

Facing the Enemy

Series: Joining God for the City
Brad Bailey – February 29, 2015

Intro

We are continuing in a series entitled...*Joining God for the City*.

Last week...we began by recognizing something surprising... that **cities are God's idea**.

God called his people to create cities ... and the uniting of heaven and earth is described as coming as a city. The formation of life may have begun in a garden but it culminates in a city.

Cities actually **bear a divine purpose**...they elicit **creativity**...and **diversity**.

What would happen if we stopped **just seeing** the city as a **place**...and began to see the city as a **purpose**?

What if instead of seeing the city as **having problems**...we saw were **purposes that have been lost**...and can be redeemed.

Now when we think about redeeming the city... most of us can find that such an **overwhelming** thought that we simply the city we simply **withdraw**. We carve out **our niches**...sort of move from niche to niche.

We know that this city needs God... needs his love... his uniting...his fathering...

I find that when we think about being a witness of God in a city like Los Angeles...there is a tendency for some to **fear that they will alienate people**... and others simply feel indifferent. I think we need to shed both of these tendencies. While we certainly should share with others people what we know about God...about what God has done for us...and what he can do for them.

> But **Jesus sees something that begins before our words**. It begins with **our ways**....a **change within**.

Jesus didn't declare and bear a **new religion**...but a **new reality**.

It is a reality that changes us...and if we allow it to change us... we will bear not just the words of Jesus...but the **works of Jesus and the ways of Jesus**.

As he **nears his own sacrificial death**...to defeat the powers that rule...he stops and thinks about those who now go forth...about you and I.

John 17:13-21 (NIV)

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. ²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

In this moment... he is completing the life of one who has been SENT.

That is what he now imparts...

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” - John 17:18

Every life that receives Christ as their savior and Lord... who responds to his call to follow...is “sent.” Every disciple was sent into the world... sent to now engage this world with the in-breaking of God’s reign...sent into this world with good news...sent into this city with hope. That is WHO he prays for...everyone who receive...enter...and join.
(Note verse 20, *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message...”*...that is a prayer for you and I.)

And WHAT does he pray for? That we may be “sanctified.”

“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth... For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” – John 17:17,19

Sanctified...means to be set apart... for proper place. It means for us...to become different...rightfully different.

To become those who are no longer “of the world.”

Jesus declared that he was not of this world...that is...he **bears a nature** that is **not rooted in this system that defies God.**

He says that **those who enter union with him...**...those gathered with him...the church...are not of this world...we are no longer under the rule of that which is destined for destruction and death.

We have been called into **the resistance...not the withdrawal.**

We’re to become **redemptively different** and distinct.

We are to become **different for the sake of the world.**

Jesus bore life because he was both fully different...and fully here.

This is what he has called us to now carry on.

1. We must embrace the call to become different...for the sake of the world.

Our power in this world is in our capacity to have discovered and entered the eternal reality of God made possible by Jesus.

Our power lies in becoming different.

More than ideas and words...it’s about real difference.

> **You cannot love this world if you love this world.** (How is that for a strange statement?)

We cannot love this world in the true way if we love this world in the wrong way.

We cannot care about this world being redeemed if we are attached to this world as it is.

Nothing will steal the vitality of life with God more than just liking what we can get out of this world without caring for it.

Jesus said we are to be the **salt of the earth**...but if the salt **loses it’s saltiness**...it has nothing to offer...no effect. (Luke 14:34, Matthew 5:13.)

We are to become the change we believe in.

So Lent is a season to renew our own defining allegiance....and attachments.

The **basis** for being in **union with God** is what Christ has done....but **living out of that union** involves a **process**.

> **How do we become different for the sake of this world?**

How can we become redemptively distinct?

Lent draws upon the 40 days in which Christ was drawn into the wilderness...and faced the enemy as a model for us. (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)

It is the process of spending 40 days in the wilderness...along...praying and fasting.....that Jesus forged his deepest determination...settled his alignment and allegiance....**decided what mattered most.** [1]

Context is interesting... comes immediately after the story of his baptism by John in the River Jordan. What an incredible moment that must have been in the life of Christ: baptized by his cousin and then a voice from heaven declares before the crowd: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

What a moment...never more affirmed and intimate with the Father from whom he had been eternally bound. He receives the blessing... the blessing that affirms and anoints...that prepares him to go forward. But **another voice comes. It always will.**

Matthew 4:1-11 (NIV)

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Here we see that just after his identity is most profoundly spoken...he is taken out to the wilderness.

When God speaks to you, Satan strikes at you.

