

Matthew 10:16-22a

Introduction

In our last study, we focused mainly on the *practical advice* of being shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. We talked about being cautious and wary of men, but also about not being anxious and trusting God to give us words to say. We talked about being shrewd and “smart” for the sake of the Gospel, but also about being harmless and vulnerable. As I thought about these things, I realized that this focus could especially be a relief for us *if* it distracts us from any thoughts of the actual suffering and persecution that these verses predict! But remember: *Why* are we to be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves? It’s *because* we are sheep in the midst of wolves. Not only should we focus on the practical advice of what to do and how to live, but we also need to work at accepting the simple reality of this persecution that Jesus speaks of. If we were not *sheep* in the midst of wolves, then talk about shrewdness and harmlessness would be completely pointless! And so we see that Jesus first warned us about those who would reject us and turn us away – refusing to listen to our words. But then He began talking about being delivered over to courts, being flogged in synagogues, and being dragged before governors and kings. Notice the words “delivered over” and “dragged”. The disciples will be forced against their will to go places they don’t want to go and endure circumstances that they don’t want to endure. I’m reminded of Jesus’ words to Peter:

- ✓ John 21:18 – Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.

This is a bitter pill to swallow. The disciples will be subjected to physical pain and suffering – such as being flogged in the synagogues. What happened to the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? These are difficult and harsh realities, and *ignoring* them won’t do anyone any good (as we will see). So Jesus continues:

Verse 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.

So we’ve moved from simple rejection and unbelief in verses 11-15 to persecution and physical suffering in verses 16-20 and now even to the experience of being killed – of having one’s own life taken away. And, of course, what makes this even more horrendous and terrible is that some of Jesus’ followers will be betrayed and delivered over to death by their own brothers or sisters, by their own father or mother, by their own son or daughter. This seems impossible! Every part of us revolts against the very idea. Here is ultimate treachery and betrayal in the very place where more than anywhere else we expect to find love and loyalty (paraphrase of Morris). But *why*? How can we explain something so completely abnormal and so completely contrary even to nature itself (such as parents betraying their children)? *Why* will Jesus’ disciples be delivered over to courts, flogged in synagogues, and dragged before governors and kings? *Why* will Jesus’ disciples be killed and put to death even by their own family members? *Why*? What have they *done*?!? What have *we* done to *deserve* this? In a murder case, the prosecution always seeks to

establish the *motive* for the murder. So then what is the motive behind the persecution and martyrdom of Christians?

Verse 22 – And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.

It’s as though Jesus wants to make sure we know that He was not exaggerating when He talked about being delivered over to death by one’s own family members. “You will be hated,” He says, “by *all*.” Jesus is not saying that we will be hated, and persecuted, and pursued to the death by every single individual on the face of the earth, but rather that we will be hated by people of all kinds. We will be hated by rich people and hated by poor people. We will be hated by young people and hated by the elderly. We will be hated by men and hated by women. We will be hated by the educated and hated by the uneducated. We will be hated by people of every nation and language. We will be hated by complete strangers and even by our own flesh and blood.

And notice carefully what Jesus says here – we will be *hated* by all. Webster’s dictionary gives this definition for hatred: “An intense hostility and emotional aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or a sense of injury”. Synonyms for “hate” are “detest”, “abhor”, “abominate”, and “loathe”. Why will we be persecuted and killed? Because people will *hate* us. But why will people hate us? Webster says that hatred usually derives from fear, anger, or a sense of injury. But why should anyone fear us? As Christians we carry no weapons, and the Church has no army (Mat. 26:51-52). The Bible tells us to love our enemies (Mat. 5:44) and so far as it is possible to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18). The Bible tells us to submit to the governing authorities, to pay our taxes, and to obey the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1-7). Why should people be angry with us or feel a sense of injury? The Bible tells us to respect the life and possessions of others and to do good to all men (Gal. 6:10). The Bible commands us never to take our own vengeance, but always to repay evil with good (Rom. 12:17, 19-21). We will be persecuted and put to death because people will hate us – they will have an intense hostility and emotional aversion to us. They will find us detestable and loathsome. But *why? What have we done?!*

