

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Friday, July 03, 2020

Matthew 10:13-42 “Facing Gospel Rejection and Persecution” (Read vv. 16-23)

Intro. Have you ever suffered rejection? Of course you have. Guys, do you remember being rejected when you asked a girl for a date? Have you applied for a job but received a rejection notice. Have you ever had a friend or family member reject you? Have you ever been rejected by a spouse? Rejection can be very painful!

Well I want you to know that Jesus Christ certainly knows about rejection. Isaiah gave the following prophecy about Jesus Christ, “He was despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...” (Isa. 53:3). In Mk. 8:31 Jesus began to teach His disciples “that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...” The apostle John said, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (1:11). If you have felt the pain of rejection, Christ can certainly sympathize with you, for He’s been there!

Now in this text of Scripture Jesus warned His disciples that *they* would also face rejection and persecution. He said in vv.24-25, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” (cf. 9:34; 12:24). So Jesus is saying that if they slander Me, they will slander you. Later in Jn. 15:20 Jesus said, “...If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” The Lord’s servants are not to expect better treatment than the Lord Himself received.

Now here’s the issue we face: If we publicly confess our faith; if we share our faith with others; or if we express biblical morality, we can be sure that we will face at least some rejection as well. In fact, for the first time in my 40-year ministry I see persecution of believers in America, not as a remote or future possibility, but as likely. While I support racial equality and justice for all, the more radical elements of the social and political revolution that is unfolding before us has a goal of destroying the founding principles of our nation, including freedom of speech and freedom of religion. People are already losing their jobs if they express Christian moral or conservative views on social media.

Now here’s the problem: Jesus Christ wants us to share our faith and testimony with others. We should be able to express biblical moral views in public to promote the wellbeing of others. But when we do so, we will face likely face rejection or even persecution. And so too often we do not share our faith just to avoid such consequences. That is not good. So I want to share with you from this text of Scripture what Jesus says about dealing with Gospel rejection.

Jesus is very honest with His disciples as He prepares to send them out to proclaim the Gospel to the world. First, He gives them a warning and then some practical suggestions about facing persecution. So let’s first look at the warning Jesus gives:

I. BEWARE, YOU WILL FACE VARIOUS TYPES OF REJECTION

Because our nation has increasingly turned from God and instead turned to secular solutions for the problems we face, we are going to face rejection and persecution as Christians. In v.17 Jesus said, “But beware of men...” Jesus told us to beware, take heed, be on your guard;

watch out! Why? That is because in the previous verse He said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” (Cf. Luke 10:3). “Behold”, introduces something important, something that calls for close attention. People can attack you like wolves, and we have seen many examples of this in recent days. So be prepared for the following responses when we try to share our faith:

A. Some Will Not Receive You into Their Homes – In v.14 Jesus said, “And whoever will not receive you ..., when you depart from that house....” Jesus warned that some would not receive these missionaries. In fact, they will shut their door and not invite them in. I have had that happen to me on a few occasions.

B. Some Will Not Listen to You - In v.14 Jesus said, “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words....” There will be those who turn a deaf ear to you. It is so sad when you know that you have good news to share, but someone just doesn’t want to listen. I wonder who is not listening right now, even as I speak? Jesus warned me that some will not listen!

The other day I saw a video of a black police officer who tried to share the gospel of Jesus with a white protester who would not listen but just kept yelling obscenities at him and other officers.

As we move into the next section, beginning with v.16, the instructions and warnings become more serious. Much of the mistreatment described here was not experienced during the disciples’ initial preaching tour, but came later. In fact, these verses look all the way to the end of the age, as we see in vv.22-23. Notice what will happen to some of God’s people:

C. Some Will Hate You – In v.22 Jesus said, “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake....” Based on the last part of the verse, this will especially be true in the end times. Why would anyone hate good, loving Christian people? It seems inexplicable. Here’s the problem: when light exposes the darkness of sin, you can be sure that the darkness will fight back. In fact, John 3:20 says, “everyone practicing evil hates the light....” This warning will especially be true in reference to believers during the Great Tribulation. During such a time, Jesus warned in Mt. 24:12, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” We are witnessing the rise of lawlessness. As lawlessness has grown, even so hatred toward all who stand for righteousness has grown.

