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“The Christians Are Here; Call Out The Lions!”



It was a beautiful Thursday night in Chicago just before 7 p.m. I was walking into the “Super Maximum Security” division of the Cook County jail—one of the most notorious county jails in the United States. As a chaplain, I have been preaching there once, twice, and sometimes three times a week for the last 18 years. It’s an absolutely incredible place. On 96 acres, it’s the largest county jail in America. It’s a city within a city. There are 10,000 men and 1,500 women locked up behind hundreds of thousands of tons of cement and steel. As many as 100,000 men and women will be processed through the jail each year. It has an underground tunnel system connecting 10 of the 11 divisions. It has almost 4,000 full-time employees, and its own hospital. When the first division was constructed in 1929, it included a small room with one piece of furniture—the electric chair; they call it the “Ice House.” In 1931 Al Capone became one of its most notorious inmates. In 1971, blues legend B.B. King recorded an album there appropriately titled: *B. B. King—Live at Cook County Jail*. And, in 1996, the *Back to God Hour* produced a television special there entitled: *Back to the Streets*.¹ It featured our ministry.

Super-Maximum Security

“Super max” is where they keep the highest-bond and no-bond inmates. Here you will find the most violent men charged with the most heinous crimes. Division 11 is also the newest addition to the jail. At a construction cost of more than \$100 million, it’s huge, it’s all white, and I call it the Taj Mahal. Each block is air conditioned, and furnished with a colored TV. Every inmate gets “three hots and a cot,” and the best police protection money can buy. Ironically, they also get a piece of cake or a cookie on their dinner trays!

Once inside, I take the elevator up to the third floor to the security office in order to sign in and pick up my I.D. badge. Security officers will then arrange to have the men escorted to the chapel. On special occasions, we have had as many as 1,200 inmates in the gymnasium for chapel! Exiting the elevator and approaching the security office, I spy an officer sitting at his desk I have not seen for some time. That's because they are transferred from division to division every year or so just to "shake things up." I have known this particular officer for the last 18 years, and every time I run into him (he's like a Mack truck) he's taken every opportunity to insult me personally, to mock Christianity, and to openly mock God! I have met some characters over the years as you might imagine, but this man is in a class by himself.

As I'm approaching the security office, he sees me and I see him. As I walk in, he stands up and assumes the stance of a weight lifter about to try out for the world's record. You know, leaning slightly forward, arms hanging down slightly curled in, flexing his muscles; sort of like a turkey spreading its wings to show off. In a loud voice, with his eyes fixed on me, he barks at the two officers across the room:

"THE CHRISTIANS ARE HERE; CALL OUT THE LIONS!"

Without hesitation, but rather sheepishly at first, I replied, "Sergeant, I'd like to remind you that it was 2,000 years ago that the Roman Empire was feeding Christians to the lions, and we have the incredible perspective of being able to look back over 2,000 years of recorded history and what do we see?" Getting louder and bolder I said, "There are more Christians alive at this moment than the total number of people that made up the Roman Empire over its entire 500-year history,

AND THE LIONS AND TIGERS ARE ON THE
ENDANGERED-SPECIES LIST. WE'RE NOT
AFRAID OF LIONS; BRING 'EM ON!"

I looked at him, and his jaw dropped. I looked at the two officers in the corner, and their mouths were open so wide they could have eaten a banana sideways! The sergeant, slightly discombobulated, broke the silence and ordered the officers, "Call chapel!" So, what is the point of this story? Simply this:

When You're Right About God, And You're Right With God,
You Never Have To Be Intimidated By The World, The Flesh,
Or The Devil Himself. And, It's Okay To Get Excited About
Jesus!

As an interesting follow-up to that story, that officer is now my best friend at the jail. He actually goes out of his way to help us bring more men to chapel. Best of all, he now asks me questions about the Bible!

The Fear Of Man

The Bible has a lot to say about the fear of man vs. the fear of God. It should be ruled a “no contest,” but unfortunately not everybody sees it that way. It appears most people, including many who claim to be “Christians,” are more concerned with what people think than what God thinks. My hope is that this book will serve as a clarion call for Christians to come out of the closet and get real with God.

Humanly speaking, our problem is understandable since we see men but we have never seen God. However, that rationale becomes irrational when we realize that man could not have created the universe. Only an all-powerful and eternal being could do that. When life is over we are accountable to the Eternal God, not to mortal man. What will we be held accountable for? We will be held accountable for what we did with our time, our talent, our treasure, and our temple.

As ambassadors for Christ, Christians have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Sin has separated man from his Creator, and the church has been given the unspeakable privilege and great responsibility of sharing the good news that Jesus paid the penalty for sin once and for all. The world has no hope apart from God's salvation in Christ. Man will never solve his own problems because man *is* the problem.

