

Living Inside Out: Fight Like a Christian

Revelation 7:9-17

Intro

Our opening passage is one that we know from previous conversations relating to All Saints Day. We are told about the numberless multitude who are robed in white worshiping before the throne of the Almighty.

However, the perspective that I would like for us to focus upon is where these worshipers come from. That little tidbit (along with all of the 'no longer' describers that follow) declare to us in no uncertain terms that the lives faced by those now robed in glory were treacherous.

While our lives are anything but 'treacherous', the need to fight the good fight is still absolutely necessary and ridiculously important. Absolutely necessary because that is the life that our Savior has called for us to live (more on that in our second passage), and ridiculously important because the presence of God is not felt in the world by accident. No, God works through those who live their faith out. In case there's any question: that's supposed to mean us. The scripture reads this way.

Revelation 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, ¹²singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' ¹⁴I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

¹⁵ For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶ They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Matthew 28:16-20

Intro

Now, that call from Jesus to fight the good fight: one of the places that it shows up is right at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Right after Matthew's account of Easter morning, which is then followed by this interesting little tidbit that the guards at Jesus tomb were bribed to tell a story that Jesus body was stolen by his disciples (which doesn't speak all that well to the sort of military training that those guards

had...but I digress), comes a concluding paragraph that we know as the Great Commission ('go therefore and make disciples of every nation...').

And then that's it. The account ends. We aren't told if or how the disciples respond. It just ends.

But does it? Would we be here talking about how the story ends, if it just 'ended'? Would we be worshipping here this morning if the doubt that was described became the predominant reaction, not only among the disciples, but of those whom they shared their story with?

The answer is a clear, 'no'. This, combined with even a fleeting glance at the history of the world over the last 2000 or so years reminds us that fighting the good fight is anything but the exception. It's the rule. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

'Living Inside Out: Fight Like a Christian'

Martin was good at what he did. His contemporaries knew. His employers knew it. My guess is, that Martin was able to recognize it as well. By the time he was 24 he had multiple pieces of paper on the wall showing the educational levels he had attained. To highlight that point, by the time he was 28 he had become the head of his respective department. Just a few years later and he was overseeing at least 11 other similar departments in his region. He was climbing the ladder.

But Martin never felt that 'climbing the ladder' to achieve success in the eyes of the company was what ultimately mattered. No, Martin was a devout believer in God and he was willing to put that belief ahead of any standing that he may have. When he was 33, this devotion manifested itself in a letter to his boss that detailed all of the things that he felt was amiss at the company. The issues that he had were well thought out and pulled absolutely no punches. And to make sure that his employers actually read and really heard his critiques, he made sure to cc a ridiculous number of people both inside the company...and with the press. He spoke the truth as he had been led to declare it...even if that meant that his employers would get...upset.

And they did. HR was deployed in all of its respective forms trying to get Martin to back down from his grievances...which only steeled Martin's resolve because he felt that what he was saying was faithful to who God wanted him to be but more importantly, the truths that God had declared about God's-self over time. Any guesses on how that ended up? Exactly, not well.

Or, depending on your perspective, maybe it went really well.

Okay, enough of the speaking in code. The Martin who I am referring to is Martin Luther, the theologian who, 500 years ago on October 31, 1517, sent his 95 Theses to the 'supervisors' and 'CEO' of the Roman Catholic Church. These grievances were published and widely circulated within a few months. Almost

instantaneously, these ideas lit the theological and cultural kindling that was strewn throughout Western Europe into what we know as the Protestant Reformation, the same reformation of which this congregation here at Three Bridges is a decedent.

I bring this up for two reasons. First, 500 years feels like a pretty big anniversary (if 50 is the golden anniversary, what do you give when you're 10 times beyond that?).

But more importantly, Luther is someone who lived inside out, he stood for the truths of God and then he stepped out and proclaimed them, even when it looked like that proclamation would be to his detriment. He fought like a Christian.

That word, fought, is one that is, by and large, viewed in the negative in circles of faith because most of the connotations attached to it involve lashing out. Even last week, during the children's message, we were reminded that Jesus said (in Matthew 5:39), 'If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.'

But as we started to talk about last week, Jesus was not a pacifist in the modern sense. He expressed his emotions and sometimes that even meant that anger would show. I do not believe that it was uncontrolled, and it was very much in response to those who are taking the truths of his Father, the truths of God Almighty, and bending them to fit their wants and needs.

Jesus fought. He instructed his disciples to fight, fight the good fight, but fight. In Matthew 10:16 he tells them amidst a variety of instructions to 'be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.' It sounds antithetical.

But our faith, certainly according to the mores of secular culture, always has been. And until Jesus returns, I think it always will be.

