

Storm The Gates - Part 3

As the attack of Mansoul continued by Prince Emmanuel's troops, the second captain came to the Ear Gate. The first attack had come from Captain Boanerges who was absolutely confident in what he had to say. Captain Conviction, whose main assistant was Mr. Sorrow, was just as confident but his attack on the Ear Gate came in a bit different manner. Their uniforms they wore were pale and their insignia was the book of the Law that issued a flame of fire. He said to the inhabitants:

'Hear, O Mansoul! Thou, O Mansoul, wast once famous for innocence, but now thou art degenerated into lies and deceit. Thou hast heard what my brother, the Captain Boanerges, hath said; and it is your wisdom, and will be your happiness, to stoop to, and accept of conditions of peace and mercy when offered, especially when offered by one against whom thou hast rebelled, and one who is of power to tear thee in pieces, for so is Shaddai, our King; nor, when he is angry can anything stand before him. If you say you have not sinned, or acted rebellion against our King, the whole of your doings since the day that you cast off his service (and there was the beginning of your sin) will sufficiently testify against you. What else means your hearkening to the tyrant, and you're receiving him for your king? What means else your rejecting of the laws of Shaddai, and your obeying of Diabolus? Yea, what means this you're taking up of arms against, and the shutting of your gates upon us, the faithful servants of your King? Be ruled, then, and accept of my brother's invitation, and over-stand not the time of mercy, but agree with thine adversary quickly. Ah! Mansoul, suffer not thyself to be kept from mercy, and to be run into a thousand miseries, by the flattering wiles of Diabolus. Perhaps that piece of deceit may attempt to make you believe that we seek our own profit in this our service; but know it is obedience to our King, and love to your happiness, that is the cause of this undertaking of ours.

'Again I say to thee, O Mansoul, consider if it be not amazing grace that Shaddai should so humble himself as he doth: now he, by us, reasons with you, in a way of entreaty and sweet persuasions, that you would subject yourselves to him. Has he that need of you that we are sure you have of

him? No, no; but he is merciful, and will not that Mansoul should die, but turn to him and live.'

Captain Conviction comes in and takes a different but just as effective method of preaching to Mansoul. Where Captain Boanerges relied on authority, Captain Conviction relies on passion and fervor. Notice how that he confronts them with their sin and their rebellion against God. He also establishes the fact that they have sold out their allegiances to a king who is far less superior to what King Shaddai had been toward them. He tells them that their actions are going to cause them increasing misery as time passes on if they do not respond to the gospel call. He tells them that they are to humble themselves before God because this is their only way of escape.

For the most part, “conviction” preaching is dead. Some of that is the direction that society has taken in their desensitization of spiritual things. Some of it is the fault of the preacher because there is a spiritual price tag of prayer, fasting, and an overall withdrawal to God necessary to be this kind of preacher. Some of it is the fault of the church who now is seeking a palliative Gospel instead of a therapeutic Gospel. You see those kinds of terms used in medical facilities when dealing with cancer patients. Once the disease progresses to a state that it cannot be cured, a palliative treatment plan is followed. It will not cure them but it will make them as comfortable as possible. On the other hand, a therapeutic treatment for cancer involves pulling out the big-guns of chemotherapy, radiation, and radical surgical measures. The patient will suffer through it but hopefully a cure will be the end result. The American church at large has determined that mortification of the flesh (Romans 6), separation from the world (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1), and the development of godly disciplines (2 Peter 1:4-10) to be too demanding and only want just enough Gospel to keep them comfortable. So it is rare that Captain Conviction rises anymore to assault the Ear Gate.

Why is that? For what reasons has Captain Conviction been banished from among us? I thought of several thoughts as to why it is not popular in today's pulpits:

It is not uplifting. Most people want to leave church like they would leave a

so-called total makeover. “I don’t go to church to hear preaching that is going to make me feel bad. I want to feel ‘good’ when I leave.” The man in the pew states, “I want Gospel-lite. Something that tastes great and is less filling.” Gimme that guilt-free Gospel. The Gospel from Starbucks! Chocolate or Vanilla. Hot or Cold. Cap or Frap, you decide! Imagine the disappointment of today’s modern purpose driven models for Jesus to stand in the pulpit on Sunday and state clearly that a Cross was to be taken up.

It is not pragmatic. That means that this sort of preaching is not going to fill up a church nor will it fill the coffers to pay for all the “stuff.” The “show” must go on and this kind of preaching gets in the way of the “show.” Most doctrinal teaching and preaching will immediately define and create distinct boundaries. This sort of preaching does not tell you how to manage stress, grow stronger families, or climb the corporate ladder. Amazingly over the last few years the high profile “pastors” who have preached series of messages on sex as sort of how-to kinds of things. Our society no longer blushes at this kind of thing but just because they don’t blush doesn’t mean that God is not embarrassed by it. Revisit Isaiah 6 and recall Isaiah’s response to holiness and I have a feeling it will inspire you to reach a little higher for a coal from the altar. If you think this is an exception to what normally goes on, peruse the websites of these mega-shows (not churches) and see what is being preached and taught.

It demands a commitment. The commitment that this preaching demands is that which is life-changing. It is preaching that calls out the worldlings to a higher level of relationship with God. The closer you get to God the more that He reveals the necessity to change. This sort of preaching does not accommodate contemporary culture trends nor does it tolerate multiple choices. Increasingly we are seeing that people who live high-levels of commitment to the Lord are being ostracized and looked upon as legalists. We are accused of straining at gnats and swallowing camels. I can only wonder if the Gospel has not been so minimized that if we were to be transported back to the first century we would be extremely humiliated by our low-level of commitment as compared to those first century saints.

