

(1 Peter - Part 27): Who Is He That Will Harm You?

by A.W. Tozer

Nothing can harm a good man, neither person nor thing nor circumstance, because their value lies within and is protected by God.

Duration: 38:43

Scripture: Genesis 4:8, Matthew 5:11-12, John 3:16, Romans 8:33, Romans 8:35-39, Philippians 4:13, 1 Peter 3:13

Topics: "Fear"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher describes the physical deterioration of a man who is nearing death. Despite his weakened state, the preacher emphasizes that the devil and death cannot harm the man's spirit or soul. The preacher draws parallels to the martyrdom of two missionaries who were killed for their faith, highlighting that although their physical bodies were destroyed, their souls were preserved by God. The preacher also references biblical figures such as Stephen and Abel to illustrate that physical harm does not diminish one's worth or closeness to God.

Transcript

in service over the last weeks with Brother McAfee, we foresaw two things. One, that quite a sizable number of our people would duck out on us this morning, and cut class, and go down to the Opera House, for which we do not blame them at all. One chance in thirty-one years to get to Council, I don't blame them for going.

And obviously some of them did, quite a sizable number. The second thing we foresaw was that a few of the delegates would come here to church. And our prophetic predictions have come to pass in both anticipations, and we concluded together that we would not alter the service at all, not even by asking anyone else to read scripture or pray.

Though we are not unmindful of the honor some of our ministerial brethren have done us in coming here this morning to our service. We felt that we would go ahead just the same as we always do, without any change at all. And I even concluded that I would go right on with my sermons in Peter.

So I'll do it. Somebody was unkind enough, bless her heart, to remind me that she had taken down the date of my first sermon on 1 Peter. One year ago I began preaching from 1 Peter, and I am now in 3.13. At

this rate I'll be an old man when I get through it, if indeed you would not want to say that I was one when I started.

But at any rate, here is 1 Peter 3.13. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? Now, that is a rhetorical question. And the rhetorical question, as you know, is one that carries its answer in itself. You don't have to answer it.

For the answer that this question carries, who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? The answer is simply, no one. It answers itself. Now, Paul says something about the same in Romans 8.35. Let me read.

He says, verse 33, who, verse 34, who, verse 35, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Should tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword, knave, and all these things which are more than conquerors through him that loved us, for I am persuaded that neither death nor light nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. I emphasize the personal pronoun, who, three times, in order that you might see how the Holy Spirit gives his language. He says, who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemns? Who shall separate us? Those are personal pronouns, implying personality.

But then he uses neutral things here. For I am persuaded that neither death nor light nor principalities nor things. Showing that when he says who, he includes not only the persons who might want to harm us, but things that might want to harm us.

And this gives me my thesis for the morning hour. I will state it, and then at least hope that I may be able to prove it. It is simply that nothing can harm a good man, neither person nor thing nor circumstance.

Nothing can harm a good man or woman. Now, if you want to take down the gist of the sermon, and for any reason at all you feel you must go now, you will have had the sermon. That is it.

Nothing can harm a good man. Now, I want to talk a little about what it means to be harmed. Because I never like to use words that I'm not sure my hearers understand.

If I use a word meaning one thing and you hear it and give it some other meaning, you and I might as well be talking Chinese. So, I define the word harm, or harmed, in my own language. I didn't even look in Webster.

I thought this up myself for purposes of this sermon. That to harm is to debase in quality. That is one meaning of the word harm.

Harm is done to gold, for instance, if it were possible to do it. If gold could be debased by being made silver, that would be harming the gold. And if the silver could be debased by being made iron, that on the other hand would be harming the silver.

And if we went on to debase the iron by making it lead, that would be debasing the iron. And then if we made the lead clay, that would be debasing it still more. It would be a deterioration in quality that would be to harm a thing or a person.

And then the second definition I'll give it is that harm would mean to reduce in dimension or amount. A building, for instance, say an office building that has a thousand offices in it, had a fire or a bombing or an earthquake, and great sections, wings of the building were destroyed so that it was reduced to, say, a hundred offices or fifty offices, that would be harming the building in that it would be reducing its dimensions and its numbers or amount. Then when we come to human beings we would say that harm means to prevent the fulfillment of our destiny.

