

# Matthew 10:16-33

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[0:00] I want to speak from Matthew chapter 10, verses 16 to 33, we're going through Matthew's gospel. And if you remember last week, you'll remember that Jesus was speaking to his ambassadors. He was speaking to those who were going to carry his mission to the world.

And we saw, didn't we, that those words were given to the apostles, they were not given directly to us, but they are given for us. And they were to go to the Jews and speak of the Jews in Matthew 10. And we learn lots about God's plan and the progress of God, about his priorities for mission, how God provides for us. And all those things are directed by the gospel.

But verse 16 shows us that Jesus is now looking further ahead. Look at verse 16. He's looking beyond the immediate concerns of the 12 disciples. And he's looking to that time beyond Pentecost, when the gospel would kind of go out to all peoples. When they would bring the gospel to the world, verse 18. It speaks of mission to the Gentiles, whereas verse 6 speaks about mission to the Jews. And if you look at verses 21 and 22, he's still speaking there, isn't about the church's mission, about us and our mission to the world. It stretches to today.

This turmoil of parents against children. Of this hatred. And what Jesus is doing this morning is he is shocking us. He is saying that in the mission of Jesus, which we carry out, we must expect persecution. And in the light of that, we must be ready to persevere to the end. So look at verse 16. It's an abiding principle. He says, doesn't he?

Behold, I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to the courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. It's really smart, isn't it? He's saying, to be saved, you've got to endure to the end. You've got to keep going. It means enduring to the end of the persecutions. Enduring to the end of our lives as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2:31] The Christian life is about keeping going. You fight the fight. You run the race so that you will receive the crown. And it really is an obvious passage about persecution and perseverance and endurance. And there will be much hardship in the Christian life and Christian witness.

What he's saying to you is, to live as a Christian, there will be danger and heartbreak. There will be disappointment and there will be struggle. And that is Christian discipleship. That is what it is like to be a Christian. And that is such a contrast, isn't it, to what we're often told by the church today. You know the words like celebration. Words like experience, like worship.

You don't find, do you, on any website that I've gone on this week about churches, on the front page, persecution, suffering, hatred. But there's no triumphalism with Jesus. There's no naivety either. He says, beware of people. They are like, verse 16, they are like wolves. That's pretty blunt. And he says you must therefore have wisdom and realism. You must be wise as servants, gentler stuff. And it's clear, isn't it, that Jesus is not naive of a Christian life. It's going to be tough right to the very end. And he says you must be surprised by that. You must be shocked by that. But why is it going to be so tough? Well the answer is very clear. And that is that the gospel of Jesus Christ always, always divides. So do you remember in chapter 9, verse 33, we saw it in the summer, don't we? That after all these miracles, the crowds, they marvel. We've never seen anything like it, they say.

We rejoice in the faith. But look at the very next verse. Look at verse 34. It's very clear, isn't it? But the Pharisee said, he casts out demons by the prince of demons. Do you notice how Matthew does that? He puts, doesn't he, faith and unbelief side by side. The gospel of Jesus always divides. And the messages of Jesus always divide. So verse 34 is very clear, isn't it? There is a division. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.

I've not come to bring peace, but sort of division. Can we reach up a sun? There are, there's stark words, aren't there? There are two ways, two ways to live. Two gates. Two roads. There's a road of life and the road of death. And the gospel is always a double-edged sword. It divides men and women and boys and girls. And that is why it's hard to be a Christian. And the mark of a false gospel, the mark of a false gospel preacher is that there's no division. The whole church claims, isn't this wonderful? Isn't this terrific? This is the ministry that we want. And when the ministry is uniformly popular, that means it's not likely to be the biblical gospel. If the reaction to the gospel ministry is not the same reaction as what Jesus received, it's not his message. Some are, on the one hand, will be hungry, they'll desire more, they'll want more. But others, well there will be those whose hearts are closed. Or closing. And hardening.

[6:12] And we have to come to terms with that in the Christian life. And it's not easy. From the perspective of the preacher, it's not easy. It's hard to know if you're being faithful to the message of Jesus. It's hard to know that if you are, you will always see division.

