

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

November 17, 2024

I. Introduction

A. **Matthew 10:32-39**, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. [33] But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. [34] Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. [35] For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; [36] and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. [37] He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. [38] And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. [39] He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.”

B. In sending out His disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom, Jesus included a warning about possible persecution – from simple rejection to cruel treatment. This does not mean every Christian who speaks and lives in such a way as to bring truth, justice, love, and righteousness into their world will be persecuted. Yet it is a probability, and one we ought to be prepared to face. Therefore, I am urging you to take what was taught the past two Sundays and today and use it to look into your own heart and mind to see if you are prepared, or are preparing for the possibility of persecution so that you remain faithful should that day come.

C. Pray

II. Faithful or unfaithful, worthy or unworthy in the face of persecution

A. [32] Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. [33] But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

1. Jesus said something similar in **Mark 8:38**, “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

2. The **therefore** of vs 32 refers back to the promise of vs 31, “So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.” And this promise gives us confidence that God can and will bring good – now and in eternity – out of even the worst forms of persecution.

3. To **confess** Jesus before men is to acknowledge – in word and deed – that, first and foremost, you serve Him, that you do His bidding and fulfill His will in spite of what the law or those in power or the culture or your employer or your church or your family want you to do.
4. To **deny** Jesus before men is to speak and act as if Jesus, His will, and His teachings are of so little consequence to you that you will not allow them to take precedence over the will of those in power or those around you – from the culture in which you live and work to your family.
5. As I have said, it may be hard for us to see how these words of Jesus apply to us, because we live in a place where religious freedom is a protected right. And yet, the shifting views of the culture, some government agencies, the educational system, some employers, the religious community, and even some family members are slowly eroding this freedom under the guise of personal rights, inclusion, and anti-discrimination.
 - a. Therefore, we should not be surprised if the day comes when we are no longer free to express and practice our faith as Christians committed to serving and doing the will of Jesus – our Savior and Lord.
 - b. But neither should we meet that day, if it comes, unprepared to remain faithful – to the end – to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who died so that we who live will no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf.
6. And why should we prepare now? Because, when the pressure is on and our well-being or the well-being of those we love is a risk, we will respond with what is in our heart – that is, we will respond according to who we really are – which is determined by what we believe and value, and who we trust and love.
 - a. The devil and the world know this, which is why they often use fear and the threat of suffering to motivate Christians to deny Jesus, abandon their Christian convictions, and either support evil or grow silent – instead of speaking for truth and against evil.
 - b. And yet, there is a cost either way. You will pay a price for confessing Jesus, and you will pay a price for denying Him. And though this may not be much comfort when you are suffering, keep in mind that the cost of confessing Jesus is temporal, whereas the cost of denying Him is eternal.
7. Therefore, to make the wisest choice in the face of persecution you must hold a settled conviction that the eternal is the greatest value,

otherwise, in the moment of testing, you are likely to give greater weight to the temporal.

8. In talking about suffering for the sake of the gospel, Paul passed this quote from the early church on to Timothy, “It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; [12] If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; [13] If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (*He won't begin doing evil things to us even though we have turned against Him*)” (**2 Timothy 2:11-13**).
- B. [34] Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. [35] For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; [36] and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. (*It seems Jesus is quoting **Micah 7:6***)
1. This is a challenging statement, for it seems to counter **Ephesians 6:15** which says the gospel message is the “Gospel of peace,” and **Romans 12:18** which says, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”
 2. So what is Jesus talking about? The gospel message, which includes Jesus' teachings about how to live, is by its very nature opposed to the values, beliefs, will, and ways of the world – so much so that the world sees them as its enemy – an enemy that must be resisted.
 3. For example, think of the response of unbelievers to Jesus' teaching that we are to allow ourselves to be taken advantage of for the sake of promoting and protecting righteousness. And if you bring trusting God to take care of you into that discussion, you are likely to be treated as if you are asking them to willingly be stricken with cancer.
 - a. The reality is, where enemies oppose each other to this degree, it leads to strong feelings of hostility. And where there is hostility of this kind, it ultimately leads to violence toward the godly.
 - b. I do not believe this is the outcome God wants, but it is the natural outcome in a world where willful evil is opposed by God and godliness.
 4. Jesus says this kind of hostility will happen in our homes – the very place it ought not to happen. And yet it did, and does – especially in honor/shame cultures where converting to Christianity or speaking up for truth and justice brings shame on your family. And this kind of shame often creates social problems for these families in their community, and financial problems in their workplace.

