

CAN YOU TRAP A BIRD WATCHING YOU?

Today's Text: Matt. 22: 15-46

Extracts:

Then *the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk; and they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth, nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" but Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?"*[Matt. 22: 15- 18]

Brother Cesare Borizzi is a 62-yr-old Italian monk who was the lead singer in a heavy metal band.¹ Wearing his traditional brown robe and sandals, he sang about real-life issues, such as sex, drugs and alcohol. He had never had any trouble with his superiors over his choice of musical career, spanning fifteen years. Brother Metal (as he is popularly called) and his band released a second album a few months ago. But, just when his popularity was skyrocketing, he decided to quit. In a recent interview aired on BBC World News,² he said that the devil was trying to divert his attention with popularity. He came into heavy metal music (which he loved a great deal) because he wanted to convert people to life.

The Catholic monk was wide-eyed when he came into the rough- and- tumble life of a musician and remained so for fifteen years. So, he could not be trapped with fame and popularity that the world was offering him. The word of God says, "Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" [Prov. 1: 17]. In other words, you cannot trap a bird that is watching you! Right now, in your family, work or business place, school or place of worship, there are people or satanic forces setting traps to catch you. How can you watch their moves? What strategies are you putting together to avoid their traps?

In this week's study, we shall use how Jesus handled His critics and detractors to guide your steps to success and victory.

¹ Frances Kennedy, 'Heavy metal monk in second album,' BBC News, 07/18/09, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/europe/7513571.stm>

² 'Metal Monk rejects the devil,' BBC World News Report, Fri. 12 Nov 2009, 2 pm [EST]

1. Trap-setters in action

Trap- setters (trappers for short) can be defined as those who have made your downfall their passion. You may have offended some of them but in most cases, you may not be able to explain what wrong you have done against them. What matters is that they are always on your case! For example, the devil is constantly making war with those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” [Rev. 12: 17]. Trappers can present in various shapes and here are some of them:

a) *They may be familiar and friendly*

They are closest to you as family, friends or colleagues. They know your moves, strengths and weaknesses. Their aim is to lead you to failure or destruction by cheering you on, no matter whether you are right or wrong. A good example was Delilah, the Philistine wife of Samson.

At the time, the Philistines had dominion over Israel. So God raised Samson, a man of extraordinary strength that He would use to set Israel free [Judg. 14: 4]. The Philistines sought to know the source of Samson’s strength so as to know how to stop him. The lords of the Philistines approached Delilah, his Philistine wife, with a handsome reward, and said, “Entice him, and find out where his strength lies, and by what means to overpower him that we may bind him to afflict him” [Judg. 16: 4-5]. She turned her beauty charms on her husband and “pestered him daily ... so that his soul was vexed to death.” Samson was too blinded by love and wine to see the trap. He succumbed and told her everything. Samson lost his strength and his total destruction came soon after [vv. 6- 31].

b) *Or they may simply be envious*

The envious trappers are sad when you succeed but very happy when you fail. Therefore, your success fuels their passion to stop you by all means. They do so by playing down your good results, attributing them to luck or connections, or by openly celebrating when something bad happens to you. When they achieve success in their own chosen work or career, it is meaningless to them if it does not give them a major advantage over you.

For example, King Ahasuerus, the husband of Queen Esther, had promoted Haman the Agagite above all the princes in his kingdom but Mordecai, one of the king’s servants and the Queen’s uncle refused to pay him homage, because that was against his Jewish faith. Haman plotted to destroy him and all the Jews in the kingdom [Esth. 3: 1-6]. Despite the fact that Haman was richer and continued to receive favours from the king and his queen, he confided in his own wife, Zeresh, “Yet all this avails me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate” [Esth.

5: 13]. Mordecai's destruction was his passion, driven by his envy of Mordecai and the Jews.

c) *Or they may have strong ideological differences with you*

Your trappers may have strong ideological differences with you that they consider irreconcilable. The two cannot stand side by side. One has to go and it must be yours! Therefore, no matter what you do, good or bad, they will still oppose you. They believe that your world view has to be destroyed for theirs to thrive. So, they see your elimination or defeat as the only solution in the contest for hearts or minds. That was why Paul warned the Corinthian church, saying, "What communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" [2 Cor. 6: 14-15]. For Christian values to hold in that church, Paul was telling them to watch out for ideological traps set for them by forces of darkness, Belial and unbelief (in Christ).