Most people don't know it, but you amount to something. God made you in his image. And you have a destiny to fulfill.

And harming you would mean to stymie that destiny somehow and to block its fulfillment. And secondly it would mean to block the accomplishment of our appointed task. God has appointed a task for all of us, and if somehow you can be cheated out of the fulfilling of your task, you've been harmed, or it means lowering in value.

If somehow or other someone or something can get hold of me and debase me and devalue me so that I no longer signify in the eternal scheme of things as high as I did before, but that I am reduced in value, I am cheapened like money, devalued, then I have been harmed. Now, on that definition, I say that nothing can harm a good man or woman that follows that which is good. Nothing can debase his quality, nothing can reduce his dimensions, nothing can prevent the fulfillment of his destiny, nothing can block the accomplishment of his appointed task, and nothing can lower his value before God and the universe.

Now, I say these things cannot harm a good man. They cannot happen to him. Only sin can debase us.

Only sin can deteriorate us, and if we deal with sin, we may be perfectly sure that nothing else can get to us. That is, nobody can be reduced in size by anything that anybody can do to him. You can't get any smaller.

I remember years ago the sharp-tonguedographer said about a certain man, he said he was getting smaller and smaller every day, trying to get big enough to fill his job. And you can make yourself smaller and smaller if you want to do it. You can debase yourself.

You can reduce your size and your moral dimensions, but nobody can do it to you, and nothing but a combination of things can reduce you. And then think of our destiny as a human being, made in the image of God. We have a higher position.

I have often said and repeated that there is a morbid humility that is dishonoring to God Almighty. God made me in his image, and outside of sin, I have absolutely nothing to apologize for. This belly-scraping kind of humility that crawls like a paddle spaniel over the sidewalk and says, excuse me for living, I'll die as soon as I get around to it.

I'm no good, I'm nobody. That kind of thing dishonors God Almighty. Who art thou, man, to speak against the potter that made thee, and the carpenter that built the house? Who art thou to find fault with the house? God made you, and he made you higher than the angels in that he said about you what he never said about an angel, that he made you in his own image.

You have only one thing to be sorry for and ashamed of, and that is the sin that mired that image. So you have a destiny and a high moral calling as a human being, and I ask you, who can change that? Who can unmake that image in you? Who can make you anything less than God intended you to be, except your

own self and sin? Then there is our appointed task. Everybody has an appointed task.

I never believed in this little orphan Annie conception of a human being. I never believed that we were orphaned in childhood and that somehow cut loose from our minds we float, driven by one wind and another, and changed and twisted by all cross currents and that we have no home and no beginning and no ending and no certain dwelling place. All that is deism or agnosticism, but it is in Christianity and it is in Bible.

The Bible teaches there is a sovereign God who has appointed the ways of man. And it teaches that you and I are dearer to God than the apple of his eye. And it teaches that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

And it teaches that the very second person of the kind God came down and was made in the image of mortal flesh that he might redeem us. God would not do that for a creature that was any less than infinitely valuable. And you imagine that anybody can take away from that value, can make you anything less than you are? You are tragically and sadly mistaken and the purpose of this sermon is to try to correct your error.

Now, lowering us in value can't be. Nobody can do it. Here we stand.

And you say, all right, then what is this, Mr. Tozer? Universalism? Do you believe that all men ever there are lost or saved? That our lost are saved and we'll be saved? Now, how'd you get that idea? I don't believe anything of the sort. But I believe that no external circumstance can harm me and I believe that nobody outside me can reduce me in value nor anyway hurt me. But I believe that I can hurt myself.

I believe that I can harm my own soul and the very things I've said nobody on the outside can do, I can do inside my own heart if I don't watch myself. Now, I not only believe that nobody can harm me, I believe that nobody can harm anybody else. We use language very foolishly.