- a. We know Jesus was speaking from personal experience, because **John 7:5** says He experienced unbelief from his own brothers.
 - b. We know from stories coming out of Muslim countries, or countries like China (*communism*) and India (*Hinduism*) that this is the experience of Christians today. In a Muslim country, it is not uncommon for an uncle or father to take a convert's life.
 - c. It is possible some of you have experienced resistance from family members to some of your biblical beliefs and godly values. Possibly even in regard to this last election.
5. Though this kind of resistance may be minor, Jesus' warning ought to be taken seriously, because the day may come when what is now a minor thing, will be major – and it is wise to be prepared to accept the cost of living the Christian life in a sinful, evil world.
- C. [37] He who loves father or mother more than Me **is not worthy of Me**; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me **is not worthy of Me**.
1. Most Christians don't like using the words **worthy** or **unworthy** in relation to our relationship with God.
 - a. It is generally believed that by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection, we who were unworthy because of our prior sinful life are made worthy by the imputed righteousness of Christ.
 - b. When you add eternal security to this, the words worthy and unworthy in relation to our relationship with God sound like we are trying to work for our salvation (*works-based salvation*) – which the scripture makes clear is impossible. So what is Jesus saying?
 - c. By its nature, Christianity brings with it a conflict of loyalties – loyalties which are sorely tested in times of persecution.
 - d. And yet, even before persecution begins, we are making loyalty choices in relation to Jesus, His word, and the Christian life when family members hold to and live according to beliefs and values that oppose Jesus and the Christian life. And it is in these moments that our loyalty makes us worthy, or our disloyalty makes us unworthy of Jesus.
 - e. Therefore, just as faithfulness in marriage makes us worthy of our spouse, and unfaithfulness makes us unworthy, so our faithfulness to Jesus makes us worthy of Him and our unfaithfulness makes us unworthy.
 2. In other words, to remain loyal to God above all others – including family members – is to love God, godliness, righteousness, and the good of all more than anyone else, including yourself.

- a. However, to love anyone more than God, godliness, righteousness, and the good of all, is to love self and what this world offers more than God and what He gives us now and throughout eternity.
 - b. Therefore, to be worthy of God is to live according to His will and word. This does not mean salvation is something you can work to earn – for no amount of good deeds can pay the debt of sin, or given in exchange for eternal life.
 - c. What it means is that God does not indiscriminately hand out eternal life. Rather He gives it to those who repent, trust in Jesus' saving work, submit to the rule of God in their life, and faithfully live accordingly. This is what it means to be worthy of Jesus.
3. Some may think family is not important once we become a Christian. That is far from the truth. Family is always important, and especially so after we've become a Christian.
- a. Does not God require children to honor their parents? Does not Paul exhort husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the Church? Do not the scriptures say that fathers are not to provoke their children to anger? Does not Peter exhort wives to respond to their husbands as Sarah did to Abraham?
 - b. Family matters. But God matters more! Why? Because it is God, not our family, who knows and shows us the path of life, the way of love, the value of godliness, and the importance of faithfulness – all qualities that make family life the best it can be.
 - c. To part from His will and word in any area of life not only harms our own character and well-being, it also harms everyone effected by our selfish and sinful choices and behavior.
 - d. Therefore, loyalty to God must always come before loyalty and allegiance to anyone else – including self – which is why Jesus goes on to say . . .

D. [38] And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me **is not worthy of Me.**

- 1. It is my opinion that harder than enduring the physical pains of persecution is enduring the pains of dying to self, self-will, self-rule, and every form of selfishness.
 - a. We are incredibly foolish when it comes to wanting and doing what we can to keep self, and at least a few elements of selfishness, alive. And I put myself in this category.
 - b. Rather than being a great loss – like so many of us believe, the death of self brings about one of the greatest gains you can obtain,

both in this life and in the life to come. In other words, you don't have to wait until the next life to enjoy its rewards.