In this week's study, Jesus was confronted by different sects of Jewish leaders who saw Him as their common enemy, whose new doctrine threatened their own status (envy) and way of life (ideology). Therefore, the only solution acceptable to them was His total elimination. However, they had a problem with how to go about it because Jesus was popular with the multitudes who took Him as a prophet [Matt. 21: 46]. They opted for a more subtle approach, namely, to entangle Him in His talk and so get Him to put Himself in trouble with Roman and Jewish authorities [Matt. 22: 15]. .

2. But how could they trap the All-Knowing?

One major weakness of trap-setters is that they always believe that they are superior to those they are targetting. Having convinced themselves that Jesus was the mere son of a carpenter [Matt. 13: 55] who never went to "college" [Jn 7: 15], they could confound Him with deep political and theological questions that He would be either unable to answer or answer by trapping Himself! What they did not bargain for was that Jesus is the Christ, the All-Knowing One who saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning [Lk 10: 18]. So what trap could they set for Him that He did not already know?

a) *They set a political trap*

The Pharisees tried to disguise their hand by sending their disciples and the Herodians to trap Jesus with a sensitive political question. The Herodians belonged to a political party loyal to the dynasty of Herod the Great, King of the Jews. Although the Pharisees themselves were also a political and social movement, they are better known as the ones who claimed to be the set apart purists striving to uphold the Law of Moses, even though adulterated by them to suit their moods and desired outcomes.

So, their surrogates came to Jesus and began by pouring encomiums on Him. They called Him the true Teacher who knew and taught the way of God in truth; a man who practised impartiality. Then, they threw at Him a big question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” [Matt. 22: 16-17]. Be careful when people you hardly know come praising you to high heavens and exhorting your high qualities. They could be setting you up for a knockout punch!

Jesus, we are told, “*perceived their wickedness*, and said (to them), ‘Why do you test Me, *you hypocrites?*’” [v. 18]. In other words, He knew them before they opened their mouths! He knew that they were wicked and lived a false life as hypocrites. Nevertheless, He used the opportunity to teach them the proper relationship between church and state. The coin He asked to be shown to Him had the image and inscription of Caesar on it. So, they should “render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” [vv. 19-21]. Believers must pay their due taxes to the state [Rom. 13: 6] and their tithes and offerings to God [Mal. 3: 8-10]! They are not incompatible. That was a hard blow to the local politicians who had expected Jesus to justify their civil disobedience to Roman rule. They could not trap Him there! They “*marvelled and left Him and went their way*” [v. 22].

b) *They tried a theological trap*

It was the turn of the Sadducees to try to trap Him. They were a political group opposed to the Pharisees. Understandably, therefore, they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, nor in angels or the spirit world [Acts 23: 8]. They did not bother with trying to eulogize Jesus. They went straight to their point. They wanted to know who, in the resurrection, would be the rightful husband of a woman married successively by seven brothers that died one after the other [Matt. 22: 24-28].

This is a classical example of experts trying to propound theories in their areas of ignorance! Your trappers think they know more about your area of strength than you do. For example, can you imagine a young atheist challenging the Pope or Rev. Billy Graham on their Bible-based knowledge of the origin of man? They will simply pray for him to get saved! Jesus answered the Sadducees, “You are mistaken, *not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.*” The dead do not marry and they are like the angels of God in heaven. At any rate, God is the God of the living, not of the dead. [vv. 29-32]. In other words, those who are dead in Christ by faith, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, will live forever with Him in the Resurrection. That was too much for the Sadducees!

We need not go into the rest of the story because Jesus confounded His critics and trappers to the extent that “no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that

day on did anyone dare question Him anymore” [v. 46]. The All-Knowing had silenced the all-ignorant!