One man shoots another man and we say he did him an injury. One man starts a slander about another man and we say he harmed that man's reputation. But we're using words very carelessly, my friends.

The simple fact is nobody can harm anybody else. All he can do is to put temptation in his way and make it possible for him to harm himself. Now, I'll give you Bible illustrations of this.

You remember there was Adam and Eve way back in the garden and someone will be peeking out ahead of me and say, how do you get that way, sir? The devil harmed Adam and Eve. I reply, the devil did nothing of the sort. He did not harm Adam and Eve.

The devil simply told Adam and Eve how they could harm themselves and they were fools enough to accept the proposition. If they had stood on their own piety and believed their God, there would have been no harm done to either one of them and it would not have been said the devil harmed them and they would not have been harmed. But they accepted the proposition that they should harm themselves and so they harmed themselves.

But unless you open the gate and let the devil in, he is totally harmless and he can't injure anybody except as he is allowed to get in. Now, later on that same devil, remembering that he had succeeded in tempting the first Adam to harm himself, he came to the second Adam and started the same nefarious scheme. But how far did he get with the second Adam? He didn't get anywhere for the first Adam would not harm

himself.

The second Adam, I mean. And the first one did, but our Lord Jesus Christ refused to do it. And he stood on his own spirituality and his own faith and said it is written and the devil went away red-faced because he had not succeeded in causing the second and last Adam to harm himself.

Jesus Christ knew better he would not do it and so nobody harmed him and nobody could harm him and the devil couldn't harm him. I've never been a very devil-conscious creature. I've always been a wee bit afraid of these people who are in rapport with the dark world.

I don't believe in visiting the underworld, not even for purposes of writing an article. I think we ought to stay out of the underworld. Ah, that old madam so-and-so with her rag around her head telling fortunes in a dirty hole under the sidewalk.

Let her alone. Stay away from her. Why do you want to go in there for? And unless you're taking the gospel and having services, why do you want to be down on West Madison Street for? I don't mean to moisten, I mean throw the way.

You want to be down there for in the first place. Why hang around with cutthroats and bums and droppers and gunmen? Stay away from them. And don't be jittery and jumpy about them.

Since we've had Council Hill, we've had one gang murder and two kidnappings. But they didn't bother me. And they didn't bother you, and they wouldn't bother you.

So why should we be always devil-conscious? I've met people that were always in such contact with the devil that it was breathing on their neck all the time. And they were always praying, and almost fantastically praying, Oh, Lord, deliver me and help me. I concede that sometime during your lifetime you might have a run-in with the devil where you would have to really get down and pray.

But for the most part, if you forget about the devil and focus your attention on the eternal, everlasting, victorious Son of God, you'll break the devil's heart and render him paralyzed. So nobody outside can hurt you. If you go along looking over your shoulder, thinking the devil is catching up with you, he'll never catch up with you if you're faintly believed that nothing can harm a good man.

And who is he and what is that will harm you if you be followers of that which is good. I want to point out here a few things that people mistakenly believe harm them. You may have to do a little thinking here, and if you're not used to it, you may get a charley horse in your head.

But if you follow along with me, it'll do you some good, I think. I want to point out here, brethren, that some people imagine physical injury harms a man. And I don't believe it.

I have here a little thing I want to read. It's only about nine lines long and brief. An old fellow by the name of Epictetus.

He had a name I'd have changed if I'd had it. But Epictetus was a crippled Roman philosopher. And he was, of course, stoic, but he did have some ideas.

He never had seen the New Testament, but he got further without New Testaments than some of you do with one. But he said, what's the use of worrying about external injuries and harms? He said, I must die? Well, must I die groaning? He said, I must be fettered. Well, must I be lamenting too? I must be exiled.

Well, what hinders me, then, from going smiling and cheerful and free? The emperor said, betray a secret. And he said, I'll not betray a secret. He said, well, if you don't betray a secret, I'll fetter you.

He said, what do you mean, man? Fetter me? No, he said, you can fetter my legs. And not even Zeus himself can get the better of my free spirit. Well, he said, I'll throw you into prison.

