

Jesus' Representatives
Matthew 9:35-38; 10:16-25; 28:16-20
The Laurel Center
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Main Idea: Jesus warns us about persecution as he commissions us to spread his gospel.

Introduction

Many Christians are not fully prepared to bear witness about Jesus with the people they work with, and now with and live with. Christians have been lax in preparing their fellow believers to talk about Jesus in an effective way, answer questions unbelievers have and be prepared for the rejection that may follow. Because of this fear of speaking about Christ off-the-cuff in the rejection that may sever the relationships with friends and family, many Christians do not even attempt to share the gospel of Jesus Christ today.

By looking at these three passages in the book of Matthew we will focus in on Jesus' words concerning evangelism and persecution. Jesus did not hold anything back as he spoke about these things. The apostles and other believers were ready for evangelism because of their personal time with Jesus himself and also for persecution because he told them it would come. We must train one another to answer the tough questions about Jesus, the Bible and God. We must also prepare them for the possible persecution that may come if people reject Jesus and his message.

Matthew 9:35–38

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. **36** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. **37** Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; **38** therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

I. Jesus evangelized with word and deed (Matthew 9:35-38).

A He healed the sick and worked with compassion.

- 1 Today evangelism is often separated into preaching the gospel and what is called compassion ministries. Compassion ministries refer to things like the healing of the sick and miracles.
- 2 But when Jesus presented himself he did not separate these two things but did both of them simultaneously. Jesus is the bottle for the church today in evangelism.

- 3 People who do not believe in Jesus are still hungry to hear about him. When Christians are not willing to talk about him it creates the problem of making Jesus look like he is not the answer.
- 4 **Illustration:** Choosing to not speak up about Jesus when the world is hungry to hear about him is like keeping a cold glass of water from a person who has just come out of the desert. The very thing that they crave they are being denied by those who have Jesus more in abundance than anyone else. More important than the possibility of rejection when we share Jesus is the fact that we keep Jesus from those who desperately need him while the time is running out.
- 5 One of the problems with using Jesus' method today is that the church lacks the power of the Holy Spirit to do what Jesus did in healing people and setting them free from demonic forces.
- 6 Because the church lacks visibility that Jesus had simply from not seeking the Holy Spirit and longing to do what Jesus did, the church gives up its voice to speak to the world's issues.
- 7 The world is hurting from the pains of sickness and sin but the church has lost its effectiveness because it has insulated itself from the outside world. Because it is no longer involved in what is happening around it the church has given up its right to speak to these issues.
- 8 **Application:** We need to follow Jesus' model of reaching out to those around us instead of cowering away from communicating with them and living among them. We need to seek the Lord once again for that power that comes from the father, the Holy Spirit's power to give us that boldness to witness about Jesus again and to demonstrate his power against the forces of evil in darkness in our world. We do not have to live as the world does to live among them. The church must find its voice and the ability to speak with power again.

B He spoke to the people about who he was and his ministry.

- 1 Jesus demonstrated that he is the Messiah back then and we must let people know who he is because the time is short and there are so many who have never heard about Jesus.
- 2 Jesus himself told us that there are many out there that want to hear but there are not enough people to tell them about him. In the famous phrase, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."
- 3 In another gospel the phrase talks about the fields being white with harvest much like the grain harvest. You know that people are ready when they are mature like the grain.

- 4 It is up to the Holy Spirit to guide his children into the proper relationships and timing to tell people about Jesus. By his prompting Christians are able to see the advantages and opportunities to preach the word in word and in deed.
- 5 Jesus also mentioned praying to the Lord of the harvest. He says to pray earnestly to the Lord so that the Lord will provide the workers. Only the Lord can prepare people for evangelism.
- 6 Evangelism is vital to seeing people come to Christ but it can also be very dangerous impending on the environment and the situation. The danger of persecution and even death looms in many places.
- 7 While many are open to hearing more about Jesus there are some that do not want to hear about Jesus or want others to hear about him.
- 8 These people are opponents to the gospel and would like to see it silenced in their areas. It can be dangerous to share the Christian faith with others and it is not easy to share in these areas.
- 9 We must trust in the Lord that he will be with us and take care of us whenever we share the gospel. Rejection of the gospel and our testimony is most likely in some cases. This should not dissuade us from Sherry Jesus with those who need him.

