

Matthew 10:16–33

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 October 2018

Preacher: Rev. Ben Roberts

[0 : 00] Well, it's great to be back here preaching. This is the first place I preached as an Artizo intern 10 years ago. And after my sermon that day, Rowena Slack, who I'm sure you remember, gave me some feedback.

She said, your sermon was okay, but they'll crucify you for those shoes. And indeed, the shoes were terrible, especially with the cassock and surplis.

But I've gotten new shoes, and so we should be okay for this morning. Now let's look to Matthew 10. You remember that in chapter 9, Jesus looked out at the crowds, and he saw sheep stressed and oppressed without a shepherd.

And in his great compassion, he told the disciples, pray that the Lord will send out workers into the harvest. And then last week, we saw the 12 begin to become the answer to their own prayer, as Jesus calls them and sends them out to Israel, proclaiming God's kingdom in Jesus by healing and heralding.

Well, this morning, Jesus continues in that line of instruction to the 12. And what we see here is what we should expect as we go out sent by Jesus.

[1 : 26] And as we go, we should expect two things. We should expect opposition, persecution, and we should expect fear.

And we'll get more into that as we go. So let's look at the first thing. Expect opposition, verse 16. Jesus begins with this word, behold. Pay attention.

See the reality here. See what's going on. I'm sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves. There's a lot of animals in this passage, aren't there?

Later on, Jesus talks about sparrows. But notice why he brings this up. Jesus sends us not into comfort. He sends us into trouble. Sheep in the midst of wolves can't be expecting easy grazing or relaxing life.

We'll need to keep our wits about us like serpents, even as we reject guile like doves. This is amazing, isn't it? This is the place where Jesus sends us.

[2 : 33] He sends us to a hostile place. He sends knowing that there will be difficulty. He sends these apostles among men whom he likens to predators. And he promises that they'll be delivered to persecution in synagogues and courts.

He's going to send them as witnesses. Before rulers and kings. Even before Gentiles. The mention of Gentiles here is a little surprising given that he just said, Go only to Israel.

But I think it's a clue that we're looking into mission in a wider sense. We're looking at how Christian mission is going to begin with this sending. And some of the traits that are going to carry on in the years to follow.

When people are sent by Jesus, they're sent into a hostile harvest. But the place of hostility is also the place of opportunity for witness.

And we see there, it's a spirit-empowered witness. Well, there's no question if this will happen. But verse 19, when they deliver you. Verse 23, when they persecute you.

[3 : 39] Flee to the next town. Verse 21, even families are going to become hostile to one another. Delivering each other over to death. And so those sent by Jesus into this harvest cannot rely on family or government.

Or even their religious leaders. But in their faithful witness, verse 22, they will be hated by all. The sense in the Greek there is so strong. Absolutely everyone will hate you.

Why all this persecution? Why this hatred? Why this hatred? Verse 24 and 25 lay that out for us. It's because a servant is not above their master.

It's not you. It's Jesus that they're rejecting. If they hated Jesus. If they said that Jesus did the work of Satan. Beelzebub. How will they not hate those of his household?

Now here's another surprise in the passage. His household. If you look at it, there's some parallelism there, isn't there? We expect the text to say, If they hated your master or teacher, they will also hate the servant or the student.

[4 : 47] And Jesus has just been talking about that. But he doesn't say that. Jesus says they will hate his household. And so we're sent out as witnesses who have also become, in a sense, Jesus' family members.

We're followers. We're disciples. Yes, we're also brothers and sisters. We're God's family sent by Jesus. We share Jesus' reputation. We share his rejection.

What a privilege. What a privilege that people would look at us and hate us because they see Jesus. Acts 5 talks about this.

Says the apostles left the council, which had threatened and flogged them, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. The name of Jesus.

To be hated is horrible. But to be hated because we are Jesus' own, there's something joyful about that. There's something wonderful about that.

[5 : 49] Being counted as part of God's household. Well, Jesus has set our expectations here. Things are not going to be easy for the apostles. And this pattern continues throughout the New Testament.

It continues today in many parts of the world. The mission is ongoing until Jesus' return. We see that idea in verse 23. Keep going to all the towns.

