

Sermon on Respond Wisely to Your Enemies

Kwabena D. Akufo

7/8/2007

Text:

John 7:1-13 After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ² But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him. ⁶ Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸ You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." ⁹ Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. ¹⁰ However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. ¹¹ Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" ¹² Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." ¹³ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.

1 Introduction

In sports if you let the opposing team force you to play according to their strategy you will most likely lose. You must play your strategy and force the opposing team to play according to your strategy. Since you know your strategy well and the opposing team doesn't, you will most likely win. The Patriot's Football Quarterback, Tom Brady, plays his strategy systematically even when they are pressed on all sides. In many tough games this approach has enabled him to lead the Patriots to victory. This approach to dealing with an opposing team applies equally to war.

In this passage, we find that Jesus faced strong opposition and threat from his enemies. He did not panic but instead he played the game according to his own strategy. He responded wisely to the threats from his enemies and was therefore able to continue on his mission. He did

not allow the enemy to force him to act but deliberately responded wisely. When you face enemies strategize your actions and respond wisely.

2 Jesus faced several opponents in his ministry

Because the success of Jesus' mission meant the disarming of Satanic powers, Satan launched an offensive through several quarters. Jesus was persecuted by all kinds of people. In the same way, if you decide to truly become like Jesus and work hard for him you will be persecuted. After going through a lifetime of persecution, the Apostle Paul concluded that, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12) As a believer, you are called to live a godly life and work diligently for Christ. If you faithfully do these things you will face serious opposition just as Jesus faced. This passage lists for us the various people who set themselves up to oppose Jesus to try to destroy him and his ministry.

2.1 The Jewish leaders in Judea plotted to kill Jesus

In verse 1, we learn that the Jewish leaders in Judea had plotted to kill Jesus. Jesus had become a threat to their sovereignty as the sole interpreters of the law to suit their needs. Jesus challenged their abuse of the law and hence incurred their wrath. In the same way, if you decide to do the work of the Lord with honesty and integrity you will face opposition from corrupt leaders. These are leaders who have exploited church government and traditions for years for financial benefit. We hear of pastors who extort money to make someone an elder. We hear of members who bribe their way through the system and hence the leaders can't discipline them for falling into open sin. If you decide to stand on Biblical principles they will plot to kill you using spiritual means since it will be illegal physically. Be reminded of what the Apostle Paul said, "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

2.1.1 Jesus' response was to avoid those who were physically threatening him

Jesus' strategy was to avoid those who were a physical threat to him. In verse 1 we find that Jesus decided to stay away from Judea where the Jewish leaders were looking to kill him.

There was no reason to go to the cross prematurely for that will be playing according to their game. The time was not yet and so he must avoid them and finish the task of setting up the disciples to take over after Calvary. Professionals tell kids to just walk away when someone is provoking them to fight.

In my book, *Utter Mysteries to God*, I tell the following story:

I know of an incident in which some members of a church upset about the transfer of their pastor physically accosted their visiting regional executive pastor during a church service and snatched the microphone from him preventing him from conducting the church service and thus abruptly bringing the church service to an end. Years later I learned that the ringleader of this rebellion got into trouble with the law and spent some time in jail for criminal charges.

The regional executive pastor did not respond but asked all those who wanted to follow him to go outside and he left thereby diffusing any unnecessary physical commotion. You see to engage the ringleader of the rebellion would not have been fruitful. This guy was bent on harm because it turns out he was a drug dealer and so physical fight is part of his normal way of doing things.

2.2 Jesus' family did not believe him and appeared to wish him evil.

In verses 3-4, we find Jesus' brothers urging him to take his ministry to Judea; a place Jesus has been avoiding because of the plot by the Jewish leaders. These two verses alone may sound as if they were encouraging him to expand his ministry. But the verse 5 then comments on the two previous verses saying, "For even his own brothers did not believe in him." This enables us to see that his own brothers appeared to be against him.

In the same way, you must realize that a strong opposition to leading a godly life and working hard for the Lord may come from your own family and/or your closest friends. They would say discouraging things to make you feel you are not capable or worthy of the position. They may even align with your real enemies to fight against you. When this happens, know that it comes with the territory, for "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

2.2.1 Jesus tactfully responded to his family's verbal attacks

Jesus' strategy was to respond tactfully to verbal attacks. When he was attacked verbally, Jesus found a clever way to respond by stating the facts of the situation without escalating the problem when he said in verse 6, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right." If they were looking for a fight, Jesus deprived them of one. You have to watch out for people who want to provoke you into a verbal fight. You see it is like someone in a mud pit who is taunting you. If you are not careful you will jump into the mud pit to fight him and as a result get mud all over you. People will then group you with him as a bad person. The person who is taunting you knows that people know that he is bad and so he doesn't care. So he wants to pull you down in this way. Use wisdom and the direction of the Holy Spirit to respond tactfully.

