

It is Hard to Follow Jesus Matthew 10:16-25

We have been working our way through the Gospel of Matthew. In recent weeks we have seen Jesus training His disciples and call 12 of the specifically to be His apostles, His representatives, His sent out ones.

Last week we saw Jesus send out the 12 into towns around Galilee. He told them to trust Him and not take extra stuff for the mission. He also told them to scope out the towns and homes and look for someone worthy. We discovered last week that Jesus was telling them to look for someone that was like-minded or supported the following of Jesus.

This our pericope is still focused on Jesus, sending out His 12 apostles. He is giving them instructions before they go out to minister. These instructions are not what you would call a rah-rah speech, they should be viewed more as a does of reality. Let's dig into the text this morning and see what Jesus is instructing His apostles, the ones He has sent out, recognizing that He has commissioned us in the same way.

Persecution Will Come (10:16-25)

Matthew 10:16 (ESV)

16 “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Remember we ended last week with Jesus in the middle of His commissioning of the 12 to go out to minister in Galilee. We pick up His training of them, picking up when the message gets difficult.

Jesus says that He is sending them out like sheep into the midsts of wolves. Back in:

Matthew 7:15 (ESV)

15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

During the sermon on the mount, Jesus told His disciples that they were sheep and the false teachers were ravenous wolves. Jesus knows that the world will attack what we say and will come after us. But Jesus also gives us some instructions on how to deal with it.

Matthew 10:16 (ESV)

16 “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Since we are as weak and unoffensive as sheep are, we are to be wise like serpents yet innocent like doves. In our house, we love to watch the show Guardians of the Glades. This show follows a team as they go into the Everglades looking for pythons and other invasive critters. The snakes they track are very cautious and pay attention to what is going on around them. They don't want to get captured, and so they pay attention to everything going on around them. In that same way, when we are involved in the ministry, you have to have a sense about you and what you are doing. Particularly what you say and do. Don't give false teachers ammunition by posting something on Facebook or tweeting something out that puts you or your savior in a bad light. The enemy is just going to seize upon that and go after you even more.

At the same time we are to be innocent like doves. Doves are innocent in that they don't act like they see much danger around them. We are to be a combination of someone who is cautious and someone who is not. Don't put yourself needlessly in danger but also don't avoid doing what God has called you to do.

Matthew 10:17–18 (ESV)

17 Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.

Jesus tells His apostles to be on guard concerning men. The word men here is used generically to speak of human beings, not just males.

Jesus says that men will work against you through government action or religious action. In the environment that Jesus was sending out the apostles, it was quite easy to make a false accusation to the High Priest about the religious activity of another. You really only needed 2 or 3 witnesses to bring an accusation. It was even easier to do so to the Romans who had soldiers all over in the region. You basically could go up to a soldier and tell them that so and so was not being obedient to Cesar.

We just completed our study in Sunday School of the book of Acts. The book ends with Paul in prison because some Jews claimed he brought a Gentile into the temple. That ended up getting him ultimately taken to Rome before the Emperor.

Jesus reminded His apostles how easy it was to use the power of religion and government against them when they are serving God. It is really no different today. A couple of years ago in the Mall of the Americas in Minnesota a former white Muslim who

had turned to Christ was having a conversation with someone. The conversation turned to Christ. He was answering a question posed to him by two Somali women. He did not go to the mall to solicit, he did not approach them, they approached him. He was eventually arrested for trespassing at the largest mall in the United States. Someone was offended that he dare talk to Muslim women about Christ. The prosecution eventually dropped the case, but it took more than a year. Don't think that it won't happen here in the US. This is not the only case; there are many others.

There are many cases of zoning boards, not letting churches start in residential or even commercial zones. Even when mosques are just down the street. There are all sorts of cases where government power is used to suppress the gospel. In other countries, it is worse. Go to Canada and try to witness on the street or casually say that you do not believe in abortion and you believe God intended Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. That is now against the law in Canada.

The Anglican church worldwide made a decision recently to not permit homosexual weddings. Many churches in the US are being forced out of the denomination because of that decision.

Losing their property and everything in it over the fight.

Satan uses government power and religious power to fight the spread of the gospel and works against the same governments and religious groups from working against him.

Matthew 10:19–20 (ESV)

*19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.
20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

Notice how Jesus begins this sentence. He says, When not if they deliver you over. The world is going to work against you. There is no question about it. If you are busy serving God, Satan will use whatever he can to fight you. It may be others around you, it may be the government, it may be other religious groups. Jesus is not hiding from His apostles the reality that it will be difficult to serve Jesus. That is not the message that new believers want to hear. It is not the message that is necessarily conducive to attracting people to the Lord. Tell someone that you are trying to lead to Christ that if they follow Jesus, things will get difficult for them. That doesn't work so well. I want you to think about that for a moment.

