

## When Kingdoms Collide

Scripture: Acts 5:40-42

Sunday, October 3, 2021

When I preached last Sunday, the text I used went all the way to the end of chapter 5. My focus was on looking at Professor Gamaliel's thinking that helped navigate a very difficult situation. He did not try and convince them of a new truth that they not already believe. Rather he simply take the elements of their existing world-view and come up with an action plan that would avoid spiritual harm and keep open the possibility of discovering the truth of who Jesus Christ might be. So, we looked at how professor Gamaliel saved the day but we also looked at how his reasoning can be applied to the issues we are facing today.

But there is something we did not look at. And that is the last three verses of last Sunday's text. This deals with what happened to the Apostles after their Sanhedrin clash and that is what I am going to focus on this week.

So after Gamaliel had spoken the Sanhedrin was in agreement and decided to let the Apostles go.

But we know that that is not where the drama of that day ends. Because instead of just letting the Apostles go, as would be the case if a person was found to be innocent, they had the Apostles flogged first before being let go. Why? Because flogging was used as a very strict warning to the recipient to refrain from whatever he was caught doing. So let me tell you what that would have looked like. Well, flogging would mean 39 lashes or it was also referred to as 40 lashes less 1, in case they made a mistake in counting. The whip used to do the flogging would consist of 3 strands of calf leather. The victim would have their chest bared and put in a kneeling position and whipped on both the bare chest and their back. There would be two whips on the back for every one whip on the

chest. So there would be 26 lashes on the back and 13 on the chest. This was severe and cruel punishment and men have died just from this lashing even though killing was not the intent of this punishment. Now as you know, for the apostles, this lashing was a warning to not continue to preach in Jesus' name.

Before I go on I want us to step back and observe this dynamic taking place here of the release with lashings that the Apostles were given. You see even though the Sanhedrin agreed to Gamaliel's reasoning to let the Apostles go, the lashings sentence shows that they were not ready to be sincere seekers of the truth who would wait and see and make serious attempts to discern if these Apostles were from God or not.

On the other hand, Jesus Christ had also warned the Apostles right at the very beginning with these words, quote, "***and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me***" end of quote. Now if you are wondering what an individual's cross is supposed to be, my personal definition is that, it is the very specific way the world collides against a particular Christ follower as they stand up for Christ. This idea was so important to Jesus that it is repeated in the Gospel of Matthew, Luke and John.

So I want you to pause for a moment and put these two ideas together. On the one hand is the truth that in this world there will be many people who will not be ready to discern the truth and lash out against Christ followers. On the other hand, Jesus fully aware that this would be the situation in the days to come had warned his disciples from the very beginning that if you are not willing to deal with this lashing as you collide with the world, you are not worthy of being a Christ follower.

Now in our case we are not likely to ever receive lashings for standing for Christ. But we will also run into collisions with the world and we should be aware of these if we are going to be prepared.

So let me outline three ways in which Christ followers collide with the world. The first thing is when the world asks you to align your values with the world's values. If you don't go with what the latest definition of marriage or gender identity or if you don't go along with the gun lobby's agenda as just two examples of many many things, then life will be difficult for you as you engage the world. This is where a Christ follower will be misaligned with the world. And when you are not aligned, you feel like you don't belong. Let's call this a belonging clash. And when you experience a belonging clash you will feel the pain by being denied work opportunities or career advancement. You may even be shunned by your social circles. The worst is when you are shunned sometimes even from your family. When you align with the Kingdom of God, when it comes to your values you get misaligned with almost every circle level that makes up an individual life. Your **values** do not belong anywhere in this world and there is definitely a pain associated with that.

The second way the clash occurs is when you stand up and share the Gospel and the world does not want to hear it. So when you are in the world, you can use "Jesus" as a swear word and that is acceptable in any social setting. But if you were to use Jesus Christ in the context of the Gospel, suddenly that is not acceptable in a work environment or in a secular setting or with people of different religious backgrounds. You can call this clash the Gospel resistance. You see a Christ follower is given a job to do, to share the Gospel. But the world makes this job a very difficult job to do. So you are left with only two options. Share the Gospel and deal with the consequence or you don't share the Gospel and wonder if you are doing what pleases God. There is no smooth road for someone who is a Christ follower. This is what the Apostles were experiencing in the Sanhedrin, pure Gospel resistance. And you and I will face this Gospel resistance to in the very secular and anti-Christian environments that we live in.

