

## **Matthew 10:16-42**

### **The Call of the King to Persevere in your society**

Jesus once said if the world hates you keep in mind that it hated me first  
Opposition and persecution towards followers of Jesus  
Has always existed since Jesus  
And it exists whenever the gospel is shared  
According to the open doors website  
1 in 8 Christians worldwide are persecuted for following Jesus

The vast majority are located in countries in the 10/40 window  
That is countries between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude  
And that persecution can take many forms  
Rejection by a community  
Constant surveillance  
Interrogation and imprisonment by the state  
Kidnap and torture  
Forced denouncing of faith in Christ  
Being treated as second class citizens  
Violent beatings and death threats against family members  
Murder or execution

Living in Australia,  
Unlike many of my brothers and sisters around the world  
I have never experienced any of these forms of persecution  
The worst that I might encounter  
Is the awkward dinner party conversation  
when someone asks me what I do for a living  
When I say I'm a pastor,  
The conversation fizzles out pretty soon after that  
That's not persecution is it?

But even here in Australia  
There is an increasing hostility towards the gospel  
Our young people who follow Christ  
will often find that high school and university  
is more hostile to Christian beliefs than ever before  
With increasingly different views  
particularly on gender and sexuality  
A young Christian making a stand for Jesus  
Sharing the gospel of Jesus  
In the most loving and respectful way possible  
Might still be regarded as a hateful bigot

Well how should we think about this persecution for the gospel?  
That's what we'll be looking at today.

Let me pray for us

Over the last three weeks we've seen how Jesus' compassion for the lost sheep  
Leads to prayer for God to raise workers for the harvest  
So that they can proclaim the gospel  
But with proclaiming the gospel  
Comes the need to persevere in the face of persecution  
Last week we saw that this persecution can occur in families  
But this week we see that this persecution also happens in society

This morning we will be looking at the need to

**Persevere in persecution**  
**By being faithful and being fearless**

The first thing to note is that Christians should expect persecution  
Verse 16

<sup>17</sup> Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. <sup>18</sup> On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it.

It shouldn't surprise us should it  
When we see increasing opposition to Christian belief in Australia  
Whether that's in the media  
Or in legislative assemblies  
Or schools and universities  
Often we respond with a bit surprised  
We wring our hands at the loss of our freedoms  
But there has always been opposition to the gospel in our society  
Including from authorities

The ancient historian Tacitus  
Records that the Emperor Nero  
blamed the Christians for Great Fire of Rome in AD64  
Christians were set on fire to provide light for garden parties  
And fed to the lions at Gladiator matches  
Roman emperors continued to persecute Christians  
For the next 250 years until Constantine came to power.

How should believers behave when facing such cruel opposition?

## Be Faithful

Be faithful to our Master Jesus

Verse 24

“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

The Pharisees hated Jesus and called him Beelzebul, the prince of demons  
And Jesus is making the point,  
If they can do this to me – the Master  
Well then expect them to do that to you – my students  
To follow Jesus is to willingly walk a path of self-denial and suffering  
As Jesus says in verse 38

Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.  
Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Jesus opens the way for us to God through the cross  
But the cross also shows us the way we must live in response  
A willingness to suffer for Jesus' sake

The apostle Peter who was most likely martyred during Nero's reign  
Wrote this to his readers in 1 Peter 2  
But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

It shouldn't surprise us should it  
Jesus walks a path that he expects us to walk.

Jesus says in verse 16 that he is sending out his sheep among wolves  
The prophecy of Isaiah 53 reminds us that  
Jesus himself was like a lamb led to the slaughter  
To bring us forgiveness and eternal life  
Jesus faced hatred, abuse and a violent death.

We should be faithful *to* Jesus  
By being willing to suffer *like* Jesus

But we should make sure that we suffer *for* Jesus

In verse 18, Jesus says, *on my account*  
You will be brought before the authorities  
We should suffer because we are witnessing to Jesus  
Not for foolish reasons  
Look at 1 Peter 2 verse 20  
But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?

I recently heard about a Western missionary  
living in an area where he shouldn't have been living  
but he was pretty gung-ho and over confident  
And inevitably he was kidnapped by extremists  
His country paid a ransom to release him  
And now that only increases the likelihood of kidnap for other missionaries  
That's not suffering on account of Jesus  
That's a foolish reason to suffer.

Here's another example  
Say if you're a health professional and a Christian  
And you use most of your work hours to evangelise your patients  
And you get suspended for this  
That's also not suffering on account of Jesus  
That's just being foolish

Suffer *like* Jesus *for* Jesus

Jesus gives us another way that we can be faithful to him.  
In verse 40 Jesus said  
"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me  
welcomes the one who sent me.