And Epictetus had the answer. Then he said, I'll behead that paltry body of yours. And Epictetus said, did I ever tell you that I was the only man on earth that had a head that couldn't be taken off his body? Well, what can you do with a man like that, brethren? You see, he's gotten loose from kings and emperors and prisons and chains.

But we Christians don't have that much sense. If we hear that somebody in North China or Colombia has been thrown into jail, we write a big tract about it. And we say, they've been harmed.

They haven't been harmed at all. The building blown up, well, that's not part of them. That doesn't reduce them in value in the universe.

That doesn't devalue their currency to have their building blown up under them. That doesn't make them any smaller. That doesn't hinder their manifest destiny.

That doesn't prevent them from doing the work of God, not their slaves. We imagine the physical injury of her harmed people. It does not.

Here's Abel way back in the early part of the world's history. The fellow didn't like Abel because he was a spiritual fellow. So he took him out and beat him up.

It doesn't say how it happened. He probably didn't mean to kill him. He just meant to give him a good beating, I would guess.

But he didn't know his own strength, and when he walked away, his brother was dead. So he kicked a few leaves over him, and there he lay, his blood crying unto God for vengeance. But I want to ask you, was Abel harmed? Was he any less dear to God? Were there any of the mansions of his soul closed and a sign out of order put over them? No.

He was the same great big believing Abel that he had been before. And though poor God he lay there among the leaves and the dirt, he still was as great a man and as strong a man and as big a man and as significant a man as he ever was. Take that man Stephen, when they stoned him to death there.

You think that when the rocks began to wham him to the ribs and head of the man Stephen, and he finally died, did they harm Stephen? No, they didn't. They injured his body, but they didn't harm the man. They killed his body, but they never touched his soul.

Who is he that can harm Stephen? He was a follower of that which was good. He was a man full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. And you can't harm the Holy Ghost, and you can't harm wisdom.

So Stephen was just as valuable in the scheme of things, just as wonderful, and just as big as he was before they killed him. This man that we read about in the 12th of Acts, the man James, says that they cut off his head, or at least they threw him with a sword. Did that harm him? Not at all.

The only thing he did was separate his head from his body, and he had no need for his head then, anyhow. And if we only knew how little need we have of our head, we wouldn't be so careful of the poor, empty thing. Because really, our heads don't amount to an awful lot.

God Almighty makes us to run by heart power and live by heart power. God did not say, He blew in him the breath of life, and he became a living head. It said, He blew into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul.

In your head, God gave you the kind of steering wheel to keep you out of trouble and help you along while you're down here. But you are spirit. God made you spirit, and that's the part nobody can get to.

Well, you might talk about Paul also and Peter and all the rest. Then there's persecution. Now, we go on and cry about being persecuted.

I personally never was persecuted. Any. Maybe I've not been good enough Christian to deserve the honor.

But I've not been persecuted much. I've been called some very eloquent names. But sticks and stones can break my bones, but names can never hurt you.

So, persecution. Now, it says, They wandered about in goatskin, in deserts, mountains, in caves. Now, those were the persecuted ones.

But you see, the persecution came to the outside. It couldn't get to the inside at all. The genius of Christianity is internalism.

You know that? The genius of Christianity is that the kingdom of God is within you, and it is inside of you that you matter. It's inside of you that you signify. And the persecutor can only get to the external.

The persecutor can't get in to the mansion of your soul. He can't get to your... Here they were wandering about. They had no home.

They were in goatskins. They had no clothing. Persecuted.

They had no money. In deserts, they had no friends, mountains, dams, and caves. And yet all these were external things, and you couldn't get to them.

Were these persons dressed in goatskins any less valuable than the king in his palace dressed in his silks and all? Because silk and goatskin belong to the body, whereas the value of a man lies inside of him. They weren't persecuted. You know, I think when we live, we waste a great deal of sympathy on people.