There will always be a mixed reaction. No matter how good your sermon is, no matter how good your church is, how faithful it is, Jesus says there will always be a division. But Jesus tells it as it is. He's not a spin doctor. And he says we must expect hardship and persecution and struggle, and we must prepare for it, so that we're able to persevere to the end. And he says we go out as sheep. Sheep in the world's eyes are powerless. We are foolish. We are weak. Who is here of sending out sheep to convert wolves? It's madness. It's ridiculous in the world's eyes, but we are not valueless, Jesus is saying. You go out as sacrificial lambs for my sake. For my sake. That is why you're hated. And you have heavenly power and heavenly resources the world doesn't see. Just look at verse 19 of chapter 10. When they deliver over you, 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. For it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your father speaking through you. I am with you. And because I will never abandon you, well you must know that as well. So in this first paragraph, there are three areas where persecution comes from. Three areas where you and I must expect persecution. The first area is from the religious establishment. Look at verse 17. The danger is when we read the gospels, we think of it like westerns. Do you remember westerns where you can always tell the goodies and the baddies really easily? The baddies had stubble and beards. The goodies were clean shaven when they, but it's not like that. It's not like that in life in general.

And it's not like that when you come to the gospels. We mustn't think of the Pharisees and the synagogue leaders as these kind of very obvious bad and evil people. You see they were the church of the New Testament age. Synagogues and rulers, they are closing their eyes and hardening their eyes. The church, when Jesus came to it, persecuted him because they were so adrift from the reality of the grace of God, they couldn't stand it. And so they flogged the ministers of Jesus Christ and nothing has changed in 2,000 years. And so around the world, so much of the persecution of true believers in Jesus Christ comes from institutional churches. Just ask Christians in some of the former Iron Curtain countries where the Orthodox church in Russia and in Greece persecutes relentlessly the evangelical people. It's the same in our country. Religion despises evangelical gospel faith. It despises the words of Jesus and the apostles' words being taken seriously. So save us from these fundamentalists. Let the church be broad. Let it be very broad as long as it's narrow enough to keep us out. Because that's the reality. Religion always hates real faith. And it always has done. It always will do.

Because real faith, real faith in Jesus Christ liberates people. That's why, where religion it always seeks to control and enslave people. And religious leaders always want to make you dependent upon them. They love to make you enslaved of them. They love to make the institution the one that is in control. So there will always be persecution from the institutional church.

Secondly, there will be persecution in verse 18 from the state. From governors. From society at large. That's true, isn't it? Throughout history. The history of the Christian faith. It's something that is real and alive and has always been a terrible threat to society. Gospel believers.

[10:35] A society that is militantly anti-Christ. That is why Nero burned those Christians in the first century. Blamed the burning of Rome on them. Butchered them. That is why the Nazis and the Soviets rounded Christians up and sent them to gulags and concentration camps. In our Western secular democracy, it's no different. There's not the same physical violence, is there? But there is the same vehemence. Just think of the media. How sneering and how scornful they are of the biblical faith. They laugh Bible-believing Christians. They scorn, don't they? The disdain of someone

like John Humphreys. Or even Ricky Gervais. They love the liberal churchmen who will tell them everything they want to hear. But when somebody is actually really clear on stating the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching of the apostles, there will be nothing but scorn. The third area is, it will be from within the family, verse 21. And maybe that is most painful of all, isn't it? Think of the hurt and the hostility. The bitterness, the pain that is in people's families. When a child is converted and they turn to Christ.

And the parent cannot stand the loss. Maybe the loss to their career or to their future. When a child goes against the pattern of their parents by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, what a heartbreak and what a pain that is. Or a husband against a wife.

But Jesus is saying, isn't it? This is genuine Christian discipleship. And this is what will happen. And when that does happen, when your family turns on you being a Christian, that is not an evidence of failure. That is the reality of following Jesus. So to sum up, verse 22, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. And sometimes that experience is very real, and we know that. I think as some of you hear it, it is very lonely, isn't it, for you to bear the name of the Lord Jesus today. Sometimes it seems almost too much to bear.

And Jesus is warning you and I, and encouraging you and I, and saying, do not be deceived. It is not a sign of failure when that happens. My mission is not out of control when these things happen. Rather, it's the only way it can be in a world that disdains our Saviour. And he says, rejoice in it for my sake. It can't be any other way. Do you remember the Beatitudes?

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and slander you on my account.

Rejoice. Why? Well, they persecuted the prophets that went before you. In other words, what does it show you? It shows you that you are the genuine article of faith when people hate you.