And our mission today is an extension of this same mission, isn't it? It's a carrying on of the apostles' witness, which is faithfully handed down generation to generation. And now we pick it up as those sent in the household of Jesus, and we become witnesses in the same hostile harvest.

And so we have to ask, how are we to respond to this promise of persecution? And the verses at the end of the chapter, verse 26 to 33, give us some instruction in thinking about this.

Jesus tells us to fear. He tells us to fear, and he tells us not to fear. Persecution might make us anxious or afraid, but we must learn to fear rightly.

[6 : 58] Jesus tells us whom we should fear, and whom we should not fear. And so first, the first thing that we are not to fear is slander. Verse 26 says, have no fear of them.

And the them it's talking about is who we were talking about just before. Those who have called Jesus Beelzebub, the Pharisees. Those who have accused Jesus of casting out demons by the prince of demons.

And they make that accusation in chapter 9 and in chapter 12. If they misunderstood and told lies about Jesus, they will misunderstand and tell lies about his household.

We know that's not a good feeling, being maligned. Jesus says, don't be afraid. Why does he tell us not to be afraid of that? What would happen if we bowed to the fear of slander or of this hatred?

Well, I think it would mean that our witness to Jesus is silenced. And we see that in the instructions that he gives as he follows on. Jesus says essentially, well, whatever they might say about you, and it's not going to be good, you don't fail to speak out.

[8 : 13] What I've said in secret, you proclaim all day long. What I've whispered, you shout from the rooftops. Oh, this is very challenging, isn't it?

I mean, if you think about the way the world views us today, I feel as if on the one hand, Christians are known as misguided and foolish. That's kind of like the best possible read, right?

Is that you're just a little bit foolish. But on the other hand, well, you're hateful. You're bigoted. And I think that our instinct is to fear for our reputation.

And we wither under that accusation. And so we withdraw. We leave that conversation. We just privatize our faith. But Jesus here says, don't be afraid of them.

Shout it from the rooftops. Now we know there's a balance here, don't we? We know we are to be wise. We know that the disciples not to seek out persecution.

[9 : 17] Verse 23 says, you should flee if you encounter persecution. So there's, of course, a balance here. But yet, consider, have you been cowed into silence about Jesus because of what people might say about you?

The second thing that we should not fear is those who can kill the body but not the soul. Jesus says, rather, this is who you should fear. Fear him who can destroy both body and soul and hell.

Speaking of God. We might expect Jesus to say, don't be afraid of anything. I'm with you. And yet he reminds us to have a proper fear.

To fear rightly. To have a fear that casts out all fear. St. Augustine put it like this, let us fear, therefore, that we may not fear. God is the one who can impart eternal destruction rather than temporary destruction of the body.

He demands our allegiance. He's our rightful Lord. Yeah, Augustine says, fear that we may not fear. Why is that?

[10 : 30] This fear, this obedience and reverence, this placing God and his shepherd and his mission first is also putting our full trust in the Father.

So the one that we fear and obey and reverence is also the Father who cares deeply for us. And this is the third reason not to fear in the passage. The Father is watching over you. The Father is in control.

We're more valuable than sparrows, which, tiny as they are, are not outside the Father's will. And so as we think about persecution, we know that the time and place where that might happen, our sharing in the slander of Jesus' name, even our death, is all in the Father's capable and caring hands.

I don't think it's a coincidence that he brings up sparrows again, right? The last time was in the Sermon on the Mount. Don't be anxious. Your Father can care for all of your needs, right? The Father has sent us Jesus, the Great Shepherd.

We're held close by him. Well, it's time to close. These final verses, though, bring us comfort and challenge as we go, I think.

[11 : 44] When we think about this task of witness, this task of being sent, Jesus is very clear. We're asked to proclaim Jesus to stand as his witnesses.

And the reasoning behind that is so interesting. We are to stand because Jesus stands before the Father on our behalf, our perfect mediator and advocate.

We stand because Jesus stands. this is the gospel, isn't it? The very good news of the kingdom that Jesus stands for us before the Father, that he's made a way and that now we are invited to joyfully respond by standing for him and sharing the good news of his kingdom.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.