

Let Epiphany Come

by Thaddeus Barnum

The sermon explores the possibility of experiencing epiphany in the midst of conflict, and highlights the importance of the character of our Lord and His response to conflict.

Duration: 20:51

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1, Matthew 5:44, Matthew 10:16, Luke 23:34, Romans 5:3-4, Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12

Topics: "Christian Suffering", "Loving Enemies"

Description

This sermon delves into the theme of conflict as seen in Matthew 12, highlighting the opposition faced by Jesus from the Pharisees and the promise of conflict for believers. It emphasizes finding epiphany and peace in the midst of unresolved conflict, drawing from biblical passages that speak of suffering for Christ and loving one's enemies. The sermon underscores the importance of responding to conflict with gentleness, sensitivity, and a focus on carrying out God's mission, even in the face of opposition and persecution.

Transcript

The text with which I'd like to attend this morning is in the Matthew 12 passage. And to come to simply an exposition of the word this morning, to give thanks and praise that this is a great invitation to be applied to our soul on the day of Epiphany, the wonder of experiencing the glories of the Epiphany. And I think this high exalted doctrine that's found in this text will do that for us this morning.

I am needing that Epiphany as I come to the text because you'll find the great theme of this is conflict. The opening verse tells us that the Pharisees went out and conspired against our Lord to destroy him. It is the first time in the Matthew gospel that we're going to find this kind of strength in the statement.

We are facing the ominous presence of our Lord's killers. Now, the question that's going to be behind it is then how does Epiphany come and does it bring any practical help to us? I would underscore this conversation by suggesting to you something that might not bless you at 7.15 in the morning, but that conflict is actually promised to us. And our Lord has already said this.

You'll find this in Matthew 10 verse 16. Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. I suggest that that's conflict.

And our Lord will repeat that in Matthew 15.20, as they have persecuted me, so they will persecute you. The New Testament picks up this same theme with great strength, does it not? Philippians chapter one, it has been granted to you not only to believe upon him, but also to suffer for him. Not only so, but I rejoice in my sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character.

Paul's great line to young Timothy, indeed, in fact, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. It's a lovely verse, one to memorize, I would suggest for your contemplations. But the promise of what our Lord has said is that this is real.

So the question then becomes, is it possible to find this epiphany in the midst of conflict? That's really the question, I think, at hand this morning. And I would suggest to you this, that in order for us to approach this, the scripture is also going to teach us that conflict isn't always resolved. The strength of what you're seeing here in Matthew 12 and verse 16 is going to be found.

Verse 14, I'm sorry, the one that we're looking at, this passage of the Pharisees rising up will only go stronger in Matthew, will it not? They're going to rise, the increase of their hatred and their opposition to our Lord. So the real challenge is to ask the question, how is it possible in the conflict, when it's not resolved, to find this peace that passes understanding, this epiphany, this great experience of epiphany? And let me suggest to you that that's the whole point of it, that epiphany is possible in the conflict. Again, I would suggest to you that our Lord has already outlined this in the Sermon on the Mount, where he said, yes, you have heard it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. It is possible in the midst of conflict to know epiphany.

I would also want to just make this other comment. Some of you know that conflict has got its different sources. It can be from the flesh, it can be from the world, the socio-political issues that face us, but it can also be from the demonic powers of hell.

And this is the hard part to discern sometimes, is it not? And the other day I was talking with a clergyman, I was interviewing him, he was interviewing me, I think, I don't know exactly what, we had never met before, but he stated quite obvious to me that he was quite fine, he was fine, he was doing quite well. So I poked and I prodded a bit and I found suddenly he was immersed in a conflict. I was hearing for 45 minutes every detail of the conflict, I mean every detail.

I didn't get a word in it, nor did I want to actually. And he said during the course of this 45 minutes of recitation of all that had happened to him, that he's fine. And so I said, are you sure? And that's when the tears began to come.

You see, he's in process. This story still needs its epiphany. And he was inviting me to come alongside, to help him find this epiphany.

Is it possible? And that's what this text does for us. This is the wonder of the text. Our Lord has got opposition.

Now your text, I'm afraid, doesn't have the opening parts of the chapter 12. I should just summarize it for you briefly to say that there's a reason why the Pharisees went out and conspired against our Lord to destroy him. They were in synagogue and the Pharisees had risen up and they were appointed question

for him.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Matthew makes it clear their motivation underneath it. And he says this, so that they might accuse him. They weren't asking for information.

They weren't asking to find out. This wasn't conversation. It wasn't dialogue.

This was in fact to accuse him. They had a motive behind it. And Matthew states it.