- c. True, it comes at a cost, but once the rewards begin rolling in, you will see that the cost was well worth it.
 2. Besides, how can we live a life worthy of Jesus if we do not die to self? Did He not die to self for our sake – from the time He left heaven until He ascended back into heaven (**Philippians 2:3-11**)? Therefore, He is right in saying we are not worthy of Him if we will not join Him in dying to self – for God's sake and the sake of those around us.
 3. Without question, the Christian life is costly – but never to our harm, and never to the loss of anything truly valuable. You will come to realize the truth of this if you will make your aim to value what is truly valuable, be grateful for what you ought to be grateful for, and love what you ought to love.
- E. Jesus concludes this truth with these words, [39] He who has found his (*earthly*) life will lose it (*eternal life*), and he who has lost his (*earthly*) life for My sake will find it (*eternal life*)."
1. Jesus said it this way in:
 - a. **Matthew 16:25-27**, "For whoever wishes to save his life (*in this world by denying Jesus*) will lose it (*in eternity*); but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. [26] For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? [27] For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds."
 - b. **John 12:25**, "He who loves his life loses it (*and everything he gained in this world*), and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal."
 2. Once again, it come down to what we believe and value, what we fear and hope for, where our loyalties lie, and who we love above all others and all else. These are the things that are vitally important, not only in this life, but for all eternity.

III. Addendum – information on persecution around the world

- A. OpenDoors World Watch List 2024. OpenDoors is an organization that keeps track of Christian persecution around the world. It is known for favoring a more conservative estimate compared to other organizations. The following information comes from their site (www.opendoors.org).

1. More than 365m Christians live in areas where there are high levels of persecution and discrimination for being a Christian.
2. Where are Christians most persecuted today? North Korea (No. 1), Somalia (No. 2), Libya (No. 3), Eritrea (No. 4), Yemen (No. 5), Nigeria (No. 6), Pakistan (No. 7), Sudan (No. 8), Iran (No. 9), and Afghanistan (No. 10), India (No. 11), Syria (No. 12), Saudi Arabia (No. 13).
 - a. The deadliest country for Christians was Nigeria, with more than 4,100 Christians killed for their faith—82 percent of the global tally.
 - b. Islamic oppression (30 countries): This is the main source of persecution that Christians face in more than half of the watch list countries, including 7 of the top 10 overall.
 - c. Dictatorial paranoia (11 countries): This is the main source of persecution that Christians face in 11 countries, mostly in nations with Muslim majorities—Syria (No. 12), Uzbekistan (No. 25), Bangladesh (No. 26), Turkmenistan (No. 29), Tajikistan (No. 46), and Kazakhstan (No. 47)—but also in North Korea (No. 1), Eritrea (No. 4), Myanmar (No. 17), Cuba (No. 22), and Nicaragua (No. 30).
 - d. Communist and post-communist oppression (3 countries): This is the main source of persecution that Christians face in three countries, all in Asia: China (No. 19), Laos (No. 21), and Vietnam (No. 35).
 - e. Religious nationalism (2 countries): This is the main source of persecution that Christians face in two nations, all in Asia. Christians are primarily targeted by Hindu nationalists in India (No. 11) and by Buddhist nationalists in Bhutan (No. 36).
 - f. Organized crime and corruption (2 countries): This is the main source of persecution that Christians face in Colombia (No. 34) and Mexico (No. 37).
 - g. China, Eritrea, and Iran ranked in Pew’s top 10 nations implementing government harassment, while India, Nigeria, and Pakistan rank in the top 10 experiencing social hostility.
3. Violence Against Christians Worldwide (2024). Based on 70+ countries tallied by Open Doors researchers for the 2024 World Watch List
 - a. Christians killed for faith-related reasons: 4,998
 - b. Churches and other Christian buildings attacked: 14,766
 - c. Christians abducted for faith-related reasons: 3,906
 - d. Christians detained for their faith: 3,329
 - e. Christians sentenced for their faith: 796

- f. Christians raped or sexually harassed for faith-related reasons:
2,622
- g. Forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians: 609
- h. Christians physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons:
42,849
- i. Houses of Christians attacked: 21,431
- j. Businesses of Christians attacked: 5,740
- k. Christians forced to leave their homes or go into hiding: 278,716
- l. Christians forced to leave their country for faith-related reasons:
16,404

2024 WWL reporting period: Oct. 2022 to Sept. 2023.

Table: Christianity TodaySource: Open Doors 2024 World Watch List