Jesus talks about how people treat his messengers  
If in fact you welcome those sent by Jesus  
It is as though you are welcoming Jesus himself  
And for this, you will receive a heavenly reward.

Further in Matthew's gospel in the parable of the sheep and goats  
Jesus will make quite a pointed statement  
About those who claim to be Christians  
But fail to faithfully care for the followers of Jesus

In Matthew 25 Jesus says

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’” The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

By making mention of his brothers and sisters who are in desperate need  
Hungry, Thirsty, Imprisoned and needing clothes

It seems quite likely that Jesus is talking about persecuted Christians  
Jesus’ final answer to those who didn’t care for his persecuted followers

Is quite damning

Talk is cheap

Unless you show faithfulness in action

By caring for the least of Jesus’ disciples

You will face the condemnation of Jesus

According to the Open Doors website

Pakistan is ranked the 5<sup>th</sup> hardest country in the world to be a Christian

Asia Bibi was harvesting berries with a group of women

And she was told by the women to fetch water for them to drink

Bibi stopped to take a drink herself

from a metal cup she found next to the wall

A neighbour stopped her and told her off for drinking with the same utensil

That Muslims drink from

Because Bibi was considered unclean as a Christian

The women made derogatory statements about Christianity

And demanded that Bibi convert to Islam

Bibi said to them:

"I believe in my religion and in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of mankind. What did your Prophet Mohammed ever do to save mankind? And why should it be me that converts instead of you?"

For saying this, Bibi was charged with blasphemy against Muhammad

Asia Bibi was imprisoned for 9 years

and sentenced to be executed on death row

Most of that time was spent in solitary confinement

After a series of court trials and appeals

The murder of two politicians who supported Bibi

Plots by fellow inmates to murder her

And riots around the country by hardline Muslim groups,

Asia Bibi was eventually freed in 2018

And her family offered asylum in another country

Here's the great thing right,  
On the Barnabas Fund website, you can actually give money  
Towards buying a house for Asia Bibi and her family to live in safety  
Including a daughter with disability  
After all these hard years of standing for Jesus in the face of such hatred  
That is a small thing to do for Asia Bibi

Jesus said:

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine,  
you did for me.

Be faithful to Jesus  
by caring for those who have suffered for Jesus

And there are brothers and sisters in our own church  
who have faced difficult persecution  
And there are ways that you can show them practical love and care  
And also prayer  
Just come and talk with one of the pastors

But you can also inform yourself as to how to pray for  
And provide help to brothers and sisters around the world  
who are suffering persecution for the sake of Jesus  
Websites like  
Open doors  
Voice of the Martyrs  
Or the Barnabas Fund are very helpful in informing yourself

### **Let me apply these verses**

If we are to be faithful to Jesus our Master  
We should have a constant desire to **Know our Master**

I am always struck by the apostle Paul's words in Philippians 3  
I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and  
participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so,  
somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

It was Paul's desire to know Jesus  
That was the foundation of his willingness to suffer for Jesus  
Paul didn't pursue suffering for the sake of suffering  
He wasn't a masochist  
Paul was willing to suffer

Because he wanted to *know* Jesus more and more  
He wanted to be *like* Jesus more and more

I find these words challenging  
Because I wonder how much I really desire to know Jesus my Master  
Like the apostle Paul  
I wonder how much I treasure his death and resurrection for me  
I wonder how much I seek to imitate him in my life  
I wonder how much of my desire for comfort and convenience  
And how little I actually suffer for Jesus  
Actually reflects how little I know Jesus  
On the flipside of this  
I wonder also how much I am missing out on in my Christian life  
Because something that costs very little is worth very little

The Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna  
Died in 155 AD  
At the hands of the Roman Proconsul for not renouncing Christianity  
For this he was burned alive  
He is recorded as having said this before he died:  
“Eighty six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong; how then  
can I now blaspheme my King and Saviour?...I bless you Father, for judging me  
worthy of this hour, so that in the company of martyrs I may share the cup of  
Christ.  
It’s also recorded that he refused to be nailed to the stake  
to hold him in place  
Instead he said God would enable him to remain on the pyre  
and endure the flames

Polycarp knew His Saviour  
That’s why he could be faithful to the very end  
To be faithful to Jesus  
We need to know Jesus more and more