We know from the time that from the earliest parts of the rabbinical law that the only permission on a Sabbath is in case of medical emergency. In case you're like Clark, then something on the Sabbath can be done. But that's about it.

And so they're waiting for our Lord. What's he going to do with the man with the withered hand? What's he going to do? Is it lawful to heal? That's the issue on the table. So our Lord appeals back to them.

And I'm afraid cites our own hypocrisies. If a sheep falls into a pit, what shall you do with it on the Sabbath? You already know the answer to it. You'll rescue it.

Don't you love that little image? Hasn't he summarized the entirety of the gospel right there? You and I, we fell into the Genesis three pit. Did we not? Did the shepherd not come? I've incorporated the entire Bible now. There it is.

He's done it himself. He's come to rescue us, to lift it out. This is not the entire point of it.

You do this. No medical emergency. You do this.

But they waited. They said nothing. And so the Lord moved out of words and into kingdom power and said to the withered hand, the man with the withered hand, stretch forth.

And you would think like the paralytic, not many chapters before, that when the paralytic rose and everyone gave praise to almighty God for the wonders that had just happened, you'd think that the Pharisees would have risen up and praised God. They did not. They said they went out.

They conspired. They sought to destroy. Now I'm left wondering, this word went out.

Did they go out publicly or was it done after the service? Do they want to publicly humiliate him when they decided to go out? I wonder. Now I want to say this. Our Lord's response is very strong.

Listen to it. Our Lord aware of this. He's not confused about their motive.

He knows what's going on. He knows he's in front of his killers. Does he not? Aware of this.

Much powerful words from scripture. Jesus aware of this, withdrew. Now had it been me on their departure, I would have given them a bit of a talk.

It doesn't say he rose his voice up and accused them. He didn't fight back, did he? It says he withdrew and he went about his work and many followed him and he healed them all. He healed them all.

Body, soul, mind, and heart. Those who followed our Lord, he healed them all. Many of us know this moment.

Do we not? When we're in the midst of conflict, we're in the midst of conflict and you go about your work. Isn't that what he said? He's going about his work. I learned this as a young clergyman.

I was still in seminary and I was to preach a sermon at a wedding and the celebrant came in five minutes before the wedding. That was not helpful to me. His tears were so full.

His face so red. He went over the sacristy. He washed his face.

He had just been at the hospital with a dear couple whose baby had died and he's going from that moment into a wedding. You've done this. You know the story.

You know how to, in the midst of conflict, though you've not processed it, though you've not gone through anything, you know how to go about your work and do what you're given to do because that's what we do. And yet our Lord here says a line that's given to us. Oh, I just don't like it.

I find it an irritating line. Listen to it. Verse 16.

After healing them all, he ordered them not to make him known. Now, I think we should take the word not out. Then we'd have a great sermon.

The moment somebody attacks you, tweet. Absolutely. This is what we do.

It's the American world. We respond. We react.

We get on. This isn't just what the whole political thing is. One comments, the other tweets.

Isn't that the whole point of it? But look at what our Lord, look at his character, look at who he is. Did not the prophet Isaiah tell us this? He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

And so he ordered the others not to open their mouth as well. Everything inside of me wants to cry out for vindication, self-defense, self-justification. And yet we see in the character of our Lord, epiphany is possible in conflict.

It's possible to be in the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil. It's possible when the conflict isn't resolved, it's possible to know the power of epiphany and that's the secret. And Matthew, he could tell us.

Matthew could tell us on his own. Matthew comes and says this. I love the word this.

This, you've got to find out what this is about. But this, he just simply says this. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

He brings Isaiah alongside. He's not going to tell us himself. He doesn't need to.

He's been prophesied from the beginning. Our Lord knows epiphany in the midst of conflict. Let me tell you, it's a secret for him.

It's a secret for us. He brings Isaiah alongside. Conflict does not have to define us.

Conflict does not have to control us. And so it is with our Lord. And so he lets Isaiah tell the secret of epiphany.

And it is beautiful. And it is holy ground. And today is epiphany.

Behold my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, my beloved in whom I am well pleased. We will find out, will we not, in the scriptures. These are not just mere words.

This is the experience of epiphany, isn't it not? When our Lord stood at the River Jordan and our Father spoke the words, this is my son in whom I am well pleased. The identity of who we are isn't in the conflict of others. It is found in the Father's love.

The experience of the Father, epiphany is always in the Trinity. The Father expressing his love for his Son and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. Epiphany here for our Lord.

Epiphany invited for us. The declaration of the Father's love. See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God.

And such we are. For this reason the world does not know us because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God.

It has not appeared as yet what we shall be. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him. Epiphany is designed for us.

