

PERSECUTION AND WITNESSING

In Matthew 10, Christ paints an ever-widening circle of persecution. He first states the premise of His followers being sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves. That is the basic idea. First, the persecution essentially came from the Jews – after all, for the first 5 years of the Church age, the Church was essentially Jewish. Although Christ experienced persecution and death, for the disciples persecution largely came later following the resurrection – and then initially it came from the hands of the Jews. So note the development of thought here...

v. 16 Expect a hostile environment

v. 17 Jewish context – (religious persecution)

v. 18 Gentile context – (Gov't persecution)

v. 21 Family context

v. 22 Whole world context

Matthew 10:18 (NKJV)

18 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

Here Jesus widens the circle to include persecution by the secular government agencies. Notice that this happens for Christ's sake and God allows it so that His people might be a testimony to these secular authorities.

As we move into the book of Acts, we see the church more and more facing political (Gentile) persecution even in relation to the highest realms of government (cf. Acts 17:6; 18:12-17; 24-25). If God wanted His people to witness to the king, how might he get an audience with them? Well, one way is through the arrest and trial of His people who for Christ's sake are called to testify of their allegiance to Christ. In this case their trial is a calling used of God for Christ's sake.

Matthew 10:19–20 (NKJV)

19 But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;

20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Often when we think about potential witnessing situations we start to worry and wonder how we should respond. In the context of being hauled off to jail for your faith Christ says not to worry about what to say when you are interrogated.

In that context Christ promises that in that hour of trial the Spirit of our Father will speak through us. God will guide us in what He wants us to say.

Standing for Christ may bring suffering but along with it comes divine empowerment.

“Poor, and ignorant, and obscure fishermen would naturally be [concerned] what they should say before the great men of the earth... How consoling, then, the assurance that God would aid them and speak within them!” – **Albert Barnes**

The power here is of the Spirit. Christ’s followers put in this position are not to depend upon the cleverness of human intellect, but rather upon the supernatural power of God.

“Man has his wickedness, but God has His way.”

In the early Church we see the Spirit speaking mightily through those arrested.

Acts 24:24–25 (NKJV)

24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid [KJV “trembled”] and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.”

I wonder how many Christians today tie “**righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come**” in with “**the faith in Christ**” message. I think many if not most have such a watered-down weak gospel that no one much trembles at it – let alone those in authority. But that was the nature and effects of Paul’s gospel witness. It was powerfully CONVICTING!

I don’t think a Spirit-filled message is one that unrepentant people want to hear. There is pressure to tone it down – to preach a LORDLESS gospel – to preach a soft man-centered gospel that offers salvation without

repentance. The Church is full of such converts – but are they really converts at all?

The true Christ of the Bible is offensive to a Christ-rejecting world. Only in repentance does the rebel lay down his sword and have a true “come to Jesus experience.” Christ is offensive in that He as Savior claims to be the ONLY way. This humbles the pride of man. Christ is offensive in that He as Lord calls for sold out allegiance to Him above all else. This humbles the pride of man.

In a naval battle the Admiral Lord Nelson, commander of the British navy, defeated the French. The French admiral came on board Lord Nelson’s ship to surrender. He walked up there in all of his regalia, with his sword swinging by his side. As he approached Nelson smilingly, with his sword swinging at his side. ***He held out his hand to the victor.*** Nelson made no response to this gesture but said quietly, ***“Your sword first, sir.”*** Laying down the sword was a visible token of surrender. That came FIRST – then the hand shake.

In like manner we must FIRST in repentance lay down the sword of our rebellion and self-will.

*Make me a captive, Lord,
And then I shall be free,
Force me to render up my sword
And I shall conqueror be.
(George Matheson)*

Christ is the most wonderful loving person ever and yet He is the most offensive person ever for those who don’t accept Him on His terms. No wonder the world is hostile! It’s Christ’s way or the way to hell!

Some have tried to apply verses 19-20 to sermon preparation (or lack thereof) claiming God will give them what they need to say when they need to say it.

“When I was in seminary, a fellow student, who was a little odd in more ways than one, believed that he should preach without any preparation. A friend and I decided one night that we would go and hear him preach. Well, it was painfully obvious that he had not prepared his message. On the way back to the seminary, my friend, who had even more nerve than I asked him, ‘Did you prepare that message tonight?’ ‘Of course, I didn’t!’ ‘Well, how did you get it?’ ‘The Spirit of God gave it to me.’ My friend said to him, ‘I don’t think you ought to blame that message on the Holy Spirit!’”

– ***J. Vernon McGee***

There is a specific context here in Matthew 10 related to persecution and prison. In that sort of context gives you what to say when you need it. But for normal teaching and preaching God expects the hard work of preparation to be put in.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV)

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

1 Timothy 5:17 (NKJV)

17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

“If we are to divide the word of Truth rightly, then we must be very diligent about studying it. There is no shortcut. Only as we master the Word of God are we made adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17). That is the essence and goal of discernment.”

– ***John MacArthur***