



March 12, 2017

Playing With Fire

READ: Acts 4:20 (Common English Bible)

“As for us, we can’t stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

MEDITATE:

Playing with Fire is a country ballad that yanks the listener into the emotional fervor of a guy and girl who are in a relationship together and are fully aware that the relationship is toxic for both of them. Sung by Thomas Rhett and Jordin Sparks, the song is the struggle – even angst – of two people who cause pain for each other but find that they can’t let each other go. The experience of their love is like “playing with fire,” both knowing better than to continue being together but unable to make the break. “I know I should let it go. Take a different road when I’m driving home. But I don’t want to.” And later in the song when the two are together again, “When I hold onto you baby, I’m all tangled up in barbed wire.” That powerful image is felt by the listener, two people entwined together in a moment that produces pain like being “tangled up in barbed wire.”

Peter and John, both disciples of Jesus, are “playing with fire.” Jesus has now left his disciples and returned to his father in heaven. Stirred with the vigor and emotional zeal from the events of the resurrection of their friend, Jesus, and Jesus’ post resurrection teaching, Peter and John are continuing the preaching they once heard from Jesus. But there is a difficulty. The religious establishment of that day is not at all receptive to this preaching. Peter and John are confronted and warned to stop. They do not. Both are arrested and placed in prison. When they are questioned the next day, they multiply their difficulty when they remind the distinguished religious leaders that it was they who crucified Jesus but it was God who raised Jesus from the dead. Peter and John are “tangled up in barbed wire” with Jesus. Holding onto Jesus would result in death for Peter and persecution and banishment into exile for John on the isle of Patmos. Yet, they simply “can’t stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

Often I meet people who long for the emotional depth and vigor of faith that they see in Peter and John. For them, faith is more practiced than felt and attendance in worship is more of a chore rather than a celebration that stirs the senses. Jesus remains attractive to them. A belief in God and God’s activity in the world is unquestioned. But the senses are dulled. Routine settles in and activity in the church resembles every other commitment on the weekly calendar. Missing from their faith is anything that resembles the transformative power seen in Peter and John. The “barbed wire” experience has been replaced with exhausting – and largely unfulfilling – church programs. What is unfortunate is the number of people who remain “in love” with Jesus but simply “give-up” on the church.

This expressive country ballad concludes, “Yeah, I know it sounds crazy. But I guess I like playing with fire, playing with fire.” Perhaps that is the secret. If our faith is to recover the vigor and vitality of Peter and John’s, we will have to step out of the routine of “playing church” and pay fresh attention to this Jesus that ensnared so many of his followers in barbed wire. Read Jesus in the Bible. Learn everything that Jesus taught. Determine to change everything about your life that does not conform to Jesus’ teaching. In some measure of time, you will discover that you are now, “playing with fire.” More importantly, you will begin to see and hear things of such weight and beauty and power that you will find that you simply can’t stop speaking about them.