[ 13 : 55 ] And great is your reward in heaven. In other words, you're not forgotten when these things happen to you. And God is saying, I've not abandoned you. And he's preparing a reward and he sees it all. And you've got to realise that is how mission works. Look at verse 80. He says, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness to them and the Gentiles. The word there, bear witness, it's the word we get martyr from. That's how the church grows. Tertullian, in the second century, he was right when he said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. And Jesus, you see, is teaching his followers all of this. That they will be prepared for lives of witness and discipleship and so they'll be able to endure to the end. It's so much the opposite of what we hear today, isn't it? So people say to me, do not speak about the negatives of the gospel up front. It'll put people off. And don't talk about sin and suffering and the demands of Christ, particularly in the area of sexuality. Don't speak about that on Sundays. Because on Sundays we are visitors.

This is great to have so many visitors here today. And those who are new to the Christian faith. And we don't want those who come to be put off by the rough stuff. But if you don't preach it on Sundays, when do you preach it? It's actually deceitful and dishonest, isn't it, to hide this. And actually, a bigger problem is it's the antithesis of what Jesus does in this chapter. Because Jesus is brutally and absolutely up front and clear. And you see, Jesus knows your heart and mind. And he knows, doesn't he, Jesus knows that there are great weapons in the hand of our enemy. And the great enemy of all Christians in particular. And fear, fear is a great enemy, isn't it? Fear is a great enemy of Christian mission. Fear can neutralise mission in our churches and in our lives and in our families even. And wherever fear is so often the great enemy within, it is something that must be confronted and overcome. And how

Jesus helps you and I to do that is he forces us to face up to the causes of fear, which are real and they're understandable. But Jesus wants to show you this morning that you should not allow your thinking to be directed by fear, but by the true gospel. So that we need not fear and we can endure. And so the second paragraph of verses 24 to 33, Jesus puts his finger on three specific dangers that our great enemy, fear uses to cripple us. Three times Jesus tells you this morning, do not be afraid. And each time he gives you the remedy. So the first fear that comes to us is he brings before us the fear of the terrible sting of slander. The terrible sting of slander.

Slander. And slander, when people speak evil against you, leads to a silencing of the witness of the gospel. Look at verse 25 and just see how horrible that sting can be.

Here is the religious establishment. And here is the church of the day. And they brand Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah.

[ 17 : 54 ] They brand him Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons. The devil himself. Here is the clever and the powerful religious experts of the day.

The theologians. The ones that come on the TV and are asked to speak on documentaries. And they sneer at gullible simpletons who take the Bible seriously. Who believe things like heaven or hell.

Or two ways. Or a final judgment. Or an exclusive way to God through Jesus Christ alone. They say things, Well I used to be like that.

But I've grown out of it. I used to be a word man. But then I discovered the Spirit. Don't get me wrong, I'm very glad of my evangelical roots.

But you have to move on. It's far more complex. It's too simplistic to take the Bible seriously. In fact, people who do that are quite a danger.

[ 18 : 54 ] They are fanatically. So how do you feel when that kind of slander is directed at you and what you believe and what you cherish most deeply in your heart?

What you want to do at that point is shrivel up, don't you? And hide. And to get away from the horrible, stinging sarcasm. And it's very easy for the sting of slander to silence us.

To silence the gospel. To silence the truth. So we basically live our privatized religion. And the assault comes on us from those three directions that Jesus has already spoken about.

From the religious establishment. From those who call themselves Christians. And that particularly stinks, doesn't it? That particularly stinks when we feel that we need to be accepted. It's particularly hard for Christian leaders.

I hope you pray for your elders. We're not immune from this. And you must pray for those who are in far harder places than we are. But it is often a very, very lovely furrow.

[ 20 : 05 ] When you're looked at as a kind of narrow, bigoted, fundamentalist. They're coming to family circles, can't they? That young teenager who is converted and starts to take God seriously and the family are desperately worried about their fanaticism.

That's taken over them. Parents worried sick and the real temptation is there is you keep quiet. We know, don't we, it can happen in society.

In our workplace or in our school, in our colleges. You get the sneers behind your back when you won't join in the humour of the office or the classroom. When you won't take part in the going on and on and on about sex or whatever it is.

I heard this week about a young teenager who was at work and he had his mobile phone stolen by his colleagues. And they managed to get the courage to get into it. One message they found in it was sent from a Christian friend.

It was the words of a psalm to encourage him. And they taunted this teenager relentlessly and remorselessly. What do you think that does in a hostile work environment?

[ 21 : 21 ] Well I'll tell you what it does. You know what it does. It makes you want to be silenced doesn't it about your faith. It makes you want to be quiet completely and to make that horrible stinging slander to go away.

And that pressure is isn't it very very very strong today. But Jesus says in verse 26 just look at it with me he says have no fear of them.