Notice in v.22 that Jesus said they will hate us “for My name’s sake....” Don’t take this rejection personally. They are not really rejecting you, but Christ. Increasingly they will manifest hatred for Christ and for any who identify with Christ.

Now because they will hate you:

D. Some Will Persecute You – In v.17 Jesus said, “But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.” Notice that much of the persecution will come from other religions, for we see here that the persecution takes place right in the synagogue.¹ Certainly Islam has led the way in persecution of Christians. But persecution will also come from government as we see in v.18, and even from family (v.21). The three institutions which God established in this world are the home, government, and the church. In the last days, all three of these institutions will oppose the truth instead of promote it.

¹ It was not just a place of worship but also discipline (cf. Jn. 9:35).

Now this persecution will take on different forms. They may slander you, as we have already noted in v.25. In v.17 we see that for the disciples, they would be scourged. As we see in the book of Acts, the disciples were scourged by the Jews several times. V.18 implies imprisonment as another form of persecution. They may even put you to death, as Christ mentioned in vv.21 & 28.

By the way, what Jesus warned about came true. Everyone one of these disciples was scourged, and all but John were put to death for their faith in Christ. Fortunately, in our country, we are supposed to be protected by the Constitution and other laws from this happening. But many are dying for their faith in other countries. In fact, 8-10 Christians are dying for their faith every day in the world. There is significant persecution in North Korea, China, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Somalia and Sudan. Governments that are Communist, Marxist, or Islamic are the greatest persecutors of Christians. According to the 2020 World Watch, 260 million Christians suffering high to severe levels of persecution, up from 245 million in last year's list. They are threatened with prison, mob violence, and other actions—for their faith. And if America continues on the path that we are on, this kind of persecution is even coming to our nation.

The solemn foretelling of persecution goes on and becomes even more foreboding, for:

E. Even Some Family Members Will Betray You – Christ speaks of our dear ones turning to foes.² This is really bad. In v.21 He said, “Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.” This should come as no surprise. In vv.34-36 Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’” There Jesus is quoting from Micah 7:6. So this kind of reaction is actually a fulfillment of prophecy! For a while Jesus’ own family opposed Him (13:53-58; Mark 3:21; John 7:3-5). There is no middle ground concerning Jesus. One either believes in Jesus or rejects Him. As the Son of God and only Savior, He demands our upmost allegiance, even above one’s own family. Furthermore, different values, morals, goals, and purposes will set us apart from others.

I have seen intergenerational conflict increasing on social media. In such a time as this we should give heed to Micah 7:5, “Do not trust in a friend; Do not put your confidence in a companion; Guard the doors of your mouth....”

Some of you are experiencing these verses right now. When one person in a family accepts Christ and another family member does not, you can have division in the family. If a Jew becomes a Christian it is not unusual for his family to have nothing to do with him or her any longer. If a Moslem becomes a Christian, they are often put out of the family, or even put to death. If a Catholic becomes a baptized evangelical Christian, he or she may be rejected by their family. Betrayals, even by family members, have been common in the persecution of Christians and will be more so in the last days.

Now folks, what we read about in chapter 10 is likely to become more and more of a reality even right here in America. If a Marxist revolution succeeds in this country, you can be sure that Christians and others who do not bow the knee to the revolution will be betrayed by family members that embrace the revolution.

² In fact, Paul warned in 2 Tim. 3:3 that many people in the last days will be “without natural affection,” that is, without natural family love.

The question for us is this: Are we going to be defeated by the devil's treats of persecution and rejection? No one likes rejection. No one wants to suffer physical injury and discomfort. But are you going to allow the devil to keep you from Christ or keep you from witnessing your faith just to avoid persecution and rejection? Or are you going to allow the devil to keep you from being the Christian God wants you to be, just to avoid persecution? Listen, Jesus was willing to suffer rejection, suffering, and death for us. We should be willing to suffer the same for Him.