If following Jesus, doing what He commands, is difficult, and is not conducive to attracting others to Him, why does Jesus tell us about it. It is because He has promised to be honest with us and because it is not about what we do, it is all about Him. Jesus does not worry about telling people who are His followers that it will be difficult because He is the one that is leading and drawing. It is not the people that are following.

Jesus says when they deliver you over, work against you, we should not be anxious about how you are to respond. I want you to look at this verse closely.

When they do turn you over, don't worry about how to respond. Because you will be led in what to say by the Holy Spirit. Of course, Jesus is talking to His closest followers, including Judas, and He recognized that these followers would be led in the proper response. In fact, true followers of Jesus will be speaking from God with God speaking through them.

We just have to look at the lives of the apostles after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Of course Judas failed because he was not a true follower. Peter, John, and the boys all spoke boldly when confronted by religious groups and the government. With the exception of John, they all went to their graves boldly for God.

Matthew 10:21–22 (ESV)

21 Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, 22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

If was not bad enough that Satan will use religious people and the government to go against you, even family will turn against you.

Brother will go against brother, child against parent. Think about what happens in the Muslim world when someone follows Jesus. They are ostracized from family, disowned by parents.

In the book Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus, Nebel Koresh talks about how he came to Christ. Most of his family rejected him and his message. There are accounts coming out of the middle east where Muslims are turning to Jesus at a record pace, of these new followers of Jesus losing their job, their family, and everything they have, just to follow Jesus.

What Jesus says here was true then and remains true today. Think about what Jesus must have been thinking as He told His apostles their families would reject them. His already had. His brothers did not believe HIM until after He was dead and then was resurrected. There must have been a sense of pain and reality in His words.

Look again at verse 22.

Matthew 10:22 (ESV)

22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

There are two really important factoids in this verse.

The hatred that the world brings to bear on you is not because of you but because of Jesus. They hate you because they hate Jesus. Satan has led humanity in this quest against God right from the very beginning. In the Garden of Eden it began and

continue right through until the new heaven and the new earth. That is just the reality of it.

Now, look at the last phrase. “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” That is perhaps the most confusing statement in this passage. To understand this we must remember the context.

Jesus is sending out His apostles to preach the kingdom to Israel. He tells them they will encounter opposition from family, friends, religious people, and the government. He then says that salvation comes at the end of the persecution or opposition. In the context of Israel and the kingdom, Jesus is talking about at the end of the tribulation when Israel is ready for the kingdom and ready for her collective salvation.

So when we extrapolate out from the instructions that Jesus is giving to his apostles in teaching about the kingdom to Israel and apply the principles to the church teaching about the coming kingdom, there is salvation at the end as well. The end of the period of the church or the church age is the rapture in which the church is taken to heaven for the marriage supper of the lamb.

Jesus is not speaking of individual salvation but the collective or corporate salvation. I have to say that many scholars look at this differently, but I cannot see another way to legitimately interpret Jesus’ words here in this context.

Comfort for the Kingdom Worker 10:24-25

Matthew 10:24–25 (ESV)

24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

In context, these verses make more sense. The context is Jesus the master is sending out His apostles, His disciples, His servants, His slaves, to minister. So if the master is mistreated how can the lessor, the slave, the disciple, expect to be treated better. Jesus had just said that they hate you because they actually hate me. There is no way you can expect as a follower of Jesus to be treated by the world better than the world treated or treats Jesus.

The Pharisees had already attributed to Satan the supernatural work of Jesus, you only have to think about how much worse they spoke out against Jesus.

So what He is saying here is since they have already called me, the head of the house, Beelzebub how much more will they bring against you.

Jesus was intending that His disciples, His apostles, understand that following Him would be difficult with many times of trouble, but at the end of the struggle is the joy of being in His presence for eternity. That same message is true for us as well. We need to endure to the end and then enjoy His presence for eternity. Not that we are saved by going through the difficulty. That is not what Jesus was saying and is not what I am saying. We are saved through faith by God grace. But at the end of our travels we will be in His presence and in the joy that being with brings.

There will be struggles along the way, if you are truly following Him. No slave of Jesus will get away with not having struggles, not being confronted, not being attacked. Satan conserves his energy for those that appose him and follow Jesus. If you follow Jesus expect to have difficulty. I recognize that is not a great recruitment poster, but that is not how recruitment for followers of Jesus works.

Let's Pray!