

## **Intro**

Last week we discussed compassion. Compassion for people suffering from the consequences of their sins and sins inflicted on them. Compassion for people deceived by false narratives. Compassion for people without gospel hope. Compassion for people who are under God's wrath.

This morning we discuss courage. Specifically, courage in sharing the gospel. Jesus assumes we'll be afraid to share the gospel. So he encourages us to fight our fears. Maybe it's hard questions. What will I do when someone asks a question I can't answer? What will I do when someone asks a question, and I know the answer, but I know the truthful answer won't be received well?

What will happen if I discuss sin? People don't want to hear about sin so we cower. We don't want to be judged. We don't want to be rejected. We don't want to be the odd man out. So we stay silent.

So Jesus seeks to inspire courage in us.

Maybe you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian and the phrase, "the gospel," means nothing to you. The gospel is simply the good news, the message, of forgiveness in Christ. The message that our offenses against God (sin = breaking his law) can be forgiven through faith in the Son of God, Jesus. Jesus died on the cross in the place of sinners so that our offenses could be forgiven. And when we believe we're given a new heart so that sin doesn't rule us anymore.

This morning we ask this question:

**CRUCIAL QUESTION: Why should we engage in gospel conversations without fear?**

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

- Recap: inviting sinners into our homes, having compassion on the miserable state of sinners, searching out receptive ears, pressing on when the gospel is rejected.
- The common problem we share with the apostles is being afraid to proclaim the gospel because of opposition.
- We'll spend some time setting the stage then we'll get to the answers.

## Setting the Context

Jesus is preparing the apostles for their immediate mission, the lost sheep of Israel, and their future mission, the Gentiles.

*Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, <sup>18</sup> and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. (10:17-18)*

Opposition is assumed. Even from family:

*Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (10:21-22)*

Family will turn on Jesus' disciples. Even turning believers over to the authorities for execution. In shame cultures, like say Muslim dominated societies, a family member converting to Christianity brings shame on the whole family. So Christians are turned over to the authorities. Hated by all ≠ every last human on earth, but all men in general (Jews, Gentiles, black, white, rich, poor). The gospel is universally opposed. Jesus explains the reason why:

*"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household." – 10:25*

The temptation will be to deny Christ:

*So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (10:32-33)*

This is why Jesus can say:

*But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (10:22)*

True faith confesses Jesus publicly and endures the consequences without denying Jesus. With threats including even execution, there's temptation to deny Jesus. So Jesus says endure. Endurance means "to continue to hold to one's confession despite difficulty and suffering." It's not that one act of failure is an unpardonable sin. After all, Peter denied Jesus three times and remained an apostle. It's that true disciples publicly confess Jesus despite the consequences. People who habitually deny Jesus will be rejected at the final judgment. Their faith is a sham.

It's not that we're saved by our own courage. It's that God strengthens our faith in times of testing and provides the courage that we lack. God has caused us to be born again so that "by God's power [we] are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet 1:5)." Meaning God strengthens our faith so that we don't fall away and attain final salvation. God helps us do what he requires: publicly confess Jesus despite opposition.

Because real dangers exist, Jesus offers guidance:

*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. (10:16)*

The apostles are sheep in that they're vulnerable to danger. So they should act with wisdom and be careful to be innocent. Innocent means innocent of evil. No legitimate charges can be made. Don't do anything to create opposition. Wisdom means avoiding danger if at all possible.

*When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. (10:23)*

Don't seek persecution. Avoid it if at all possible. When your life is in danger, move on to another location.

The phrase "*for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes,*" is a challenge to explain.

- 1) Problem = it sounds like Jesus will return for the final judgment before the apostles complete their mission to the Jews
- 2) Saying flee from one town to the next when persecution comes because ("for") you won't complete your mission to Israel until I come (see 10:6)
- 3) = their exclusive mission to Israel terminates when Jesus comes
- 4) = resurrection (mission to Gentiles begins) or 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem (consequence of repeated Jewish rejection of the gospel)

### **Bridging the Context**

We may not be facing floggings, being dragged before governors, or execution, but we face opposition. Stereotypes, insults, hostility, threats. Strained relations with family and friends. Lost work promotions. While not as extreme as what the apostles faced, I'm sure most of us have some fear of sharing the gospel.

And we also need wisdom...

### **Illustrations**

- Chris discipline & Frank thoughts at PNS = don't need to take the bait and say everything that could be said
- Pat: machine gun questions and turning into a public dispute
- Evangelize one on one = don't get ganged up on (e.g., when you're trying to share with a person who's interested but there's eight other people who don't want to hear it and are ruining the conversation)
- When someone's getting really angry = continuing to proclaim when it's unwelcome could constitute harassment (the goal is to find a receptive audience, not win an argument!)

Friendships and character are critical because they give credibility to our words. **Caution:** this is persecution that results from gospel proclamation, not because of our tone, self-righteousness, or harassment. Despite universal opposition, as we saw last week, the gospel will be received by some. The gospel with salt and light Christians bears fruit. Innocence matters!