I have given Christ's warning regarding rejection and persecution. That's the bad news. Now we must consider how we can have victory over the forces of darkness. So let's move on to the next point:

II. BE WISE IN YOUR RESPONSE

In v.16 Jesus said, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." The cautiousness and wariness of serpents had become proverbial (cf. Gen. 3:1; Ps. 58:5). It refers to insight into the nature of one's surroundings. Snakes use their forked tongues to deliver chemicals to the brain that gives them directional awareness of their surroundings. So we need discernment. In times of persecution we need to be sensible, thoughtful, and prudent. We are not to be sheeplike, naive and gullible. Being wise as a serpent will enable the Lord's ambassador to see trouble coming and to be prepared to avoid it, or properly handle it. Be wise and avoid the traps that will be set for us. We also need the right disposition. We are also to be harmless as doves. Being harmless as a dove will enable the Lord's servant to display the Spirit of Christ when trouble does overtake him. A dove is a symbol of peace and we are to be peacemakers.

Now I want to share some specific examples of how we are to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

A. It Is Wise to Avoid Persecution – Jesus said in v.23, "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another." Don't be dumb and just let people beat up on you! When the wolves are chewing at you, don't just stand there and be totally passive. Nowhere does the Bible teach that a kingdom worker must stay in the same city where he and his family are threatened and harassed. Instead, we are to move on. So we ought to be wise enough to seek self-preservation. A living witness may do more for Christ than a dead martyr.

Now this is one way that we are to be "harmless as doves." We are to flee, not retaliate. Jesus said in Mt. 5:39, "whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Paul wrote in Romans 12:17, "Pay no man evil for evil." They may hate you and slander you and even try to physically hurt you, but we should not respond in like manner. We ought to be like Jesus. Peter said of Him, "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Now another wise thing to do is this:

B. Turn Persecution into a Witness Opportunity – Jesus said in v.18, "You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles." All of the apostles were arrested and brought before national leaders.³ And they always took advantage of the opportunity to share their faith in Christ with these important people. We do not

³ Cf. Acts 14:15; 16:19-34; 17:1-9; 18:12-17; 23; 24-26:32; 28:17-31.

have easy access to people in high places. So sometimes God will allow us to be persecuted so we can get access to such people.

Will you take advantage of the opportunities that are presented to you?

C. Always Remember: Some Will Believe! – Jesus spends about 23 verses talking about those who reject the Gospel. It's not until we get to the last 3 verses of this chapter (vv.40-42) that Jesus tells of those who receive us and our message. Some will even offer aid and comfort in times of persecution.

So my point is this: We should be faithful to share the Gospel with others, because there will always be at least some who will accept Christ as their Savior.

Finally, in times of rejection and persecution, Christ makes another appeal:

III. DO NOT FEAR YOUR PRESECUTORS

Are you paralyzed by fear? That can happen to people! It is one thing to be cautious of danger but it's another thing to be so fearful that you become a recluse. So our Lord has a word for fearful Christians! He said in v.26, "Therefore do not fear them." In v.28 Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body...." And for the 3rd time in v.31 Jesus said, "Do not fear...." "Do not fear" is one primary message here. When many hear about the possibility or even likelihood of persecution, they may turn from Christ out of fear. And one primary application of the command to "fear not" is found in the immediate context. Based on vv.32-33 we see that we should not fear confessing Christ openly before men. God has no "secret service." The public confession of faith in Christ is one evidence of true salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

So how can we avoid becoming paralyzed by fear? The primary way we overcome fear of men is to:

A. Fear God Instead – Jesus said in v.28, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The fear of God is the fear that cancels fear of everything else. There is a fear that makes cowards and apostates; there is a different kind of fear that makes heroes and apostles. He who fears God is afraid of nothing else.

Stalin was the cruel communist leader of the Soviet Union. One of his schoolmates became a bishop. He came to Moscow and decided to pay Stalin a call. Stalin agreed to see him. While getting ready for the visit, the bishop agonized over what to wear - bishop's attire or laymen's clothing. After much thought, he decided not to take any risks and put on a conservative business suit. When the bishop entered Stalin's office, this detail did not go unnoticed. Instead of a greeting, Stalin said, "You're afraid of me but not of Him?" (pointing his index finger first at himself and then at the ceiling).⁴ That bishop failed to direct his fear solely toward God.

So truly fear God and you will not fear men.

