

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: BREATHLESS

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

Conflict on the Way to the Cross

(Mark 11:27--12:34)

Study #25

Introduction: Enemies...

One of the warmest words in our vocabulary is a word that we reserve for certain, special people.

This past week, I got to use that word a couple of times as I was waiting for my breakfast partners to show up at one of my favorite San Antonio holes-in-the-wall, the world famous, Taqueria Aguascalientes (next to the Hills and Dales motorcycle bar, the “Center of the Universe”).

I showed up first for both of these breakfast get-togethers (because I am pathologically committed to being early to everything). The waitress - who knew exactly what I was going to order - came over to see if I was ready and I told her I would wait until my friend showed up.

It felt good to say that. I like how that word “friend” sounds. I’m meeting a friend.

At the other end of the verbal spectrum is the word “enemy.” Warm fuzzies don’t wash over us when we think “enemies.”

In fact, it’s uncomfortable for many of us - maybe for you, surely for me - to think about having enemies.

For much of my life, I have had the sense that if I have enemies, then there is probably something wrong with me. And maybe you’ve felt the same way. But in recent years I’ve seen that to be flawed thinking. And it is the Bible - Jesus, in particular - that has helped me to think differently about enemies.

If you will read through just about any section of the Bible you’ll find reference to God’s people having enemies. Abraham and David and Esther and Paul all had enemies.

It turns out that to have an enemy, all you have to do is stand for something. So, into most of our lives, at least from time to time, enemies will surface.

Some will be mutual, some will be unilateral. But “enemies” is a biblical category that we ignore at our peril. And knowing how to deal with enemies is an important life skill. Today, we watch as Jesus gives an advanced seminar on how to respond, wisely, to the attacks of enemies.

Last May we began journeying through the life of Jesus, allowing Mark, an early disciple and close friend of the Apostle Peter, to guide us.

With interruptions here and there, we were in Mark’s Gospel on most of the Sundays of the summer and fall, taking a break around Christmas. We have continued that break from Mark in the early weeks of 2012 as we turned to explore God and His ways.

Well, this morning we are picking up where we left off in the Gospel of Mark. And from here until Easter, the messages I’m bringing will be all about Jesus.

Mark’s Gospel has a certain flavor to it. There is a breathlessness to his book. He says, “*Immediately...*” a lot! Mark shows Jesus moving from place to place, always on the go. He heals and teaches and casts out demons and performs miracles and trains His disciples and travels throughout Galilee and Judea and goes to Gentile regions, too!

The last scenes we viewed prior to taking a break from Mark were those of Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem for the last time. It was His Triumphal Entry, an entry that occurred on what we call Palm Sunday.

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus forcefully removed those who were selling merchandise and animals from the Temple. He cursed a fig tree. He taught His disciples. These things took place on Sunday and Monday.

Today, our focus will be on what occurred on His final Tuesday. The events of that Tuesday were dramatic and determinative.¹ Because of what He said, who He interacted with, and how He interacted with them, the plan to do away with Jesus became solid on Tuesday.

Prior to Tuesday, in the minds of His enemies, there had been a vague wish to get rid of Jesus. After Tuesday, they were committed to seeing Him killed.

For the next few minutes you and I are going to walk through some of the exchanges Jesus had with certain groups of people on that fateful Tuesday and learn from Him a bit of what we need to know when we face enemies to our faith.

Early on that Tuesday morning Jesus and His disciples took the 2-3 mile hike from Bethany to Jerusalem. They were staying in the home of their good friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Every morning they would walk from Bethany into the city.

On Tuesday, they walked through the city gates back into the recently cleansed Temple precincts to find a crowd of religious types gunning for Him.

Attempts at Entrapment (11:27--12:27)

The Scribes and the Elders

Who gave You the right? (vv. 27-28)

[27] They came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, [28] and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?"

As soon as He walked into the temple precincts Jesus was accosted by enemies - the chief priests and the scribes. These men were probably members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, something like the Supreme Court of Israel, but with more political clout than our own Supreme Court.

They have a question - and it is an accusing question.

Over the course of His three year career Jesus had been very active. In fact, I just mentioned a bunch of things that He had been doing since John baptized Him in the Jordan River.

More recently He had been receiving the worship of adoring crowds, cursing fig trees, borrowing donkeys, and cleansing the Temple.

It was probably these ***"these things"*** that the chief priests and scribes were asking about when they came to Him.