### **This brings us to our second point**

#### **Be Fearless**

One of the consistent themes in the second half of chapter 10  
Is Jesus telling his disciples not to be afraid  
Yes there will be suffering for the gospel  
But followers of Jesus need not fear

Let’s have a look at verse 16 first

<sup>16</sup> “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup>

This verse is quite well known and in its context  
It's about how Christians should respond to persecution  
But what does it actually mean.  
The sheep are of course followers of Jesus  
Now note these sheep are not lost sheep  
These are sheep that have actually been found by Jesus  
But now Jesus is sending them out to proclaim the gospel  
Amongst wolves

The wolves are those who oppose Jesus and his gospel  
For example, the Pharisees in the time of Jesus  
Now Jesus is telling the sheep that when you face persecution by wolves  
You need to act both as a snake and as a dove.

Well why snake?

When we think snake in the bible  
We think immediately of the serpent in Genesis.  
Actively deceptive and full of lies  
I don't think Jesus is commanding his disciples to be deceitful liars

So what does he mean?

Often when we go bush walking  
We're often scared of snakes attacking us if we are about to step on them  
But more likely than not  
They will quickly slither away  
Snakes are very shrewd at self-preservation.  
Snakes know when to run.  
And I think that's what Jesus is saying here  
You need to be shrewd enough to know when to run and when not to

This makes sense of verse 23  
When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.

Jesus is telling his followers  
Don't be a sucker for punishment  
If you can get out of a difficult situation, then do so  
A snake's first instinct is to survive rather than use its venom

The apostle Paul knew when to get persecuted for gospel and when to run  
In Acts 22 we see this incident when Paul is arrested in Jerusalem  
And he's about to get a flogging  
When he pulls out this card from his deck

“Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?”



The roman commander was alarmed when Paul said this  
Because this was not how you treat a Roman citizen.  
And so Paul escaped the flogging  
That was a shrewd move by Paul.  
And you see being shrewd doesn't mean being scared  
Paul wasn't scared when he avoided the flogging  
He was being smart.  
He ended up in Rome and got even more opportunities to testify about Jesus

Not let me take a moment to explain what the rest of verse 23 means  
"Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the  
Son of Man comes."

On first reading, we might assume  
That when Jesus talks about the Son of Man coming  
He's talking about his second coming  
Which of course would make his statement untrue  
But the Son of Man coming  
could also be taken as a display of Jesus coming in power  
Which he does in his resurrection  
So I think this is one likely explanation of this verse  
That the disciples would see Jesus coming in power  
Before they finished witnessing to Israel

Being a dove is to be blameless and innocent in our dealings with others.  
People may bring false and trumped up charges against us  
Like they did against Jesus and Asia Bibi  
But we must make sure that our behaviour is righteous  
and innocent before God  
We must not be the ones causing harm  
Because doves are not harmful

And if we are charged and brought before courts  
We need not fear how to answer these charges

Verse 19

But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At  
that time you will be given what to say, <sup>20</sup> for it will not be you speaking, but  
the Spirit of your Father speaking through you

God will give us words to respond  
God our Father promises to empower the believer  
By the Spirit to keep witnessing to the Son  
And it is through the Spirit that the very presence of Jesus

Will be with the suffering believer  
Jesus made that great promise at the end of Matthew's gospel  
Surely I am always with you to the very end of the age  
The believer is never alone  
Even in the worst situations  
Because Jesus will be present and helping through His Spirit

Even though words will be given to the believer in the most dire circumstances  
It doesn't mean that in normal situations of suffering and opposition  
That the believer should not be prepared  
For 1 Peter 3 says to believers  
That we should always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have  
in Christ

During the marriage equality referendum  
I was once asked by someone  
"Why didn't our church just get with the program  
And just allow anyone who wants to get married to get married?  
Now I should actually prayerful prepare  
A biblical, caring, thoughtful and personal response to a question like that  
I should be ready to answer that question  
in a respectful yet Christ honouring way  
Even if someone asks that question in a hostile way

Jesus gives another reason not to fear in verse 26

<sup>26</sup> "So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.

Jesus is the light that comes into a dark world to expose sin  
And by proclaiming the gospel  
His followers are also bringing light to what is hidden in darkness  
Sin thrives in the darkness  
And followers of Jesus  
are going to experience the pointy end of this darkness when persecuted  
But this should not discourage them from continuing to proclaim  
Because there is coming a day when all will be revealed by God  
On the final day of judgement  
Nothing that was hidden will be hidden anymore.

