

## Discipleship in the Lectionary - 06/25/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>

**Matthew 10:24-39**

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### Finding life

Last week's text provided more insight from Matthew's Gospel on what it means to be a disciple including both short term and longer-term missionary instructions (10:1-23). This week's text provides the characteristics of disciples on mission in the face of persecution and conflict. While Israel had a historical tradition of persecuting prophets and this text would have resonated with the first century audience, the nature of this text is quite strange and extreme to most Christians growing up in the West. Up until recently, to identify as a Christian was considered mainstream. Christianity was safe. Today, however, the wind blows in a different direction and the sea is beginning to change. Many are waking up to realize that faith is more dangerous than it used to be, and the once unthinkable idea of church persecution is becoming more widespread. How ought Christians respond?

### Matthew 10:24-39 Commentary

The lectionary text falls within the second of five main teaching blocks, or discourses, of Jesus. The second discourse (10:1-42) focuses on the authoritative mission of the Messiah's messengers.

*<sup>24</sup> "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.*

In these verses, using commonly understood relationships in the culture of the original audience, disciple-teacher and master-slave, Jesus explains how His disciples will face persecution and possible martyrdom. Jesus was accused of working with Beelzebul, the prince of demons (9:34; 12:22-27). If Jesus was accused of being in league with Satan, so too should Jesus' disciples expect to be falsely accused.

*<sup>26</sup> "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> 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.*

Whereas fear in the face of persecution is a natural reaction, Jesus admonishes His disciples not to be afraid. There are three "fear nots." The first refers to the last section (vv. 26-27). The disciples are not to fear those who falsely accuse them. Jesus' teaching cannot be covered up or kept secret. It is destined to become known, despite the opposition such teaching provokes from the culture. The job of the disciples is to proclaim this teaching

publicly – to shout from the rooftops. In other words, we are not to pussy foot around and water down the Gospel because of fear of persecution, we are to be bold enough to shout from the rooftops in broad daylight.

The second "fear not" is that we should not be afraid of our persecutors because all they can do is kill the body that is going to die soon anyway. Only God has power over our souls.

*<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

This is a classic lesser to greater argument. Sparrows were considered the smallest creatures and what is rendered as "penny" is *assariou*, the Greek word for the least valuable Roman copper coin (*quadrans*). Two of the smallest creatures can be bought for the least valuable coin yet God still cares about them. Number of hairs on a head is a metaphor for too numerous to count (Psalm 40:12; 69:4) yet God knows the number of hairs on each of our heads. The third "fear not" is thus if God cares about such lesser things, imagine how much He cares about us. The fact that God cares for us does not mean we will not suffer during our short time on the earth.

*<sup>32</sup> 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.*

Here is both a promise and a warning. For those who publicly acknowledge Christ in words and deeds on earth can expect Christ to be our advocate with the Father; a metaphor for our eternal salvation. One cannot be a Christian and live in fear and silence.

*<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

For those who think that accepting the call to discipleship can be compartmentalized into part of one's life, these final verses of the text offer a rude awakening. Accepting Jesus at His Word has always been dangerous. If in times of relative safety there are risks to being a disciple of Christ, imagine how much more risks there are during seasons of persecution. There is no easy beliefism here. No health and prosperity gospel. The final verse may signal an eternal perspective, yet it has much relevance to our time on earth. The word rendered as "life" is the Greek work *psychē*. This word is translated as both life and soul. *Psychē* is associated with healthiness, happiness, vitality. In other words, if we attempt to seek happiness by attempting to satisfy our own selfish needs and wants, we usually end up in a state of unhappiness. It is only through Christ that we can achieve meaningful lives full of joy and purpose on this earth, even if there may be times of persecution.

### Reflections

As our culture becomes decidedly more anti-Christian, we have two basic choices: Live in silence and compromise in the hope of avoiding trouble or the equivalent of shouting from the rooftops in broad daylight. One is from fear, the other is "fear not." One allows you to live until you die, the latter allows you to truly live.

### Application

- Are you living in fear and compromise or are you living by "fear not?"