

EXPECT PERSECUTION

The main theme throughout the whole context in Matthew 10 is “persecution”. Christ prepared His followers well for this coming reality. In effect, He said to EXPECT it!

Matthew 10:23 (NKJV)

23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Christ is addressing the apostles, but it is clear that what He is saying has broader application than just the immediate mission He was sending them out on. For example, Christ speaks of being a testimony to the Gentiles in verse 18 but in the most immediate context of that day they were not being sent to the Gentiles as seen in verse 5.

So Christ is speaking generally making application to an ever widening circle of reality which comes to encompass world wide rejection generally and extends in duration all the way to the Second Coming – which is the emphasis here in verse 23.

Not only would all hate Christ’s people, but this reality will be in place until the coming of the Son of Man. This is the essence of what Christ is saying in verse 23.

There is no getting cozy in this world. Persecution happens and God’s people flee from one place to another – from one city to another. This world is not our home. We are in hostile enemy territory.

Hebrews 11:13–16 (NKJV)

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The context here is Jewish. The Church had not yet been introduced and so Christ speaks to them on those terms. Jewish rejection and persecution of God's people will be a reality until the Second Coming.

Zechariah 13:8-9 is very clear that in the last days 2/3 of the Jews in the land will die under God's judgment and that only 1/3 will come to faith calling on the Name of the Lord with God saying to them "***This is My people***" and each one in turn saying to God, "***The LORD is my God.***"

The terminology "Son of Man" ties back to the OT Messianic prophecy of Daniel 7:13-14 which is a Second Coming context. So the coming of the Son of Man most naturally fits with the idea of Christ's Second Coming.

The exact nuance of "***you will not have gone through the cities of Israel***" is debated. Is the sense that the mission to Israel will not be completed until the Second Coming; is it that there will always be places of refuge to move on to; or is it simply indicating that this pattern of persecution and shuffling from place to place will be a reality until the Second Coming. I tend to think it is this last reality. The emphasis on standing for Christ is a given but the focus here is on the resulting persecution.

Very literally in the Greek the text says, "you shall not finish [or "complete"] the cities until the Son of Man comes." The explanatory "for" links the desperate flight from one city to another with the thought that this pattern will continue until the coming of the Son of Man.

Note there is a place for "self-preservation". The individual is not to just seek martyrdom but rather to flee from it. The flight to preserve life is not incompatible with either courage or loyalty to the gospel.

"It is not wrong to escape from danger – only from duty."

– ***William MacDonald***

Paul in his ministry often fled as a means of self-preservation (cf. Acts 12-14; 17). "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The pattern of faithful ministry is that we seek to be a faithful witness for Christ, but when rejection becomes severe, we move on. You don't just continue to cast your pearls before swine (cf. Mt. 7:6). There is a time to move on – even in the sense of well-being and self-preservation!

James is very clear that friendship with the world is enmity with God (Ja. 4:4). The world of unbelievers is not neutral toward God. They are at enmity with God and that is reflected in their abuse of God's people.

Galatians 6:14 (NKJV)

14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

“Nay, world! I turn away, Though thou seem fair and good;
That friendly outstretched hand of thine is stained with Jesus' blood.”

– **Margaret Mauro**

The dividing point between the believer and the world is Christ. The world is dead to us (wants nothing to do with us) and we are dead to the world (in that we want nothing to do with their rebellion).

Christ plainly told us to expect persecution from the world (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12). Peter said do not think it strange when the fiery trials of persecution come. It is to be expected. Yet, we should be wise and yet innocent in how we respond. Be smart and yet harmless in perfect balance.

Richard Wurmbrand was severely persecuted for his faith in Romania. He died in 2001. He started a ministry called Voice of the Martyrs. Years ago when he spoke out against crimes committed by communist regimes, he was often booed when he spoke in the United States. When asked about his qualifications to speak out in this way, he would strip to the waist, revealing 18 torture scars and say, “***These marks are my credentials***”.

Galatians 6:17 (NKJV)

17 From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

No Scar?

*No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has nor wound nor scar?*

-Amy Carmichael

What a penetrating question: Can he have followed far who has nor wound nor scar?

Jesus said: "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

God help us to follow on in the way of the cross!