

Friend Of The Bridegroom
John 3:22-36

We'll begin our study today by reconfirming a truth that we are all very familiar with, but that we really must be reminded about over and over again. And that truth is that we must never consider "sin" to be something that is "passive". That sin is simply a violation of God's law, and if we carefully avoid it, it will never take place.

Because oh my dear friends, that simply is not the way of sin.

Each one of us has a sinful nature that was bred into our souls at birth. And that nature has an unyielding "bent" towards sin, desires hidden deeply within our souls, desires that lure us into doing the sins that we encounter.

But even beyond our own personal sinful desires, sin itself seems to reach out to our souls, drawing us to join with it. A strange thought yes, but real!

And yes, I know that those words sound odd, very odd, perhaps attributing some form of "inherent life" to "sin". And I confess that I don't understand it well myself. But God has clearly given us reason for those thoughts.

Remember how there in the Book of Genesis, our Lord said to Adam's first born son Cain, as Cain was about to go out and murder his brother Abel, He said,
 ⁷ sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7)

And no, we can't know all that these words mean. But it's clear that they mean that "sin" is not passive in its effects on us, but is instead an active predator that seeks after us and desires to have and to control us and to control our behaviors.

Some people have argued that these words are simply speaking about the people or the demonic powers that use "sin" in their attacks on us. And perhaps that is so. But regardless, "sin" is the weaponized power that provokes our wrongful behaviors.

And may we be careful to add that these sinful behaviors are not just behaviors used against us. But can just as easily be wrongful behaviors used by us

ourselves against other people. We are all preyed upon and misused by sin's evil ploys.

And dear friends, there are many, many weapons within the arsenal of sin, with one being the weapon that we'll talk about here today, the weapon of "pride", "pride". The weapon that was used from the earliest beginnings as satan rebelled against God, and is still used to this day.

Here in our scripture passage that we'll study today, we are given a view of how pride had seeped into the hearts and minds of these people who were gathered around Jesus in His day, and we'll see their responses.

And also, and thanks be to God we'll see, the right and appropriate response to "pride" being given by this saintly man of God, John the Baptist.

Let's pause for a moment and read our passage for study today given in John chapter 3, beginning in verse 25.

²⁵ . . . there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. ²⁶ And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" ²⁷ "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸ "You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' ²⁹ "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰ "He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:25-30)

Folks, it is no small matter when a man receives the call from God to step forward to preach, to declare, to proclaim God's word to other people. And there ought rightfully be an almost overwhelming sense of wonder and gratitude within the heart of that person as they would stand in a church pulpit or in some other setting and present the Word of God.

But along with the wonder and the gratitude, there needs also to be a deep sense of fear and reverence. Because anyone who ever stands in a pulpit is held severely accountable to always give only the message that has been given to Him from God, never allowing the substitution of his own message.

God warns us about that in the Book of James chapter 3. There He tells us,
 ¹Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because
 you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. (James 3:1)

Great care needs always to be exercised by the messenger, else the message that he gives might very well be a message of his own, a drum that he is beating at the time, a political point of view, or perhaps a strong opinion that he would like to express.

This warning though is not just to preachers. It is to everyone that dares lead and influence others in daily conversation, at home, or at work, or across the table with friends. If a person busies themselves with winning converts to their own way of thinking, they might be found guilty of stealing a person's affections away from the path that God wants them to follow.

We are always messengers whether it be from a pulpit or in daily interaction with friends and coworkers. My question for you today is, "Whose messenger are you?" "Are you a messenger that carries God's words, or do you pridefully carry your own message?"

"If you carry your own message and you win a person to your way of thinking, what have you gained in the process?"

God asks us that same question by saying, "What does it profit a man (or woman) to gain the whole world, but loose his or her soul in hell?"

We must know and understand that most any advice and counsel and leadership that we give to another person is likely to direct them along a particular path. And that path will lead them either towards Christ and things of eternal value, or the path will lead them towards ideas and concepts and beliefs of this world.

"Pride", with all of its subtle influences within our souls causes us to take special delight in attracting others to believe as we do. We will debate for hours with someone to win their agreement to our way of thinking.

But God is warning us that there is a hidden danger in that sort of pursuit. Whether we influence others on political matters, or on family and social issues, or and especially, when we win someone else to our doctrinal point of view.

God warns us, that on the day that we stand before Him in judgment, everything that we will have ever discussed, every argument that we will have ever won or lost will have eternal consequence.

We must always be careful to measure who we are, whose message we are carrying and just what the eternal consequence will be for all those involved.

In the final analysis, you and I, with every word we speak, are only to be simple messengers of God, giving His Words, speaking them only in the manner that He would speak them, intending only the results He intends . . . else on that final judgment day, we will be found guilty of having built our own enterprise upon the enterprise of God and we will be held severely accountable for it.

You and I need to know our place in the daily flow of this life. We need to know the message that we are to give, and we are to be intimately attached to the One who has given us the message.

John the Baptist knew his message well, and he was intimately attached to the One who gave it to him. And, very importantly, he also knew his place in the order of things.

John the Baptist, the man that Jesus had praised so highly by saying that there was no greater man, born of woman on the whole earth, knew his place. He knew that he was "but dust" as compared to the greatness and the holiness of the living God that had given him his messages.