But... was it the enemy hauling Jesus into the desert? No... it says that the Spirit led him. The language is even strong in Mark...where it is rightfully translated as describing that "the Spirit **DROVE him out into the desert** (NRSV, ESV) or "compelled him" (NLT.)

Jesus needed this time in the wilderness. The wilderness is that places where we are separated from all attachments...distractions...and therefore where we face ourselves at the most fundamental level... and face the claims upon us...within us.

We all need some time in the wilderness...some time in which we face the calls upon our lives...we face that which wants our allegiance.

So a second truth is this...

2. We must embrace the process of deep personal transformation...more than mere public and political positions.

When the blessing comes... he does not head to Jerusalem to fight the Roman oppressors...nor to any human government. [2]

If we are going to join with God for this city....we have got to face the difference between personal and political change.

We live in a time in which we think having the right political positions make us the right people. Conservatives think they are more righteous than liberals...and liberals think they are more righteous than conservatives.

The more we can demean and demonize the other... the more righteous we feel.

Ideas certainly matter...but having the right position does not make us the right people.

We live in a world that is filled with public discourse... talk shows. And while such thoughts can serve the public good...they don't help bring anything new...don't bring real change...unless we face the real change we need personally.

Having the right position on a matter is not the same as becoming the right person.

Jesus didn't join the political parties that were so sharply dividing the religious lives... rather he faced that which must be settled within.

He forged his allegiance... not what served his personal pleasures...but what served the true good of all.

Here I believe we should find something of **a healthy humility**...as we **face that words are relatively cheap**...and that we are **not as different as we should be**.

We may bear words that tell of God's kingdom having come in Christ...but it can seem to speak of **a kingdom somewhere else**...not one we have fully entered...not one within us..

We do well to hear **Jesus calling us to be changed ...in the heart**.

For he said **our righteousness must be greater than the religious leaders**...they knew the rules and followed them....but their hearts were not different within them. To this he declared...we have heard that we should not kill...but he now takes it to the heart...we should not have contempt for another.

I was struck recently as entire segments of radio and TV news...were essentially that of 3 or 4 commentators spending an hour discussing whether a comment made by a sportscaster should be deemed racist. It wasn't that it didn't have some value...but at some point having countless lives focused on a single comment by a single individual...seems to capture the fact that we all want to just have the right position on an issue...rather than become the right people.

Similarly...we can talk about the sanctity of life...as it relates to the act of abortion...while not facing the lack of value we have for life in our hearts...while carrying little for the conditions so many face...while holding contempt for others.

You may find that at your workplace...or among your circle... topics get tossed out there and it becomes about one's position: It's "what do you think about "a women's right to choose...."same sex marriage"...50 Shades of Grey...the latest sign of religious associated violence.

My suggestion: Don't play into tendency to focus on positions... if you have a personal process about you're your heart...share it...and it will offer something real.

3. We must recognize that we are in a spiritual conflict

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert **to be tempted by the devil.**” – **Matthew 4:1**
You may think... this whole idea of some character whose red and horned and holding a pitchfork...what a silly idea. Indeed it is a silly idea. The Scriptures never tell us about any such silly cartoon character. Rather they tell us that there is a spiritual force set against God's goodness and glory....and to draw us to join in dissenting from God.

As the apostle Paul described...

Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Important to grasp that the whole process was to create disconnect....but Jesus was ‘accompanied by the Spirit’ and raised the ‘Word’ of God his Father.

> In the same way... **facing the enemy** creates the **opportunity to deepen** rather than disconnect from our connection to God. We will either join that autonomous way of self-consumption ...or deepen our dependency.

The spiritual conflict is ultimately about resolving our primary attachment...whose reign we have given our heart and trust to.

You may recall that in his prayer we heard earlier...a prayer for us...he said:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”
(John 17:15)

First temptation...

After Jesus had fasted for 40 days, the devil comes to him and says: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

Notice in v.3 that Satan said to Jesus, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Only recently at the baptism of Jesus, God the Father had confirmed that Jesus was the Son of God. So Satan uses that as the springboard of this temptation. “Son of God, hungry? How ridiculous! And if you are a Son, then God is supposed to be your Father. He must not care about you. You have to take matters into your own hands!”

“If you be” was a challenge to prove Himself “the Son of God.” Satan wanted to attack the divine mission of the Son of God.

Goes onto to say essentially: “Hey...you are hungry...it's a natural need....a legitimate desire... follow my care...and follow my way....independent of the Father who provides... independent of the Holy Spirit who had led Him into the wilderness. He was seeking to destroy the Son's confidence in his Father's will and power to sustain him.

