

Proper 10B – Know your Enemy

Know your enemy. We know that sports teams study the films of other teams to learn their plays and identify their strengths and weaknesses. A chess master will study the games of the other chess master to know the opponent's strategies. In the business world, a company will study its competitors.

1. In a much more serious matter, we should know our ultimate enemy.
 - a. What are the aims and goals of the old evil foe, the devil, the "ruler of this world"? What is his agenda? What are his strategies and his tactics?
 - i. We know that the devil wants to see all manner of violence and wickedness - the more of that, the happier he is.
 - ii. But at the core what he's about is unbelief.
 - iii. He wants to keep unbelievers in unbelief, dead in their sins, and he wants to draw believers away from their Lord and Savior, from faith to unbelief.
 - b. But what does the Holy Spirit want? Just the opposite He wants to create and sustain faith in the heart.
 - i. The Holy Spirit wants to tighten the bonds between us and our Savior to help us become stronger, more mature Christians, to grow in Christ.
 - ii. How does the Holy Spirit do that? By means of the Word of God.
 - iii. Through the Law of God, he leads sinners to recognize their sin and repent.
 - iv. Through the promises of God fulfilled in Christ, he creates and sustains faith and gives joy in the Lord.
 - c. It all hinges on the Word of God: the devil's goal is to prevent sinners from hearing the Word of God and the Holy Spirit works through the Word to give life
2. It has been this way from the moment we fell in the Garden – the devil wants us to question and reject the Word just as Adam and Eve did
 - a. That's what we see in our OT lesson from Amos which takes place around 760 BC.
 - i. When Solomon died, the united kingdom of Israel was divided between the 10 breakaway northern tribes and 2 southern tribes under Solomon's heirs.
 - ii. But Israel was God's covenant people, and that included the ten northern tribes – His steadfast love endures forever!
 - iii. So, He raised up prophets like Elijah and Elisha and Amos to proclaim his Word to the people to bring them back.
 - b. Instead of worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem, where they were supposed to go, the north set up its own sanctuaries.
 - i. One was located at Dan in the far north and the other at Bethel, in the southern end of the Northern Kingdom just 10 miles from Jerusalem.
 - ii. Amos was in Bethel, where the people had gathered to worship.
 - c. But those in charge at Bethel didn't want to hear what the Lord had to say

- i. He brought a word of judgment, **“the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”** (Amos 3:9)
 - ii. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, complained to the king, **“Amos has conspired against you [O King Jeroboam II]”** (v 10).
 - iii. To proclaim judgment against Bethel was to oppose the government: the false government of northern Israel and the false temple of northern Israel were united.
 - iv. Amaziah considered Amos’ words just a human message invented by him to serve the political goals of Amos and the Southern Kingdom.
- 3. Know your enemy! The old evil foe tries to prevent sinners from hearing the life-giving Word of God.
 - a. He does this by leading people to discount, trivialize, ignore, or dismiss it as simply human speech or opinion.
 - i. Amos was proclaiming, “Thus says the Lord,” and the opponents said, “No, that’s only your opinion.”
 - ii. Then Amaziah tried to pressure Amos to leave, to go back to his home in Tekoa, south of Jerusalem: **“O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah”** (12).
 - iii. Amaziah pretended to be Amos’s friend who feared for Amos’s life when it was Amaziah who reported Amos in the first place.
 - iv. The kingdom of darkness is deceitful and conniving.
 - b. The kingdom of darkness doesn’t want sinners to hear the Word of God.
 - i. It leads people to discount the Word of God as only self-serving religious talk that ensnares the feeble minded while enriching the preacher.
 - ii. The world says, **“Don’t impose your religion on me. Keep it to yourself.”**
 - c. But how about us? Do we truly want to hear the Word of God?
 - i. Think of all the things in our lives that get in the way of truly hearing it.
 - ii. Life is busy, swamped with daily duties and activities.
 - iii. And so many voices are vying for our attention—on TV, the computer, digital devices.
 - iv. Know your enemy! He wants to prevent you from hearing the life-giving Word of God by drowning it out in a sea of other voices.
- 4. But God will not be silenced. He is the God who speaks. He does not hide in secrecy.
 - a. The true God speaks as we see throughout Scripture, beginning in Genesis 1.
 - i. The true God speaks in human language so that he can be heard and understood.
 - ii. He reveals his will in clear human language because through his Word, the Holy Spirit leads sinners to recognize their sin and repent.

- iii. That was why God called Amos. So that ancient Israel would turn away from their evil and turn to the Lord, the true God.
 - iv. But when Israel rejected the Word of God spoken by His prophets God raised up the ancient Assyrians, who destroyed the Northern Kingdom.
 - v. Unfortunately the southern kingdom didn't learn their lesson; a century later, God raised up the ancient Babylonians who destroyed Jerusalem.
5. But that was not the end of the story, God's Word never ends in judgment.
- a. God also spoke promise through Amos, the sure and certain promise that one day God would reverse the judgment.
 - i. Later in Amos, God promised that he would raise up the Davidic kingship that was about to fall.
 - ii. There would be a new and greater Davidic king who would restore his people, Israel.
 - iii. Further, He would include the Gentiles in this future kingdom so that they who were not part of the OT promises would be God's own people.
 - b. In the fullness of time, that promise was fulfilled in Jesus - the new and greater David.
 - i. Jesus also came as the new and greater Prophet, and like the prophets of old, he was rejected – but His rejection is our salvation!
 - ii. The God of Israel laid upon him the iniquity of us all, He suffered in the place of sinners and for sinners dying on the cross for us.
 - iii. But then God raised him up, just as he promised through Amos when he said, **“I will raise up the booth of David”** (9:11).
 - c. Now the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God the Father and the Spirit of his Son, Jesus the Messiah, is at work through God's Word.
 - i. Through the ancient prophetic Word of Law and judgment, the same God still leads us to recognize our sin and repent so that we would stop listening to ourselves and only hearing what we want to hear.
 - ii. Through the Word of promise He creates and sustains faith and transforms our lives.
 - iii. Through Holy Baptism He puts his name upon us, and we belong to him.
 - iv. Moreover, he promises that one day we will inherit the new and greater promised land, the new creation, in Christ.
 - d. Know your enemy, be ready for him, he wants to tear you away from the Word of God, hold fast to what the Lord God promises.
 - i. Only his Word can lead you to recognize your sinful selfishness.
 - ii. Only his Word can sustain faith in your heart. Only his Word can lead you to eternal life.

- iii. Despite so many confusing voices (including your own), listen to what the Lord God Almighty has to say. Amen.