

Brace For Impact Part 4

We have been talking about bracing for impact, preparing ourselves to be able to stand against the attacks of the enemy and what the bible refers to as the “evil day.” We started this message by talking about the instruction given to the crew and passengers of US Airways flight 1549 as they prepared to crash land into the Hudson. Captain Sullenberger told them to “Brace for impact!” This is the word of warning I believe the Lord has been speaking to us. Across the nation and the world, believers and followers of Christ should brace for impact.

As I felt the Lord speaking this message into my heart, I heard this phrase used in three different ways of instruction to us. The first was as a warning as we have discussed in the past three messages, warning us to prepare for the schemes and tactics of the devil as he tries to defeat and discourage us as children of God. We have to brace for impact as the devil becomes more emboldened by the wickedness of humanity and the attacks get more ferocious and more frequent. We have to brace for impact as our society and culture grows less tolerant of the Christian faith and of Christians. We have to brace for impact as our culture moves farther and farther away from the values and mores expressed in the word of God and from the foundation of our Judeo-Christian ethic. We have to brace for impact as judges rule in favor of immorality and embrace a culture of death rather than preserve a culture of life. We must brace for impact.

But I sensed the Lord speaking another word of instruction to us using this same phrase. Brace for impact. I told you before the word “brace” is another word for prepare – prepare for impact. I want to use that thought to talk about the impact that our lives have upon other people. You see your life is having an impact upon everyone that knows you. Your life, your choices, your actions, your behavior, your conversations, your attitude, your testimony, all of it is having an impact upon others. The question is, what kind of impact are you having? Is it positive or negative? Is it impacting them for good, for God, or is it impacting them for evil, for the devil? Your life is having an impact and you need to prepare yourself to make the right kind of impact, an eternal impact. Someone is watching your life today. Prepare yourself so you can make the kind of impact that will effective others for eternity’s sake. Prepare yourself to

make a great impact for God and his kingdom. Brace for impact.

Turn with me to Philippians 3:12. Paul tells us, **“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Philippians 3:12.** I want you to understand that Jesus found you in your sin and through his mercy and love he laid hold of you. Paul said Jesus took hold of him. We have been taken hold of. He captured our heart and he did this for a reason and a purpose. That purpose was so we could and would live for him and please him with our life. Paul said in Ephesians **“for we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10.** He took hold of us and saved us because he has a plan for us. You aren’t here by accident today. Regardless of what your parents may have thought or told you, you were no accident. God planned you and chose you for impact! He planned for you and your life to make a difference in this world and in the kingdom of God. He took hold of you because he chose you for impact! The question is, “What kind of impact are you having on your world?”

God created you and Jesus took hold of you so that you could know and love God, so you could know and love and help his people, so you could grow in maturity and wisdom and faith in him, so you could serve others and so you could tell others about God’s amazing plan of mercy and grace for each of them. He created you for more than just wandering through this life – he created you for impact! Brace yourself, prepare yourself to make the kind of positive impact for which God created you.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 3. I want to show you a passage of Scripture that illustrates another way in which God intends us to have an impact on this world. Paul was writing to the church at Corinth. In this passage he makes reference to something that was often done in the first century. Letters of recommendation were often sent along with people traveling to another city or province. Someone of influence would write a letter of introduction or recommendation that you would then present to secure lodging for yourself in a home, or to present yourself to conduct business. Paul would often send letters like this, introducing believers and leaders to the various churches. The book of Philemon is a letter like this, recommending that they receive Onesimus as a brother in the Lord.

We still do it today. I’m often asked to write a letter of recommendation or serve

as a reference for someone. I've written letters of introduction for traveling ministries, singers, for some of our young missionaries, to introduce them and commend them to other pastors for services. I tell a bit about the person and their ministry and the positive effect they have had on me or on our church and encourage others to welcome them and have them in their service.

Apparently some folks had shown up at Corinth with impressive letters of introduction and had been received by the church, but then they had begun to be critical of Paul. Perhaps they had asked if Paul had come with letters of introduction as impressive as theirs, implying that maybe Paul didn't have the right credentials. But Paul makes an unusual point about this to the believers in Corinth. He says that the church doesn't need a fancy letter of introduction – he doesn't need anyone to recommend his ministry to them because the believers in Corinth themselves are his letters of recommendation. Living epistles he calls them. Living letters to be read by everyone. Everyone can see that his ministry is Christ-centered and effective because the church at Corinth didn't exist until Paul came along. They were his letters of recommendation.