And he gives us a reason he says nothing that is covered will not be revealed. Nothing is that is hidden will not be made known. In other words Hebrews 4.13 says nothing in all of creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered but everything is laid bare before the eyes of him whom we must give an account to. God is true and in time the truth will out.

That is what Jesus is saying. There is a coming judgment when everything will be laid bare exactly as it is and he will vindicate his people and we can be sure of that.

[ 22 : 29 ] And so verse 27 the answer to slander is not silence but what proclamation. It is to proclaim the truth of God from the house troughs to be unashamed to speak.

Don't be silenced because God is true. Never forget that. Proclaim his truth. You see the gospel proclaims the hidden things.

Things which are invisible to the eyes of the world but the day will come one day when these things will be declared openly and all the world will see it. And Jesus says to his battle disciples and believers he says live in the light of that day.

Keep that day and all will be laid bare on that day. Keep that day at the most in your minds and proclaim the truth of God. Don't be afraid. Secondly our enemy fear beats us with the dread of violence and persecution doesn't it?

Verse 28 It beats us with the dread of violence and persecution. And those things that fear and that dread can so easily lead to paralysis and compromise.

[ 23 : 41 ] Verse 28 speaks of the reality and the violence of martyrdom. We're not experiencing that in this country at the moment but we must never think that that has gone away.

It's affected every century of the church. There were more martyrs in the 21st century than all the other centuries put together. It's very likely this century will have even more. The most conservative average says that there will be probably 20 martyrs for the Christian faith today.

People are being relentlessly persecuted for the sake of Jesus Christ. And who's it coming from? It comes from the establishment the religious establishment and it comes from families in many places.

There are Muslim converts in this country who've literally disappeared. some have been physically beaten and some have disappeared. Some have been assumed dead by their families when they followed Christ.

It comes too doesn't it from secular governments in many parts of the world. You look at Burma. The systematic persecution of the Kaurin people. Largely Christian people and many many more.

[ 24 : 55 ] But in our western secular democracy the hostile is just as great. that's what I want you to see. There is no violence at the moment because it's against the law.

But if we teach the uniqueness of Christ and the falsity of all other ways to God, if we teach the truth of God's moral law about sexuality and other things, these things will be turned against us.

And Jesus says, expect it and be ready for it. And worse, verse 28, he says, don't be afraid even if those have the power to kill the body.

Rather fear God. Because he's not only true, he's great. And he is the one who has power of life and death. And that power is for eternity.

That fear, Proverbs 9, verse 10, says, that fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. And Psalm 34, which we'll sing right at the end of our service, teaches us to fear the Lord, you his saints.

[ 26 : 07 ] For all those who fear him have no lack. Fear him, you saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear. And that God has you in his hands now.

But more importantly, more importantly than that, verse 3, 33 makes absolutely plain, doesn't it? That we will all be in his hands, all of us, every single one of us, ultimately, on that day.

That God is the one who is to be feared, not the one who can beat and hurt our bodies. So live in the light of that day, Jesus says. And thirdly, fear taunts us with the kind of desolation of divine distance.

What does that mean? That we feel God is far away. The desolation of divine distance. When God seems to be so far away from us, that he's abandoned us, and it's so easy, isn't it, easy to kind of allow that to lead to an erosion of confidence and a loss of trust.

And perhaps this for us is the most difficult thing of all. Perhaps in the UK, this claims more casualties than any other. When life is hard, and when our prayers don't seem to be answered, when it seems like the heavens are like brass, and God is dead, where are you, Lord?

[ 27 : 34 ] Why am I still suffering with this? Why? I've been faithful. Haven't you prayed that? Why have you allowed my beloved partner to be taken from me? Why am I still struggling with this sin when I hate it?

Where are you, Lord? Why haven't I been healed of this disease or this illness that dogs me? Why haven't I had any sense of breakthrough in the Christian ministry I'm involved in?

Where are you, Lord? Have you gone away? Are you distant? And you see, the religious establishment and the world and our families very often join in the chorus. Look at these pathetic Bible people, so old fashioned.

They don't see anything like the kind of church growth that we see. And God has left that kind of thing. I remember when I had just come to this church and somebody searched me up and said you are a really good preacher to old people.

Meaning, I was completely out of touch, which may be. We live in a visual age, we live in a techno age, a church that is devoted to the teaching of God's word and the simple means of grace.

[ 28 : 46 ] It just won't cut it anymore. We've left all that behind today. You're a dinosaur. And God feels distant.

Or your family says, look what you could have had. Look how you could live if you weren't so fanatical. How has God provided for you? Where is he? Look what you could have had. Where is your God when you can't get the job?