### To unbelievers

- whatever you may think about Christianity, it's a religion where we endure suffering for the eternal good of others...mirrors our Savior

Jesus assumes the reason why we don't engage in gospel conversations is fear:

- 1) "do not be anxious" – 10:19
- 2) "So have no fear of them" – 10:26
- 3) "And do not fear those who kill the body" – 10:28
- 4) "Fear not" – 10:31

Is there a greater obstacle to sharing our faith than fear? Let's look at four reasons why we shouldn't be afraid according to Jesus.

### Reason 1: Don't be afraid because the Holy Spirit will give you the words (10:19-20)

*When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. <sup>20</sup> For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (10:19-20)*

Don't be anxious because the Spirit will help you speak. This isn't an excuse to be unprepared. Some justify preaching without preparation, winging it, because of these statements. That's not what Jesus is getting at. The context is arrested believers forced to speak before the courts. In those situations, not public preaching, the Spirit will give you the words. It's no excuse for the Sunday school teacher either.

And it doesn't exclude evangelistic preparation. In a similar context, Peter said:

**1 Peter 3:14-16** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup> yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

This is very similar to Matthew 10:

- 1) Faithfulness leads to suffering
- 2) Don't be afraid
- 3) Set your hearts on Jesus
- 4) Conduct yourself with gentleness and respect

But Peter says something new: be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Be prepared for the questions you will be asked beforehand. Jesus isn’t saying don’t ever be prepared before you share the gospel. He’s saying, when you don’t know what to say the Spirit will help you. So be prepared before you proclaim. Pray. Have an idea of what you’ll say. Have an idea of possible objections. Have an idea of questions you might be asked. But if something comes up you didn’t anticipate, the Spirit will help you. When you’re in an intimidating and fearful situation, the Spirit will provide the words you need. When we’re in an intimidating and fearful situation, the Spirit helps you bear witness. So don’t be intimidated by gospel conversations. The Spirit helps us in the moment.

### **Reason 2: Don’t be afraid because God will vindicate his people**

We shouldn’t be afraid of gospel opposition because “*nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.*” There’s something that is presently unknown, but in the future it will be made public. And this future disclosure is a reason not to fear and keep on proclaiming. Well, what will be revealed that discourages fear, and when? This likely refers to the final judgment when nothing that has been done in secret will remain hidden:

**Revelation 20:12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

The hidden sins of the disciples’ persecutors will be publicly disclosed at the great white throne. The books will be open, all will come to light, and punished will be rendered. The logic appears to be: don’t be afraid of your persecutors because their end is eternal punishment. **Don’t fear because God will vindicate his people.** We’ll be received. Our persecutors will be rejected.

The prevailing narrative may portray Christians in a negative light. So negative that parents turn on their children. Or children against parents. But one day the story will be set right.

*What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. (10:27)*

God reveals so we’ll proclaim. The gospel message isn’t restricted to the church property. The gospel must go into the world.

### **Reason 3: Don’t be afraid because your persecutors can’t kill your soul (10:28)**

*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (10:28)*

Jesus’ logic is blunt. While your persecutors can kill your physical body, they can’t destroy your soul, but God can destroy your soul. So fear God instead of your persecutors. Don’t fear the wrong source. Endure by fearing God, not man.

Eternal life is eternal. It can't be taken away. Even by physical death. When the believer dies their physical body is buried, lost in an ocean, burned in a fire, etc. Their body stays on earth. But their soul enters the presence of God (Luke 23:42-43; 2 Cor 5:8). There's nothing man can do to your soul.

On the other hand, fear God. He can destroy your soul with the sentence of eternal punishment in hell. A place of weeping and gnashing that never ends. A place to be avoided at all costs.

We fear God by recognizing his authority as judge over his creation. God is the one who will pronounce guilty or not guilty on the day of judgment. We can live with man's rejection. But we should shudder the thought of God's rejection on the day of judgment.

Fearing God, we concede our rebellion. We look to his Word to discover the way of pardon. And we find pardon in Jesus. Through faith and repentance. Trust in Jesus for pardon. Turn from your sins and follow Jesus. So fear leads to faith. And faith to pardon. Fear God, not man. Rest in God's promises. Endure man's threats.

#### **Reason 4: Don't be afraid because nothing can happen to you unless God wills it (10:29-31)**

Sparrows were of little value. Two were sold for 1/16 of a day's wages. On an 8 hour day that's 1/4 hour's wages. And as little as a sparrow is worth, *"not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."* In other words, a sparrow can't fall to the ground without God's consent. Since God's providential oversight of his creation is so meticulous that a sparrow can't fall to the ground without God's consent, surely nothing can happen to any of us unless God wills it.

Furthermore, God sees everything, like the number of hairs on our head (some more than others), and we're more valuable to God than sparrows. We have no reason to fear because God's watching over us and he cares. Nothing can happen to us unless God wills to permit it. Like persecution. Like being dragged into the courts. Like being put to death.

The comfort is found in the fact that God is watching over us all the time, wherever we are. And even if he should permit us to suffer, he will be with us in the moment, giving us the words to speak. In the end, he'll vindicate the charges against us. Even if we perish, our soul will immediately enter God's presence and all suffering will cease. Fear God, not man. Engage in gospel conversations without fear! But do so with wisdom and innocence. God is with you as you speak for him.