

Overcome Fear to Boldly Proclaim

Matthew 10:16-30

We need to be aware that PERSECUTION IS COMING.

The Apostles experienced everything Jesus told them they would (10:17-18, 21-22, 25-26). Much of this is recorded in Acts and the subsequent history of the 1st Century Church confirms the rest.

Our brothers and sisters all over the world are experiencing persecution currently. It has been the history of the peoples who immigrated to America to experience persecution in Europe as well as in the new colonies.

We are seeing the disdain the people of the world in the United States have for Christians who believe in a narrow way to live versus the broad way most people follow. There is reproach on those contending that Jesus is the only way to the Father and only for those who trust Him alone.

Jesus wanted His disciples to be aware of THREE KEY FACTS (10:16).

He does this through three similes. He compares His followers to *sheep*, *snakes*, and *doves*.

1. You are **defenseless** as a flock of *sheep* amongst wolves. Two sheep are no match for a pack of wolves. They simply have no defensive capabilities against such attacks ... other than to appeal to the Shepherd. The problem is the Shepherd is the one who is sending these 12 men out in groups of two to face the wolves. Because of this fact, it is essential that ...
2. You must act **prudently** as a *snake* does. Snakes are relatively defenseless against being stepped on. Because of this they have to be 'hyper-careful' about their movements relative to those who can hurt them. The Apostles were to be discerning and careful of the presence of enemies. They were not to antagonize them, but as Paul told Timothy, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. ¹⁵ Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said. 2 Tim 4:14-15 (NLT).

Once at a camp in the mountains, our bus driver noticed a rattlesnake in the road. He ran over it. I jumped out and put my steel toed boot on its head while someone else found a knife and cut its head off. And then the good Lord called the poor thing home. Even a rattlesnake hides itself, it rattles to warn people off, it may even strike first to keep people from crushing it underfoot, but once stepped on it has little or no defense.

3. You must be **harmless** as a *dove* intends no harm to anyone. Even when we have opportunity to retaliate, we are not to do so. Our intentions from beginning to end is to tell the message, not to punish those who will not listen. God will do that, if necessary. Instead, we are to pray that He will bring them all to repentance.

We are to REJOICE IN THE OPPORTUNITY persecution affords us.

1. Rejoice that you get to **suffer** for His name (10:17-18a). The courts are the *sanhedrins* which met on Thursday nights to hear cases prior to the Friday night service where punishment might be carried out in front of the *synagogue*. This is what was done to the Apostles. In Acts 5, we find the Great Sanhedrin opposing the spread of the Gospel when they, ⁴⁰ ... They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. ⁴¹ The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus."
2. Rejoice that you get to **witness** for Him (10:18b). I remember the story from WWII, where a Scottish officer of the RAF was giving a briefing on fighting tactics to some Americans who had come over to fly against the Luftwaffe. He was asked what to do if one found themselves in the sky against three or four Messerschmitts. His reply, "Rejoice, laddie, that's why you are here!" We need to rejoice that persecution gives us opportunities to give the reason for the hope that is in us (see Acts 5:29-32; 1 Peter 3:13-16 for examples).
3. Rejoice that you get to be God's **voice** (10:19-20). Our tendency is to over-focus and to worry about what we will say to get ourselves off the charge. We are, or should be, guilty of spreading the good news about salvation in Jesus. When we are brought to court or before a legislative committee, we should not meditate on what we are going to say, but instead rely upon the Holy Spirit who is within us to give us God's "right words at the right time." It will be the Father speaking through us ... that is prophecy. It is not that we are giving new revelation, but that God is sending His message to the people in that room using our mouths!
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We need a REALITY CHECK on what is going to happen if we are to stand fast.