Why isn't God provided your wife or husband or family? And we say to ourselves, Lord, have you left us? Well, there's nothing new to that, is there?

The psalmist says in Psalm 42, my tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say, where is your God? And the answer is, says, Jesus is not only, Jesus says that God is not only true, but that he is to be proclaimed, and not only that he is great, and to be feared, but God is far from distant and disinterested in you.

So he is near. So look at verses 29 and 30. They are wonderful verses, aren't they? it's not just that he sees each sparrow fall to the ground, but actually a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the God of heaven and earth deciding it will happen.

[ 30 : 12 ] Two little sparrows, and he numbers the very hairs of your head. It's a picture of a mother, isn't it, with a little girl between her knees, and she's gently combing and pleating her hair, and that is the Lord.

Except he's counting them to every single one of them. He is near. He is near to you, and he loves and he cares for every single one of his beloved children, and every hair on your head.

And therefore he says in verse 31, do not be afraid, because you are more valued than many sparrows. I love those words God speaks to Moses at the burning bush.

When Israel is downtrodden, and they think that God has abandoned them, and they're groaning in slavery, and all the while they're unaware that God is working out his great plan of redemption, and God says, I have seen the affliction of my people, and I've heard their groaning, and I've come down to deliver them.

And maybe you feel this morning that God is distant, that he's got no interest in you personally. And perhaps you feel, well, why should God be interested in me? I'm so insignificant.

[ 31 : 23 ] And perhaps even more, you're saying, you don't know how I've let him down this week, and he must have let me. And all your confidence is sapping, and your faith is teetering, and the enemy of fear has gripped inside your heart, then verse 31 is especially for you, isn't it?

Fear not, because you are of more value than many sparrows. how do I know that? How do you know that? Well, because Christ the Redeemer came down from the glory of heaven, to die on the cross at Calvary, because he saw the affliction of his people, and he loved his people, so he came. And do you think he will ever abandon you in your Christian life, having done that? Never. He says, to his people, I am with you even to the end of the age, even amid all the struggles that you will surely face, right to the end, I am with you.

I am not distant, so take heart. And if they did those things to you, do you know why they did them to you? They drew them to you because they did them to me. And if they hate you, it's because they hated me, and if they persecute you, it's because they persecuted me.

But rejoice, because it's enough for the servant to be like his master, for the pupil to be like their teacher. It's for me, it's for my sake. It's not because I've abandoned you.

[ 32 : 39 ] One of the Puritans closest to the captain is a sure target for the archers. And so if this morning you come to worship and you are struggling, take heart.

You live life now in the light of that coming day, that day when a war shall be declared and God will vindicate his people and rejoice, verse 32. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven.

You count the cost. And you count the cost of the struggles and the hardship that there will be in the Christian life. Don't be naive, don't mistake. Count the cost this morning.

But count it in the only terms that matter, that is eternity. Every struggling believer that is faithful to the name of Jesus Christ, and the onslaughts, and the assaults from the world, and the flesh, and the devil, and all its forms, every single Christian believer who endures the end will hear the Lord Jesus Christ proclaim their name to the Father in heaven.

But we need to finish where the passage finishes in verse 33, which is a shock. Because what Jesus wants you to do in verse 33 is he wants you to count the cost of not standing for Jesus Christ.

[ 34 : 04 ] Count the cost of denying him, denying him who loved us and gave everything for us. And if you are not willing to stand for him, it will lead to a loss that is, verse 33, unimaginable.

You see, the mission of Jesus Christ and his kingdom claims absolutely everything. Be clear about that. And discipleship always will be a life of struggle and persecution.

It will be a life of being sheep amongst wolves. And it will be a life of persevering, of keeping going to the end. Despite fears within, but Jesus says, don't be silenced by the sting of slander.

God is true. And so proclaim his truth from the roof jobs. Fear not, and don't be paralysed by the threat of violence. God is great. Fear him, not men and women and boys and girls and all they can do for you.

And don't ever be desolate and think that God has forgotten you, or that God is distant because God is near and every hair on your head is numbered. And so trust him. He sees it all and he cares.

[ 35 : 15 ] And he is with you. And above all, live now in the light of these, well these light and momentary troubles.

But look at them in the light of an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all. And so live in the light of that day. And everything we face today will only be a cause of rejoicing.

Even though that joy will be through tears and pain, it will be a solid joy and a lasting treasure that only the disciples, the children of Jesus Christ, know anything about.

Let's sing before we come to the road stable.