Matthew 10:16–23

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. **23** When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

II. Jesus warns that persecution will come as we witness (Matthew 10:16-23)..

A He teaches us how to deal with opponents.

- 1 Jesus’ warning comes to us very clear and open about the challenges of evangelism. He did not shield us from these dangers but openly warned us that they will happen.

- 2 He did not trick us into a dangerous position but was upfront about the issues of teaching about him in a world that hates him and us for being associated with them.
- 3 Rejection is the least of the visceral responses to the gospel by its opponents. They do not just come after the message and after Jesus but they will come after us for following him.
- 4 People and areas closed to the message of the gospel will do anything they can in the physical realm to stop it from going forth. Their weapons range from offense to the message, rejection of the message, Jesus and his followers to outright persecution of Jesus, followers.
- 5 All of these weapons are considered persecution. We suffer them at the hands of people who do not want to hear the gospel or that others here at. We put ourselves out there for Jesus because he is worth sharing.
- 6 Jesus' warnings tell us about our disadvantage. We do not play dirty in our methods of sharing Jesus. We are outright and honest about who he is and the dangers of worshiping and serving him in these cultures.
- 7 Jesus tells us that he sends us out as sheep among the wolves. Wolves are a predator of sheep. But now that we are prepared to face the wolves we are not disadvantaged.
- 8 Jesus also tells us that our best response is to be innocent but also very wise or cunning. We must find ways to be courageous and share the gospel the matter what. We must outwit the walls.
- 9 Jesus is not left us alone even in this task because he has given us the Holy Spirit who will help us by speaking through us wiser words that we could come up with ourselves.

B He describes opposition by family members.

- 1 Because of the revolutionary nature of the gospel it will unfortunately divide families between those who believe in those who oppose the gospel.
- 2 This is not Jesus' intent but it is the unfortunate result of those who oppose Jesus' message and person. Even the most intimate relationships bonded by love can be torn by the gospel message and our allegiance to Christ.
- 3 **Illustration:** Rejection can be dangerous even from family members who love us from birth. In the Islamic community they have something called honor killings.. These allow for family members to kill family members that turn away from the Islamic faith. They are sanctioned by the faith in the sense to keep the person from falling away from Islam. They are reasoned out as preemptive strikes to keep the person from falling into the other religion and are sanctioned because they keep the person from

completely falling away from Islam before they die and their eternal fate is sealed.

- 4 Persecution includes anything from rejection of the sender of the message to death. That is a pretty steep price to pay for sharing Jesus but Jesus is with us in these times and gives us the strength.
- 5 Persecution can also yield the results of making Jesus a legend that people want to believe in. In Roman times when the Romans killed a Christian and the Christian became a martyr for Christ it actually made the public sympathetic to their cause and showed that they were serious about Jesus and their faith in him.
- 6 Jesus has also provided us with the Holy Spirit has our defender when we share the gospel. The Holy Spirit gives us the words to speak and makes us his mouthpiece.
- 7 We don't even have to prepare to speak about Jesus to others. The words come to us and sound better than anything we could conjure up on our own because Jesus is using his Holy Spirit to speak through us.
- 8 Our fear of not knowing what to say when we are asked questions turns and encourage as we serve Christ in witness about his change in our lives. The Holy Spirit becomes Jesus' advocate through us.
- 9 **Application:** our fear about not knowing what to say to people or being rejected by the our friends is canceled out by Jesus' assurances that the Holy Spirit will speak through us and give us the exact words to speak in the situation. The Holy Spirit will give us the information we need to defend Jesus in every question. The best way to be ready for witnessing to others is to know the Bible as well as possible and to share your own life story about what Jesus has done in you. Jesus does not just send a message through our mouths but through our hands. He is with us all the time and gives us the ability to speak for him. We do not need to fear sharing Jesus with others because he helps us to do it.

