

Matthew 10:16-31

The Cost of being a Faithful Disciple

Section 1: 16-20 – Trust in God’s Strength and Power

¹⁶ “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, ²⁰ because it isn’t you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you. (CSB)

Within our culture we value strength and power. For men that is manifested physically. Even as young men society, for the most part, teaches or at least influences us to see emotions, crying or losing as weakness. We are encouraged to “man up”. For women strength and power is more manifested emotionally. Society teaches our young women to be self-confident, to have a positive body image, to not be reliant upon a man. Women are encouraged to “be independent”, specifically, centered around mental and emotional independence. Now, I understand these two points are over generalizations but the concept of our culture is true. Strength and power are highly valued regardless of how it’s packaged.

Jesus has a very different approach to accomplishing His mission. He doesn’t use strength and power in the American sense, but He uses grace and truth. The disciples were sent out without human power but with spiritual power. Jesus sends His disciples out as “sheep among wolves.” In case you are unaware, sheep would never stand a chance against a wolf. Why? The truth is God doesn’t need our abilities, strength, power, knowledge or wisdom. God desires us to experience and rely upon His abilities, strength, power, knowledge and wisdom. Because accomplishing all that God calls us to do is impossible in our own strength, we desperately need Jesus.

Jesus explains that because you are as sheep among wolves, you must be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. Craig Blomberg in his commentary on Matthew states it this way: *“With incisive, proverbial language, Jesus calls the Twelve to exhibit great acumen without sinful compromise. ‘Innocent’ literally means unmixed and refers to purity of intention.”* This command comes with a warning. You must be this (wise and innocent) because this (warning) will happen. What is going to happen? They will be beaten, flogged and brought before nations. Jesus doesn’t say “if” you are handed over, He says, *“when they hand you over...”*. Persecution for a faithful disciple of Jesus is unavoidable. We are not told to fight or rebel or overthrow such governments, Jesus tells the disciples to not worry because the Spirit will give you the words to speak in that moment.

This passage reminds us that Jesus isn’t bringing Christianity to the world through force but through faithful followers proclaiming the gospel whether by their life or by their death. We, as believers, have a message worth dying for; worth giving up our freedom for; worth being wise and innocent.

Application

We need to be people that seek after wisdom and innocence. These two attributes seem to be lacking in the American church today. Generally speaking, we are biblically illiterate (not wise) and we often compromise our morality (not innocent). Craig Blomberg states it this way: *“Shrewdness and integrity form a crucial combination not often found in the Christian church. In fact, we more often invert the two, proving to be as guilty as serpents and as stupid as doves!”* Herschel Hobbs puts it this way: *“Alone (shrewdness) produces evil and (innocence) results in gullibility. But together they produce the spirit which enabled the early Christians to successfully storm citadels of sin.”* Let us be people that seek true wisdom found in the Scriptures and commit to live out the Scriptures by being morally unstained by the world.

This passage teaches us that in order to be a faithful disciple we must trust in God's strength and power. God's way is better than our way. We should trust in God's plan (wisdom and moral excellence). Why should we trust God's plan more than our own? Because God has a much clearer vision and understanding of life than we do. It's time we started trusting Him. Isaiah 55:8 reminds us that God's plans and thoughts are superior to ours:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways." This is the Lord's declaration. (CSB)

While we may not always understand His ways, we can trust that His ways are always better.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Do you find yourself relying upon your own strength or power when you face difficult times in life? Why or why not?
- ❖ How can we practically seek to rely upon God's strength and power when we live our day to day lives?
- ❖ Have you ever considered that your wisdom and morality are your greatest weapons in your spiritual war?

Section 2: 21-25 – Seek the Approval of God

²¹ "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. ²² You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. For truly I tell you, you will not have gone through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ A disciple is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his master. If they called the head of the house 'Beelzebul,' how much more the members of his household! (CSB)

We love being loved. It's a natural human reality. But should we compromise our faith, beliefs, personality or relationships to be loved by all? This is a difficult position for Christians. We are commanded to love all people unconditionally. Meaning, even if others hate us, we are to show love. The reality every Christian must come to terms with is that the world will hate us because of our faith in Jesus.

There will be a point, even in America, that all Christians will be faced with hatred from the world. Family members turning on family members, governments turning against its people and friends will turn on friends. As much grace and love that is in the gospel message, it is shocking how much hate this message causes in people's hearts. I think we often forget that we are warriors in a constant spiritual war. And like any war there will be sides chosen and people hurt.

Regarding the disciples specifically, Jesus tells them to flee to other towns when persecution comes. Not that we should avoid all persecution at all cost, but we are not necessarily to run into the fire of persecution to sacrifice ourselves on the altar of martyrdom. For example, that's why believers in China meet in what we call the secret church and not in the town squares. They aren't "running" from persecution, they are being wise and seeking to spread the gospel. But when persecution is unavoidable, we walk in confidence knowing that the Spirit will give us the words and courage we need to stand for God's glory.