3. How you can watch those setting traps for you

From the forgoing, we can learn principles for knowing how to watch your trappers. Some of them are as follows:

a) *Hide the Word of God in your heart*

The word of God has been preserved in the Bible and if you do not read it, you cannot know your trappers or their designs on you, for Satan poses as an angel of light, as do his messengers [2 Cor. 11: 14]. For example, most of the answers that Jesus gave in the passage under consideration were based on the Scriptures which He quoted profusely [Matt. 22: 29-32; 37-45]. When the devil tempted Him in the wilderness, He fought back by using Scriptural verses [Lk 4: 4, 8, 12]. We know the Scriptures have been given by God’s inspiration and they are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness [2 Tim. 3: 16].

We are to meditate on God’s word day and night so that we can prosper and be successful [Josh. 1: 8]. When we hide the word of God in our hearts, then we cannot sin against Him [Ps. 119: 11]. People perish for lack of knowledge of God’s word [Hos. 4: 6]. With your faith as your shield and the word of God as your sword, you can handle all the fiery darts that your trappers are throwing at you [Eph. 6: 15]. Therefore, make the word of God your breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks!

b) *Be Spirit-led*

Jesus did not begin His earthly ministry until He had received the Holy Spirit [Lk 4: 1, 18-21]. That was why He knew *in advance* what His trappers were even thinking. Jesus promised His disciples (then and now) that He would send them the “Spirit of truth” who will guide them “into all truth” [Jn 16: 13]. So, as your trappers are setting their snares, God will be revealing everything to you.

For example, when Jesus was a child and Herod had evil plans against Him, it was the Spirit of God that spoke to Joseph, Mary’s husband, in dreams concerning the Lord’s safety. When Herod planned to kill all male children in Bethlehem two years and under (as a way to eliminate the Child Jesus), it was by divine instruction in a dream that Joseph took Jesus to safety in Egypt [Matt. 2: 11-16]. Even in the Old Testament, when the king of Syria planned to attack the king of Israel, God revealed everything to him through the prophet Elisha each time in advance [2 Kgs 6: 8-12]. To be spiritually-minded is life and peace [Rom. 8: 6].

c) *Hide under the banner of God*

Your enemies may see you before you see them because they are always watching your movement. But only God who sees everywhere at the same time can keep watch over you [**Prov. 15:3**]. For example, when Satan came along with the sons of God to present themselves before the Lord, He asked the devil where he had been. Satan replied that he had been going to and fro in the earth, and from walking back and forth in it [**Job 1: 6-7**]. Do you know what he does during his wandering moments on earth? As our adversary, he is “walking about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” [**1 Pet. 5: 8**]. When God asked Satan if he had considered His servant Job, a “blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil,” the devil replied, “Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household and around all that he has on every side?” [**Job 1: 9-10**]. Therefore, if God is hiding you under His banner, nobody, human or spiritual, can trap you. God is watching for you against them!

For example, when Balak, the king of Moab, hired a soothsayer, Balaam, to curse the children of Israel on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land, God made him speak blessings instead [**Num. Chaps 22-23**]. Yet, the children of Israel did not know about it when it was happening. In like manner, God will set confusion among those trying to trap you and you will pass through their fires and you will not be burnt, and through their waters but you will not be drowned [**Is. 43: 1-2**]. That is why the Psalmist says, “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty,” our refuge and fortress [**Ps. 91: 1-2**]. His truth will be your shield and buckler. You shall no longer be afraid of the terror by night nor the arrows that fly by day [**vv. 4-6**].

4. Conclusion: Stay in the light of Christ and you cannot be trapped!

Jesus laughed last on His trappers. After He had destroyed all their traps, He set one for them. He asked them what they thought of the Christ; whose Son is He. They answered, “The Son of David.” He asked them if it was so, why did David in spirit call the Christ his Lord? They could not answer Him! From that day on, the trappers did not dare to question Him anymore [**Matt. 22: 41-46**].

That same Jesus has assured you that He is with you always even to the end of the age [**Matt. 28: 20**]. He is the light of the world and if you follow Him, you will “not walk in darkness but have the light of life” [**Jn 8: 12**]. The best place to hide is in the open, in the light of Christ. In His light, all the traps set against you will be revealed and exposed. So, stay in that light and you can no longer be trapped.

You cannot set a trap for a bird that is watching you.