“You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” 2 Corinthians 3:2-3.

Paul says they are letters that are clearly read by everyone. But Paul can't take credit for writing the letter. He didn't save them or change them – Jesus did that. He then says that the believers are like a letter from Christ, written by Christ, not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on a tablet of stone but on a tablet of the human heart. To carry on the metaphor, Paul is saying that our lives are like a living letter dictated by Christ and enscribed by Paul through his preaching of the gospel.

Think about this for a moment with me. You are a letter written by Christ. A living epistle (that's what a letter is.) You are a letter from Jesus to your world. What message is Christ communicating through your life? You are the letter he has written to those friends, those classmates of yours, those business associates, those co-workers, those family members, those neighbors. What kind of impact is God making through

your life and your life message?

You are a letter of introduction. Jesus is introducing himself to those in your world through your life. What do people think about Jesus after reading the letter of your life? How do they think Jesus would live and act and speak after watching your life? You are his letter of introduction. What are you saying about Jesus through your life?

You are also a letter of recommendation as well. I'm often asked to write letters of recommendation for people. I have to be honest, often times people hand me a reference form to fill out and it asks all kinds of questions about your church attendance and your involvement in the church and do you contribute to the church financially and sometimes I'm thinking, "Did you read this over before you gave this to me? Did you want me to tell the truth about your church attendance and your financial contribution to the church?" I'm not suggesting that you stop asking me to fill out a reference form for you or to write a letter in your behalf. I'm glad to do that. What I am suggesting is that you live your life in such a way that you'll be pleased when I tell the truth on that form. Maybe you ought to go ahead and fill some of those parts out for yourself.

When you ask someone to write a letter for you, you are placing your reputation in their hands. I can tell the person asking for the reference whatever I think. You are trusting me to speak well of you, to present your best qualities, to tell the truth to the person who is asking for the information.

Think about what Jesus did. Think about the risk he took. He made us his letter of recommendation for himself. He placed his reputation in our hands, in our actions and behavior and in our choices and our conversations. He stakes his claim to legitimacy on us – on the life and lifestyle we choose to live. He trusts us that we will tell the truth about him, that we will represent his character and qualities accurately and honestly. We will show his nature through our lives. We are his letter of recommendation, his letter of introduction to the world. It should make us stop in our tracks and give some thought to the life we are living, the choices we are making, the message we are communicating through our life.

What message are we sharing with the world? What does the world think about the Jesus they know after reading our life? What do your friends decide about

receiving Jesus into their life after reading the letter he sent them, the letter of your life? Your life is making an eternal difference in someone's life. Get prepared because you are making an impact, one way or another! Someone may be in heaven or someone may be in hell because of the impact of your life.

You are a personal letter from Christ. I hate form letters, so impersonal. Written and addressed by computer. We get them here at Church addressed to Carbondale of God. Dear Carbondale God. Understand it's not a form letter Jesus is sending to the world. He has written each letter personally. Each one of us is a personal letter, written by His grace and by His Spirit, incorporating the experiences and details of our life and addressed personally and uniquely to the people we know, the people who know us, the people we encounter on the journey of our life.

You are a letter from Christ. That's what Paul says. That's what the bible says. The letter of your life may be the only opportunity some of those folks have to encounter the truth of God's character and love. The letter of your life could be the only announcement of God's good news some of them will ever read or see. You are a letter from Christ. What is your life saying? Does it introduce people to a loving God who calls them to a new life in Christ? You are a letter from Christ. What does your life say? Does it communicate a life of purity and freedom that comes from obeying Christ and his word? Or is the good news blurred by your compromise, your wrong choices, your selfish actions. Are the pages of your life torn and impossible for others to read? Prepare to make an impact with your life because others are watching. Your children are watching. Your grandchildren are watching. Those people in your life, they notice how you live, how you respond. They know if your choices match up to the faith you profess to have in Christ. You are having an impact. It matters how you live your life. What does the letter of your life say?

Turn to 2 Corinthians 5:20 and let me show you another passage that reveals the impact we should be having. Paul writes, **"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We**

implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

You are a living letter, written by Christ, communicating his love, his redemption, his grace, his message to your world. And Paul also tells us that we are ambassadors of Christ and we are speaking on his behalf to our world. It is as though God were making his appeal through us. Once again the message, the responsibility of that message is placed upon us. We have been chosen to make an impact in our world.

