

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: The Heart of the Mission

Text: Matthew 10:16-23

Introduction/Aim: Jesus addresses the four areas of trouble they may encounter. There are a few things to note as we begin the portion of our text. The apostles did not experience any such direct persecutions in their missions before Jesus dies. We see some “soft” persecution in Matthew 9:3, “This fellow blasphemes” said the Scribes. And in Matthew 9:11, “When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?” In Matthew 9:34, “But the Pharisees were saying, He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.” However, these are just the beginning stages of bitter hatred. They will increase. They will become violent. And Jesus warns them of what is ahead.

Jesus does not discourage the disciples, He simply gives them the truth about what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. Let me be clear before we unpack our text. God has blessed this nation, for 246 years we have seen almost unfettered freedom to worship. No one is asking for trials, sufferings or persecution. The fact remains not all will suffer, but you must be willing to do so. A few facts about the Americanized Christianity and how to avoid these pitfalls. (1) American believers have a consumerist mentality regarding a home church. The biblical emphasis is being equipped for the ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” (2) American Christianity promotes a culture of entertainment. The Bible promotes the pursuit of God. Psalms 42:1-2, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” Too many are seeking what entertains them.

POINT 1 - THE ANALOGY (VS. 16A)

Jesus uses the word “behold” which means to pay close attention to what He is about to say. In chapter 9:36, He spoke to unbelieving multitude as a sheep without a shepherd. In this paradox Jesus sends the sheep into the midst of the wolves. The common culture understood to stay away from where the wolves were.

Sheep - they are the most vulnerable of animals. They are the most dependent, helpless, clueless and often dumbest of all animals. The only natural defense they have is running. And they are good at that. The sheep’s greatest threat is predators. And the worst predator are wolves. Those in this time understood the difficulty in keeping sheep alive.

APPLICATION: Jesus identifies these disciples as sheep, and for clarity, it means us also. This text applies to you and me today! The nominal danger of the time is wolves coming into the sheep fold. But here Jesus sends them out to where the wolves are.

What we have here is a graphic illustration as to what the world will do to those who promote, and proclaim the gospel. A God-hating world will seek to silence the gospel. Paul knew this as he said in

The Gospel of Matthew

Acts 20:29, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.” Romans 8:36, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in Matthew 7:15, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” It is clear the image of a wolf to sheep. It’s dangerous. But Jesus said He is sending us into the wolves den. He is sending us into the heart of rejection.

APPLICATION: We don’t hear much today in the way of “hungering and thirsting for righteousness.” Nor do we hear much about following the narrow road instead of the broad road. It’s popular today to make Christ look appealing to what you want. To twist the words of God to reflect a theology you like.

It’s shameful to see pastors and leaders display a mirage of what being a Christian is like. Telling people they can have what they want, live like they want and enjoy the best life now is nauseating. In fact, it’s deceitful and these men will stand before God under greater judgment, cf. James 3:1.

POINT 2 - THE ATTITUDE (VS. 16B)

The transition is “therefore” or “so be” which connects these two carefully. Let’s define some terms. Shrewd (wise) as serpents. We are often told not to be like a serpent. The imagery is that of deceitfulness.

ILLUSTRATION: In ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, serpents symbolized wisdom. They were considered wise, smart, cunning and cautious. In a bizarre way, the disciples, and us, are to be wise as these ancient serpents. But what does this mean?

We are to be wise in what we say and do. We should say the right thing and the right time and place. Colossians 4:5, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.” It is not wise to be accusatory or inflammatory. Unlike how the Pharisees did, Matthew 22:15, “Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him.” It was a question of whether to give a poll tax. Jesus responded wisely and lovingly in Matthew 22:21, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.” His response didn’t raise a level of anger, but it was wise and loving.

The dove is the most harmless and gentle of all birds. Doves have also represented purity and innocence. You can be faithful and true to God’s word, and not be abrasive or hateful. Wisdom and innocence are signs of biblical discretion, cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. Be wise and innocent. But be biblical. Jesus being our example, here is his response to persecution, “and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). Paul also describes the mission of being a Christian in 1 Corinthians 4:12-13, “and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when

The Gospel of Matthew

we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now.”

POINT 3 - THE PERSECUTION (VS. 17-18)

Men will in general persecute you for the truth. The truth is obsolete today. Truth today is whatever one makes it to be. Jesus warns to beware of men. These men are used by Satan to do wicked things. This is why being wise and innocent will be useful in the Christian life. It is through men that Satan opposes the things of God. Don't be fooled. Be watchful. Ephesians 6:12 is never more important than now, “For our struggle (wrestle) is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

There are two things Jesus says they will do. They will scourge you. Vines Dictionary describes the Jewish scourging as, “The use of three thongs of leather, the offender receiving thirteen stripes on the bare breast and thirteen on each shoulder, the forty stripes save one, as administered to Paul five times.”¹ This is an encouraging reason to follow Christ right?

APPLICATION: We are to be on guard, wise, perceptive, and to be innocent does not mean to be naive. As John MacArthur says, “To love our enemies and not return evil for evil in one thing; to deny they are enemies is quite another.” Matthew 5:10-11 describe how we respond, but it also shows us the reality of wickedness, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” We understand that men will seek to reject, persecute and revile you as a Christian. In the work place, at school and unfortunately on the social media platforms of today.

Furthermore, the disciples had yet to experience such persecution, and for most if not all of us, we haven't. The message is we don't know what an election will bring or a new government will bring. We must count the cost.

3A - Religious persecution. They will hand you to the courts and scourge you in the synagogues. These were places of gatherings (worship), public gatherings, and court hearings. The Jews would try, convict and punish those who broke their laws, often with scourging. A scourging was 13 lashes with a whip. Historically, nearly all of Christian persecution has come from religious groups.

Paul made this admission about his life before conversion in Acts 22:19, “And I said, Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.” And yet it was the Jews who persecuted Paul, 2 Corinthians 11:24, “Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.”

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3146/nasb95/mgmt/0-1/> (accessed 10.27.22)

The Gospel of Matthew

In many countries today, religious persecution is carried out by “witch doctors, pagan priests” who cast spells and promote violent actions against Christians.

3B - Governmental persecution. The Romans saw the increase in Christians and began to make up lies about them which led to persecution. They accused them of cannibalism. Today many communist countries have strict laws against worship, and pastors, leaders of Christian churches often disappear without ever finding them. But don't worry about what you will do or say (vs. 19-20) for the Lord will be all supplying to you.

POINT 4 - THE PROVISION, HATRED AND HOPE (21-23)

Micah 7:6 is a prophetic message of the day, “For son treats father contemptuously, daughter rises up against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household.” Many fathers, brothers, and children often betrayed their own family to civil authorities. In some cultures, a family member who becomes a Christian, the family has a funeral for them. They consider them already dead.

4A - Why are they hated? Not because of who they are, but because of who their shepherd is. They will be hated by all because of His name (vs. 22). Today in America we rarely see any type of persecution, and we rejoice in that! In the recent Covid madness, local leaders, state leaders often tried to shut down places of worship. There we saw some soft persecution. But the truth remains, men, governments, religious groups hate Christians because of who Christ is.

4B - The hope of being in the hands of God. The reason Christians endure is because it is God who holds and keeps them. It is God, who provides the means of endurance. Why? Because we look to an eternal home as Abraham did, Hebrews 11:10, “for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Hebrews 3:14, “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” Some endure for a while, Matthew 13:21, “he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” To the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:3, “and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.” How? It's not because of what we do, it's because God keeps you. This is what we call the perseverance of the saints. Endurance doesn't earn you salvation, it verifies the eternal keeping of God.

Finally, don't give up, just move on to the next city. Men's opposition doesn't end your message of truth.