"Jesus," we can almost hear them say, *"You're acting like You own the place. Who made You Boss of the temple, anyway?!"*

Well, Jesus listened carefully to their question and responded with one of His own.² Their question didn't beat around the bush and His question to them was just as frontal.

2. Answering a question with a question (vv. 29-30)

[29] And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. [30] "Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me."

Before he was killed, John the Baptist had been a powerful, if polarizing, force. He was all about God, faith, holiness, and repentance. Jesus' question to the religious elite brings John back up on center stage.

¹ So the Harmony of the Gospels by A.T. Robertson.

² Counter-questioning was a common debating technique among the rabbis of the first century.

By their question they intended to put Jesus on the spot. But by His question He has impaled them on the horns of a serious dilemma. They immediately huddled up to consider how to respond.

Impaled on the horns of a dilemma (vv. 31-33a)

[31] They began reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ [32] “But shall we say, ‘From men?’—they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. [33a] Answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.”

On the one hand, if they said, “*John’s ministry was from God*” they would leave themselves open to ridicule because they never accepted John’s message.

But on the other hand, if they said, “*His ministry was NOT from God*” (which is what they would very much have liked to say!) they would become very unpopular with the people, because the crowds all believed that John the Baptist was God’s prophet.

After considering the two possible answers they might give and finding neither of them acceptable, they came back to Jesus with a dishonest and cowardly, “***We do not know.***”

The truth was they just didn’t know how to answer without looking silly. Jesus’ response was neither cowardly nor deceitful.

Checkmate, stalemate (v. 33b)

[33b]...And Jesus said to them, “Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

He just flatly refused to answer their question. Jesus was perfectly comfortable not answering their question.³ And that is one way to deal with accusing questions from enemies who are out to trip you up.

³ Jesus was still probably being loving by not answering directly, as they had already rejected clear claims He had made to have been given authority by God to

Lesson #1 for dealing with enemies:

Not too long ago, I answered a question someone asked me. It was a question about an issue that is central to the Christian Gospel. I don’t know if the questioner was trying to trip me up or not.

I answered. And I’m not ashamed of the answer I gave. I spoke the truth as lovingly as I could. But by giving a quick yes/no answer I cut off what could have been a helpful Gospel conversation.

I felt constrained to answer because I was asked. Jesus shows us that we need not allow someone else to determine the rules of engagement. He didn’t allow these chief priests and scribes to set the rules for discourse. That’s not being tricky. It’s being wise.

When asked a question, or when challenged, or when presented with an accusation, we are free to respond as we think will best push God’s purposes forward.

Right after that exchange, Jesus told a parable. The group that heard this parable probably included the chief priests and scribes PLUS His own disciples and some Jerusalem by-standers.

The parable is a perfectly transparent indictment of the religious rulers for having rejected Him.⁴

Parenthetic: A perfectly transparent parable (12:1-11)

[1] And He began to speak to them in parables: “A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. [2] “At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers.

do what He did. To have answered directly would have just increased their guilt or rejecting.

⁴ Jesus teaches a parable that clearly illustrates God’s rejection of the Jewish rulers because of their treatment of the past prophets and their soon-to-come mistreatment of Him.

[3] “They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. [4] “Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. [5] “And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. [6] “He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ [7] “But those vine-growers said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ [8] “They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. [9] “What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. [10] “Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; [11] THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES’?” [12] And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

The story (like most of the parables) is a simple one that would have been easily understood by anybody in first century Israel.

A certain landowner put a lot of resources into a plot of land to make it suitable for a vineyard, complete with wine-making equipment.

Then, before taking off on an extended vacation, he leased the vineyard out to tenants who would work the land in his absence.

The arrangement required that when the vines started producing, the tenants would keep some of the produce for themselves and give part back to the owner.

At harvest time, the owner sent a slave to receive what had been agreed to for rent. But rather than give to the owner what had been agreed to, the workers beat the slave and sent him back to the landowner empty-handed. They did the same thing to a second slave and to every other slave the landowner sent to them!⁵

⁵ The servants the owner sent to collect the rent/fruit/crop represent the prophets God sent to call Israel to worship. Many of the prophets received exactly the kind of treatment Jesus describes here in this parable.

Finally, the landowner sent his own son, convinced that the workers would honor him. But instead, thinking that they would get to take full control of the vineyard if the son was not around, they killed the son.⁶

At the end of this little story, Jesus asked the listeners what they thought the landowner would do to those workers? They responded, rightly, that he would destroy them and give the vineyard to others.