I remember some missionary was killed, not in our society, some years ago, and it gave the printing presses and old-made poets and tear-jerking preachers ammunition for the next five years. And we built that up and built it up and built it up. It was an amazing, astonishing, wonderful, world-shaking event.

Two missionaries were killed for Christ's sake. Oh, brother, they weren't hurt at all. They just made them kneel down, lean over, and they cut their heads off.

But they didn't get to them. They didn't get to the spirit of them, the soul of them. They never got to the essence of them.

They only cut their heads off. And now they are with the Lord, and the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, and no evil shall harm them, and though it seems for a season that they have been injured, actually, God has taken them away from the troubles to come. So it was a victory that they went home, not a defeat.

And because we're earthbound and our faith won't penetrate the blue, but we think as men think, and we evaluate as men evaluate, and our scale of values is that of Adam and not of God, we make a great to-do if somebody in the course of his duty dies on the battlefield of the faith. My brethren, that ought to be taken in stride as a matter of course. And when a man goes, we ought to think, for example, Jesus on high, another has entered his rest, another has escaped to the sky and is lodged in Emmanuel's breast.

Nobody is harmed when he's killed, nobody is injured when he dies, if he's a Christian. And then slander, I notice. Some people are so desperately jittery to fear somebody will slander them.

Now Christ was slandered, but did it do him any harm? I want to ask you. They said he had a devil, and they said a great many other terrible things about him. But it never hurt Jesus any, it never changed the love of God for his Son, it never took away the crown from the heart and head of the Savior, it never made him any less than he was, it never closed up a single mansion in the mansion of his soul, it never in any way harmed him.

Slander never hurt anybody, and it will never hurt anybody down the years. And there is abuse. People have suffered, God's people have suffered abuse.

Now that is one thing the good of all the ages have had to suffer. They've had to suffer abuse. I suppose before King killed Abel, he told him off plenty.

He abused him before he slew him. And all down the years, the righteous have had to be abused by the unrighteous. The twice-born have had to take the thumb-lashing from the firstborn, or want-born.

And you know, sin has taken away a great many things from humanity, but it's not taken away the power of speech. A sinner can be just as eloquent as a saint, and he can be a whole lot more effective because he's more uninhibited in his use of words. A saint, you see, when he starts to answer, a sinner has to be awfully careful and sound like a Christian.

But when a sinner starts working on a saint, no holds are barred. And the names that we get called are simply something lovely to behold and to hear. I say to you, my brethren, that sin does not take away the power of speech.

The sinner can still curse and still douse. But the man of faith sees it and knows that it's simply the raven sitting on the dead limb of a blasted oak croaking implications against the dove. And the dove can't answer because he's a dove.

And so he looks modestly down at his pink feet and makes little tender noises like the dove that he is. And because he doesn't answer back, the raven thinks he's one that he knows. But all he's done is prove he's a raven.

And so when you get abused, if you don't get abused, God help you, you're not where you should be. And if you do get abused, just think of that fellow that's abusing you as one of Adam's ravens. Fallen ravens sitting on a dead limb croaking his displeasure with your spirituality.

You can afford to take it, brother. The day will come when God will avenge all of his people. But he doesn't hurt you, you see.

It only gets to your ear, and your ear isn't you. Cursing doesn't get past your ear unless it gets past your ear. Suppose that the man that curses you tempts you to hate him.

Then you've injured yourself. Suppose the man that persecutes you tempts you to malice. You've injured yourself then.

Suppose you carry sulky spirit in your breath. You're harmed, but the devil didn't do it, you did it. Keep the persecutor out of your bosom.

Keep hate out of your heart. Keep malice out of your spirit, and your sound as gold. And nothing can harm you or get to you.

Well, the last, and I'm finished, is death. Death, we all generally agree down here among the sons of Adam, that to kill a man is the dirtiest trick you can do to him. And even the law is based upon the fear of death.

The law says if you murder, we'll kill you. And the theory is that if that restrains men, they're afraid of death. And we generally agree that to die is to incur the greatest damage, the greatest harm.