Some things in life can surprise you or catch you off guard. Jesus doesn't want His disciples to be caught off guard when it comes to persecution. He explains to them that they will be hated because He is hated. If Jesus is considered evil, how much more will they consider His followers to be evil? Have you ever heard the phrase, "guilty by association"? When we claim to be Christian, assumptions will be made about us. Being a Christian can be seen as a positive or as a negative depending on the situation. We should not be surprised when being a Christian is seen in a negative light. Jesus healed, cast out demons, cared for the poor, fellowshiped with the rejected and loved unconditionally yet He was hated. We must remember that people are not rejecting us when they reject Christianity; they are rejecting God Himself. The underlining reason behind the rejection of Jesus, is that our sinful nature despises (hates) the truth. We prefer to keep our sin and hide it in the darkness. But Jesus brings all things to light,

our thoughts, intentions and actions. It's hard to "take a long look into the mirror" when your thoughts, intentions and actions are evil in the sight of a holy God. Ultimately, sin is the root cause for the hatred of Jesus.

Application

As believers we need to seek the approval of God not man. Memorizing Galatians 1:10 would be a good start.

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. (CSB)

Too often we try to be accepted by the world. We are to be in the world but not of it. We are to be living for the glory of God not the glory of man. 1 John 2:15-17 is a good reminder about the world and our relationship with it:

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions—is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does the will of God remains forever. (CSB)

This can be difficult to balance (in the world but not of it) and that is why we should be walking through life together. We need others to help us along the way, to help us keep the right perspective and to not forsake our first love. This is where the church becomes extremely valuable to us. The church is a wonderful gift that we should use for our good and His glory. We are to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) so that no one has to struggle through life alone.

In order to be a faithful disciple, we must seek the approval of God rather than the approval of the world. Being a faithful disciple means that we give up the things of the world for the Kingdom of God. And we do this together as a family of believers.

Discussion Question

- ❖ Do you have moments where you seek the approval of man more than God?
- ❖ Why do we so easily give up our morality to "fit in" or to please others?
- ❖ How do you think you would respond to persecution?
- ❖ We are promised the power of the Spirit in the face of persecution. How should this truth impact your faith in the face of persecution?

Section 3: 26-31 – You are Valued

²⁶ "Therefore, don't be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won't be uncovered and nothing hidden that won't be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Aren't two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. (CSB)

Fear can be a powerful emotion. It can cause us to do things we normally wouldn't do. Jesus tells us to not be afraid of those that can bring persecution. Why should we not fear? We are only to fear Him who can destroy both soul and body. As bad as this life can possibly get...it is temporary. Romans 8:18 says, "¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us." (CSB)

To add comfort to this somber passage of Scripture, Jesus reminds us of our value. God knows where every bird is and what every bird is experiencing. As much as God cares for the birds, it is nothing compared to how God cares for us. Sometimes we just need to be reminded that we are valuable to God.

Our self-worth can quickly derail us. Many people “give up” because following God is too hard or they think they’ve messed up too much to be used by God. Our value is not found in the “world” or in “people”. Our value and the importance of our mission is found in God. No matter how difficult life gets we must remember that God has a “higher” way of life and we shouldn’t settle for something less. Even when we feel “unworthy” we must remember that Jesus has made us worthy.

We can’t escape hardship or failure, but in Christ we also can’t escape joy, peace and hope. Through Christ we can experience joy, peace and hope no matter what may be happening to us or around us. As faithful disciples we must fight to keep our eyes on Jesus. We must fight to see ourselves as God sees us. We must fight to live according to God’s will regardless of how “difficult” it may seem. The great news of the gospel reminds us that the strength and power we need to fight for the faith is freely given to us through the Holy Spirit. We don’t even have to fight our own battles. God fights for us. We just need to keep going. Keep walking. Keeping loving. Keep going to church. Keep reading the Bible. Keep praying. Just keep moving toward God and He will carry you through.

Application

To be a faithful disciple you have to remember your value. Your sinful nature and the enemy are continually trying to strip you of your value and worth. Whenever you feel invaluable or unworthy remind yourself that you are dearly loved. For example, read these passages of Scriptures:

Psalm 139:13-16

¹³ For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well. ¹⁵ My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret, when I was formed in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw me when I was formless; all my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began. (CSB)

Ephesians 2:4-9

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! ⁶ He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift— ⁹ not from works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. (CSB)

Praise be to God our value is not dependent upon our giftedness, abilities, faithfulness, goodness or personality. Our value is found in the goodness of Jesus that is freely added to our account through the gospel.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Do you find yourself needing validation from the world or people from time to time? How does that impact your self-worth?
- ❖ How do you respond when people reject you or hate you?
- ❖ Why is it important to find your value or worth in God alone?
- ❖ Are you currently fighting for the faith? Or do you give up easily?
- ❖ Why is it easy to give up on God (for example: stop going to church, stop praying, stop reading the Bible)?
- ❖ Why is it good that our value and worth is found in who Jesus is and not in who we are?