

Martin Luther had a dear friend of his by the name of Philip Melancthon. Philip was kind of his right-hand man, the guy who helped him to accomplish much during the time of the Reformation. But one winter while Philip was traveling, he fell extremely sick, so sick in fact that everyone thought that he was going to die. And to make it perhaps even a little bit worse than this, Philip was severely depressed, because he just recently gone through a scandal that had kind of been his own making. He had given some terrible advice that backfired terribly, and it caused a huge public scandal. Philip felt that he was responsible for all of it, and as a result he felt that this sickness was God's judgment. He felt that he was going to die, because God was putting him to death. And so when Luther finally came to him a little while later and came into the room where he was, Luther did a very remarkable thing. Because when he saw Philip, he then turned to the window, and he began to pray. And Luther later wrote that he "threw his sack at God's door and wearied out his ears with his praying," calling to mind everything that he could think of, of God's promises that He had made. And then confident that God would hear him, Luther then turned to Philip and said to him, perhaps with a little bit of a smile, "Eat something, Philip, or I'll excommunicate you."

And what Luther understood that day was something that the blind man understood in our story for today as well, that faith is about holding on to God even when it seems like everything is opposed to it. That in those moments when it seems like everything is set against us, God calls for us to hold on to him for dear life. Luther understood that. The blind man understood that. And the Holy Spirit calls for us to understand that too, that faith holds on to Jesus no matter what.

Because think of all the different ways, Christians, that we might find opposition in this world. I can think of the best one coming right out of our text for today, the opposition of the world itself. Because this beggar who was blind heard a crowd going by, and he wants to know what's going on. And they tell him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." And so the first thing that he does when he hears that is he cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" But the crowd doesn't want to hear it, do they? They tell him to be quiet. You're making a fool of yourself! You're going to embarrass us. You're going to embarrass yourself. Just be quiet! But he cries out all the louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And how many ways, dear Christians, does the world try to tell us to be quiet too? Maybe the world would say something like, "We don't want to hear about Jesus. We don't want to hear about sin. We don't want to hear about redemption. Don't talk to us about these things. Keep your religion to yourself. Don't bring it into the public square. Just be quiet." Or maybe the world would say something like, "You call all of these things that we approve of sins. That's so old-fashioned and so out of date! This is 2020. Get with the times! Get with the program. Otherwise, just be quiet." Or maybe the world would say, "Don't even bother praying to God. It's not going to do anything anyway. It's all just the same, so just be quiet." And that can be very difficult for us to deal with, can't it? Because the world is always going to be more than the Church. And sometimes when we're dealing with the opposition of the world, we're dealing with the opposition of friends, of family, of neighbors. And it's so easy to just be quiet in the midst of that, to not cause a scene, to not embarrass ourselves, to not rock the boat. And so the temptation is always there.

But Christians, Jesus tells us that he is greater than the world. Jesus tells us that he has overcome the world. Jesus has conquered, and whatever the world is going to throw at us--and it will be a lot--whatever it chooses, it doesn't matter, because we have God on our side. And because we have God, and faith which holds on to him for dear life, it doesn't matter what they say, because we will always be with him. So hold on to Jesus, dear Christians. Hold on to him for dear life, even when the world is against you, because Jesus will never fail you.

But how else might we find opposition in the world? Sometimes that opposition might come from

ourselves, actually. Because how often do we have a guilty conscience? How often do we become our own worst enemy? Think about Philip, for example, Philip, who was Martin Luther's friend. He was so convinced that God could never forgive him that he was convinced that his sickness was God's judgment against him, and nothing could shake him out of that. And how often do we do something similar? When we say things like, "God must hate me! How could God forgive me? He knows what I've done. He knows the sins that I have committed. How could anyone forgive me after that? How can I ever find God's favor again? Just look at the situation that I'm in. Would I be here, being sick or the things that I suffer in this life or whatever it might be, if God could forgive me? And we become our own worst enemy, in a sense, opposed to ourselves and convincing ourselves that God could never forgive us.

But Christians, God has forgiven us. Jesus is a real Savior. He's not come to save fake sinners or people who are only partially sinners. He has come to save real sinners. The sins that we have committed, no matter how great they might be in our eyes, are not too great for Jesus. He is our life and our forgiveness, and even when we become our own worst enemies, faith holds on to those promises that we have forgiveness in Jesus. So hold onto him, Christians. He has forgiven you by dying for you and rising again.

But perhaps the most difficult one of all--to deal with the opposition--is when it seems like God himself is our enemy, when it seems like God himself is opposed to us. Those moments when we have prayed over and over and over again and we just can't feel the presence of God. Those moments when it seems like he's never going to answer, like how the Psalms say over and over again, "Where are you, God? Why are you so far away? Why won't you answer me?" And when it seems like God is our enemy, can we believe in the midst of that kind of opposition?

Yet God calls for us, dear Christians, to cling to him even then, even when it seems like he is opposed to us, because God never goes back on his promises. Think of like the Canaanite woman in the other parts of the gospel whom Jesus called a dog. Even she said, "Yes, Lord, I am a dog, but dogs eat the crumbs that fall under the Master's table. And Jesus gave her what she asked for, because she held on to him in faith. And that is what God calls for us to do as well, Christians, to believe him, to always trust in him, even when it seems like he isn't there, because God will never fail. Think of Israel, for example, Israel, who had sinned. Israel, who was being sent away into exile because of their sins. That seemed like God was breaking every one of his promises. It seemed like he would never be able to come back to the way things were. And yet God said, "I will bring you back. I will put you back in your land, because my word never fails." Even when it seems like God has gone against it, his promises never fail. Faith holds onto those promises, dear Christians, and refuses to let go, because it knows that God is going to keep his word.

So Christians, hold onto him. Hold onto him even when the world is opposed to you. Hold on to him even when your own conscience is against you. Hold on to him even when it seems like God is far off, because God will never fail you. God will keep his word, and God is with you always.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen