

## Comfort in the Struggle Matthew 10:26-42

We continue in a difficult section of the Gospel of Matthew. In recent weeks we have seen Jesus specifically select out the 12 who would be called apostles. Jesus was sending them out two by two in the cities and towns of the Galilee Region. Jesus instructed them to trust God in faith for the trip and to not take extra clothes or money. But to go into each town and look for someone “worth.” We discovered “worthy” means someone of like mind, someone who desired to follow Jesus. They were then to stay in that home to minister to the town by casting out demons, healing the sick and preaching the kingdom. Jesus also instructed them to shake off the dust of those towns and homes who rejected their message. Don’t bother to spend a great deal of energy on those who did not want to listen.

Then last week, we worked through a section in which Jesus is giving them further instructions, and He reminds them that it will not be easy. The people will reject you and your message. They will use every means they can to go after you, including the government and the religious system.

This morning we come to the end of Jesus instructions to the 12 as He sends them out. Jesus still has some difficult things to tell them but He also has some comfort to give them. So let’s dig through the text and see what God has for us this morning.

## Have No Fear (10:26-33)

*Matthew 10:26 (ESV)*

*26 “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.*

We saw last week that Jesus reminded the 12 that He was the object of the hatred so as a result of that they should not fear those that go after you.

It is perfectly normal and natural that when you are being oppressed that you feel like no one knows what is going on or what is happening to you is not known, or perhaps not known outside of your immediate circle. It is very common to think that the injustice that is happening may never be known and you never be vindicated.

So Jesus tells the 12 that there is nothing that is in secret that will not be revealed. Those barbs, those attacks, the slanderous statements, the jibes, that people throw at you that hurt and cause lots of problems, but yet are unknown to most people, are known to God. Look at the verse again. Don't fear them, for there is nothing that will not be revealed. The truth will come out. The lies and slander will ultimately be dealt with by God. But in the meantime, we have a message to teach.

*Matthew 10:27 (ESV)*

*27 What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.*

The message we are to deal with is the message that Jesus has taught. During those times Jesus was teaching the 12 alone, set apart from the world, the message He in effect gave them in secret is the message they are to teach and proclaim.

It also appears that Jesus was utilizing a teaching method often used in Shivahs, schools fro Rabbis. The teacher would teach in a low, calm, quiet voice, and the lead student would then proclaim loudly with enthusiasm and flair what was being taught. It was an exercise in delivery and in learning. Jesus may have been using that to illustrate we are to take what we learn and proclaim it loudly.

There is also a sense that we are to speak with people where people gather. The reference to the housetop I think refers to a gathering place, possibly even a place for meetings to occur. It was often the only place in a house or building where more than just a few people could gather.

So the teaching by Jesus was that we are to not let oppressing, the slander, the lies, stop us from proclaiming the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Don't let the difficulties that the world brings to you to prevent you from standing up for Jesus.

*Matthew 10:28 (ESV)*

*28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Jesus then reminded the apostles to not really worry about their bodies. In fact, you might interpret what Jesus is saying is, “don’t worry about your body, it is expendable.” Your body is not what is really important. What matters most is our eternal condition. Don’t be afraid of what happens to this bag of bones but be concerned with your soul.

The next phrase is very interesting to me. We are to fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. A couple of words we need to make sure we get the proper understanding of.

Fear is the Greek word φοβηθήτε (phobēthēte) not the idea of reverence but of truly being afraid. Don’t be fearful about your present physical body. But do be afraid of your soul and eternal body. Jesus makes clear here that there is a real and true physical punishment we call hell.

The word in our ESV “hell” is the Greek word γέεννη (geennē), not the city in Ohio, but the eternal destination we most often refer to as hell. Look at what Jesus says here: We are to fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in γέεννη (geennē).

Destroy is the Greek word ἀπολέσαι (apolesai) which does not mean to annihilate but to bring to ruin, often used to speak of

eternal death. So Jesus is reminding the apostles to not worry about their physical bodies in the here and now, but to be concerned with eternity and where and with whom they spend eternity. Very often people are very short-sighted, only looking at right now and not the future.

*Matthew 10:29–31 (ESV)*

*29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

Jesus then uses a comparison. He tells the Apostles that sparrows are not worth much. They can serve as an alternative to doves for poor people to bring for sacrifices and can be purchased two for a penny. Yet not a single sparrow falls to the ground without the Father knowing about it. We should interpret the phrase “apart from your Father” as “**without His involvement.**” Not a single sparrow, not worth much, falls to the ground without the involvement of the Father.

God is involved in the basically worthless birds, knows how many hairs on your head, how much more of value are you to God than a worthless bird. The low cost of the birds shows there relatively low value. The fact that God numbers our hair reflects the reality that we are of high value to God.

Don't worry about the oppression, about the slander, the lies, you are more valuable to you than the birds that God remains involved with. He sees everything and He knows everything.

That should give us some comfort and encouragement. If God is actively involved in what happens to worthless birds, how much more is He going to be involved in your life?

*Matthew 10:32–33 (ESV)*

*32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

Jesus now completes His point. Because we should not be afraid of the persecution of man, the slander by man, there should be nothing that prevents us from confessing Jesus before others. Keep the context tight here. Jesus is instructing His apostles to go out into a hostile world that will challenge them, use every method they can to go after them and oppress them. But they serve a God that knows how many hairs are their head and highly values them, and those who oppress them will be found out, so what is there to stop them from proclaiming Jesus? Now take that very same thought and apply it to yourself and your situation.

You are called by Jesus to represent Him. He loves you and knows every hair on your head. You are very valuable to Him. Since He cares for you and will bring retribution on those, who

oppress you, what is there to prevent you from speaking out for Jesus? The answer to the question should be nothing should prevent you from speaking out for Jesus.

The picture that Jesus is painting here is: So what if they kill you? So what if they slander you? So what if they oppress you? They will be dealt with by God who highly values you and can see to it that those who reject Jesus and go after you are dealt with and their punishment is for a really long time.

### Not Peace, But a Sword (10:34-39)

This next section seems a little strange to many people. Back in:

*Matthew 5:9 (ESV)*

*9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

Jesus talks about the peacemakers. While this is often used today to speak of law enforcement, Jesus is really talking about those who follow Him. But here in chapter 10 He tells us that peace is not something that always follows His slaves and those who speak out for Him.

*Matthew 10:34 (ESV)*

*34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

The wording here seems a little difficult for us. Jesus' goal is not to cause a disruption, but He knows that will be the result. Jesus tells His apostles that He is sending out to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, that the message will not bring peace, rainbows, and unicorns. The spread of the gospel will bring about difficulty. Jesus use of the word sword here underscores that there will be significant trouble in the world because of the spread of the gospel.

*Matthew 10:35–36 (ESV)*

*35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.*

The spread of the gospel will result in father and son being divided. One will follow Jesus, and one will not. We see that happening in record numbers in the Islamic world. When someone comes to Jesus, they become outcasts in their own family.

We should not interpret this as it was Jesus goal or intent to sperate families. It is just the normal and natural outcome of some in a family turning to Jesus and some not.

I should point out that Jesus is quoting from Micah chapter 7 here in 35 and 36.

*Matthew 10:37 (ESV)*

*37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

This verse is often misunderstood. Jesus is not seeking to divide families. He is not saying you can't love your mom if you follow Him. What He is saying is that you have to love Him more than mom and dad, or even your little baby. I want you to think of the immensity of that. We are to love God more than anything else, even our families. That is really hard. It can only happen through the power of the Holy Spirit working in you.

*Matthew 10:38 (ESV)*

*38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Jesus also told His apostles and us, that we are to take up our cross. This was more than a year before He would go to the cross that He uses this as an illustration. I have to imagine that they could not understand then what He was saying. It would not be until after He actually went to the cross and then rose from the grave.

So what does Jesus mean by taking up our cross? I think that Jesus is telling His apostles and us that those who are worthy of Him are those who have counted the cost, observed that it will be costly to follow Him but do it anyway. After all Jesus became

a little lower than the angels, became part of His creation, jumped into the box, not just to become King, but to first suffer and die to save those who were His enemies. If He was willing to do that for me, I should be prepared to put Him first in my life. It really is the only appropriate thing to do.