“You will be hated by all”, Jesus says, “*for my name’s sake*.” In verse 18 Jesus says: “You will be dragged before governors and kings *for my sake*. Now let’s not be too quick to say that *now* the world’s hatred makes complete sense! After all, *why* should the world hate us for Jesus’ name’s sake? It is in the name of Jesus that we offer to the world the free hope of eternal life. We do boldly confront the world with its sin, but we do this in love and in humility, acknowledging first of all our own sin, and then always extending the free offer of Christ’s mercy and compassion. We do proclaim and warn of God’s wrath in the coming judgment, but we do so with sorrow and always with the desire to see people *escape* the judgment through faith in Christ. And most importantly, we never pretend that it’s our job to enforce God’s laws in the world or to punish those who break God’s laws. To summarize, it is in the name of Christ and for His sake that we are to be *harmless as doves*.

So let’s review. Why will we be persecuted and killed? Because all people will hate us. They will have an intense hostility and an emotional aversion to us. But why will people hate us? They will hate us for Jesus’ name’s sake. They will hate us for all that Jesus *is* and *stands for* (Morris). But *why* will people hate us for Jesus’ name’s sake? After all, what did Jesus do? He willingly laid down His life for those who were His declared enemies. He extended this gracious invitation

to all sinners everywhere: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light... let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Mat. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17). This is the Jesus on whose account we will be persecuted, hated, and killed. As one man said: Here “we are in the presence of ‘the *mystery* of iniquity’” (Bruner). Are you feeling how completely unreasonable and irrational this hatred is? The *only* way to make sense of it is in the light of sin. But sin itself is unreasonable and irrational – that a Savior should be rejected, that a gracious God should be spurned, that harmless doves should be so detested and loathed! It makes *no sense* at all! This is the mystery of iniquity, and there is ultimately only one way for us to come to grips with something so irrational and unreasonable, and it’s simply this... are you ready? – Jesus *predicted* it. Think about it. If Jesus had not told us in advance that we would be hated by all for His name’s sake, I believe we would find it impossible to accept such a crazy reality. If Jesus had not told us in advance that we would be hated by all for His name’s sake, then the unreasonableness and unfairness of the world’s hatred would easily cause us to despair. We can often deal with things so long as they make sense to us. But at the end of the day, the world’s hatred will *never* make sense – apart from the simple comfort that comes from the fact that Jesus predicted it. Because if Jesus predicted it, this means that even the world’s reckless hatred and unfair persecution of Christians is under His control (cf. verses 29-31).

Conclusion

Have we ever personally felt and experienced the world’s hatred? Have you ever watched a TV sitcom where sin is accepted and even laughed at? (Yes, you have, if you’ve ever watched a TV sitcom.) And did you feel in that laughter the world’s hatred for all those who would grieve and mourn rather than laugh? Were you grieving and mourning? Have you ever been hated because your deeds were righteous while the deeds of those around you were evil? Or when we see the evil of those around us do we hide our deeds of righteousness? Do we hide our light under the bushel? Do we laugh at the jokes or in true sorrow, do we walk away so that we might not have to listen? Do we try to *fit in* with the world by adopting their language, dress, music, and past-times or are we so desirous of the glory of God that our lifestyle ends up being an invitation to many for ridicule and mockery?

- ✓ 1 John 3:11-13 – For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

To paraphrase one commentator: People who have never experienced the world’s hatred have probably not sufficiently witnessed to their faith (Blomberg). We have probably not sufficiently longed for God’s truth and holiness and mourned over all sin and wickedness. Another writer says this: “Today in the West I do not have a sense of Christians being universally hated. To be a Christian here seems more often a means of social establishment than of disestablishment. (This is changing.) ... Jesus depicts missionary-disciples as sinking deeper and deeper into a net of contempt. If our commitment to Jesus were as real as this chapter describes, might we find ourselves more often outside than inside our present circles of respect?” (Bruner) Of course, it is

never our *goal* to be hated (this would not be shrewd). Instead, it is our *goal* to “be well thought of by outsiders” (1 Tim. 3:7). But despite our goals, we will *never* be able to stop the world from hating us. The world’s hatred is one of the surest signs that we do, *in truth*, bear the name of Christ (2 Tim. 3:12). Jesus said: “*You will be hated by all for my name’s sake*”. So being hated is one of the signs and evidences of true Christianity. Let us not run away from the very thing that identifies us as Christ’s followers. If we’re not experiencing the hatred of the world, let’s examine ourselves to see in what ways we may have compromised with the world.