I say to you, brethren, this is Adam's philosophy, this is not God's. This terrible fear of death is not the teaching of the scripture. Gracious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

Now, I wouldn't underestimate, nor would I in any way try to rise poetically above death or show that death is not something to shock us and startle us and frighten us. I wouldn't. I would be a liar if I tried it.

But, I believe that death is the devil's last indignity. It's the last ferocious, obscene attack he makes upon the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost. But he can only reach the tabernacle.

Fear not them that can kill the body, said Jesus. That's only the tabernacle. And the devil is not only bad, he's dirty.

And he's not only dirty, he's obscene. And he hates the people of God with a hatred as old as the century and as black as the pit where you go. So the devil wants to kill people, the people of God.

And he'll heap all the indignities he can upon them. And he'll push them and break them and make their bodies look terrible. One of the holiest men that I have ever known I saw the other day.

He has been to me an outstanding example of spirituality in this degenerate hour. He has lived a long and useful life, not too long, but a useful life. He has been persecuted.

He has endured a great deal of suffering. But he has never as much as opened his mouth once to enter back. He's as humble as a rug and in his prayers as lofty as the eagle and a great creature of truth.

I hadn't seen him for about a year. I saw him recently. To say that I was shocked wouldn't be to tell all the truth.

Those fiery eyes were now looking dully out through hollow sockets. That fine, rather homely, but strong, good-looking face gone away to a shadow. The well-fed-up body now bent.

The arms and legs showing through the clothing like sticks sitting looking at the floor. Death sits like a buzzard or circles over him and waits. And unless God Almighty proposes a miracle within the next three months, that tired, sick, whole body will be the plaything of the forces of death.

And they'll destroy it. And they'll make it pale and gaunt and worse-looking than now. And shut up the eloquent tongue and pull down the blind over those bright eyes.

And they'll carry him out. And the devil will laugh and say, I've enjoyed this indignity, this profane act of indignity against the temple that I've hated. But listen, brethren, he hasn't harmed the man of God at all.

And not all the devil's tricks can do it. And not the undertaker can do it, nor the embalmer can do it, nor the grave digger can do it. And not the slow forces of nature that will dissolve this mortal body back to dust can harm the man.

For the man was made in the image of God, redeemed by the blood of the Holy Son of God, and indwelt by the Holy Ghost. And so the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have made his soul their habitation. And death can't get to that habitation.

He's a young Muslim. He was 25 years old. And he's as sound and healthy as at the healthiest moment of his life.

Only the body is suffering, that is all. John Adams. Which one of the Adamases? John Adams, the President.

He only had two of them. Well, this grand old man, he was a godly old man, too. He was getting pretty old, and he was the sort of emeritus elder statesman walking around the streets of Washington.

And some friend met him and said, Mr. Adams, how are you? Well, he said, I'm all right. I never was better in my life. But he said, my dwelling place is on mortgage.

And I understand they're going to foreclose before long, and I'll be thrown out. Oh, his friend said, how terrible for a man like you. And he started a little affair, what do you call it, to get money, a subscription to buy a house for this fellow.

And when it came back around to him, he laughed and said, well, you misunderstood me entirely. He said, I was talking about this old carcass of mine. He said, you asked how I was, and I said, I was all right, but there was a mortgage on my home.

He said, this old place where I've lived for these 70 sodium years, he said, well, nature's got a mortgage and it's going to foreclose. But he said, it doesn't bother me any. Now you see what I mean, don't you? Now, my brethren, here's my thesis.

No one, no thing, no circumstance can harm a good man. If you believe that, you can relax. If you believe that, you can start worrying that somebody will do you dirt.

Nobody can do that. They can cry. Nobody can block you.

Nobody can hinder your manifest destiny. Nobody can reduce the size of the mansions of your soul. Nobody can make you any less valuable to God or dear to the Father.

Nobody can block your ministry or stop your forward progress. Nobody can do it. Nothing can do it.

Only you can do it. Keep sin out of your heart. Walk under the blood.

Keep in contact with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. You can be as free as an angel that walks the streets of God. For nothing can harm a good man.

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