2.3 The World hated Jesus because he pointed out their evil deeds.

In responding to his brothers in verse 7, Jesus disclosed that the World, the cosmos, which etymologically means the sinful world system, hated Jesus because in his ministry he pointed out their evil deeds. He confronted the teachers of the law and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and for preventing the people from entering the kingdom of heaven.

In the same way, when you decide to lead a godly life it would require you to pull away from your family and pull away from your friends. When they want to do certain sinful things, your Godly conscience will cause you to point it out to them. When you do the people in the world will hate you. Sometimes I come in contact with someone and I can feel the hate vibes even without doing anything or having any interaction with them. When that happens I know that the type of spirit in him recognizes the Holy Spirit in me and so his bad spirit causes him to emit antagonistic and hate signals.

2.4 Some of the people accused him of being a fraud and deceiver

In verse 12, we read that some of the people at the festival in Jerusalem were spreading the rumor that Jesus is a deceiver. The Greek word translated "deceiver" by the NIV also means "someone who leads people astray" and so the NLT translates it as "fraud." A fraud is someone who deceives people for dishonest gain or advantage. Fraud is deemed a serious crime that is shunned by modern civilizations such as the US. In ancient near eastern culture honor was very important and cherished. For someone to be accused of fraud thereby totally ruining his honor

was a severe attack. This was exactly what the people were doing to Jesus. They were assassinating his character thereby attempting to ruin his credibility in ministering to the people.

In the same way, if you do the work of the Lord with diligence, honesty, and integrity you will step on many toes. Such people will spread false rumors about you to malign your character. They will manufacture things you have not done. They will convince people that you don't even know that you are a bad person. Other than being physically killed by your enemies this is the next most serious attack. This is because it has the potential to cripple your ministry and your witness for Christ.

With all these types of enemies Jesus was truly boxed in on all sides. Is there anyone who even thought well of Jesus?

3 Some of the people who thought well of Jesus were afraid to defend him publicly

Yes. In fact, verse 12 and 13 tells us that some of the people thought he was a good man, a wonderful man, or an honorable man. Yet they were afraid to publicly declare their good thoughts about him. They were afraid to defend Jesus publicly when others were saying bad things about him. The Apostle Paul describes the same situation he faced when he said in 2 Timothy 4:16, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me." No one in Rome came to his defense; they were afraid to defend him publicly.

Recently we had an issue in this church and people started questioning my actions. The sad thing is that they questioned my actions through the rumor mill. They never came to me and so I couldn't even defend my honor. In another case the people who thought I had made the right decision were afraid to speak up because the other people were vocal and bent on causing trouble. Shall I say again what the Apostle Paul said, "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

With no one publicly defending him, how did Jesus deal with his opponents?

4 Jesus waited for the right time to act

Jesus did not panic. He had a well-developed strategy for dealing with the variety of opponents. He kept to his game plan and did not allow them to dictate his response.

Jesus' overriding strategy was to patiently wait for the right time to act. In waiting he prayed to empower himself and discern God's will and direction concerning the threats. He did not allow his opponents to force him to act and thereby make a mistake. He acted in his own right time. When the time was right he decided to engage his opponents directly by openly doing ministry.

When you face attacks as you do the work of God, you must follow this strategy and wait upon the Lord. After all, he is your boss and should tell you what to do. He is not just an ordinary boss, but he is omniscient and so he knows all the enemy's devices, he is omnipresent and so he sees what they are plotting, and he is omnipotent and so he can repel any attacks mounted against you. Therefore you must pray, you must fast, and you must watch every step you take.

5 Conclusion

Jesus faced several opponents in his ministry: (1) The Jewish leaders in Judea plotted to kill him; (2) His family did not believe him and appeared to wish him evil; (3) The World hated him because he pointed out their evil deeds; and (4) Some of the people accused him of being a fraud and deceiver. Unfortunately for him, the people who thought well of Jesus were afraid to defend him publicly. But Jesus developed a strategic response to his opponents: He avoided those who were physically threatening him, tactfully responded to verbal attacks, and waited for the right time to act

Jesus maintained his strategy for dealing with his enemies without playing according to their strategy because he knew his mission well. You must know your mission as a child of God and a believer-priest working for Christ. He also knew that he had the backing of God and the forces of heaven. So, I want to encourage today as you walk the straight and narrow path, know that God and the forces of heaven are backing you up.

So, when your enemies want to kill you, your angelic body guards will strike them down. “No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you.” (Isaiah 54:17) “The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” (Exodus 14:14)

When your enemies spread rumors about you, your angelic body guards will make them eat their own words.

When your enemies wish you evil, “The Lord will rescue [you] from every evil attack.” (2 Timothy 4:18)

When your enemies hate you, the Lord “will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.” (Exodus 23:22)

When your enemies conspire against you, know that the Lord has “made you a fortified city, ... They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for [the Lord is] with you and will rescue you” (Jeremiah 1:18-19)

Finally, take a hold of what God said to Joshua and use it in your life: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)