The parable is obviously a thinly veiled charge that by their rejection of Him, they are rejecting God’s own Son!⁷

The chief priests and scribes definitely “got” the point - they understood that the parable was directed against them - and desperately wanted to “get” Him. However, fearing the crowds of people who were enjoying this beatdown, they simply walked away, probably seething.

Battle lines have now been drawn, and the battles aren’t nearly over.

Shortly after giving the parable, with Jesus still in the temple, some other Jewish leaders showed up intent on entrapment. These men were from two groups that were usually at odds with each other, Herodians and Pharisees.⁸

The Pharisees were super-scrupulous religionists and very patriotic Israelites. They wanted to see an Israel restored to her former glory and to be rid of Roman domination.

The Herodians (as their name implies) were linked to the Herod dynasty which ruled over the Jews under the Romans. Far from being opposed to Roman power in Palestine, they supported it.

⁶ In the first century, if there was “ownerless property” it could be claimed by whoever first laid claim to it. The tenants here may have believed that the appearance of the son meant that the owner had died, allowing them to lay claim on the land if the son was out of the way.

⁷ Vineyard was a familiar symbol of the nation of Israel. (See Isaiah 5:1-2)

⁸ It is possible that these two groups had been arguing and came to Jesus to settle the dispute. Possible, but not at all likely.

On this day, these political and religious foes joined forces against a common enemy: Jesus.

They greeted Him respectfully and then laid a trap they were certain He couldn't escape.

The Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17)

Leaders send leaders to trap Jesus (vv. 13-15a)

[13] Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap⁹ Him in a statement. [14] They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? [15a] "Shall we pay or shall we not pay?"

As subject people, the Jews were forced to pay tax to Rome. Not surprisingly, paying taxes to Rome irritated the Jews.¹⁰

This delegation of Pharisees and Herodians simply asked Jesus about the rightness of paying tax to Caesar. And they knew that by posing the question, they had put Him in a "can't win" situation.

Saying "*Pay the tax*" (which the Herodians would have applauded) would make Him extremely unpopular with the average citizens. (Generally speaking, most people don't relish paying taxes...)

But saying, "*Don't pay the tax*" (which the Pharisees would have loved) would have gotten Him in really big trouble with the Romans.

So, we think, "*Poor Jesus. What can He do? He's trapped.*"

Well, just as the Pharisees and Herodians are exchanging high fives over having finally bested Jesus, He turned the tables and asked them to bring Him a coin.

The "image" issue... (vv. 15b-17a)

[15b]...But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing¹¹ Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." [16] They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's."

They would have brought to Him a common denarius, which was the Roman coin used to pay the tax in question.

Looking at the coin and then at the crowd that had gathered, Jesus tossed out a question, "*Whose image is on the coin?*"

Obviously, it was Caesar's image and the crowd said so.

Jesus then answered and His answer did address the concerns of the Herodians and the Pharisees. But He avoided the trap they had laid by keeping the main thing the main thing.

[17] And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

In other words, if you use Caesar's coin and benefit from his government, give him his due. Pay his taxes.

But don't forget that YOU are God's coinage. You bear His image and likeness. And if Caesar is deserving of his coin, then God is infinitely more deserving of the allegiance and worship of those who bear His image.

Mark says that they were amazed at Jesus and the answer He gave.

Amazing amazement! (v. 17b)

[17b]... And they were amazed at Him.

And whether the "they" included bystanders, Pharisees, Herodians, chief priests, scribes, or all of the above, knowing what we know of Jesus, we're amazed that they were amazed!

⁹ "Trap" = in the original language, this is a word used of wild animal traps.

¹⁰ Tax = census, referring to the annual poll tax (head tax) demanded by the Roman emperor from all Jews since A.D. 6 when Judea became a Roman province. The money went directly into the emperor's treasury.

¹¹ Test = tempt, with a view to failure.

Lesson #2 for dealing with enemies:

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to earth to bring men and women to God and He never lost sight of that mission.

So, when He was pestered by a taxing question, His answer pointed back to His primary mission. He refused to be derailed into a side issue. He brought the conversation right back to the theme of people and their relationship to God.

One of life's greatest challenges is to keep the main thing the main thing. And at the end of the day, I believe that what we all want is to be known as a "main thing" person.