It calls for Biblical knowledge. To listen to this kind of preaching requires a much more in-depth knowledge of the Bible than our society has. Our current society is far more familiar with the line-ups of the Braves and Dodgers, the box-scores of their fantasy teams, the antics that the Hollywood society is up to, and how to operate the latest electronic device. All of this is much more important than understanding a Book that is attempting to get them ready to face an eternity somewhere off in the future. Our society has turned into barn-building fools who never expect that on tomorrow an accounting must be rendered.

Captain Conviction banished to the side-lines watches in fear, desperation, and sorrow as Mansoul collapses under the weight of her liabilities. If you will be a Captain Conviction in this generation, there are some price tags on this kind of ministry.

Personal Holiness

Men like this are men who are much with God and were little with the world. They have to be separated from the world and to God. Their focus is on how close they can get to God. Their preaching is not geared toward moving into a larger house, owning a nicer vehicle, or modeling the newest trend in clothes. In fact, if you will be close to God there will almost seemingly be a disdain for financial success and a priority on spiritual results.

The dilemma that has hemmed us up in this generation is the fear of being intolerant. Furthermore because of the castigation of those who would say that we are legalists there is little passion for personal holiness in our lives anymore. If you have a presentation of holiness, the bottom line is that you will be different in all that you do! If the things that I do and the places that I go are no different from the world, then am I really set apart? Babylon is choking the American church.

One man said it like this concerning personal holiness:

Sanctification is an idea that seems almost completely missing from the church. An almost pathological fear of "legalism" keeps most ministers from

ever questioning whether any element of postmodern culture is compatible with Christlikeness or not. Taboos are the only remaining taboo nowadays. But when (for example) tattoos, cigars, beer, poker, and other stylish emblems of worldly culture are widely regarded as necessary elements for "relevant" men's ministry, I'd say the pendulum has swung too far against the dangers of "legalism." Does no one recall that loving this world and conforming to its tastes (and tasteless preferences) is also a dangerous sin?

If we lose the doctrine of separation, the true Church will begin taking on water! In some places, water is quite visible. Instead of managing buckets to bail water, our obligations must be tending to ropes and rudder or the ship will be dashed on the rocks.

For those who are involved in the preaching and teaching of the Word, it will be required that some serious study go into the principles that we are teaching. A superficial knowledge of the Word is detrimental to what we are working to accomplish. Will everyone be saved? Absolutely not! But far too often those who are purveyors of the truth use this as an excuse to preach holiness with nastiness. This is just as unacceptable as not preaching holiness at all.

Desperation for God

Another characteristic necessary if you are to be a Captain Conviction is that your preaching will be marked by an all compassing hunger to touch God in your personal life. As you are reaching for God in your preaching, the congregation will be drawn up into the "chase" with you.

It is crucial that every man who opens up the Word to preach it, have in his own life a certain measure of desperation and tenacity to gain the presence of God. Much like the midnight wrestling of Jacob, a conviction preacher will venture into that same atmosphere. The places that we wrestle with God are often marked with fear of the pursuit (from Esau), darkness that is overwhelming (the fight occurred deep into the night), an absence of resources (alone with God in a place where talent, pedigree, and ability means nothing), pain and weariness (every battle will cause some joints to get dislocated and energy expended will tire us), and loneliness (you cannot

take anyone with you). This is where the conviction preachers took us with their messages.

Embracing the Noble Doctrines

Another characteristic of the work of Captain Conviction is messages that are not filled with the “atta’ boy” or the “c’mon you can make it” content. Your preaching should not be designed for the here and now but for the hereafter. The content of the conviction messages are generally contrasted between Heaven and Hell. They will be centered on the pain and wonder of the Crucifixion. They will press people with messages about personal prayer. These messages are preached on the White Throne of Judgment and the Judgment Seat of Christ. You will find yourself preaching about the lost opportunities of Achan, Judas, King Saul, and Samson’s foolish decisions. Some may think that you have very little concern for the so-called wounded self-esteem of men. In fact, I believe you will come to understand that the more wounded a man is in his conscience the better his chance of moving to an altar of change.

If you are a preacher, I have a few questions for you:

When was the last time you preached a message on Hell?

When was the last time you preached on Holiness and identified the profane?

When was the last time you worried with getting on your knees to see the White Throne of Judgment?

When was the last time you were in a long and drawn out altar service because of a convicting message? (This is the norm for some places but those are in large part in the minority.)

Personal Suffering

Another characteristic that brings conviction into your preaching is personal suffering. There is no need to elaborate on this except to say that personal suffering that is endured will make you a much better preacher. You may have to walk through some very lonely and dark valleys in your life but it

will be the best. You cannot see this now but in time, you will! Our modern concept is to remove every bit of the pain possible. However, great suffering and heartbreak often brings great purpose and anointing.

Students of Human Behavior

Another characteristic of Captain Conviction is preaching that can have the guts and grace to tell heart-rending stories of poor choices. There will be choices that people make that will be detrimental to their walk with God. True conviction preaching can tell these stories in a way of compassion and a pleading tone. You do yourself well to become a wise student of human behavior. You will come to understand that there is nothing new under the sun and the same mistakes that men make today were the same ones that pour out of the Bible.

I am certain that there are other things that make one a “conviction” preacher that I have left out but if there ever were a time that God needed men to stand on the wall and cry aloud, it is today in modern times. Every wall needs a watchman. **Every church needs a man of conviction in the pulpit.**