B. Remember, God Knows Everything – Jesus said in v.26, "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." The enemies of the gospel may do their dread deeds under the cover of darkness, or they may plot against believers in secret meetings, but God sees them, and He will judge them or foil their plots.

⁴ *Parade Magazine*, July 28, 1981 [Illus.#C-104].

Sometimes God uncovers plots against His people. In Acts 23 we read that over forty men joined in a conspiracy to ambush and murder the apostle Paul. But Paul's nephew heard about the plot, and informed the Roman officials, who protected Paul. Several other times in the book of Acts plots against the apostle Paul were uncovered!

Furthermore:

C. God Will Deal with Your Persecutors – Notice what Jesus said about those who reject the Gospel in v.15, “Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!” Sodom was one of the most wicked cities in the ancient world. Yet Jesus says that people who reject the Gospel, and especially those who persecute Christians, will face far greater judgment.

Let this be a warning to anyone who will join those that carry out persecution against Christians! God will deal with you in due time.

So instead of living in fear, we are to trust God to deal with our persecutors.

D. Their Harm Is Very Limited - Jesus said in v.28, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” It is so foolish to be more concerned about the body than the soul. The body is mortal. The soul is eternal. Just say to anyone who threatens you, “You can kill my body, and think you have defeated me, but all you have done is given me a swift ticket to glory!” For the apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:8 that “to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord.”

Martin Luther wrote the great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” He caught this truth when he wrote:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.

Within 60 years after the death of Jesus, the mighty Roman Empire began a war against the Christian faith. They demanded that Christians bow the knee to Caesar as Lord. Does that sound familiar to what we are witnessing today? And yet they could not do it because only Jesus is Lord. So they threatened to throw them to the lions, and did so. They poured pitch on their bodies, tied them to poles, and burned them to cast light on the darkness. They crucified some, and beheaded others. And yet, their war against God's people was an utter failure because Jesus has removed the sting of death and the fear of death. They knew that through death they would pass into the presence of Jesus. And for every Christian they killed, several more were saved by the power of God to take their place. The threats of death were totally futile in stamping out Christianity in those early days. [Illus.#C-1232]. Within 300 years Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire, and the world was changed for the better.

Again, remember how Jesus quoted from Micah 6:7, that your own family will betray you. Well listen to the next verse, “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD will be a light to me.” Let us have victory over our persecutors by faith and hope in the Lord.

I want to give you another reason not to fear in any situation:

E. You Are Important to God - Jesus said in vv.29-31, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” We do have personal worth to God. You are so valuable that God sent His only Son to die for you (Jn. 3:16). Therefore, He will protect us from harm because even we humans care for and protect what we value, right? Yet at times God will allow some of His people to suffer *bodily* harm when he has some higher purpose for our suffering. Even then He will not allow harm to your soul and instead will comfort you and strengthen you. Furthermore, God is concerned about all of the details of our lives. Even the hairs of our head are numbered. God sees the sparrow fall to the ground, and God sees when a hair falls from the head of one of His children. God knows if you’re losing your hair. Just be thankful that you haven’t lost your head!

So there is no need for us to fear when God is exercising such wonderful care over us. Instead, just trust God.

Conclusion: Rejection by family, friends, and your peers can be very painful, especially if self is still on the throne of your life. But that is nothing compared to being rejected by Christ at the final judgment. That is the rejection that people ought to be concerned about. In Mt. 7:23 Jesus describes what He will say to many on Judgment Day. He will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” In Mt. 25:41 we have more ominous words, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Ah, but Christ wants to receive you. He wants you to spend eternity with Him. He said in John 6:37, “...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” But you must come to Him now, when you have the opportunity, when the Spirit is calling. Come to Jesus! Publicly confess your faith in Jesus.

Most of you have already come to Jesus. You have already committed your life to Christ. My invitation to you is to recommit your life to Christ. Will you make a commitment to be a witness for Christ, regardless of the cost? Christ died for you. What will you do for Him? Are you going to look to the world for happiness, or to Christ?

Sources: Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2020; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Philips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. To obtain an audio or video recording of this message, go to www.sermonaudio.com/pastorFelker, or go to www.SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com/Resources. Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).