It's the way of self-gratification...immediate personal gratification. And this is a temptation we all face on a daily basis. It seems that our whole society is geared up for this, especially in the broadband world in which we live. As each generation passes, we are getting worse at waiting:

whatever it is, we want it now – and, actually, we can have it now, so it doesn't even feel like a temptation anymore... patience is no longer a virtue; it has been turned into a vice. The pursuit of instant gratification is the placing of my needs at the center of the universe and I will pursue them, whatever that may mean for others.

- **“Are you lonely?...** Get a little attention in any way you can.
- **“Do you feel a need to *feel important?*”**...Look down upon those that are different (event though they are equal)
- **“Do you need to make sure you *get your share?*”** Get as much money as you can...and keep as much money as you can.

Second temptation...a scene set up for the ultimate public hero... jump from the temple where tens of thousands could be gathered...and all could see angels come to meet you.

There were many people at the temple at that time. Jesus could have popularized Himself through a sensational display of angels bearing Him up. But that was not God's will and purpose.

Sensationalism appeals to the flesh and Jesus wants men's hearts. It was God's will that He take on the nature of a servant, not of a dynamic celebrity.

“Jump” was **not born of faith** in anything the Father had told him to do... it was demanding and really a **reflection of distrust**. [3]

But even more so...it is a call to sell out to empty prestige.

Third temptation...look...all the power...

Satan shows Christ all the kingdoms of the world. (Likely this is another vision he has taken him up in...which seems clear from Luke's account adds that he did this “in a moment.”)

Imagine... Christ...the one whom is the incarnate ruler of all...now made poor...soon to be mocked and stripped and beaten...being shown a taste of the honor that is truly his. Imagine you are the source from which everything has come...now crawling across it's wilderness.

The final round of the conflict is over. Jesus was victorious over the most powerful temptations Satan could throw at Him. And because Jesus resisted all of the temptations of Satan, He could issue the command, “Be gone, Satan.” And v.11 shows the result of Christ's supremacy over him. Matthew says, “Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.”

4. What tests us...can strengthen and sharpen us.

Matthew 4:11 (NIV)

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

> Jesus defies the powers of this world...painfully....sacrificially.

... and Jesus does not just survive.....he becomes ever more resolute ...determined.

What does this mean for us?

1. The powers of this world will not overcome God ...and they will not overcome our city.

2. The invitation to us to face our enemy. We need to accept times in the wildernessfaced our attachments.

Jesus told Peter... “the devil wants to sift you...”

That is what Jesus went through. It is the sanctifying process of being sifted. Sifting brings forth the purest and best. We become stronger and sharper.

Faithfulness to God’s ultimate reign and goodness... can prevail.

We can overcome the ways of the enemy through the ways of God. [4]

May we become different ...for the sake of the world.

May we become the change we hope for.

Resources:

Notes:

1. Video of the wilderness temptations (from The Bible series) -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixfYkAHjAgM>

2. Jesus entered a time in which the empire of empires ruled... human power at it’s heights... and those whom God had made himself known to were divided in their responses...you could join their parties... decry the other...one called for force (zealots)...the other said use the system.

We have a lot to learn from the fact that Jesus joined neither party.... He seems to have agreed with aspects of each...but he understood that true battle at hand...the spiritual forces that ruled over lives...

3. Regarding the second temptation (have misplaced the source)

Jesus’ words come from Deuteronomy 6:16 and refer to the time when Moses struck the Rock in order to get water to satisfy the grumbling Israelites (Ex. 17:1-7). Because God did not immediately meet their expectations, they questioned His leadership and faithfulness. Faith is simply trusting God and taking Him at His Word no matter our circumstances or trials. We are not to try and force God’s hand, but simply to take God’s hand and follow Him.

When you try to take matters into your own hands then you run into trouble and cause enormous pain for others.

A case in point is when God called Abraham to trust Him and WAIT for his promised son. God promised Abraham that he would father a child with his wife in his old age. That God would bless the world through this child. Rational thinking told that Abe he getting real old and his wife was barren and could not have children. You see how satan can cause you to doubt and to not listen fully to God. He said to WAIT. But ...Abe took his wife’s maid and had sex with her, thus causing her to become pregnant with Ishmael. This seemed like a better quicker way to accomplish God’s plan. Big Mistake! All of us, all over the world, are suffering to this very day for that rational.

4. We can overcome the enemy. Consider:

2 Timothy 2:22 (NIV)

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

2 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way

out so that you can stand up under it.

James 4:7 (NIV)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.