Matthew 28:16–20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

III. Jesus commissions us to preach and teach about him (Matthew 28:16-20).

A He has been given all authority.

- 1 We do not need to be afraid when we share our faith with others because Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. He is the master of everything and we have him as our advocate and helper.
- 2 Jesus gives us everything we need in abundance. He also controls everything around us. It's like having a secret agent behind enemy lines.
- 3 We can be assured that everything that happens to us as we witness about Jesus has been sanctioned by him because he is in ultimate control. He gives us the courage to face whatever people will want to do to us.
- 4 Jesus has authority over all of the forces of evil in the world. He will not allow them to do anything to us that he cannot take care of. Even if we are murdered for our faith we go to heaven.
- 5 One of my mentors was fond of telling us that, "You can't scare a Christian with staff. If we die we go to heaven." In one sense persecution through death is sending us to heaven so that we can be with Jesus.
- 6 Christians do not seek to die for Christ but if it occurs they are more than prepared for the consequences. It gives them courage to face persecution and be strong for Christ. Even in death Christians make their best case for the reality of Jesus' rulership.
- 7 Jesus has told us that he has the authority and power over every circumstance in our lives and we must trust him. He will not allow anything to happen to us that he cannot take care of.
- 8 We have his assurance that he is in control even when it feels like the situation is spinning out of control. We need not fear even the worst the enemy has to offer. Jesus has a way to counteract whatever evil they plan for us. We are unstoppable!

B His disciples are promised his presence.

- 1 With all of these assurances Jesus finally proclaims the great commission in which he calls us to preach the gospel and teach about Jesus everywhere that we go.
- 2 The command is not in going but in preaching and teaching. It is better translated, "In your going preach and make disciples of all nations." Wherever we are in the world we are a missionary for Jesus.
- 3 Evangelism and discipleship are not separated for Jesus. Even in his great commission he tells us to do both individualism and discipleship: once. As we talk about Christ we are not only being persuasive in our speech but we are answering questions and beginning to disciple people.

- 4 Discipleship is simply an apprenticeship a way of teaching people who are younger in Christ and you. It is a messy job but Jesus will help us with every part of it.
- 5 Evangelism and discipleship go hand-in-hand and should not be separate. We continue to encourage each other that the gospel is true and everything that Jesus said about himself is true.
- 6 As we learn things we pass them on to those younger in Christ in us. This mentor ship is not just through words but through example. We encourage each other in the faith and enjoy the fellowship of other believers.
- 7 But the very best part of it is Jesus' promise right at the end of the book of Matthew. It is the same promise he gave to Moses in leading Israel and to all of the major leaders.
- 8 Jesus promises his presence as we face these trials and dangers. When we share Jesus with others our greatest promises that he is with us every step of the way.
- 9 Jesus is one in us, around us and surrounds us with his presence, his Holy Spirit's power to be bold in our witness and to demonstrate his power. Jesus' presence also gives us a piece in whatever we face whether it be rejection, torture or even death.
- 10 **Application:** the promise of Jesus' presence with us no matter what we may face for sharing Jesus with others is the greatest promise in the Bible. Jesus has not left us to our own devices and the results of our witnessing. He is not left us to be persecuted all alone. Like Stephen when he was stoned to death we will see Jesus when we are faced with these dire consequences of sharing our faith. The best part is if we are martyred for our faith in death we go to heaven where Jesus is physically. We cannot lose!

Conclusion

As we have seen, Jesus prepared us for the persecution that may happen when we share the gospel. But he made it an imperative to share the gospel, to teach others about Jesus and to baptize new believers in him. And he gave us the great promise of being with us. God's presence has always been the strength of believers when a gone to tough situations. Jesus prepared us also for the persecution that could happen. It is good to know that we have Jesus' presence with us and the Fellowship of believers everywhere. Jesus needs each one of us to be in the field harvesting the crop of unbelievers who will turn to Christ!