

The Unbound Word of God

2 Timothy 2:1-13

October 9, 2016

21st Sunday After Pentecost

Christians are starting to get scared. Living by the Word of God is becoming increasingly difficult if not downright dangerous. Florists, photographers, and others who don't wish to participate in unbiblical weddings are being fined, sued, and driven out of business. Simply speaking the Word of God can also get you into trouble. Pastors in Canada have been cited and fined for preaching the Word of God regarding homosexuality. A couple of years ago, the sermons by pastors in Houston were subpoenaed by the mayor to check for hate speech. Although the mayor eventually backed off due to the huge uproar the action caused, it was still very scary to think this could be done in America.

If this can happen to preachers who speak the Word of God, it can happen to you, too. Your speaking of the Word of God can be labeled "hate speech". You can be accused of homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, and a host of other "phobias" whenever you speak of the unbiblical actions of people. You can be ridiculed, rejected, criticized, be denied a promotion, lose your job, and so on.

Will it get worse? Will this harassment of the Word of God turn into full blown persecution? In 2010, the Archdiocese of Chicago's Cardinal Francis George said: "I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. His successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization, as the church has done so often in human history."

But, you may say, the Constitution guarantees us "freedom of religion". That it does. We should have the freedom to speak the Word of God and live out our faith. However, if you listen carefully to the way politicians talk today, many talk about "freedom of worship." It seems to imply that, according to some people, we should have only the freedom to worship within the confines of our church building but not take the Word of God out of here. I think that many would like us to lock up the Word of God within this building and only visit it on Sundays and holidays.

This is not a new concept. The effort to restrict or limit the Word of God originated long ago in the Garden of Eden when Satan asked Eve, "Did God really say....?" By tempting her to doubt the Word of God, Satan could get her to stop speaking the Word of God. Eve responded by embellishing upon God's Word and adding her own words to God's Word.

This was not enough to satisfy Satan's diabolical plan. He wanted the Word of God to be silenced. So, through wicked people, Satan did his best. He had prophets in the Old Testament killed for speaking the Word of God. He had the apostles in the New Testament killed for speaking the Word of God. (Eleven of the twelve disciples of Jesus died for speaking the Word of God; only St. John died a natural death.) He had others, like St. Paul in our text for today, imprisoned for speaking the Word of God. Satan figures you can't speak the Word of God if you are dead or in prison.

Satan is still trying to silence the Word of God today. He uses political, social, and cultural pressure to keep us from faithfully speaking the Word of God. Will Satan ramp up his efforts to restrict the Word of God by bringing imprisonment and death for speaking the Word of God in our country as Cardinal George suggests? God only knows, but I wouldn't rule it out. What do we do?

We could give up out of fear as many have done and stay silent in the face of pressure. Don't rock the boat. Don't ruffle any feathers. We could, out of unbelief, alter our confession of the Word of God so as to please the leaders of our culture and gain acceptance by them. Jesus has harsh words for those who will not confess Him publicly and faithfully or deny Him by being unfaithful or saying nothing at all. Jesus says, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33)

Our other alternative is simply to continue proclaiming the Word of God boldly and without fear. We have *the* Good News for this world – the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and we have Good News that, despite Satan's best efforts for thousands of years, the Word of God has not and cannot be silenced. In our text, Paul sits in chains in a Roman prison cell into which he has been tossed and locked up for preaching the Word of God. Yet he boldly and without fear declares, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!"

The Word of God has not been bound, is not bound now, and will never be bound. The Word of God already existed at the beginning of time. St. John says in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) John goes on to say, "And the Word became flesh

and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

The Word of God in human form was not bound nor was He restricted by anyone or anything from His work of saving you, me, and all people from sin, death, and hell. He successfully paid the price for all sin (yours and mine included) by offering His life into death as the perfect and complete sacrifice on the cross. He did away with death’s power over us to frighten us or hold us by rising from death and exiting His tomb, never to die again and promising to raise from their graves to life all those, like us, who have faith in Him and what He has done. Now, He is preparing a place for each of us in heaven where we will never have to worry about sin and death again.

And since the work of the Word of God was not able to be bound or restricted, then neither shall the proclamation of the Word be bound or restricted by anyone or anything. The Word of God has all the power. Right before ascending into heaven, the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ, said, “All authority (power) in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Word of God is also effective and will accomplish everything God intends for it to do, no matter how hard people try to silence it or restrict it. The Lord says through the prophet Isaiah, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

The devil, working through unbelievers, simply does not have the power to bind the Word of God nor the ability to keep it from accomplishing its purpose. Therefore, do not fear, no matter how dark the days which are coming. The Word of God will always be active in water to make new disciples for Jesus Christ. The Word of God will always be strong in the words of a pastor to absolve and forgive you all your sins and give you peace. The Word of God will always be powerful in bread and wine to feed you with the body and blood of Jesus in order to forgive you your sins and strengthen your faith. Nothing, not even the gates of hell, shall be able to prevent the Word of God from doing these things.

Therefore, be strong in the strength of God’s Word. How? First of all, read and study the Word of God for that is how you access His power. The devil loves ignorant Christians who do not read the Word of God or stop studying the Word of God after confirmation because for then He is able to exploit your powerlessness and overcome you. But with the Word of God made flesh and the Word of God written down you will be empowered and able to stand up to the devil and all of his temptations.

Secondly, trust the Word of God to mean what it says and do what it promises. Ignore what those in the world will say about you the Word of God – that it is wrong and those who believe in it will end up on the wrong side of history. Remember that this Word comes from the One who has existed throughout history from before time began and who holds the future in His hands. He is trustworthy. His word is trustworthy.

Thirdly, speak the Word of God faithfully and boldly in any and every situation and you shall not be overcome. John Chrysostom was an early Church Father in the 4th century who was known as a good preacher. (His last name literally means “golden mouth”.) Of this passage, he commented, “But now God has made us such that nothing can subdue us. For our hands are bound but not our tongue, since nothing can bind the tongue but cowardice and unbelief. Where these are not, though you fasten chains upon us, the preaching of the gospel is not bound.” (p.244)

There is no reason for us Christians to be afraid in these latter days as we live by the Word of God and as we speak the Word of God in the church and in the world. People can do whatever they want to try and stop us or to censor or restrict the Word of God which we speak, but they will not ultimately overcome us. They may bind us but they cannot bind the Word of God. Luther sums it up well in his well-known hymn.

*God’s Word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes, who fear it;
For God Himself fights by our side With weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house, Goods, honor, child, or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away, They cannot win the day.
The Kingdom’s ours forever!*

Amen