

Difficulties of Discipleship

Matthew 10:16-42

Intro

Shortly before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus spoke these words to His disciples in...

John 16:33 (NKJV)

“...In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Now, as we study the lives of Christians from that time until now, we see that disciples frequently encounter tribulation just as Jesus warned in **John 16:33**...

- And as we continue our verse by verse study of the gospel of Matthew this morning, the Lord Jesus is warning all disciples that difficulties are on the horizon...

The Lord does not issue these warnings to *discourage disciples* but *to prepare them* — because “*fore-warned is fore-armed*”...

- Keeping this in mind, we should take to heart what Jesus has to say in this passage because it will help prepare us for the challenging road we will walk as we follow Him...

With this as our introduction, let's go ahead and jump into our first section...

1) The Difficulty of Persecution (vs 16-25)

persecution — *a program or process designed to harass and oppress someone...[expand]*

And all faithful disciples will suffer some sort of persecution...

2 Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)

...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

- [expand — disciples will experience varying intensities of persecution — some will suffer more than others...]

With this in mind, let's move into the first verse of our passage...

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

This is a radical statement by the Lord Jesus...

And it doesn't sound like a fair fight — I don't know what hope sheep have against wolves...

- *But it is important to remember that sheep do not go out alone — the Good Shepherd is with us — He will never leave us nor forsake us...*

And though this is true, it doesn't alter the reality that *discipleship is difficult* — persecution will come in one form or another...

So the Lord gives the following instruction at the end of vs 16...

Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

The phrase **wise as serpents** speaks of being *intelligent, prudent and discerning...*

- As disciples we should ***seek wisdom*** — we should learn to ***walk wisely*** in the midst of a dangerous world...

At the same time, as disciples we should also be **harmless (innocent) as doves...**

- *In other words, we are to stay away from those things which would defile us...*

“You don’t need to get in the sewer to know it stinks”...

For a helpful passage on what it looks like to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, please turn to...

Ephesians 5:8-21 (NKJV)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),

10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

14 Therefore He says:

**"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light."**

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Please turn back to Matthew 10 as we move into vs...

17 But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.

The day was coming when disciples would suffer persecution at the hands of Jewish religious leaders who rejected Christ...

But the coming persecution would not be limited to the religious sphere...

18 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.

Disciples would also suffer persecution at the hands government officials...

- Both regional leaders and national leaders would persecute disciples...

Now, please notice how the Lord Jesus frames this persecution — Jesus says it will occur **for My sake** — because the disciples are faithful to Him...

- And this persecution will become an opportunity for disciples *to witness to the unbelieving government officials...*

It will be an occasion for disciples to be faithful to Jesus Christ and it will give unbelieving leaders a chance to hear the truth and place their faith in Christ...

ENCOURAGEMENT — As a disciple you have a testimony to share — you are a witness — you know the Lord Jesus and you have seen Him work in your life — share that with others...

The Lord Jesus continues as we move into vs 19-20...

19 But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;

20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

For the disciples who will suffer this sort of persecution, they are not to worry beforehand about what they will say to their persecutors...

- The Holy Spirit — referred to here as the **Spirit of your Father** — will speak through them — He will give them the words to say...

For a wonderful example of this being fulfilled, please turn to one of the most instructive passages on persecution in the NT...

Acts 4:1-31 (NKJV)

1 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them,

2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes,

6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:

9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,

10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you

crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.

11 This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'

12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.

17 But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

**25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?**

**26 The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the LORD and against His Christ.'**

27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together

28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,

30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Please turn back to Matthew 10 as we move into vs...

21 "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.

Tragically, the persecution suffered by disciples is not limited to the outside forces of *religious leaders* and *governmental authorities* — persecution will also come from *inside the home*...

- Unbelieving family members will rise up to persecute disciples...

This happens in cultures all around the globe but it is especially pervasive in regions dominated by militant Islam, militant Hinduism or communist ideology...

Now, as we move into vs 22-23, I believe that the Lord Jesus is speaking directly to those who become disciples during the Tribulation period — that seven-year period that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Christ...

**22 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.
But he who endures to the end will be saved.**

**23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.
For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.**

As we put the pieces together, it seems to me that there are at least three reasons that verses 22-23 fit best with those who will be serving Christ during the Tribulation period...

First of all, the disciples will be hated by all for His name's sake...

This connects well with the Tribulation period because that time period will be a season of unparalleled persecution as the Antichrist systematically pursues believers...

Secondly, the Lord Jesus says that he who endures to the end will be saved...

I believe that the word **saved** here has the meaning of *being delivered* — I don't think it refers to eternal salvation...

- In other words, the disciples of the Tribulation period who endure all the hardship and persecution will be delivered by Jesus into His Millennial Kingdom that He will establish when He returns...

[expand — this is an encouragement to endure — the difficulty will not last forever — *for the disciple, no pain is permanent...*]

Thirdly, Jesus says that these persecuted disciples will not have gone through the cities of Israel before He returns...

I believe this only makes sense if the Lord Jesus is speaking of those who will be disciples during the Tribulation period and who witness His Second Coming...

Let's move on to vs 24-25 where we learn an indispensable principle...

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

25 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!

These are vital truths for us to take to heart...

A teacher is above his disciples and a master is above his servant...

That is the authority structure of those relationships...

And a good disciple wants to be like his teacher and a good servant wants to be like his master...

- Obviously, the Lord Jesus is both the **teacher** and the **master** in this illustration and believers are both the **disciples** and the **servants**...