There is a third kind of clash a Christ follower will have to deal with. This is a clash with our own flesh. This is not about the world but about ourselves. So for example while the environment we live in throws many temptations at us, the fact is no amount of changing the environment can distance ourselves from our own flesh, right? So even if we were to go into a desert with literally nothing there to tempt us, we will still be tempted. That is what Jesus' own time of temptations we trying to tell us right? What Jesus Christ was demonstrating there was that we will always have our own fleshly selves to remind us of our needs. Our stomach will remind us of our physical hunger and our mind will be reminding us of bigger things like our emotional hungers, self-protection, power and worldly recognition. Now you may ask, how is this different for kingdom people versus non kingdom people. Well, there is a big difference folks! Because non kingdom people live life completely dictated by the power of their flesh. All of human life is designed to avoid pain and pursue pleasure. Now non-kingdom people will not be able to fully avoid pain. However, their life will be geared to avoiding in. And kingdom people will not be totally resistant to the pull of the flesh. Even a Christ follower will act in the direction of their flesh a lot. But hopefully, when you just become a Christ follower instead of a 100% flesh lead life, it becomes a 90% flesh lead life and 10% spirit lead life. But as that keeps progressing you will go from a 90-10 life to a 10-90 life. The Methodists and some others will argue that a 0-100 life is possible for a fully sanctified Christ follower. Some may argue that a 0-100 is not possible. The point is that when you are a Christ follower, you will be clashing with your own flesh. And this is a battle you will have to deal with till the end. Christ followers are called to deny our flesh. This seems like a negative thing. But when you understand it, it is not so much about avoidance but recognizing the power you have over your flesh as a Christ kingdom citizen. On the other hand as a kingdom person you face a third area or resistance, your own flesh.

You see when the Sanhedrin was done with the Apostles, they had given each apostle 39 lashes. This would have been a strong deterrent for any regular person living under the power of their flesh. But what these guys did not know about the Apostles is that they were not operating under the power of their flesh. They had power over their flesh. That is why when they were whipped 39 times, instead of cursing and groaning and then doing everything in their power to avoid that kind of pain, they found a reason to rejoice because they could see that they were being given the great privilege of suffering in a manner similar to that of Christ himself. And then encouraged by that honor they went on preaching the same message that got them in trouble in the first place. Now non kingdom people will not be able to understand that behaviour and it will only make them more angry.

Now you may be thinking, but I do know personally many non-kingdom people who are more diligent in fasting and denying their flesh than the kingdom people. Well, that kind of fasting is like the sacrifices say a Gold medal Olympic athlete makes throughout their training to get to that level of performance on the world stage. In that case it is a small denial of the flesh say in the physical area of life to serve a bigger fleshly need like in the emotional area of their life. But in the end, the power of the flesh is still very much the operating force.

Not so with Christ followers. You see a true Christ follower will deny their flesh for no fleshly return. They will deny their flesh to faithfully obey what Christ is calling them to and with the power of the Holy Spirit alone. That is what the Apostles were doing when they were receiving the pain of being flogged with joy. We also know from history that every one of the Apostles were killed one way or the other except for John who died in exile on the island of Patmos.

How do we navigate these three clashes with the world, the values clash, the Gospel resistance and the flesh clash? With the values clash, I would say that we have to always

be asking us how comfortable we are with the world we are in. James 4:4 puts it very bluntly, it says **“Unfaithful creatures! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”** Jesus in Matt 6:24 put it this way, he said, **“No one can serve two masters. He will love the one and hate the other or be devoted to one and despise the other.”** If this world and its corruption and injustice and deceptions and just plain hostility to Christ does not cause us to feel a complete disconnect and misalignment with it, then we are too comfortable and not aligned enough with the kingdom of God. In that case we should seek to be misaligned with this world by immersing ourselves more in the world of scripture and being in communion with God in prayer.

When it comes to Gospel resistance, if we have not experienced people who will reject our offer of the Gospel, we are not sharing it enough. It is as simple as that. People will reject way more than they accept. In fact the Disciple Making Movement leaders who I look up to say that the ratio of rejecting to accepting is easily 60 to a 100 is to 1. That means when you talk to 60 to a 100 people you will find one person who is interested. In other words, sharing the Gospel is all about being willing to be resisted that much. When you talk to people, you don’t have to start by saying, can I tell you about Jesus. Just start by offering to pray for their needs. If they are willing to receive your prayers, that is a tiny indication of a possible interest. But if they are not even open to prayer or if they are open to having their needs met but are still not interested in hearing about the true provider then you simply move on. Just by going out to have spiritual conversations with people and praying for them you will face Gospel resistance.

Thirdly, ask yourself when you have you resisted your own flesh. You and I may never we whipped with cowhide strips for sharing the Gospel. But fasting is a great way to tell our flesh, hey flesh we don’t have to give in to you every time you pull me in a direction. Of course, there are some temptations you will have to resist 100% of the time. In some cases like food, you have to resist just every now and then just to tell your body who is

boss, the Holy Spirit or your human spirit. And you can use the power of the Holy spirit not just to resist the pain of hunger for food but maybe it is the pain because of a medical situation. The bottom line is we do not let our flesh call the shots all the time. By letting our flesh know that the Holy Spirit is boss here we are both experiencing a clash with the way the world does things but we are also experiencing a victory through the power of God's spirit that the world knows nothing about. Then the world will be completely amazed at us and say what is wrong with that person? Just that can lead to a Gospel conversation just like it did for the Apostles.

So remember as a citizen of the kingdom of God, just like those amazing Apostles, you too are on a collision course with the world. But in this case we are not to steer your ships away from the collision course but as your captain who has received orders from my captain, stay right on your collision course with this world.

If you feel the misalignment with the world, you are doing well my friends, if you feel the Gospel resistance, you are obediently going out as sheep among the wolves, if you feel the resistance of your own flesh, now you are living in the power of the God's Spirit. That is the way to go my friends. Let us keep going. Please bow your heads for a word of prayer.