

Pastor Jeff, May 1, 2005:

We're talking about spiritual champions. You know I love it when the bully gets it. You're watching a movie and the bad guy gets what's coming to him. That's always the highlight of the film for me. Or even in real life, when a bully gets it, gets his/her "just due," it's a good thing. I came across a video that really tickled my funny bone. It was a shot where a martial arts expert was in one of our large cities to film a video on how to defend yourself against street attacks.

Ironically, one of those happens while he is there filming this video. Across the street from the hotel where he was staying, a pimp was physically abusing a woman, assuming she was one of the women that worked for him. The man heard the commotion and went across the street, confronting the pimp. He said, "Take your hands off that woman; leave her alone. Something bad's gonna happen to ya if ya don't." Scared enough sense into the pimp that the pimp backed off and the karate instructor felt like it was a safe situation, turned around and started to walk back to the hotel.

The pimp had lost face there in front of his pimp friends, and he decided he was going to defend his honor. So he proceeds to verbally challenge the instructor. You don't hear this on the tape; and there is no audio other than the narrator telling us what is going on because it is shot from inside a building looking down on the scene of the street. You can't hear the dialog outside; you just rely on the narrator. So they grab the pimp, and they're trying to hold him back, and he's pulling and tugging to the point where his t-shirt is starting to rip off, kinda like the Incredible Hulk when he changes. He bursts out of the t-shirt, and now nothing is holding him back. He starts going across the street to confront the martial arts instructor, who has now stopped, turned around, and begins

assessing the situation. The narrator is describing that what the pimp doesn't know is that the man he is about to affront is a martial arts instructor. I'm sitting there thinking, "This is gonna be good. This is gonna be good." He comes walking up there as such, and the pimp just waits calmly for him. As soon as he gets within striking distance, what is he going to do? Hay-ya! Yah! I don't know what he's going to do. I'm just excited, and he goes like this; I didn't expect this move...and neither did the pimp: He goes BAMB, with his forearm, catches the guy across the face and the neck, and drops him like a rock. The pimp is lying in the street-OUT. The martial arts instructor waits, makes sure he's taken care of. Finally, he turns around, raised his shoulders like "what else could I do?" and walked away. They pick up the pimp, and he kind of staggers across the other street, embarrassed and rightly so.

It's good when the bully gets it, right? We like to see strong people come to the defense of the helpless and the weak. So what does that have to do with Special Touch Ministries? I'm working on that. I haven't figured it out, but it was a good story, and I did want to share it with you.

It does have something to do with today's message. In Psalms 82:3, God's word says, "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless. Maintain the right to the poor and repressed. Rescue the weak and needy. Deliver them from the hand of the wicked." In other words, God says, "If you want to be a hero in my sight, help those who cannot help themselves. Defend those who need defending. Help those who are bullied." He's talking here about bullies. God is saying, "Beat up a bully! Come to the defense of those who need your help!"

The media we saw was very well done today. But I want to tell you something: Every single person you saw at that camp has been bullied. And I don't mean physically. Maybe some of them have been

physically bullied. But there are some bullies that torment those people. There is the bully of despair, which tells them they are different, and there is no hope, and life will never change for them. There is the bully of loneliness, which says, "You know what? This is your lot in life, and you're different. You're not going to have happiness." There is the bully of rejection, as people who may laugh at them, or make fun of them, or turn away from them in disgust. That bully picks on them all the time. There are bullies of fear. There are bullies of being devalued by the world, because they are not "normal;" they are of less value.

God says in his word, "Beat up a bully. Find somebody who is weak or lonely or in despair, and beat that bully up. Beat loneliness up. Strike a death blow to despair."

Show somebody who needs your help that they matter to you, and they matter to God. That's what this is about today. This isn't just about Special Touch. This is about our church becoming strategic with reaching out to people with special needs. You know Jesus was strategic with that. Look at his body of work. Who did Jesus spend most of his time ministering to and helping? Was it the rich? Was it the elite? The politically prominent? The powerful? The aristocracy of his day? Or was it in fact the poor? The oppressed? The defenseless? The children who didn't have a voice? The widows who didn't have a voice? The crippled? The paralyzed? The blind? The beggar? The diseased? The man or woman struck with leprosy? Jesus was continually drawn and attracted to them. The disciples would say, "He doesn't have time for you." And the crowd would push him back. "He doesn't have time for you outcasts!" Jesus would always correct them. Jesus would always go against the status quo, and he would reach out and minister to those who had special needs.

There is a verse in the Bible that I've read and you've read, and it just caught me between the eyes this week. I thought "Man-o-man!" When I read that and really caught a hold of it, I thought, "Boy, have I dropped the ball on this one!" And I bet you have too.

Luke 14:12, it says, "Jesus had just finished dining at the home of a prominent Pharisee, and he said, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends.'" I want to say this: this verb, do not invite, meant do not invite-to the exclusion of others, or do not only invite. Jesus isn't saying here, "When you throw a party, don't ever invite your family; don't ever invite friends." He's not saying that's bad or wrong. What he's trying to admonish us is don't only, always, and forever invite only family and friends. Invite your brothers or sisters, or relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they may invite you back, and so you'll be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you'll be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous. And usually when you read that, you say, "Wasn't that kind of cute, kind of nice?" But did he really mean it? Did he really mean for the church to get strategic and go out of our way to invite people with special needs into our lives, into our homes? I think he did. I think he did because it's in the imperative tense, which is a command tense, present and active-meaning now. Be strategic. When was the last time some people with economic concerns were invited into your home for a meal? Or somebody with other special needs that you reached out to strategically and invited them in and built a friendship with them.

I will tell you something: I read this and I went, "I have dropped the ball." And I bet you if we took a raise of hands this morning, a lot of hands

would go up and say, "I dropped the ball." We want to change that as a body and as a church. We believe God has some good things for our church to do, and we're going to start with Special Touch Ministries and the ministry of Pastor Brad. Brad has been a friend of mine for years, as well as Pastor Sean. I was helping him as his proctor when he was studying for the ministry, and what he has done is prepared a message to us about what the body of Christ is to be about. What we will be doing while Brad is reading his text, is reading it off the screen. If for some reason you have problems reading from the screen, feel free to move up toward the front. Most of you should be able to see the words. The font is big enough so that you can read along with what he has to share. Let's welcome Pastor Brad to our church this morning.