

## Little Foxes

*Prayer*

Song of Solomon 2:15

NKJV: Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.

CEV: Our vineyards are in blossom; we must catch the little foxes that destroy the vineyards

NIV: Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom

This morning, the Lord our God is doing a good work in Salmo!

Do you believe that we are in a spiritual battle this morning?

Ephesians 6:12-18 NKJV

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people*

If we are not battling this morning then why are we told to put on the full armor of God?

This morning I want to talk about one of the most insidious ways that the enemy tries to destroy our church... Little Foxes.

I pray that whenever you encounter a Little Fox within the church that you will take a hold of it and stop it. Why?

The opposite of worship is criticism. In your relationships this morning, if you are critical to your wife, girlfriend, husband or boyfriend your relationship suffers doesn't it? When you attack that person close to you, you damage trust and you

create disunity. How do you feel when you are criticized? Does it speak life to you? Does it lift you up? What does this criticism do to your self-worth?

Now as leaders, we are taught that we need to have an open dialog and examine criticism for truth in order to improve. After 25 years of management I can tell you that when a person brings something to you because they care about the issue and they want to make a positive difference in the company, it is often received. What causes it not to be received is a bad attitude... This results in a bad rep for the employee and lack of acceptance of potentially valid ideas that could result in positive change.

If an employee of a company is disgruntled or frustrated or even if a process or procedure is not carried out in the way that they think it should be, there is a tendency to grumble and complain about it to the other workers. This often results in a drop in morale.

In the church we see gossip, back biting and criticism. We may question the songs that are sung during worship, we may question the length of the sermon; we may criticize the preaching style of the minister, the song choices of the worship leader, the Sunday school lessons of the teacher. We may not like the brand of the coffee provided; we may not like the frequency or in-frequency of communion. We may compare our leadership to that of other churches.

These little things do not seem to be significant individually, but if we really examine what is going on, we begin to see that the enemy is creating a stronghold of division and dissent in God's church, in our relationships with one another and in our lives.

So often in business and in other aspects of life I have seen these little foxes create significant damage... Do you know why these things come about?

It is because of the sin of pride... In our arrogance we believe that we can do the job better than our boss, our spouse, our elected or selected leader.

Proverbs 16:18 NIV

*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*

Many times people have come to me in business and asked why a process or procedure was done a certain way. They have come in with a concept of how it should be. 8 out of 10 times, when I took the time to layout all of the facts involved in why a business process was in place, there was a scenario or situation that the person had not considered. The result was that the person learned something new about the company; they felt that their issue was addressed and a positive outcome came about. So what happened the other 20% of the time? I learned something... and was able to improve.

I bet that if you asked our beloved ex-mayor if he ever saw people who weren't privy to all of the facts loudly voicing their opinions of a decision he had made, he would agree with what I am saying this morning...

In the church, in a culture of honor, we cannot afford to indulge ourselves in the criticism of our brothers and sisters.

In John 13:35 Jesus says: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Relationships fail because of not having love for each other...

Consider what the Word of God says about this:

In John 13:34 Jesus says: "'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.'

Did Jesus come to criticize and condemn us?

John 3:17 "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

He is our example!

Exodus 20:12 "'Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.'

Colossians 3:21 "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged"

Relationships fail because of not having love for each other...

Ephesians 4:31,32 NKJV

*"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."*

Ephesians 4:31,32 CEV

*"Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ"*

James 4:11,12 CEV

*"My friends, don't say cruel things about others! If you do, or if you condemn others, you are condemning God's Law. And if you condemn the Law, you put yourself above the Law and refuse to obey either it or God who gave it. God is our judge, and he can save or destroy us. What right do you have to condemn anyone?"*

Psalms 15:1-3 CEV

*"Who may stay in God's temple or live on the holy mountain of the LORD? Only those who obey God and do as they should. They speak the truth and don't spread gossip; they treat others fairly and don't say cruel things"*

I think it's pretty clear from Ephesians 4:31 CEV what we are supposed to do...  
*"Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ"*

Now you might ask what all this has to do with little foxes... These little foxes can be our actions, our words and our attitudes.

Well Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. It is up to us to bear fruit and we are told that these little foxes of gossip and criticism tear down and destroy churches. Remember Solomon 2:15?

*Our vineyards are in blossom; we must catch the little foxes that destroy the vineyards*

God has a great work planned for Salmo. As things are starting to happen, the enemy will attack God's church here. We must put on the whole armor of God. We cannot let the little foxes rob us of what God has intended for his church! Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So what am I saying?

As Children of God don't let the enemy manipulate or use us by playing on our pride. Don't let him create little foxes out of God's children. We must guard our hearts. We must bring our thoughts captive to the mind of Christ and we must guard our words. We must speak life and not death.

As shepherd, it is my job to protect you the sheep of his pasture. As we read in Solomon 2:15 we are to catch or take hold of the little foxes. This word is actually the Hebrew word "Achaz" which means to get a hold of them or catch them. Why does he want us to get a hold of ourselves in this regard? Because we are told that these little foxes can destroy the vineyard.

What is implied is that we are growing and producing spiritual fruit. The enemy doesn't want that so he is trying to damage that spiritual growth.

Have you ever heard something like: "She just doesn't like me, she didn't even talk to me on Sunday..." or maybe, "The pastor doesn't like me because he was too busy to say goodbye to me last Sunday..." are these things really true or are we just feeling and then articulating the doubt that the enemy is trying to put into our hearts as we build fellowship, relationship and family?

My question this morning is are we allowing the enemy to manipulate us into believing his lies?

So let's say that at Crossroads we have our shields in place and we are guarding against these little foxes. This church is beginning to see a renewal of spirit. It is experiencing the Holy Spirit. I have seen growth occurring in the lives and hearts of the people of this church. You are blossoming. Put another way your grapes are starting to burst forth on the vine.

Here is my question this morning... If you haven't experienced the little foxes lately, how long do you think it will be before they appear?

You know I have been a PK most of my life and I have seen a lot of churches come and go and without fail, I am astonished at the little things that cause them to split or fail. I have seen churches split over the number of chairs in the sanctuary, the renovations, the lawn, Calvinist / Armenian arguments. I have even heard of one church who fired the pastor for moving the piano from one side of the platform to the other.

I want to be God's church! More specifically, I want our church to be founded upon the Rock of Jesus Christ. After all he even renamed Simon...

Matthew 16:18 NKJV

*"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

So why is this so critical? Pastor, aren't we all disciples and priests?

It is the new believer, the new adherent or member who is crippled by these little foxes... They are not strongly rooted yet...

Matthew 18:6 NIV Illustrates the significance of this to us...

*“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea”*

Let’s just say for the sake of argument that you don’t believe that little foxes can spoil the vines. Historically we find records that in Palestine foxes would cause tremendous trouble with the vines, they could ruin an entire harvest by devouring immature young grapes.

Friends, little foxes are the opposite of what we want if we desire to create a positive culture of honor in which our church can flourish.

So let us be on guard!

Let us commit ourselves to prayer, so that we will recognize when the enemy tries to do this through us, or those around us. Let us read the word and recognize that the enemy is real and we are in a battle. You see there is a scripture in 1 Peter 5:8 KJV that says: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”

I like this scripture from the good old King James because it says MAY devour... This implies that he needs permission. Today let us stand firmly together and deny him that permission. Today we choose to not let little foxes spoil our vineyard.

### Summary

God wants our church to flourish, to be fruitful and make a difference. Don’t allow little foxes to bring down and destroy that which God is building. Today, choose to guard your hearts, care for your relationships, and care for your church. After all we will be known by our love.