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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“JUST LOOK AT JESUS”
Philippians 2:5-11; Genesis 16, 21

We began this series on September 11th. The 10th anniversary of the 9-11 terrorist assault was a fitting day to kick-off a sequence of sermons about security.

It is equally fitting to wrap it up today, Christ the King Sunday, as we celebrate the reign of Jesus who died, rose again, ascended, and who will return as {Rev 19:16} **“King of kings and Lord of lords.”**

☑ Security has two basic dimensions. Objective security is safety: freedom *from* risk or danger *for* tangible wellbeing. Subjective security is confidence: freedom *from* doubt, anxiety, and fear *for* inner assurance.

Security is always a hot topic, but especially in times like these when safety and confidence feel so elusive. Our world is rocked by physical insecurity, shaken by economic insecurity, torn apart by social insecurity. Is it any wonder that we humans are so quick to give our allegiance to gods that guarantee safety and confidence?! Counterfeit gods like coercive power, material wealth and false religion.

☑ The elephant in the room in many discussions about security is that it is inextricably related to control. Control is the power to influence or regulate behavior or events. This can provide a degree of protection from danger and fear.

Exercised for right purposes, to the right degree, in the right ways, over the right subjects, control is good. It is good to have control of both your senses and your vehicle

when you get behind the wheel. It is good to have control of your mouth and fists when you feel angry. It is good to have control over who enters your home at what time. And so on.

The problem is that neither human individuals nor human institutions are generally content to remain within the boundaries of right purpose, right degree, right ways, and right subjects. Even rigid legalists (who insist that moral standards apply equally to all) tend to behave like situational ethicists when control is at stake. Even ardent Creationists (who contend that we did not evolve from lower life forms – and for the record, I agree with them on that) tend to behave like Social Darwinists when control is at stake.

In our quest for security we frequently seek control for the wrong purposes, to the wrong degree, in the wrong ways, and over the wrong subjects. Apart from Jesus we see life as a King of the Hill game, and we assume that making it to the top and staying there is the end that justifies every means.

I don't want to overstate the case. Most people are happy to operate by the “You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours” tactic most of the time – but if push comes to shove, and control of money or basic resources is on the line, they might scratch your eyes out. Just ask someone who has had to divide assets and determine custody arrangements with an ex-spouse.

The irony in all this is that while worldly control can give us a *kind* of security, to a *degree* and for *awhile*, it almost inevitably triggers greater danger and

doubt for us in the end and for others even in the midst of our success.

○ The Sarah-Hagar soap opera is a classic case-in-point. God has vowed to {Ge 12:2} **“make [Abraham] into a great nation”** – but that was 11 years ago when Abraham was 75. His wife Sarah is still barren. The couple is still childless. Family extinction appears to be imminent.

Sarah doubts that God is going to pull this off. She probably fears that Abraham has misunderstood the plan (after all God has neither spoken to her, nor has he named the mom-to-be).

In her insecurity Sarah asserts control by influencing Abraham’s behavior and regulating the course of events. She tells her husband to **“Go, sleep with my maidservant [Hagar]; perhaps I can build a family through her”** (Genesis 16:2). Abraham complies, Hagar conceives, Ishmael is born. Security is achieved.

Or is it? Fertile Hagar begins to feel superior to withered old Sarah. Sarah, in turn, feels threatened, blames Abraham, and mistreats Hagar.

Fourteen years later Sarah miraculously conceives and gives birth to Isaac. Upon his weaning Sarah asserts control again, telling Abraham to {Ge 21:10} **“Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for [he] will never share... the inheritance with my son Isaac.”** Abraham banishes Hagar and Ishmael, and they are out of Sarah’s hair forever. Security is achieved.

Or is it? The Almighty rescues Hagar and Ishmael from death in the desert. The boy grows up to hate Isaac, but it does not stop with him: he hands that hatred down to his descendants, the Arab people.

Worldly control gives Sarah a kind of security, to a degree, for awhile. It also triggers threat and anxiety during her lifetime and it sets in motion a continuing cycle of mutual hatred, injustice, and conflict between Jews and Arabs. We are far less secure because of the control Sarah exercised in her pursuit of security.

That was Sarah’s way, and it is still the way of the fallen world. But it is not the only way!

Please turn with me to Philippians 2:5-11. The text focuses directly on humiliation and exaltation, but issues of insecurity and security are also involved.

■ Verse 6: Jesus, **“Who, being in very nature God.”** As we read elsewhere: {Jn 1:1} **“In the beginning was the Word”** (i.e., Christ), **“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**

That is security, is it not? To return to a previous metaphor, Christ is King of the Hill. He is on top, perfectly safe and confident. No one else comes close.

But, verse 6 continues: **“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped”** – nor the total control that is part and parcel of that status. Christ is not selfish or self-seeking. Sustaining personal security by exploiting the instruments of control is not his priority. He has said, {Jn 8:50} **“I am not seeking glory for myself.”** {Jn 12:28} **“Father, glorify your name!”** That is his main concern.

■ Verse 7: **“but [he] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant”** (literally, **“a slave”**) **“being made in human likeness.”**

What sets a slave apart from everyone else? Slaves are not free: to choose the kind of work they do, much less where, when, how, and for whom they do it; to dwell or go where they want; to spend their “down time” as they want, as their options for hobbies, recreation, entertainment, and friendship are strictly controlled; to choose marriage or singleness, and if they are married they have little or no say in choosing their spouse; to have or not have children, and any babies they have belong to someone else.

Slaves have extremely limited control over behavior and events. They are vulnerable to dangers few free people ever face.

Christ freely set aside his rights and absolute safety to become a human slave – a slave, not to sinners like us but the Father for our sake. {Mt 20:28}, **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.”** {Jn 3:16-17, NLT} **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ... to save it.”**

■ That brings us to verse 8: **“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”**

The crucifixion defines the Lord’s entire ministry up to his resurrection. He started down the road to the cross even before his birth in Bethlehem.

■ Take a look at verse 5. All of this is preceded by the instruction, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”** Remember that Jesus said: {Mt 16:24, NRSV} **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”** Releasing control into the hands of God and trusting him for our security is essential to discipleship.

■ But it does not end there! Verses 9-11: **“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

Hebrews 12:2 {NLT} explains that **“Jesus was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward.”** And his confidence was not misplaced: **“Now he is seated in the place of highest honor besides God’s throne in heaven.”**

The Word set aside control and security not merely to suffer and die; he did it so that he could suffer, die, rise again, and ascend into the awesome presence of the Father from whence he came – to the glory of God and to our benefit. He became flesh {Jn 10:10} **“that [we] might have life, and have it to the full.”**

All {Ro 6:5, 8} **“who [are] united with him...in his death... will also be united with him in his resurrection... if we [have] died with Christ... we will also live with him.”** Releasing control is what enables us to embrace the real safety and confidence that only the Son can give, now and forever.

Discipleship can be hard, and sometimes dangerous; but it is not about self-punishment. It changes us for the better; but it is not about self-improvement. It is about setting aside the instruments of control so we can hold onto Jesus. It unites us with

him on his cross so we can live in his kingdom today and be raised up to glory on the Day of the Lord.

It only *sounds* crazy. {1 Co 1:18, 24} **“The message of the cross is [idiocy] to those who are perishing” – “but to us who are being saved it is ... the power... and wisdom of God”** for salvation.

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