So let's stop worrying about how the world views how we live out our gift of faith, and instead be focused on how God will view our actions (or lack thereof).

Which brings us back nicely to our passage at the end of Matthew.

A resurrected Jesus is before his friends, is before his disciples and he's providing them a guiding light for the rest of their days. 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing ...and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.' And remember, this was said to an audience that still included 'some' individuals who doubted.

That guiding light is declared...and then the Gospel account ends. From a literary perspective, we are left with the feeling of, 'well, what happens next? Is there a sequel? When does it come out?'

But from a place of faith, it becomes (or at the very least, should become) the light which keeps reminding us that no matter what skills and gifts we have been blessed with, our words, our actions, our very presence have an impact on the world around us, and we need to follow the leading of the Spirit so that the impact that is left is God.

We need to fight...like a Christian.

Jesus doesn't say, 'go therefore...and make sure you do so in a way that doesn't rock the boat, conforming to whatever direction the culture happens to be moving at any particular time.'

Jesus life looked nothing like that. We would be utterly mistaken to think (let alone hope) that our lives (when we are fighting like a Christian) would be without our own version of...ordeal.

Think about the version of Martin Luther's story that we just talked about. He's plugged into a time and place where people are already religious. But he sees through his study of God's Word that how the church was telling people they should live, was contrary to how God had already declared that people should live. Luther is credited with saying the following, 'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that really matter.'

He's right.

How we live impacts those around us. Stand up. Step Out. Fight like a Christian. Live the love of God.

The other night Jen showed me a picture that was taken at Bucks County Community College at some point over the last couple of semesters. The picture showed a young man holding a large sign that declared the following: 'If you (fill in the blank activities)...Beware, God is coming back.' This individual, who is a part of a cult-like community that masks itself as a church, was making an impact...and it was not of God.

As people of faith, we need to declare the truth of God's love through how we live. Which means that we cannot allow hate and hate speech to go by unchecked. We need to declare the truth of God by voicing the love of God especially when those who are around us are doing the exact opposite. If we stand by quietly, we passively give our approval of the hateful impact that is so contrary to the Almighty. We need to stand up. Step Out. Fight like a Christian. Live the love of God.

This past Tuesday, Jen and I simultaneously became the best...and worst parents ever. We were the best parents because we took the boys and headed to Newark to see a concert by an alternative rock band named Imagine Dragons up at the Prudential Center. We bought tickets last minute and everyone had a great time.

We were the worst parents because the 12 year old didn't get to bed until 12:30 AM...and then we sent him to school the next day!

The reason I bring this up is because during the show, the lead singer of Imagine Dragons talked about a disease that he has which he described as advanced arthritis. As he described it, he hurt all the time, which caused his depression to deepen and make him feel all the more angry and isolated from the world. Over the last few years, he has not only begun to receive treatment for his disorder, but also go through a whole lot of emotional counseling. He talked about the latter on stage encouraging people to know that if they are feeling that way that they are not alone, that they are loved, and that there are people who want to and are trained to help them.

Now I totally appreciate that he is not overtly Christian (even though he is someone who has a level of faith), but his willingness to stand up and step out was so on display that I sat back and thought to myself, 'I know that he is among people who paid to see him perform, but he recognizes the platform that he has been blessed with...and he's using it to declare love, and where love is, there God is as well.'

Remember, the Spirit of God is able to move through the world in remarkable ways. I'm at a concert with my family and I was very much reminded that as a person of faith that I need to stand up. Step Out. Fight like a Christian. Live the love of God.

Belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior was always meant to impact the world. It was always intended to be lived inside out. What did Jesus say? 'Go, therefore'. Today we are able to remember those who have completed their earthly part of that journey and are now a part of those worshipping before the throne clothed in white. They, in so many different ways, stood up, stepped out, and fought the good fight in ways that fit the skills and talents that God had blessed them with, even when their lives felt more like a great ordeal than not.

And now it is our responsibility to, 'go therefore.' As people of faith we need to declare the truth of God's love through how we live. Stand up. Step Out. Fight like a Christian. Live the love of God. How that love will impact your world will be different for all of us. And it needs to be the case for each of us that the impact of God is felt through us. There are examples everywhere. Let your life become the next one. Let us live inside out.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, the world looks at how You have called for us to live out our belief and tells us to keep quiet. In the face of that, You call for us to go therefore and love. So empower us to fight this good fight, standing up and stepping out as we live inside out and thereby impacting the world around us...with You. Lord, we thank You for all of the examples of people who have provided this example, and pray that Your influence through us will help to build Your kingdom in ever greater ways. In Jesus' name we do pray. Amen.