

September 1, 2024

Matt 10:16-22, 26-39
Persecution, Fear, and a Sword

Christianity ain't no cakewalk. Our faith in Christ will cost us. I desperately want to believe there is nothing I am not willing to face and there is nothing I am not willing to give up for Jesus for I believe this is the requirement of discipleship. And yet I recognize that getting to this place in our faith does not happen instantaneously. Neither can it be achieved in our own strength. I am trusting that the work that the Lord has started in me the Lord will bring to completion, as scriptures promises (Phil 1:6). But this does not mean we simply sit on the sideline and wait. No, we must get in the game because practice brings about much improvement. Faith is meant to be practiced, and life will afford us a plethora of opportunities to practice our faith. Church, Christianity ain't no cakewalk. As a follower of Christ, we will have some good days and bad days. We will have some lonely nights and some hills to climb. And maybe our good days will outweigh our bad days, but those bad days will be hard and most often unwelcomed. But rest assured everything one goes through for Jesus will be worth in the end, in the life to come. I'm so thankful this morning that Jesus in his earthy ministry did not hide the hard truth from us. Today, we encounter such a teaching and to assist us in our digestion of the text, I've chosen to break this teaching into three parts. Part I, persecution V16-22. Part II, fear V26-33. Part III, a sword V34-39. Let's dig in.

Part 1, persecution. It would be easy to read verses 16-22 and believe that you/we are far removed from this warning of Jesus. That what Jesus is alluding to is for the immediate listeners and that time only. But these words are for us, as well. And we do well to listen.

Persecution, the mistreatment of one due to his /her faith in Christ, happens in the United States of America, all the time. Many disciples have been passed over for advancement at work because of their faith in Christ. Many disciples have been maligned and lied on because of their willingness to profess the name of Jesus. Many have been mocked and made fun of due to their way of life in faithfulness to Jesus. And many a disciple have faced alienation and scorn because of their faithfulness to the word of God. And yes, disciples may not be facing jail or death for their faith, yet, in the United States but persecution is well and alive here. And though most disciples are not looking for trouble, rest assured when you live for Jesus, when you boldly and lovingly profess his name trouble will find you. **V16-22** “¹⁶ Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 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. 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. 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.” Church, persecution will find us and when persecution comes **how we respond will either glorify God/Jesus or discredit our profession of faith in him.**

2 Tim 3:12-13 “¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

Matt 5:11-12 “¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

1 Peter 3:14-16 “¹⁴But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

Part II, fear. Fear is a reality that no one avoids or can avoid. There is not a human being who has walked the face of the earth that has not been afraid at one time or another. I am sure of this. Fear can be healthy and unhealthy. Healthy fear (reverence) keeps us out of trouble, out of harm's way, and biblically, produces obedience, even boldness and courage. Unhealthy fear can debilitate us and, biblically, lead to compromise. That is, we will refuse to speak what we know to be true scripturally for fear of being discomfited by those who are offended or disagree with the word of God. We may very well fear the possibility of persecution, but we must never allow that fear to lead us to compromise. At best, persecution results in our physical death. At worst, compromise results in physical and spiritual death. Ultimately, we have nothing to fear because God is in complete control and the victory is won. **V28-33** “²⁸And 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. ²⁹Are 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. 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.” **Fear is unavoidable, but healthy fear (reverence) is the goal.**

Proverbs 29:25 “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.”

John 16:33 “³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

1 Tim 1:7-8 “⁷ for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. ⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,”

Part III, a sword. Other than the fear of death, I believe, nothing has pull on us like our love for our family. As the old saying goes, family above all else. Jesus, knowing this, gives his followers a stern warning against this type of family loyalty. He makes forcibly clear that loyalty to him must take priority over all things, including family and life itself.

This is not hyperbole, nor is it a parable. Jesus means exactly what he is saying. V34-39

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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. 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. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not

worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” We may struggle with how what he instructs is possible, but we should not discount his words. **Jesus will not accept be second fiddle to anything or anyone.** As such, he wields a sword.

Matt 12:46-50 ⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. ⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Luke 9:57-64 ⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” ⁵⁹ To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹ Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶² Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Christianity ain't no cakewalk. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.