

The Son of God Goes Forth to War

Some of you have been told at least once in your life: “It’s not personal. It’s just business.” Ok, they said it wasn’t personal. So why does it feel like you were betrayed? *When I teach the Bible truth that ‘God is just and fair,’ I try to put my listeners into God’s shoes, let them feel sin the way God feels it (Genesis 6:6). I tell them, “Imagine that I just went to the homes of your family/parents/siblings/children and I stabbed all your loved ones. How do you feel toward me right now? When I go before the judge, what do you want the judge to do to me?” It’s good for us to be stung by someone else’s sin, to take sin personally, as an affront to our existence. We need to understand how personally God takes all sin, including ours. That’s when we grasp that **THE BATTLE IS PERSONAL.**

It was personal to the Son of God. Try to put yourself in his shoes. The heavenly Father has commissioned you to set aside the full use of your divine power, be born of a poor young woman who had never been with a man, grow up in poverty and obscurity. And when you’re 30 years old, you gather around you 12 men whom you appoint to be your apostles. After they spend over three years with you, walking the stony paths of the Holy Land with you,

hearing your sermons, observing your miracles, praying with you, doing mission work for you, ... one of your apostles agrees to turn you over to the authorities for 30 pieces of silver. But they want this done at a time when no crowd is present because the authorities don’t have a legitimate case against you. Betrayal aches the heart. No wonder there’s a Commandment against using our mouth to betray others. Getting betrayed tastes awful. As Jesus neared the end of his redeeming work, one of his closest companions betrayed him. How could he not take it personally? The battle is personal.

Let the battle be personal to you as a follower of Christ. Ever since the Holy Spirit brought you to faith in Jesus as your very own Savior from sin, there’s been a battle raging inside you, a battle between ‘the sinful flesh you were born with’ (the Old Adam) and ‘the new self that the Holy Spirit created in you.’ The battle is personal. “Two natures lie within my chest. The one is evil, the other blest. The one I love; the other I hate. The one I feed ...will dominate.”

Feeding your new self is hard work. It means carving out time for worship with your fellow believers in your home church, or during these COVID-19 days in your online church. But weekly worship is not enough for most

Christians to win the battle. So feeding your new self is harder than just weekly worship. It means carving out time for Bible reading (or Bible listening) in your daily life. How can you do this when you're so busy? The same way you get anything else done: you decide it's important and you do it. But if you think it's going to be easy, think again. You've got that stickin' sinful flesh lurking in every hallway of your heart. It whispers in your mind, "Ach, I don't have time to read my Bible today." Or "I'm not a great reader." Or "Bible reading's not really my thing." Or "The Bible is boring."

You could fight to feed your faith, or you could give in and give up. But every time you listen to your sinful flesh and skip your daily devotion, you know the ironic thing that happens. If you listen to your flesh, you don't have as much strength to fight your flesh. This makes it that much harder for you to be nice. You are that much quicker to be belligerent toward others, especially those who are trying to bless you, like your teachers, or the police, or the president, or your sibling, or worse yet, the one you promised before God to love, honor, and cherish. Have you fought this battle long enough to take it personally? Have you lost enough skirmishes to realize you need more help than you can muster from inside yourself?

Help? Did someone call for help? Here comes the warrior Jesus. Your daily battle to do right and avoid wrong—it's personal for him. How can you be sure? Because, as the Savior of sinners, he loves you. The battle is personal to Jesus as your Redeemer.

He was thinking about you when he and his disciples had their last meal together (John 17:20). He was thinking about you when they all went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, when he went a little farther, about a stone's throw, and prayed. He was thinking of you when he returned to his disciples, who had fallen asleep, and he asked them, "*Could you not stay awake with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak*" (Mark 14:37-38). He was thinking of you when "*a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them*" (Luke 22:47). Jesus knew what was coming, but he went out to the mob anyway and surrendered himself to them. He was thinking of you. For Redeemer Jesus the battle was personal, because he loves you.