*Now, if the Lord Jesus — who is both our **teacher** and **master** — was mistreated by His enemies (even calling Him Beelzebub) — how are those enemies going to treat us?...*

We — of course — will be mistreated as well...

For more on this subject, please turn to...

John 15:18-20 (NKJV)

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

20 Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."

- [expand — we are not to *invite persecution* but we should *expect persecution*...]

Now, as we turn back to Matthew 10, let's move into our second section...

2) Difficulty of Fear (vs 26-33)

26 "Therefore do not fear them.

The Lord Jesus tells us — point blank — that we are not to fear those who hate Him and us...

Proverbs 29:25 (NKJV)

**The fear of man brings a snare,
But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.**

Continuing on in Matthew 10:26-27 we read...

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

27 Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.

I believe that this is another version of “Don’t hide your light under a basket”...

The Lord is encouraging all of His disciples to ***openly proclaim*** what He has ***shared with them privately***...

And this has incredible application for you and for me...

We are to seek the Lord privately — we are to have a personal relationship with Him — reading His word, praying, worshiping Him through song, the list goes on and on...

- And as the Lord shares truth with us — as He discipless us ***privately and individually*** — we are to take that truth and share it ***publicly and corporately*** — we are to tell others what the Lord has revealed to us...

And as the Lord Jesus makes clear in the next verse, we are not to allow the fear of men to silence us...

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

We are not to fear men because they are only able to **kill the body** — they cannot **kill the soul**...

- Men can put an end to our *material self* (temporarily) but they cannot put an end to our *immaterial self*...

Jesus continues in vs 28...

But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

God is the one to fear because He has power over **both soul and body** — *over both the immaterial and the material...*

- He is the One who brings ultimate judgment — He is the One who sentences unbelievers to the just judgment of Hell...

The Lord Jesus next encourages disciples with a few reminders in vs 29-31...

29 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.

30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

I believe that the point that the Lord Jesus is making is that as a disciple you are not to fear because God the Father *sees you* and He *values you...*

- You are not going to die apart from Him allowing you to die — and even your death will be something that He works together for the good...

Continuing on in Matthew 10, we move into vs 32-33...

32 Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”

Here are two common ways to understand these verses...

1) Salvation vs Damnation — those who confessed Him are believers and those who failed to confess Him are unbelievers...[expand]

2) Reception of Rewards vs Loss of Rewards — those who confessed will be rewarded and those who did not confess will lose rewards...[expand]

**I do not believe that these verses teach that a person can lose their salvation by failing to confess Christ publicly*...[expand]*

Let's move now to our third section...

3) Difficulty of Division (vs 34-38)

The Lord Jesus begins this section with some very challenging words in vs 34-36...

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

35 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';

36 and a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'

Now, it is common to refer to the Lord Jesus as the Prince of Peace — and He is — but we have to define our terms...

- *Because it is vital to understand that the Lord Jesus came to bring peace between us and God...*

Romans 5:1 (NKJV)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

Romans 5:10 (NKJV)

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The bad news is that every unbeliever is an enemy of God — but the good news is that God loves His enemies...

- And He has made a way for peace *for every unbeliever* through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ...

But the ***difficulty of division*** becomes a reality when we become disciples but our family members remain enemies of God...

- [silly example — family of Dallas Cowboy fans — one family member chooses to become a Philadelphia Eagles fan — there will be trouble...]

The division is the natural result of differing allegiances...[expand]

Now, as disciples, we should pray for our unbelieving family members and we should reach out to them in love...

Romans 12:18 (NKJV)

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

- But we should not be surprised when division comes — because we serve different masters...

Now, as we move into vs 37, the Lord shares a difficult truth...

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.

The Lord Jesus must be first — to place anyone above the Lord Jesus is idolatry...

- *Ironically, we cannot love our family members rightly unless we love Jesus first...*

[expand — Greatest commandments / love God & love others...]

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

- [expand — self-denial is the key to discipleship / “*I am not self-employed — Jesus is my Master*”...]

We cannot follow Jesus if we are going our own way...

Amos 3:3 (NKJV)

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

This brings us to our final section...

4) Rewarded for Difficulties (vs 39-42)

39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Making your life about the here and now — about the things of this world — will result in eternal loss...

But letting go of the here and now — making your life about the Lord Jesus Christ will result in ***real life...***

A life that is found — an eternal life that starts now and continues on into eternity...

Moving into vs 40, Jesus says...

40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.

As disciples, we have the incredible privilege of being *Christ's representatives* — and whoever welcomes us welcomes Christ — and therefore welcomes the Father...[expand]

- [expand — apply to us welcoming one another...]

Now we have the final two verses of Matthew 10...

41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

I will leave you to study these verses on your own if you are interested in distinguishing between the different rewards here...

I prefer to look at the overarching lesson found in these verses...

That being a disciple of Jesus Christ will be worth it...

- All the difficulties will be worth it — whatever we do in honor of the Lord will be rewarded by Him...

The Lord Jesus is telling us that being a disciple is the best possible life because it is profitable not only in this life but also in the life to come...

Conclusion

So, as we begin to wind-down our time together, the final lesson of the difficulties of discipleship is that in the end it will all be worth it...

- *And it will not be worth it because I say so — it will be worth it because the Word of God says so...*

To prove my point, I will close with a few verses that drive this truth home...

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NKJV)

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Colossians 3:23-24 (NKJV)

23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Hebrews 6:10 (NKJV)

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Galatians 6:9 (NKJV)

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

Let's pray...