What does it mean to be his ambassador? A political ambassador is sent as a representative of a particular nation to protect and see to the interests of that nation in another country. We are Christ's ambassadors. We are sent as representatives of the kingdom of heaven to another country, this world in which we live. We have been given the responsibility to speak to the people of this other country in heaven's behalf. Paul says it is as though God was making his appeal through us. He makes his invitation, pleading with the world to come and be reconciled, through us.

What does that appeal sound like? What are people seeing and hearing when we speak on God's behalf? Is it watered down, trite, selfish, silly, timid, crude, harsh? Or is it the good news that you don't have to live and die in the filth of sin but you can be saved, reconciled to God through faith in Christ Jesus. Folks, we have a big responsibility. We are his ambassadors and our lives are meant to make an impact upon the world as we live and proclaim and flesh out his message before the world. How are we doing?

If we are his letter, his message, his ambassador, the means of his appeal to the world, shouldn't we be careful how we live? If we are his representative, shouldn't we be concerned to live a life of holiness and purity and obedience? If we realize that God is depending on us and so are all of the people associated with us, shouldn't it make a difference in how we live our lives?

Here is what the bible says. Ephesians 5 says we are to **"Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."** Ephesians 5:1

We are supposed to be imitators of God. The message that is coming through the letter of our life and the appeal that is reaching others through our life, it ought to look and sound like the Lord. Quick to love, to give ourselves for the sake of others, to

forgive. But Paul goes on to tell us that our life must be one of purity and holiness. **“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or of any kind of impurity or of greed because these are improper for God’s holy people.”**

Ephesians 5:3

Paul tells us, **“Be very careful then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” Ephesians 5:15-17**

Be careful how you live, because time is short and because your life is making an impact upon others. The days are evil and we don’t have time to waste – we don’t have time for playing games – we don’t have time for “sowing our wild oats.” You could argue that you might have time, but someone who is watching your life, someone you’ve influenced to follow your path of sin, they might not have time to recover, to repent, to turn back to Christ. Your life is making an impact. What kind of impact is it having?

“Be very careful then, how you live”, Paul advised us. I know I’m saying this over and over this morning, but I feel it is so important and so urgent. Someone is playing a dangerous game with your life, with your soul, with your child, with your family, with your friends at school. You think you aren’t hurting anyone but yourself. You are making these choices and you think you’ve hidden your sin pretty well and you’re protecting those closest to you but the truth is, your life is having an impact. You can’t get these days back, but you can make a choice, a decision to stop what you are doing, come to Christ in repentance and in faith and allow him to change you. The days are evil and you are running out of time. We are running out of time. Be careful how you live. Make the most of every opportunity to serve Christ. You’re being foolish, Paul says, if you aren’t living according to God’s will. Understand what God’s will is and then live it.

If your life is a letter, perhaps it’s time to allow God to erase some things. Perhaps it’s time for a new page, a new piece of paper. It’s time for some white out so you can start over. The verse of Scripture just before the passage we quoted from 2 Corinthians 5 declares, **“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Corinthians 5:17.** Jesus wants to begin writing a new letter through your life. It’s time for you to make sure that your life is having the

impact you want it to have – that your life is having the impact God intends for it to have.

We have a bunch of young couples having babies right now. You are going to shape their lives by your life, your choices, your actions. Your life will make an eternal impact upon your children. Brace for impact. Get ready, get prepared for the impact your life will make. Make sure you are surrendered to Christ. Make sure you are living your life in obedience to Him and to his word. Prepare your life to make that eternal and lasting impact upon your son or daughter.

Some of you students are in your final year of high school. What kind of impact has your life had? You've still got time to make an impact for Christ. If you haven't been living a faithful and consistent life for Christ at school, it's time to repent and make things right and then start fresh in the morning. Be an imitator of Christ. Live your life to please Christ and not yourself. Let him write a new letter in and through your life. Let him make a new appeal through your life to all of your friends. Let God call your friends to a new relationship with God through Christ by your obedient life. He wants you to prepare so you can make an impact.

What kind of impact is your life making? Is this was your last day on earth, what kind of impact has your life had on your family? On your friends and co-workers? Would you be satisfied with the impact you've had, or would you be filled with regret? There is time today to make a change. Brace for impact. The choice is up to you.