As an important side note, we may ask how it is possible to be so universally hated and detested by people of all different kinds, and yet at the same time to be well thought of by outsiders (unbelievers; 1 Tim. 3:7). These two ideas are so completely opposite that it would seem impossible for them both to be true at the same time – like we’re talking out of both sides of our mouths! So how should we explain this? How would the Bible explain this? Well, here is an example of what we call God’s common grace. Common grace is not saving grace. In common grace, God showers His blessings even upon the unregenerate – those who have not been given the new birth. So God makes his sun rise *on the evil* and on the good, and sends rain on the just and *on the unjust* (Matthew 5:45; cf. Acts 14:16-17). Paul talks about how God is restraining the mystery of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:6-7), and we can know that God has not completely abandoned the world to its sinful ways. According to God’s common grace, every man, woman, and child has a conscience that performs the work of God’s law – accusing or else even defending them for their thoughts, words, and actions (Rom. 2:14-15). And so as a result of God’s common grace, even *the world* can still seek to obey the Ten Commandments (especially the last six) – though never in a way that is pleasing to God.

- ✓ Romans 9:31-32; 10:3 – “Israel... pursued a law that would lead to righteousness [but] did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”

We see, then, that as a result of God’s common grace, it is still possible for Christians to be well thought of by many in this world. And this is gracious because once God abandons people to their sinful ways, then they will be miserable as they have never been before. This is gracious because if God were to abandon the world to its sinful ways, there would no longer be any hope or possibility of evangelism. But here is what we need to know: The unbelievers who by God’s grace are able to think highly of us today will *all one day* abhor us, and detest us, and loathe us – without any exceptions. We know this because in hell, there will be no more common grace. In hell, the conscience will no longer function as it does in this life. In hell, there will be no more restrainer. In hell, people will be fully turned over to the depravity of their own hearts. And so one day, it will be completely and totally *impossible* to be well thought of by *anyone* other than true Christians.

So in light of God’s common grace, how can we account for the world’s hatred? Well, God is not obligated to extend His common grace to everyone *equally*, and so He is not obligated to restrain everyone’s sin equally (2 Thess. 2:11-12). So we see in the Bible that the conscience can be seared (1 Tim. 4:2) and that some in this world are more hardened in their iniquity than others. This explains how we can be both hated *and* well thought of in this world. But it also shows us

that the *hatred* will always be more “natural”, while the being well thought of can only be a temporary blessing of God’s grace. All who live in America have experienced a special measure of God’s common grace in that they live in a nation that still feels the influence of having been founded upon a Judeo-Christian ethic. So in America, we’re still more likely to find unbelievers who think highly of Christians than we are in many other nations (though this is rapidly changing). And this has led many Christians to think that being well thought of is more natural than being hated. But this is not true, for Jesus says that we will be hated by all for His name’s sake. It is only by God’s grace and for the sake of the salvation of God’s elect that it is still possible for some in this world to think highly of Christians. We must not be deceived... which leads me to my next and last point.