Here it is. And it says it even in Isaiah, does it not? And I will put my spirit upon him. Not just for ministry, is it? It will be.

You can see it following after that. But it's going to be for his character, this is who he is. I'm not going to send my Son out alone.

But the power of the Spirit, the love of the Father, out he's going to go. This is epiphanous. This is the experience of epiphanous.

And this is the Holy Spirit continuing to abide in him upon us and upon the church. We can, we can, yes, we can go through conflict and know the epiphany of our Lord. Children can know this principle.

Peter walking on the water, he didn't stop the storm. He didn't calm the storm. He calmed Peter.

Eyes on me. That's all. It's possible to do the miraculous, to walk on the water and not look at the conflict, but to look upon the face of our Savior, the face of our Lord.

And so it is here in this text. Out of the three things come verse 19, verse 20, verse 21, the three things that show us that in the midst of conflict, in the midst of conflict, our Lord knows the epiphany, the peace of God that passes understanding. In verse 19, he will not quarrel.

He will not cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He's not going to have a rally. He's not going to self-defend.

He's not going to justify. Do you know, again, I say how irritating this is. You'll see this is the pattern of our Lord.

He's not going to do it. He is not going to do it. He knows epiphany in the midst of conflict.

And so in verse 20, Lord have mercy on verse 20, a bruised head read he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench. Here it is. How many of us know that where we're in the conflict, when something is going on inside of us, we take it out on others.

We just do. It just happens. It flows out of us.

We hit the conflict. We say we can handle it. And suddenly the gentle, the fragile, we just stomp over intentionally, unintentionally, not even knowing that we've done it sometimes because we're not allowing the epiphany to happen inside of us.

We're not allowing the spirit of God to do his work inside of us. And so just casually, the broken read, you know, it's meant to measure or meant to be. Once it's bruised, it is of no use.

Once the wick is so down and it's smoldering, it's of no use. Who cares? Our Lord cares. Smoldering wick.

Oh, Bishop Trevor, smoldering wick. What a beautiful picture of burnout, is it not? Is it not? The edge of burnout and our Lord cares. Why? Because he knows epiphany in the midst of conflict.

Praise be the Lord. He knows this. He knows this.

And so he teaches us that if it's processing in us, we will care. We will be gentle. We will be sensitive to those that we serve.

It's possible to know epiphany in the midst of conflict. And of course, the third verse, the last piece of this is that he will carry on his mission, his mission to bring victory, to bring justice to victory. He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

He will bring victory. Justice will come to victory. And in his name, the Gentiles will hope.

The Gentiles will hope his ministry will continue. And what a powerful end in bringing justice to victory, that his killers would rise, that the powers of darkness would come, that the cross would become his. And in the cross, the Pharisees, those powers of darkness would think that he himself had lost when in fact he was delivered up according to the plan and foreknowledge of God.

For us and for our salvation. And when he stretched out his arms upon the cross and looked at his killers, he said, Father, forgive them. Even there in the darkness of our Savior, epiphany is possible in conflict.

I'm always tested by this, by those same three principles. When I find myself standing with those who oppose me, I already know whether I'm in process or it's done. When I'm in their presence, I can already tell inside if there's a freedom that I've been given to pray for them, to bless them, to be with them.

I know it's already because I can know already inside of me, there's still that shout of self-defense. None of you know this. I know this is justification, but you, you know, it's there.

I can feel it. I am in process. When I accidentally hurt somebody I didn't intend because I wasn't willing to do the work I had been given to do.

When I find myself distracted and out of course with the ministry that God has given me, I'm still in process. Thanks be to God when you know that you're in process. In the summer of 2012, it was not a good year.

Our dear brothers in the mission had departed and left division everywhere for Bishop Terrell and for me and for others to clean up. It was not a good year. Our dear Archbishop Bob, it was not a good year.

And then the church that Terrell served, the church that Errol and I served prior was being ripped in half. And on top of that, my brother was dying of fourth stage cancer of lymphoma. And he did not yet know Jesus and he was pressing to know Jesus.

And I was in no condition to help him, but I was there to run alongside of him. I had nothing inside of me. And so in the middle of the summer, we were in Maine and Terrell calls me, how are you doing? I am fine.

I am so good. Why are you asking? Oh, thanks be to God. He didn't rush me to epiphany.

He just took me on the journey closer. I'll never forget the line you gave me. So beautiful.

Such helpfulness to me. Allow the Lord to shape you in it. Just don't let him define you by it.

Eyes back on Jesus. I'm in process. Epiphany is possible in conflict.

Praise be the Lord.

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