Christ alone answers the most profound questions beating in the human heart; namely, who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is the meaning of life? How can I be free from the guilt and the power of sin?

Sharing the truth about Jesus Christ with others is called evangelism. Unfortunately, statistics show that 95% of people who claim to be “Evangelical Christians” have never even attempted to lead another

person to faith in Christ. Why, if we really believe the Bible to be true, do we remain silent? What kind of human being would you be if you had the cure for cancer or AIDS, but refused to share it with the world?

I am convinced, based on Scripture and experience that the number-one reason people refuse to learn how to present the Gospel is because of the fear of man. Curiously, many unbelievers have no qualms about mocking Christians, but many Christians are afraid to engage unbelievers concerning their need for salvation in Jesus Christ. Children of light should never be intimidated by children of darkness. It is in this context that a great preacher from the past once said:

“As the profane take the liberty to force their irreligion upon you, so you take the liberty to force your religion upon them.” C.H. Spurgeon

Spurgeon was not suggesting that we try to “shove religion down peoples’ throats.” He knew that was not possible. He was saying that we, as stewards of truth, should be as bold and outspoken about our beliefs as the pagans are about theirs. After all, we’re right!

The Gun That Kills Without Bullets

The most common form the fear of man takes is purely psychological. It’s like a gun without bullets. You can control people with a gun, even if it’s not loaded—as long as they are unaware of it. In reality, its power is all in their mind. If they discover that the gun has no ammunition, the game is over.

Like a coin, the fear of man has two sides, the positive and the negative. We call it *peer pressure*. On one side we have the fear of what people will think of us. On the reverse side, we love the praise of men. Both the fear and the love of what people think are rooted in one and the same thing—pride. We are more affected by this spiritual disease than most of us realize.

For many of us, the most important decisions we make in life are based not on what is best or most practical, but on what other people will think, say, or do. Everything from the car we drive to the shoes we wear is motivated in whole or in part by how we think we will be perceived by other people. This is the driving force behind materialism.

The average family in America is enslaved by credit-card debt. These cards should be called “covet cards.” We buy things we don’t need, with money we don’t have, to impress people we don’t even like. We need to get real. In Luke 16:15, Jesus said:

“...You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

In John 5:44, Jesus asks:

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?”

Another reason that the fear of man is so prevalent is this: Many people are psychologically oriented rather than truth-oriented. They live by feelings rather than facts. You can be wrong about a lot of things, but if you are wrong about who Jesus Christ is, and what it means to believe in Him, you are wrong enough to be separated from God forever!

According to psychologists, three major factors motivate most people. They are: (1) the desire for gain, (2) the fear of loss, and (3) the need to love and be loved. These three things either work for you or against you; it all depends on whether you are living for time or eternity.

The Desire For Gain And The Fear Of Loss

If you knew a financial investment that was increasing 100% per year, would you tell all your friends about it, even though some of them might not believe you? What if it was increasing 10,000% a year? Would that excite you enough to share it with your friends? Take a look at this investment from Mark 4:20:

“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it, and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

The “seed” in this verse speaks of evangelism. The hundredfold return is not 100%; that would simply be a one-fold return. A hundredfold return is 10,000%. Do the math on that. If you invest \$1,000 and get a 10,000% return on your investment, and you do that just

seven times, you would have more than the entire world money supply! In this light, the words of Jesus become even more intriguing:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Mat. 6:19-20).

How do you lay up treasure in heaven? The Great Commission in Mat. 28:19 says, to “Go into all the world and make disciples.” And in Mat. 4:19, Jesus said: “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” With that understanding, let’s examine the verse this book is based on, Proverbs 29:25:

“The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted.”

The word translated “snare” in our English Bible comes from a Hebrew word that is used both literally and figuratively for a noose. The word picture is that of a hunter who sets a noose for an animal. Once the victim is caught, it is either held in captivity or eaten. 1 Peter 5:8 says:

“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

The hunter in this case is Satan, and *you* are the hunted one. His plan to keep the church quiet seems to be working. According to George Barna, only 2% of people who claim to be Christians regularly share their faith with unbelievers. Satan spreads the net, and the fear of man drives us right into it. Sometimes it’s blatant; sometimes it’s subtle. We smile when we should frown, we laugh when we should remain silent or, worse, we remain silent when we should speak. To remain silent when we should speak is to compromise with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

“Our Number-One Problem Is A Faulty Concept Of God.”²

A right concept of God is the first step to living a full and satisfying life. You cannot know who you are until you know who God is. When you know who you are in relation to who He is, then you can begin to think and live in light of eternity.

