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Fall 2023

Staying True in a World Far From God

Sermon Title: A Dangerous Gospel

To be used with Session 1: Develop Strong Convictions

Scripture: Acts 21:1-14

Connection with Bible Study: To complement the Bible study “Develop Strong Convictions,” this sermon will build upon the study’s main point that our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

Introduction: Some time ago, I read an interesting book called *Saving Christianity?*, by Michael Youssef. He tells how churches across America are getting more and more reluctant to preach the Bible. It’s not just in his denomination, either. The problem is, the norms and values of society have drastically changed in the last sixty years, and churches that preach the Bible have become less popular. Instead of standing up to the trends, many churches are watering down what the Bible says or denying it outright. This includes many churches that call themselves “evangelical”. They say they have to change the message or Christianity will die. There’s a certain absurdity in that way of thinking. If biblical Christianity is as flawed and as obsolete as they claim, then shouldn’t they just let it die? They’re trying to have it both ways.

Make no mistake: as our society becomes more immoral and perverted, people will become less tolerant of churches that preach the Bible. The day may come when it will be downright dangerous to preach the undiluted, unvarnished gospel of Jesus Christ. The question is, will we knuckle under with the others, or will we keep proclaiming the truth regardless of what it may cost? I might remind you that proclaiming the gospel has always been dangerous. The apostle Paul knew that as well as anyone. By the time we get to this section of the book of Acts, he was wrapping up his third missionary journey. Now he was getting ready to return to Jerusalem, and his friends tried to talk him out of going. Paul appreciated their concern, but he was determined to go anyway, because he knew that’s where God was sending him.

1. The reality of this danger (Acts 21:4-6).

a. Luke detailed their journey from Miletus to Tyre (vv. 1-4a).

They sailed to Cos, which was the birthplace of Hippocrates, and to Rhodes, the home of the famous Colossus. When they arrived at Patara, they found another ship and sailed past Cyprus. This was Barnabas’s home, and he and Paul had traveled there on their first missionary journey. Evidently, there was a church at Tyre, so Paul and his friends stayed there for a whole week.

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b. The disciples at Tyre begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (vv. 4b-6).

They told him “through the Spirit.” Evidently, the Holy Spirit had revealed to them the dangers that awaited Paul in Jerusalem. Besides, many of them had probably fled to Tyre after the stoning of Stephen, so they knew the city could be dangerous for Christians.

c. Paul understood that persecution was a reality, and it’s a reality to many believers around the world today.

People hated Jesus, and He warned us that they would hate His followers (John 16:1-4). Many Christians around the world still endure persecution every day. If current trends continue, Christians in America may face persecution before too long.

2. The reason for this danger (Acts 21:7-14).

a. Paul sailed on to Caesarea, the Roman capital of Judea (vv. 7-9).

Paul stayed at the home of Philip the evangelist, who was “one of the seven” (Acts 6:1-5). Philip had four daughters who “prophesied.” Some have used this reference to argue in favor of female pastors, but the Bible consistently teaches that men are to be primary spiritual leaders in both the home and the church.

b. The prophet Agabus warned Paul what lay ahead for him in Jerusalem (vv. 10-11).

Agabus had a proven record as a prophet (Acts 11:28), so people knew not to take his words lightly. When he announced that Paul was going to be arrested there, Paul’s friends naturally feared for his safety and begged him not to go. Many of the Jewish religious leaders knew Paul personally (he had once been one of them), and they regarded him as a traitor after he became a follower of Jesus.

c. Why is the gospel of Jesus Christ so dangerous?

Human beings are naturally prideful, and they like to think they can achieve things on their own. They think they have all the world’s problems figured out, and if everyone would just bow to their way of thinking, everything would be all right. The gospel reminds us how helpless we really are, and people don’t like to hear that. Some are so offended by the message that they’ll destroy anyone who proclaims it.

3. The response to this danger (Acts 21:12-14).

a. Some churches respond by changing the message.

Many churches have rewritten the gospel to fit modern trends. They say it’s not human beings who are corrupt, but society, and they say our problems will be solved if we only create a more just society. Others haven’t exactly abandoned the message, but they’ve buried it under so much pop psychology and motivational mumbo-jumbo that the message is hardly recognizable. Still others have turned inward. They’re still preaching the Bible, but they’re focusing mainly on the people they have instead of the ones who need Jesus.

b. Others like Paul boldly face the danger (vv. 12-14).

Paul knew if God was sending him to Jerusalem, He must have a reason for it. Sure, it was dangerous, but that came with the territory. What was the worst that could happen? If his enemies killed him, he would go to be with Jesus.

c. We can trust God to take care of us in times of danger.

Thankfully, we have a God whose strength is made perfect in our weakness. If you simply obey Him, even when it's difficult, then He'll give you the strength you need in your hour of trial. Jesus told His disciples not to worry when they were hauled before the authorities. The Holy Spirit would give them the words to say. That same Holy Spirit still lives in everyone who follows Jesus, so the promise still applies. Keep standing for the truth, and the ones who oppose you will answer to Someone much bigger than you.

Conclusion: My all-time favorite preacher is Adrian Rogers. He served three terms as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and he led our denomination during a time of bitter conflict. In 1985, the convention appointed a special Peace Committee to examine the reasons behind the controversy and propose some solutions. Dr. Rogers was appointed to serve on this committee. I've heard him talk about those days. He said there was one point where he and other committee members refused to budge, and that was on the authority of Scripture. Dr. Rogers said at one point someone told him if he wasn't willing to compromise, the convention would never come together. Dr. Rogers replied, "We don't have to come together. The Southern Baptist Convention as it stands does not have to survive. I don't have to be the pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. I don't have to be loved. I don't even have to live. But I will not compromise the Word of God."

Yes, we must speak the truth in love, but we must speak the truth. Let us keep on proclaiming the gospel, even when it's dangerous, and let the critics do what they will. Even if they do their worst, we need not worry, because we have a home waiting for us in heaven. Let us embrace Paul's words in the book of Romans: "am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). May we never be ashamed of the gospel.

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