He loved Judas too. Put yourself in Judas' sandals for a few moments of that first Maundy Thursday. You approach Jesus to kiss him because

that's the discreet signal you previously worked out with the guards whom you just led into Gethsemane. A kiss is no big deal—it's the common way for close males to greet each other in your culture. Besides most of the guards have never seen Jesus before. The guards don't wear glasses. The sun is down and it's dark. Like most Jewish men, Jesus has a beard and shops at 'Discount Cloaks R Us' where one color cloak fits all. It's time for the kiss-signal so the guards know whom to arrest. "*Greetings, Rabbi,*" you say to Jesus, your master, your friend." But Jesus knows what you're about to do. He calls you out by name, '*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*'" (Luke 22: 48). When his words don't shake you from your course, he even uses sarcasm to knock down your sinful flesh for you: "*So this is what you came for, 'friend'*" (Matthew 26:50). Nope, you will not be dissuaded. You kiss Jesus anyway.

Maybe you don't like being put into Judas' sandals. My flesh hates it. It's crying out right now, "I wasn't even born when Judas betrayed Jesus. Don't say I kissed Jesus. I don't have 30 extra pieces of silver." No, but you and I have had other payouts for betraying Jesus. *In this day and age most men already know what naked bodies look like. Why look again? Is it really worth those 30 pieces of silver

dopamine in the pleasure center of your brain? *Most men and women already know how it feels to deliver a choice morsel of gossip. "I know something you don't—I'm important. I shared with you—we bonded over someone else's shame or pain." Is it really worth those 30 pieces of pleasure to betray Jesus? *We already know what ice cream tastes like. Or chocolate. Or steak. Or whatever your favorite foods really are. Why eat a half gallon when a pint would suffice? Or half a pint? *We already know what a buzz feels like. Why drink another beer or glass or shot? Is it worth those 30 pieces of pleasure to betray Jesus? *Is it worth those 30 pieces of pride to list your achievements, or to count the ways you don't fall into gross sins, as if you are a better Christian than others, as if God owes you? "O Pastor, why do you have to equate my sins to betraying Jesus?" Because that's what all our sins are, betrayal. And if you were the Savior Jesus and someone else did the opposite of what you commanded, you would take it personally too, as if they were betraying you. The battle is personal.

But rather than give us what we deserve, Jesus let what we deserve fall on him, let Judas kiss him, let the Jewish guards arrest him, let the Sanhedrin condemn him, let Pilate flog

him, let the Roman soldiers crucify him, because that's what it took to set us free from our responsibility for betrayal. While Jesus loves us, Satan is always trying to ruin our earthly life through temptation. But his bigger goal is to get us to forfeit the marvelous existence that follows this life. Satan is going after Jesus' family, but Jesus isn't going to let Satan win. Jesus loves you. The battle is personal.

The Son of God goes forth to war. He's going to win—he's the Son of God! Actually he did win. We'll celebrate his victorious death tomorrow. But for tonight, let's take note of the fact that Jesus wants us to join the battle on his side. He wants us to look over and see him right there beside us as we strive to thank him by living holy lives. Look at him. What's that he's doing now? See the Savior making the sign of the cross over your head and your heart, signifying that you have been redeemed by Christ the crucified? Where have you heard those words? Where? Ah, yes! Every time someone is baptized at your church, the pastor makes that sign and speaks those words. Get it? As you prepare for battle, Jesus wants you to remember your baptism. You were washed clean of every sin. You're so clean through his blood that even tomorrow's sins don't stick to you. Nor next week's. Isn't that why you go running to him when you have done

what he calls evil or failed to the good he wants you to do? "Wash me clean again, Savior. Then I'll be ready to go back and fight some more. With you by my side, I'm ready to battle disappointment and depression and anxiety and emotional eating. With you by my side, my cheerful spirit has returned. I'm ready to think about someone else who needs help and do something nice for them, even if all I can do is pray or send an encouraging note."

Tonight we would normally receive Holy Communion. Just as our battle against Satan is personal, so is the Lord's Supper. It's food for the battle: our warrior's body and blood along with the bread and wine to strengthen us. Jesus' words, "Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins," would have given us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this Sacrament. But as I explained in a recent video message, every blessing we receive from Holy Communion, we also receive through Baptism and through God's Word. The Holy Spirit loves to help us with our daily life. Through Word and Sacrament he loves to connect us to believers all around the world who are engaged in the same spiritual battles. Let's stay close to Jesus and his Word. The battle is personal, and in Christ we win.