There is some consolation in knowing this. None of us are immune from this spiritual disease known as the fear of man. Even the great cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us experienced it. But, as they grew in wisdom and experience, and after being baptized in the Holy Spirit, they learned to overcome the fear of man in the strength of the Lord.

Abraham, the “father of our faith,” was willing to give up his wife to another man, not once but twice, because of the fear of man. His son, Isaac, did the same thing with his wife, Rebecca. Even the disciples, who were eyewitnesses of the miracles of Christ, fled when the heat was on. The Apostle Peter denied even knowing Jesus not once, not twice, but three times! And, three times in Matthew chapter 10 Jesus said: “Do not fear man.” Note His dire warning in verse 28:

“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

If someone puts a gun to my head and says, “Renounce Christ, or die,” I would have to say, “You mean you’re threatening me with heaven?” For the Christian, death is not the end, it’s the glorious beginning. You haven’t found anything worth living for until you’ve found something worth dying for!

In Isaiah 57:11, God the Father said:

“Whom have you so dreaded and feared that you have been false to Me, and have neither remembered Me, nor pondered this in your hearts? Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear Me?”

May I Be Excused, Please?

In the Old Testament, you were excused from war for any of three reasons: (1) If you had just married a wife, (2) If you had planted a vineyard and had not tasted the fruit of the vine, or (3) If you were afraid.

Why would being afraid excuse you? Because the morale of one man had the potential of destroying the morale of the entire army.³

When God commissioned Gideon to go to battle, He said (in effect), “Gideon, I want you to go to battle, and I guarantee your victory. The

only thing is, you have too many men. If you win with this many men, you may be tempted to touch the glory that belongs to Me. I want you to tell everybody who's afraid to go home." He had 32,000 men, and 22,000 of them admitted they were wimps and went home.

The Fear Of Man Is Idolatry

Idolatry is rival worship. Placing any created thing before the Creator is spiritual adultery—an abomination to God. In James 4:4 this indictment was handed down by God Himself:

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

God couldn't be clearer when in Isaiah 51:12 He says:

“I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid of man who will die, and of the son of man who is made like grass?”

I don't mean to brag, but I'm not afraid of grass at all. In fact, I cut the grass at home. Honestly, I wouldn't be afraid if there were a whole bale of hay right behind me! God is saying, in essence, “Let's look at this in perspective. A man may live for seventy or eighty years, and then he dies like grass. It is absurd to be in dread of a dying man. I am the God who is, the God who was, and the God who always will be, without beginning and without end. I AM the eternal, self-existent One. Why are you afraid of a man who will die? A man can't save you, and a man can't condemn you. Only I can do that.”

A Profound Real-Life Illustration

I was out of town sitting in a hotel watching the Discovery Channel when I saw a spectacular illustration of the fear of man. There was a teacher telling a sixth-grade class of students that they were going to do an experiment. The teacher said, “I'm going to hold up two cards. One with a long line and the other has a short line on it. We are going to bring in a student who is unaware of our experiment to see how he or she will react. When I hold up the cards I want you to purposely answer incorrectly. I'll show you both cards and ask, “How many

of you think this is the shorter of the two lines when it is really the longer one. At that point, you all raise your hands. Okay?” Everyone agreed. Then the extra student was brought in. The teacher held up the two cards. With the long line in her right hand and the short line in her left hand, she waved the long line and asked, “How many of you think this is the shorter of the two lines; raise your hands?” Everybody raised their hands. The child who was unaware of what was going on also raised his hand. They tried it again and again and each time the children raised their hands—knowing in their hearts they were answering incorrectly.

When I got home, I related this story to my wife and children. I said to my kids, “I would like to think if one of you were in that classroom, knowing everyone was answering incorrectly, you would have stood up and asked, ‘Does anybody have a ruler?’” This represents another classic example of the fear of man. These young people were willing to throw their common sense and dignity right out the window rather than appear to be different from the crowd. It’s called *peer pressure*. Just remember, it’s better to be what you is than what you ain’t because, if you is what you ain’t, then you ain’t what you is.

In Church, Too?

Sometimes when I am in church on Sunday morning I become overwhelmed when the worship is being offered up. I think of where the Lord has taken me from, how good He has been to me, and the fact that I don’t deserve it. Sometimes I just close my eyes and lift my hands (which is the universal gesture of surrender, and the universal gesture of victory). There are people who mistakenly associate this practice with a particular sect of Christianity. Not so. It was ordained by the Apostle Paul himself, in a letter to his young protégé, Timothy. In 1 Tim. 2:8, Paul writes:

“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands unto the Lord.”

After church one day, a lady came up to me and said, “I wish I had the courage to raise my hands in church.” This dear lady wanted to, in child-like faith, lift her hands to worship the God who gave her life, but was paralyzed by the fear of man.