1. The **closest** to you will **betray** you to death (10:21). The members of your own family, your siblings with whom you grew up, your own parents, even your own rebellious children will sell you out to the persecutors. Some *spiritualize* this to mean brothers and sisters in Christ are doing the betraying, but that is not what Jesus says. He says to these Jewish apostles that the members of their family will do the unthinkable and hand their own family members over. Rebellious children will reject the teaching of their fathers and testify against their parents, knowing it means their imprisonment and death. While it has not come to that in the US, children raised in Christian homes are rejecting their upbringing to be successful in the world and to enable themselves to sin willfully against the things their parents taught them.
2. All will **hate** you without cause (10:22a). The NLT supplies the word "nations" to modify the word 'all.' It will not be merely Jew betraying Jew. The Gentile nations, who already hate the Jewish nation, will focus the intensity of their persecution upon the followers of the Way of Christ. This was the pattern in every town where Paul preached. The synagogue would stir up the Gentiles against Paul causing him to be persecuted.

3. You have already **won** all that is necessary is to hold fast your confession (10:22b). "Saved" here does not mean rescued from death. He has already told them some will be killed (see v.21). What is pictured is the triumph of the Saved. There is nothing the world can do to stop us from being victorious ... as long as we endure to the end!

Don't be like Lot's wife, who was on her way to safety with her family, but stopped, turned around to gaze at her beloved Sodom and was destroyed while the rest of the family escaped.

To endure, you must READY yourself for action.

1. You must be prepared to flee more than once (10:23). There is no great merit in continuing to witness to the same hardened people over and over again. This is really true when they turn you over to authorities and have you beaten or jailed. Go on to the next place. The Apostles were going to the cities and villages of Israel. At the time Matthew wrote this down, Jesus had been crucified, resurrected, and had ascended to the Father. They knew the apostle was not writing this about Christ coming before these men had finished this particular mission trip! What this looks to is the ongoing witness of these Apostles and those who would follow them in witness to the Jewish nation. Jewish evangelism will continue until the Lord does come again a Second time.
2. You will identify with Jesus in being called names (10:24-25). The principle of *students* and *teachers* equally applies to *slaves* and *masters*. Those who follow the teachings of John Calvin are called *Calvinists* while those who follow Karl Marx are called *Marxists*. In the early church, the followers of Jesus's way, called "The Way," were derisively called "Christians!" This slur became a badge of honor by which we are known today. Jesus was called "the prince of demons," i.e., *Beelzeboul*, a name which by that time was recognized as another name for Satan. If Jesus is called the prince of demons, then His followers should expect to be maligned as demons, malefactors, cannibals, kidnappers, murderers, hateful, etc.
3. You are charged to tell the truth (10:26-27). The world will threaten you to shut you up. That is their purpose. Don't let that happen. Instead tell all the secrets that God has revealed in His word. The Apostles were to tell all of Jesus' teachings! We are to teach this to others. Paul disciplined the believers in every place, at first in person, then through members of the team who were able to go back incognito, and even through letters.

Remember, who values you (10:28-31).

1. The world does not value you as an eternal soul. They are very willing to make you suffer and to take your life in order to get obedience. They can't do that. All they can do is kill your body. They cannot touch your soul.
2. God highly values you. He is fully capable of destroying your soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*), but instead considers both precious. If God cares for 'cheap' birds, and numbers the hairs of our head, then we should understand how precious we are to Him. That we mean more to God than many sparrows is a specimen of Jesus' humor. I feel sure He looked at them and winked.
3. Why does God have the hairs of your head numbered? He plans to use your DNA to put you back together in the resurrection.

Summary & Conclusion

1. As we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes, we recognize that we are defenseless against the attacks of the wolves of this world's system. Because of this we need to be *prudent* in our actions and *harmless* in our intentions toward others as we seek to give them eternal life.
2. Our perspective on suffering is to rejoice that we are allowed to suffer since Jesus suffered on our behalf. It gives us the opportunity to bear witness to Him!
3. To handle persecution when it comes, we must be prepared equally to flee or be called names and even betrayed to death.
4. We don't let the fear of man and his hatred overcome our fear of the God who loves us enough to send His Son to die in our place so we could live with Him forever.