*Matthew 10:39 (ESV)*

*39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

We have to figure out what Jesus means here, “find his life.” If your world is all about caring for your desires and your own goals and not following Jesus then you will have found your life. If you are truly focused on yourself and your desires this is truly your best life right now. Because afterward, it is not going to be great or even good at all.

It is only when we are focused on serving Jesus and what He wants us to do that we truly have found eternal life. Not that you receive eternal life by what you do, but the reality is that you can only truly serve Jesus when you have eternal life and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

It is really an either/or. You going to serve yourself or are you going to serve Jesus?

## Rewards for Receiving the Kingdom Worker (10:40-42)

As Jesus comes to the end of His instructions to the apostles, He brings the mood up just a little bit.

*Matthew 10:40–41 (ESV)*

*40 “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. 41 The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.*

He tells them that there will be some that will receive the message they have to bring. When they receive our message they receive Jesus and when they receive Jesus they receive the Father. When we are good kingdom slaves, when we are worthy of Jesus and follow Him doing what He wants us to do the message will be heard. When someone then accepts the messenger and the message their life is transformed.

We also need to remember that Jesus is sending the apostles out to speak about the kingdom, that is the messianic kingdom. Old Testament understandings were still present. So when Jesus talks about receiving a prophet He was also saying that the person was receiving the will of God. It was an Old Testament understanding that when you received a prophet and the word

the prophet brought you also accepted the will of God in relation to that prophetic word. As the prophets moved around and were cared for others those who cared for them were blessed by God.

So going back to the “worthy” person we saw last week. The person or family that supported the mission the apostles were on, they would also be blessed through the supporting of the ministry of the kingdom. The reward for supporting the ministry is a sharing of the rewards gained in the ministry.

So, for example, in Laboule Haiti, the church we helped by purchasing their property for them, is growing and doing tremendous things since they have a permanent home. We share in the rewards for that ministry because we supported them.

As Tony and Cathy travel and lead in groups to plant churches we share in those rewards because support them. God provides to those who minister and those who are worthy to care for them. Despite the difficulties, we are racking up rewards to lay at Jesus' feet in worship of Him. What a great day that will be. What a blessing that is, especially as you go through difficulty.

*Matthew 10:42 (ESV)*

*42 And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”*

Often we think of Jesus here talking about children. But in reality, Jesus is referring to these men that He is sending out, the apostles.

There is some debate about what Jesus means “little ones.” I think that Jesus refers to them as little ones in a euphemistic way to signify the way that the world looks at these men and by extension us. The world looks at followers of Jesus as insignificant and not worthy of much attention. So Jesus, kind of tongue in cheek, calls us little ones.

You can also interpret “little ones” as those who are willing to trust and have faith in Jesus, to match the faith and trust that little children do in their parents. Either way, Jesus says that those who support those who are His disciples will not lose their reward. Because true support of the work of Jesus comes only from those who truly follow Jesus.

## Conclusion

We have come to the end of Jesus’ instructions to His apostles as He was sending them out to preach about the coming messianic kingdom. But what do we do with these instructions?

Jesus has given some very specific instructions and warnings to His apostles. What have we learned?

We have learned that Jesus suffered to save us and we will suffer in following Him. Remember last week Jesus said when not if they attack you.

We don't have any reason to fear what the world can do to us because we serve the mighty king and He will care for us. It is God who protects our eternal life and provides us to us rewards.

Jesus also reminds us that loyalty to Him is more important than our family and friends loyalty. We must be willing to focus on eternal life and not on this life. After all it is eternal life that is really important.

We also need not be afraid of what the world will do to us, the damage to our reputation through lies and slander, because the truth will ultimately be told.

We should always look for ways and opportunities to serve Jesus and help others who serve Jesus. We should be in it for the long haul and not short gain or our own glory.

Jesus told His apostles He was sending them into a war, a war that would divide family and friends, a war that would cause a lot of disharmonies. We have no reason to think today will be any different than it was for the Apostles. But Jesus also reminded us about the rewards for enduring to the end in service of Him.

I am working for the rewards. I am working for "well done, good and faithful servant." What are you working for?

Let's Pray!