And when these "infant" disciples that had for so long faithfully followed him around, were earnestly searching to find the right person to give their devotion and faith to, John the Baptist told them plainly and simply,

"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸"You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' ²⁹"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰"He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:27-30)

John the Baptist had been especially chosen from the foundations of the earth to be the one to do this special job that he was called to, and he knew it. He knew that He was the one spoken of in Isaiah 40,

³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord;

Make straight in the desert

A highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be exalted

And every mountain and hill brought low;

The crooked places shall be made straight

And the rough places smooth;

⁵ The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,

And all flesh shall see *it* together;

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 40:3-5)

John the Baptist knew well what God intended when He put onto Isaiah's tongue those words . . . "For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Isaiah knew that his prophecy about the coming of the Messiah and of a man going before Him to announce His coming, were not his own words, but were words directly from the very mouth of God. Isaiah knew that he was simply privileged to be able to be the one who said them.

And so it was also with John the Baptist. His words were never his own. He simply was given the privilege to say them.

You and I also have to understand and we have to appreciate and accept that God's Words are ever and always His and never our own. And we have to ever and always know our place in the plan of God as it unfolds in our own personal lives.

John the Baptist had come in the spirit of Elijah, fulfilling the words of Isaiah, speaking the Words of God. That is an unimaginable honor!

To the average person, this kind of calling, this level of prestigious appointment would have been overwhelming to their ego. Anyone else would have collapsed under the pressure and would have become prideful and arrogant.

There are several messages contained in these few words of scripture today, but folks, this is the most important one for you and me for today. There is a great danger for us if we get caught up in the web of our own "pride", our own ideas and our own importance. It can become a consuming fire. That is so very evident from the experiences of others in scripture.

Satan himself began as Lucifer, the brilliantly shining, beloved angel of God, understood to be one of the highest of all Archangels, privileged with being constantly in the very presence and service of God. But Lucifer became consumed with his own ideas and his own importance. He became arrogant and prideful and wanted to be "as God".

Adam and Eve had been endowed with everything they could possibly want. They had everything handed to them. They owned it all. But they also became consumed with self and in their desire for more, they lost it all.

And those same scenes have played out in the lives of most every man and woman on the earth ever since. Ideas, self-importance, pride and arrogance take possession and rule every life!

But here in the gospels, we see another plan beginning to unfold, a plan to reclaim the prideful hearts of men and women and to set them on a different path.

The plan was for Jesus the creator and sustainer of all the earth, to come and redeem each one of us. But within that plan He would also allow men and women like you and me, and here in John chapter 3, for John the Baptist to be able to make free choices.

They, and we, would be able to choose to join in with the plan or to reject it.

In our scriptures for today, we can see free choice being worked out in the life of John the Baptist. Yes, John was special, but in the final analysis, he was only a man, a person like you and me. He just made the hard choices that he had to make when they were presented to him.

John knew the role that he was called to play and hard choices or not he was prepared to play it out. He knew that he was only the "friend of the Bridegroom", the "Best Man" at the wedding.

John knew that he was not the groom. The “bride” did not belong to him. He had no part in that relationship and he knew that well.

John knew that to insert himself into the marriage relationship between the bride and the Bridegroom would be corrupting and divisive. So, when his disciples came to him inquiring as to his position and his role in the process of redemption, John was quick to say,

“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. ²⁸“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but ‘I have been sent ahead of Him.’ ²⁹“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. ³⁰“He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:27-30)

John knew his place, his role, and he did not expand it even in the slightest.

If a “Best Man” were to try to wrongly influence the “bride”, to win or to in any way keep her affections away from the Bridegroom, it would have a destructive effect on the marriage.

That sometimes happens. In the process of a Best Man ministering to the needs of the Bridegroom, he can quietly steal the affections of the bride. He may not directly intend to do that, but by his personality and by his actions, he can deceptively win her affections away from her husband.

In today’s society, it is a very common thing for men and women to always be in competition for the affections of others. It’s part of most every television program.

And we can do that in the churches too. Preachers attract church members to their own particular mindset. Churches end up splitting because of that, and in the process, the gospel suffers.

John was a “friend of the Bridegroom”. For him to try to hang onto the affections of these disciples that had been following him around for a long time now, would be like a Best Man trying to steal the affections of the bride away from her husband.

And so, John, without hesitation reasserted his position and calling. He is not the "Bridegroom". He is only a "friend of the Bridegroom" and he rejoices when he hears the voice of the Bridegroom.

Folks, this is the preeminent goal of all that Christ intends for you and me as we make our journey through our days on this earth. We are the Bride. We have been adorned to be the beloved possession of the Bridegroom.

But often, we are also called to be leaders, and communicators, perhaps only in a miscellaneous conversation with a friend. But in our conversation, we have the opportunity to lead and influence others that are a part of the "Bride of Christ". If we in any way try to win them over to our particular opinion or to our particular doctrinal bent, then we can be guilty of trying to steal their affections away from the Bridegroom.

We may not be able to see ourselves as doing such things. We may think that all we are doing in our conversation is "offering our opinion". But folks, opinions can be very convincing and very destructive.

Whether we are preaching or teaching, or simply using clever conversation on the telephone or perhaps across the coffee table or desk to win someone else to our way of thinking, we become a competitor with Christ. And that is a fearsome position to be in.

We must be very careful with our words and our intentions. We are told to take every thought into captivity, else we will become consumed with our own ideas, believe them ourselves and then pass them along to others, violating their and our relationship with the Bridegroom.

So tell me, what about you? Are you strong spirited? Do you try to influence others to think the way that you think? It's normal to do that. It's common, but it may not be a good idea. It may even be sinful.

No matter what role you and I are called to, whether it be leadership or it be serving, we must always be careful to measure our words and to make absolutely sure that we are trying to win others to the true Bridegroom and not trying to win them to our particular way of belief.

These Words spoken by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2 are my personal sincere prayer and I hope that they will be yours also.

²For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Corinthian 2:2-4)

Pray with me.