

## “Blameless” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent 1 – December 1, 2024

- I. **1 Thessalonians 3:13** – “...So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”
- II. **I entered my first seminary class with fear and trembling.**
  - a. It was called, “Pastoral Ministry”, or P-100 with the Dean of Students as the professor.
    - i. It seemed that how I performed in the class would set the tone for the rest of my classwork at the seminary, and I wanted to do well.
    - ii. In the end, I probably remember more from that class than any other – because it gave me the Bible’s witness about the ministry and a framework for my future vocation as pastor.
    - iii. One particular point stayed with me as the professor quoted 1 Timothy 3:1-2 – “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer [pastor], he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach...”
      1. He went on to say that being above reproach means that, “no one can rightly take hold of him with a charge of unfitness,” or that no one can get their hook into you... no one can seize you for something you have done that makes you unfit for ministry.
      2. Of course I was immediately mulling this over in my mind... How can I be perfect, holy, and blameless in order to carry out the duties of the pastoral office?
  - b. The truth is that pastors are held to a higher standard in some ways because we can cause greater harm to the Church and Gospel by getting caught up in public sin and scandals.
- III. **Yet, Paul calls on all of us to live our lives in holiness and without blame.**
  - a. Most of the time, living a blameless life for us means passing the blame onto someone else.
    - i. Go back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and sin came into the world – the holy and blameless Adam and Eve chose to rebel against their God – and what was Adam’s response?
      1. As God asks, “Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” And Adam answered, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” (Genesis 3:11-12)
      2. It’s kind of humorous if it wasn’t such a horrible consequence – because we suffer to this day because of what happened.
    - ii. Another humorous story comes from Moses’ brother Aaron in Exodus 32, as the Hebrews were led out of Egypt to Mt Sinai in God’s great power.

1. As Moses went up the mountain to receive God's commands, it took too long, so Aaron and others gathered gold and made a calf to worship...
  2. Upon returning, Moses asked how Aaron could have let the people convince him to do such a horrible thing... His response was, "So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." (Exodus 32:24)
  3. Aaron had allowed these newly freed people to convince him to make a new "god" that they could worship – and he pretended that the calf just magically popped out of the fire!
- b. All of us play the blame game to take the responsibility and accountability for sin off ourselves... and shift it somewhere else.

IV. **From childhood we point the finger at the other guy.**

- a. It's the age-old story of not being accountable for our part...
- i. When we got in trouble for lashing out at our sibling, we would say something like, "They started it!!"
  - ii. If we were told not to run in the house and we broke something running around... we would say, "They were chasing me!!"
  - iii. Pretty soon, we were in school and when we got a bad grade we might say, "The teacher is mean and too strict."
  - iv. Then when we wrecked the car, we would tell our parents that it was the other guy's fault no matter how at fault we were.
  - v. Soon enough this follows us to our workplace, as nothing is our fault that goes wrong, but it has to do with crummy bosses, corporate red tape, and terrible working conditions.
  - vi. As life goes on, marriages and relationships end, and we always tell the story from our side to make us look better... rather than take the blame for a failed partnership.
- b. After hearing these things, many of us are immediately defensive, because we feel like others have a part in it... but we hate the idea of owning blame... unless maybe it's a lot less than the other guy.
- c. It's not like we always have to take the whole blame, because sometimes we have reasons to call out problems... but in general, we don't take responsibility for our part.
- i. When was the last time you heard someone say, "The buck stops here, I am responsible for this problem, and I plan to change my behavior and look for ways to make it right"?
  - ii. When was the last time you had a person call you out on something you did wrong and you said, "You're right, I take full responsibility, and I apologize"?
- d. Taking the blame makes us really uncomfortable – and we always want to avoid being in trouble or admitting that we are in the wrong.

- i. Whether we like it or not, the sin that came from Adam and Eve has manifested itself in our daily lives of sinful living – of choices we make to sin against God and our neighbors...so we can't even blame Adam and Eve... we have no one to blame but ourselves for our sins.
- V. **Paul writes to the Thessalonians to encourage and support them.**
  - a. Paul could not visit in person, so he sent Timothy in his place... and Timothy has returned to Paul giving him news about the faith and love found in the Thessalonian church. (1 Thess. 3:6)
    - i. He is so happy by what he hears, and gives many thanks for the people he cares about so much...
    - ii. Finally, Paul gives them a blessing that ends with, "May the Lord strengthen your hearts so that you may be holy and blameless before our God when Jesus returns with His saints." (my translation, v 13)
  - b. The Thessalonians are no different than we are sitting here today – the sin that came from Adam and Eve makes us blameworthy and unholy... so how can we possibly be blameless in holiness?
    - i. Is it even a consideration that we could be what my seminary professor pointed out in my class... to be above reproach?
    - ii. Can anyone, pastor or not, live a life above reproach or blameless?
  - c. The answer to these questions is at the very heart of the Good News.
- VI. **By the power of Jesus Christ our Savior**, we are called blameless and holy.
  - a. Jesus Christ and His power alone frees us.
    - i. We were all trapped in a sinful condition that could not be changed without God's intervention.
    - ii. Therefore, Christ entered the world as a helpless infant, only to be raised up as a sacrifice... He died to take our blame and rose again to forgive us and bring us to faith.
    - iii. Listen to what Paul writes in Colossians 1, "<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,<sup>22</sup> [Jesus] has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him." (Colossians 1:21-22 ESV)
  - b. By grace through faith, God has not only forgiven you, but He calls you blameless and above reproach – you are holy, you are blameless because Jesus took your sins upon Himself.
  - c. When I think about all the grace and mercy God has given each of us... it makes me want to live for Him... to reflect His goodness in my life... to show my love for Him in whatever ways I'm able.
    - i. I cannot do any of these by myself, but only with the help of God - the Holy Spirit – as He helps us to live for Him during this earthly journey.
    - ii. I will always fall short of God's glory... and so will each of you... but He always keeps us going.

d. And remember, the Last Day will come, and as we stand before the Savior in His glory and power, we have nothing to fear, because all our guilt and sin was placed on Jesus.... The one who took our blame. Amen.