we should think about it probably much more seriously than we have.

But what would you tell this mother? As I thought about what to say, two things came to mind:

1. Try to determine what it was that set this very young boy (13) off on this path. Who or what occurred to put this into his mind? This may help to remove such influences from his life.
2. But more importantly, I suggested to her that she present Jesus' question to her son. Namely,

“Do you want to be made well?”

Because surely this is the only real solution to any such enslavement to sin – *we must be made well by Christ. We must be born again.* And the question the Lord puts to each of us is, *do you want to be free of slavery to sin? Do you want to be made well?*

I have a friend who is a counselor and she told me that she always asks this question of clients who come to her asking for help with some addiction. *Do you want to be healed?* Because the truth is that many if not most people do not really want to be set free from their sin. They simply want some

“fix” so that they can continue in that sin without any serious consequences.

This of course requires that we understand just what Christ’s healing effects. So I went on to ask the mother if her son had ever been taught biblical truth about such subjects as:

- What is salvation in Christ?
- What does the Lord do in us when He saves us?
- What does it mean that the Christian puts to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit?
- Does a true Christian actually desire sin, or does he/she truly want to serve and obey Christ? Why then do we still feel this strong compulsion to sin?

The sad fact is that most people today who profess Christ are totally ignorant of these crucial issues which the New Testament spends so much time declaring to us.

Here is the truth. When Christ saves us, He puts us to death. That old person we were. That old man who entered this world in Adam, a child of Adam, in slavery to sin and death. Christ joins us to Himself when we repent and believe in Him and we die with Him and are buried with Him. He takes us to the grave. There is no time wasted trying to reform that old Jeff. The old Jeff will never be reformed.

Further, the old Jeff *will never want to be reformed*. The old Jeff loved his sin. Insert your own name here. Understand this clearly:

The person you were (and perhaps who you still are) when you were born into this world cannot be saved. He must be put to death. Christ does not reform the old me when He saves me. He makes and creates a brand new person.

We tend to think far too highly of ourselves, do we not? We think that we have some innate goodness in us which, if just somehow fanned into flame, will become good in God’s sight. And THAT is what so many of these “Christian” programs and books and therapies and so on are designed for.

But the Bible says:

Rom 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? (2) By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (3) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

And this is why Jesus so often asked people, *do you want to be made well?* Do you want to be saved? Because a “yes” answer to this question entails these things:

1. Admitting that I am not just sick in sin, I am dead in sin. Hopeless. Terminal. Unfixable.
2. Realizing that without the Lord’s Spirit working to draw me to Himself, the fact is that I don’t want to be healed. I don’t want to be saved. I love the world and I love my sin.
3. Understanding that if Christ heals me, if He saves me, I am going to be an entirely new person whose very desires are radically different than they are now. My “precious” is going to become repugnant to me.

Now, think on this. Think of that crippled man by the pool. *Do you want to be made well?* The truth is that many such people do not want to be made well. They have learned to “cope” and use their maladies to their own advantage. People give them empathy. Pity. Money. They have grown accustomed to their life as it is. And so it is with the person dead in sin. *Apart from Christ and the powerful working of His Spirit, all programs and routines and therapies designed by man are nothing more than what the Bible calls, the law:*

Gal 3:10-12 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (12) But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

It is proper to even ask a child this question – *do you want to be made well?* Do you want to be set free from enslavement to sin and the devil? Do you want to be made a brand new person? Do you want to give up that bad company – those evil friends you have been hanging with and seeking approval from? Do you understand that YOU can never go to heaven? That you must be put to death, buried, and raised up a brand new person?

As much as a parent loves their child, as much as we love other people in our lives, *none of us can answer this question for them.* In fact, we go very wrong often at this point. *We want them to be made well so badly that we try to heal them ourselves. It can't be done.* Only Christ. Only Christ. And only the sinner can answer this question for himself. *Do you want to be saved or are you really quite happy with who you are now?*

Fear or Faith?

2Ti 1:6-12 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, (7) **for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.**

One of the enemy's common traps used against us is *fear*. Fear of death. Fear of illness. Fear of poverty. Fear of sickness. Fear of a nuclear bomb. Fear of other people not liking us. People can be afraid of just about anything.

Some fear is right and good. You have probably heard of a good book called *The Gift of Fear*. The theme of that book is that human beings need to pay attention to feelings of fear – of a stranger perhaps – because that fear is trying to warn us about something real.

And of course it is right that all men should *fear the Lord*. It is an evil thing not to have such fear:

Rom 3:15-18 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) in their paths are ruin and misery, (17) and the way of peace they have not known." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

We are surrounded by people today who have no fear of God. But a godly person fears the Lord. Reveres Him and holds Him in awe:

Psa 22:23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

But the kind of fear I want to talk to you about now is the kind of fear that a Christian must put to death by the Spirit. It is the fear that Paul was speaking of when he told Timothy that God has not given us a spirit of fear. It is the fear that Christ has enabled us to be freed from:

Heb 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Let me give you a practical illustration of Christians being fearful when there was absolutely no reason for it. But if we are not wise and careful, we can be drawn into it. And note carefully – we never make good decisions when we are controlled by fear. Fear leads to un-wisdom and it can easily lead to sin as well.

You are all reasonably familiar with the wickedness that has caused the virtual destruction of ARBCA (the association of Reformed Baptist

churches we used to be members of). After we resigned and confronted the evil-doers with their sin, I received some feedback from other ARBCA pastors. Some was positive, thanking us and telling us they agreed with us. Others were wicked, accusing us of slander and so on.

But the thing I want you to notice is that in almost every case that I had communication with pastors who agreed with us, they said to me, “but don’t use my name. Don’t tell anyone that I am the one who told you this.”

Why? Why would they care if anyone knew that they were also witnesses to the evils that went on (and in fact who had knowledge, as it turns out, of evils we didn’t even know about at the time)? Why? Well, it seems to me that they were afraid. Afraid of what? Of the bullies. Of the wicked ones who had wormed their way into leadership positions.

But think of it. These people had no power. They had no authority over the churches. The most they could do would be to remove a church’s membership. So what? Yet these pastors were afraid. They had allowed the thing that Paul warned Timothy about to sweep over them. *A spirit of fear.*

The question we are faced with when the temptation to be afraid confronts us is, *faith or fear?* The Spirit in me, if I am a Christian, leads me to faith. To trust Christ and not yield to fear. My flesh screams the opposite, but I can put it to death by following the leading of the Spirit.

Think on this carefully. In Christ, I have a choice. I can fear or I can trust. Fear is entirely unnecessary for the Christian. It changes nothing for the better and it leads to all kinds of sin. Faith however gives us peace, a sound mind by which we can think truthfully and wisely, and leads us to obey Christ. Faith speaks truth boldly and exposes the enemy. Fear covers for the enemy by remaining silent. Faith walks in the light. Fear hides in darkness.

Do you realize that the Lord has told us we need not fear anything? And He means, *anything!*

Rom 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (32) He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (33) Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (34) Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right

hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (37) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (38) For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And again:

Psa 27:1-14 Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (2) When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. (3) Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. (4) One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (5) For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me

under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. (6) And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD. (7) Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! (8) You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." (9) Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! (10) For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in. (11) Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. (12) Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. (13) I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! (14) Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Faith or fear?, you see. What are you afraid of today? If you know Christ, you have nothing to fear. Nothing. Not even if you walk through the valley of the very shadow of death.