Of course, it’s one thing to be hated, and it’s quite another thing to endure the physical suffering of persecution or even martyrdom – being put to death for our faith. Here in America, God has ordained that so far we should live in peace and safety, free to worship and even assemble openly as Christians. Here in America, we are fully accustomed to the guarantee of our inalienable rights – the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. So when the day comes that we are more hated than well thought of and the church in America becomes the persecuted church (and that day must come), there will be a lot of Christians who will not be able to deal with this reality. They will not be able to get past the question: “*Why?!?* What have I done to *deserve* this?” And when the answer is “nothing”, the unreasonableness and the unfairness of our sufferings will cause many Christians to lose faith. Some will become belligerent and fight back with the carnal weapons and strategies of the world. And as we saw earlier, others will despair and give up. And yet others will join with the world, because without even knowing it, they had already come to love the world and the things in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions (1 John 2:15-16). There are many in America who are abundantly happy to be Christians so long as this will never involve true suffering and persecution, or any threat to our unalienable rights. The Declaration of Independence is famous for these words: “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” We can be grateful for these words and for the ways that our government has been shaped by them. But then how do these words about being endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable Rights (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) fit with Jesus’ words about being hated by all, being dragged before governors and kings, being flogged and beaten, and being delivered over to an unjust death? We may be grateful for any number of reasons for our constitutional right to bear arms. But in the day that the church is persecuted for Jesus’ name’s sake, how will we reconcile this right with Jesus’ command to be innocent, harmless, and vulnerable as doves? How will this right fit with Jesus’ warning that all those who take up the sword will also perish by the sword (Mat. 26:52)?

When our rights are trampled upon for reasons that are totally unfair, unreasonable, and even irrational... when we are hated and persecuted for Jesus’ name’s sake, ***we absolutely must remember***: He already told us that it would be this way. Jesus told us in advance *so that we would not be surprised*. Here, then, is the application of this study. *Here*, I believe, is God’s agenda for us in this text. Let us heed the words of Jesus, so that if we are still living when the American Church becomes the persecuted church, we will not be surprised. Because it is

especially those who are surprised who will find themselves in the gravest danger of falling away.

- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4 – Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

As we move ahead in our Matthew ten, we will see further how in the midst of persecution we can be truly comforted and live without any fear. But for now... When the world hates us, persecutes us, and sometimes even kills us, we know that we don’t need to panic, because *Jesus* told us in advance that it would be this way. Jesus *already said* two thousand years ago: “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves... they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake... brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.” He already said it – so there can be no need to panic when His word comes to pass.

Teaching our Children

NOTE: I don't believe it is wise to go into depth on the topic of suffering and persecution with our younger children. For this reason, I have worded most of the questions so that they will have simple "yes" or "no" answers and so as to be as "G rated" as possible.

- Q. Will people in the world always think good thoughts about Christians?
- A. No! Jesus said that we would actually be hated (or: strongly disliked) by all different kinds of people just because we are Christians (followers of Jesus).
~ If appropriate for older children, talk more in depth about the concept of hatred (page 2; par. 2)
- Q. Why will many people in the world not like Christians?
- A. Read and discuss 1 John 3:11-13 (page 3)
- Q. Since many people in the world will not like (hate) Jesus' followers, will they sometimes try to treat them badly?
- A. Yes. Discuss the concept of persecution according to the age level of your children (younger children: being made fun of, left out, etc. / older high school children: perhaps even physical suffering and martyrdom?)
- Q. How does Jesus tell us to respond when we are treated badly by the world just because we are His followers?
- A. Discuss the concept of being innocent, harmless, and vulnerable as doves
- Q. We see that there are many people in the world who will not like Christians and who will always be trying to treat them badly. Does this seem fair to you?
- A. No! (Consider especially how God has commanded Christians to love their enemies, obey the government, etc.; See Romans 12:17-21; also read the words of Jesus at the top of page 3)
- Q. When we think about how many people in the world will want to treat Christians badly, will this ever make sense?
- A. No. This will *never* make *any* sense. (Sin never makes sense.)
- Q. How can we be encouraged when the world treats us badly without any good reason (when the world treats us badly even though we don't deserve it)?
- A. We can remember that *Jesus already told us* this would happen. Jesus told us what would happen way ahead of time so that we would not be surprised or feel like falling apart when people in the world started treating us badly.
~ Read and reflect on 1 Thess. 3:1-4 (page 6)
~ Encourage your children to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might! (Eph. 6:10)