When it's all said and done, we don't want people to remember us as a wonderful musician, Republican/Libertarian/Democrat, great dancer, skilled athlete, or brainiac.

The main thing is Jesus. I can think of nothing sweeter than to leave behind His fragrance and to be all about Him and I'm sure the same is true for you.

When someone tries to derail you from keeping the main thing the main thing, follow Jesus' lead and don't go chasing rabbits.

So, in quick succession, Jesus has been approached by two sets of Jewish rulers. He is about to welcome a third - a group of Sadducees.

The Sadducees were another prominent group of religious leaders in first century Israel. They were religious aristocrats and political animals.

And among the distinctives of the Sadducees were their beliefs that only the five books of Moses were authoritative Scripture, that there were no angels or other spirit beings besides God, and that there was no future judgment or life after this life is over.

To show just how silly it was to believe in a life following this life, they proposed a complicated scenario to Jesus involving what is known as "levirate" marriage.

A levirate marriage was enacted when a married man who had no children died. His living brother would father children by his brother's widow, thus preventing extinction of a family line and keeping a family's inheritance intact.

Here is the scenario the Sadducees placed before Jesus.

Sadducees (12:18-27)

Pointing out the silliness of life after death (vv. 18-23)

[18] Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, [19] "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. [20] "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. [21] "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; [22] and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. [23] "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

Obviously, their proposed scenario ridiculed belief in the resurrection. And there is no question this time. The Sadducees have Jesus right where they want Him! He's stuck for sure this time.

Now, put yourself in Jesus' sandals.

He has come from eternity and knows, full well and firsthand, that angels are real and that there is life for people after this life is over. The Sadducees beliefs are clearly wrong.

It would like someone telling you, who have never been to Alaska, about the northern lights and you responding, "Nuh uh!"

Or it would be like you telling someone about a trip you've taken to the Grand Canyon and having them reply, "No way is there a canyon that deep and wide."

Well, Jesus takes a very different tack in dealing with the Sadducees' attempt at entrapment than He did with the effort of the chief priests and scribes ("By what authority are You doing these things?") or the Pharisees and Herodians ("Should we pay Rome's tax, or not?")

Here, He attacks right back, pointing out that they are guilty of just a couple of teeny, weeny little errors in thinking.

Answering as One who knows (vv. 24-27)

Jesus mentions the Sadducees' little, bitty errors (v. 24)

[24] Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

One, they don't understand the Bible (and THAT would have gone over like a lead balloon!). Two, they don't understand God's power.

His fuller answer dealt with the second question first.

He gives insight to the afterlife (vv. 25-27)

[25] "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."

The Sadducees' error consisted in trying to apply an earthly solution to a heavenly setting. Marriage, while a wonderful institution, is not a heavenly institution.

The marriage relationship is a great arrangement for this life and for this world. But it's not the way things work in the life to come. (And did you notice that Jesus got in a little jab about the angels in His answer, too?)

In the life to come God will establish a whole new order. And He is perfectly capable of resolving all apparent complications arising from life as we know it here and now.

Jesus' answer would have been (and still is) the hardest answer for those of us who, like the Sadducees, want to know exactly how it's all going to work out. His counsel? *"Trust God. He'll handle it."*

And to the larger question about life after this life is over? Jesus answered that one direct from the one part of the Bible that the Sadducees said they loved the best, the Law.

[26] "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? [27] "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

Mentioning the passage about the burning bush,¹² Jesus' whole argument hinges on the tense of a verb in Exodus 3:6.

If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob no longer existed at the time of Moses (and this scene takes place roughly four hundred years after Jacob died), then God would have more accurately said, *"I WAS the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."*

But by saying, **"I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..."** God was saying that the patriarchs were still very much alive in Heaven, even though they had died.

So, what do we learn here about dealing with enemies? I think it is pretty simple, really.

Lesson #3 for dealing with enemies:

Sometimes, when you have a fight on your hands, the best thing to do is fight.

Jesus was subjected to a straw man argument that ridiculed God and eternity. On this one He didn't shrewdly avoid a confrontation and refuse to answer. Nor did he re-direct with a coin.

¹² We know it as Exodus 3, but there were no chapter divisions in Jesus' day.

He took the fight to the Sadducees and pointed out their errors from Scripture with force. If anyone had bought in to the farce the Sadducees were making of the life to come it would have led to eternal condemnation.

So, Jesus didn't finesse His way out of that box. He exploded it with rebuke and flat out contradiction.