Which leads to verse 28

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.  
Death is a real possibility for those who stand for Christ and proclaim him  
But for the believer fear of man is replaced by a healthy fear of God  
For persecution can only take our mortal lives  
For the one that entrusts themselves to Jesus  
There is eternal glory  
But for those who persecute the people of Jesus  
There is a more terrifying reality that awaits  
Eternal destruction  
And Jesus uses this to encourage his followers  
Entrust yourselves to the judgement of God  
The God who cares for the sparrows  
Will take care of the final judgement  
You may lose your lives in this world  
But you will not lose eternity with God  
And when you are not worried about eternity  
When death is an enemy you no longer fear  
You can actually live life fearlessly and selflessly

What's struck me about the pandemic  
Is just how scared people are of dying  
And it's a fear that is absolutely paralysing  
Christians don't need to live like that  
We can live with a freedom that is actually full of loving service of others  
Because we know that the best life awaits us after death

Let me apply this

**We need to hold the course as the seas get rougher**

Increasingly, in Australia  
I think it's going to get harder to make a stand for Jesus  
Especially if we continue to proclaim the gospel  
Yes Jesus promises that the harvest is plentiful  
But we will grieve the cost  
The cost for ourselves and our children  
We will see that cost in our children being discouraged and isolated  
We may miss job opportunities or even lose our jobs  
Because we don't agree with particular workplace agendas  
We might be regarded as religious zealots  
We may be brought before human rights commissions  
And so be it  
We must hold the course  
And that means being faithful to Jesus

But never foolish  
We must be like doves  
Never vengeful  
Never hateful  
Because Jesus never was  
We should avoid persecution where possible like snakes  
But we should be fearless  
Because we entrust ourselves to the one who judges justly  
In this life and the life to come.  
We must hold the course  
Because the world that hates us  
A world that sits under God's judgement  
Needs the gospel of Jesus more than ever.

The Sentinelese live on North Sentinel island  
Which are part of the Andaman islands India's territories  
This people group have lived largely untouched for thousands of years  
The Sentinelese are especially hostile to outsiders  
Having killed previous visitors to their island  
The Indian government has also banned visitors to the Island  
One reason being the risk of infecting the Sentinelese with deadly diseases  
That they have no immunity for

In 2018 after years of physical preparation  
And learning culture and linguistics  
John Chau, a 26 year-old American missionary  
Bribed some fisherman to take him to the island  
And he attempted to make contact with the Sentinelese  
By giving gifts to them and trying to be as non-threatening as possible  
A young boy shot an arrow towards John's chest that struck his bible  
John retreated back to his boat  
Undeterred, he decided that he would ask the fisherman  
to leave him at the island regardless of what happened next

On November 16, 2018 he wrote in his journal

*Brian and Marilyn and Mom and Dad,*

*You guys might think I'm crazy in all this but I think it's worth it to declare Jesus to these people. Please do not be angry at them or God if I get killed—rather please live your lives in obedience to whatever He has called you to and I'll see you again when you pass through the veil. Don't retrieve my body. This is not a pointless thing—the eternal lives of this tribe is at hand and I can't wait to see*

*them around the throne of God worshipping in their own language as Revelations 7:9-10 states.*

*I love you all and I pray none of you love anything in this world more than Jesus Christ.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*John*

The next day John Chau was killed by the Sentinelese.  
And his body has still not been retrieved from North Sentinel Island.

Media around the world mocked John Chau  
A deluded Christian colonialist he was called  
A stupid and reckless backpacker  
Imposing disease and antiquated beliefs on a noble people  
Who have the right to be left alone  
John Chau was the butt of many jokes in comedy routines

I don't necessarily agree with all of John's approach  
He was a bit of a lone ranger  
He wasn't sent by a church  
He wasn't part of a team with support and accountability  
He broke laws and caused others to break them  
And members of John's own Christian family  
Thought that John was stubborn and reckless

But the example of John Chau also challenges me  
In a few very important ways  
He's right according to Jesus  
John was driven by compassion for the Sentinelese people  
The Sentinelese people need to hear the gospel of Jesus  
Because there is a fate awaiting them that is worse than death  
And someone has to take the gospel to them  
And John was willing to try  
And if we proclaim the gospel  
We should expect to suffer  
We should expect the world to mock us  
To hate us  
Just as John Chau was willing to be hated

Ultimately John Chau's example unsettles me  
Because I'm not sure if my love for Jesus  
Is as single minded as his was.

Listen to that last line of his journal again  
I love you all and I pray none of you love anything in this world  
more than Jesus Christ.

Let me pray