You will, from time to time, find yourself in what you recognize as a life-or-death conversation. You will hear someone say something that is devastatingly wrong, diabolically wrong.

And you will remember how Jesus dealt with the Sadducees on the last Tuesday of His life and you will point out a couple of little, bitty errors in thinking.

Because Jesus has modeled for you how to do this, you won't be shy and you won't be mean. You'll be confident and humble, bold and loving as you correct error and declare the truth.

There is yet one more conversation to explore before we wrap up this morning. And this final exchange is not an attack by an enemy. What we have here is a sincere question by a serious seeker after truth.

An Attempt to Find Clarity (12:28-34)

One Scribe with a Sincere Question (v. 28)

Many of my commentaries believe that the man who shows up next was a Pharisee. I haven't read anyone who seems to think he had anything against Jesus. The question he asks isn't biting and there is no "edge" to it.

He's impressed by the answers he's heard Jesus give on this Tuesday and he's now got a question of his own.

[28] One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?"

That's a good question and a tough one.

By Jesus' day Jewish scholars had painstakingly counted the number of commands in the Bible. There were 365 negative ones and 248 positive ones, making for a total of 613 commands from God.

Given those numbers, we wonder how anyone could possibly choose which was the most important. I sure wouldn't have been able to.

But Jesus could and Jesus did. He even gave more than was asked for, providing the first and second place commands.

Jesus' Straightforward Answer (vv. 29-31)

[29] Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; [30] AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' [31] "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

What is the most important thing to do? Love God. (So, what is the greatest sin? Don't love God.)

What's next? Love others as completely as you love yourself. (The second greatest sin? Don't love others sacrificially.)

The scribe who came to Him with the question got it!

The Scribe Gets It! (vv. 32-33)

[32] The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; [33] AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

He could have just said, "Amen." But this scribe, as opposed to the others we've seen today, was so completely in synch with Jesus' answer that he had to say more.

He affirms that nothing - not even countless burnt offerings and sacrifices, would please God more than love.

This Tuesday's worth of conversations, so far so marked by conflict and accusation and attempts at entrapment, ends with a very edifying exchange between Jesus and a man with an honest heart.

Just listen to His final comment which applauds this man's understanding and the posture of his heart.

Jesus' Commendation (v. 34a)

*[34a] When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."*¹³

And what can we learn from watching Jesus here?

Lesson #4 in dealing with enemies:

Well, recognize that not everyone is an enemy. Don't be paranoid. If you have been dealing with folks who are out to get you, it can be tempting to think that the next person who comes along with a question is out to get you, too.

Be quick to regain your equilibrium by entrusting yourself to God so that you can deal wisely and lovingly with those who are not enemies.

Conclusion:

Now, when Mark wrote this section of his Gospel, he was writing to a first-century church that was suffering serious persecution from Emperor Nero.

We today read the same passage and wonder what are we to take home from what we have seen today?

First, let's remember that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, was opposed by well-respected members of the community, by religious leaders who were as moral as moral could be.

You and I should not be surprised when we, too, are opposed for what we believe or for how we live. We simply must remember to imitate Jesus.

Sometimes we will shrewdly decide to simply not engage. Sometimes we will creatively shift the conversation to keep the main thing the main thing. And sometimes we'll lovingly fight for God's truth.

Jesus had no one method for dealing with His enemies, but was sensitive to each conversation, each situation, and to the need of the moment. As you and I are sensitive, the Holy Spirit will guide and direct and nudge us, too, as to how to respond.

So, learning to wisely navigate life when we are opposed is crucial. But there is something else to see here today.

It is impossible to watch Jesus interact with His enemies on this day and not be impressed with the sheer towering force of His moral courage. You'll notice that here Jesus never resorted to miracles. This is Jesus the God/Man living as the perfect Man.

He faces unanimous opposition from every power group in the nation. The sides are closing in on Him, but He neither panics nor caves to the pressure. He deals courageously and truthfully with His opponents. He shows raw moral courage, knowing that by doing so He is inviting crucifixion.

Today time in God's Word leads us to imitate Jesus, sure. But it also leads us to worship Him. We are in awe of a Savior who lived so fearlessly because He was fueled by a commitment to His Father and His love for us.

¹³ The cumulative effect of this passage is to leave us with the impression of Jesus locked in combat with a wide coalition of the most influential people in Jerusalem, but holding His own - and in the end having the last word.