

## **Even Worse Than Politics**

### **Matthew 10:5a, 21-33**

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup>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.

<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.

<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. <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. <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.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, a couple of years ago Marilyn and I went on a vacation with some friends, members of my last congregation. We met up mid-afternoon. Following dinner, the other husband and I started discussing politics. It did not go well; in fact, it went terribly. We almost ended the vacation the first night. We both should have known better. As two retired naval officers we should have remembered that there are three forbidden topics in the wardroom during meals – sex, politics, and religion. The next morning our two wives told us there would be no more conversations about politics. Vacation saved!

There is a topic even worse than politics – religion. This past year for my 77<sup>th</sup> birthday some friends from my first congregation sent me a birthday card. On the front of the card is a picture of two middle-aged men. They are standing at a bus stop. One man wears a business suit and tie, the other wears a t-shirt. The man in the suit looks at the second man's t-shirt. The shirt reads: "Let's talk about Jesus." The man wearing the t-shirt says, "It guarantees me an entire seat all to myself." There is a topic even more divisive than politics – religion, especially conversations about Jesus. Who is He? Why should we listen to Him? What is our relationship to Him? In our text for today, Matthew 10:5a, 21-33, Christ calls His disciples to fearless confession because the Father Himself guards and keeps His children.

#### I. The Reality of Following Christ. (21-29)

Our text is a part of Jesus' instructions to His disciples as He sends them out to tell people that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The task seems innocuous at first glance. The disciples carry a message of good news. Why should there be any trouble? The disciples herald the announcement for which God's people have been waiting, ever since God called Abraham and promised him a homeland, and a blessing for all the earth through his seed. It is here, the disciples announce. I am it, claims Jesus.

Jesus does not sugar-coat discipleship. Faithfulness to Him brings division, even with families and friends. This is not hypothetical. It happened in the early church. It happened even for a while in Jesus' own family. It happens today! How often have you heard, "Christianity is just one religion among many." How often have you heard, "You cannot inflict your values or faith upon me." How often have you heard, "That is ridiculous! You cannot believe that God the Father sent His Son to die for you, take all your sins upon Himself, and give life in Him."

The Gospel divides because it demands ultimate allegiance. It demands that we put our trust in Him above all things. The truth is, we do not choose Christ. He chooses us. Yet being chosen means bearing the cross He places on us. "Brothers will deliver brothers over to death, and a father and his child; and the children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated for my name's sake (10:21-22)." Christians should not be surprised when faithfulness costs something – relationships, reputation, comfort, and possibly your life.

This is Father's Day, so, to what are fathers called? Earthly fathers may feel pressure to keep the peace, avoid conflict or "rocking the boat." But Jesus teaches that the faithful father is first a disciple, one who stands firm even when the world pushes back. The father is called to keep the faith in the family and to live the example as a disciple. My goodness, what a challenge we fathers have, what a privilege we carry, what a testimony we live. It is not easy but somebody needs to do it!

Jesus calls all disciples to endurance. The one who endures to the end will be saved. This is not salvation by works; it is a salvation preserved by God through endurance.

What is endurance? It is placing one foot in front of the other in spite of the obstacles and challenges. Thirty-three years ago, I participated in a fifteen-mile march, fully loaded, through the Central Training Area, Okinawa, Japan. Two hundred of us started at 6am, up and down hills, through the jungle, on a hot and humid morning. Fifteen miles, how? One step at a time.

Spiritual endurance is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life is not a sprint, just like a forced march is not a sprint. The Christian life is a lifelong confession, in all circumstances, against all opposition, pushing through by the Holy Spirit. We endure, not by our own strength but by Christ who sustains us through Word and Sacrament.

When I think of endurance I think of the prophet Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet." Sent by God to preach the truth to God's disobedient people, Jeremiah faced headwinds from every direction. Listen to Jeremiah, "For the Word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and

derision all day long. If I say, 'I will not mention Him, or speak anymore in his name,' his word is in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones ... But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore, my persecutors will stumble, and they will not overcome me (20:9, 11)."

Dads, you are tasked with being a mode of endurance for your families. This is not perfection, but perseverance. This is repenting daily, staying in the Word, praying ceaselessly, returning to Christ, and leading your households to the Word.

Because Christ is Lord, Christians speak the truth openly. "Have no fear [of the critics]." The world may mock, threaten, or silence, but Christ's truth will be revealed. The Church does not whisper the Gospel; she proclaims it boldly. Jesus warns us, "... do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell (10:29)."

Fathers are called to be the spiritual leaders of their homes. Children need to hear their fathers speak the Word – pray, confess, forgive, bless, and teach. A silent father leaves a spiritual vacuum, and nature abhors a vacuum and will fill it with something. Let fathers choose what fills the heads of their children. A confessing father strengthens generations. As God instructed Moses, "... for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on their children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:5-6)."

## II. The Comfort of the Father's Care

The antidote for fear is not courage; it is confidence in the Father. "Fear not, you are of far more value than many sparrows." God the Father sees, knows, and guards His children. The worst the world can do is kill the body. God preserves the soul. Our comfort is not in our faithfulness, but in the Father's faithfulness to us. I can think of no greater demonstration of this than Paul's letter to the Romans. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress ... or the sword? As it is written ... For I am sure that neither death nor life ... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ro. 8:35, 38)."

Earthly fathers reflect – imperfectly – the perfect care of our heavenly Father. A father's calling is to mirror God's protective, attentive, sacrificial love. Fathers, our example greatly affects the family's conception of God the Father. This is a tremendous weight on our shoulders. When we fail, and we do, our heavenly Father never does. Probably, one of the most embarrassing blunders I ever committed was during a visit to an orphanage during my vicar year. I taught a lesson on the love and care of our heavenly Father to a group of elementary age children. I could tell that the classroom felt awkward. Frustrated I said something like our heavenly Father loves and cares for us much more than our earthly father. To which a boy responded, "I never knew my father." Duh, this is an orphanage. "It is better to keep your mouth shut and thought a fool, than to say something and remove all doubt."

It's not politics; it is much more important (eternally). Standing up for our faith is not an option. It is the fruit of our faith. It flows naturally. To confess Christ is to acknowledge Him publicly as Lord and Savior. However, as we warned earlier, prepare for the blow back!

Jesus cautions us against denial, not to terrify us, but to call us to steadfastness. Confession flows from faith; denial flows from unbelief. Christ intercedes for the believer before His Father. He claims us as His redeemed brothers and sisters, purchased with His blood and justified by His resurrection. Nothing can wrench us from the Father's hand.

The greatest gift a father can give his family is not money, or success, or comfort, or a tremendous inheritance; it is a clear confession of Christ. A father who confesses Christ teaches his family where true hope and identity are found.

We have a Gospel insurance. Christ confesses us! The heart of our Gospel lesson is not fear, even though we spend a lot of time in fear. The good news fills our lives, but here is even more wonderful news; the heart of our text is promise. Christ says, "I will confess you before my Father." The Son stands before the Father and names you as His own. This is the mighty, immovable foundation of all courage, endurance, and confidence. It is not built on our sinking sands; it is not built upon our intelligence and wisdom. It is built on solid rock, the rejected cornerstone of Christ. The cornerstone despised by the unbelieving has been chosen by the Father.

Hear this all you fathers and grandfathers, you need this Gospel as much as anyone. Before we are fathers, we are sons, sons of the heavenly Father through His Son. Our strength as fathers comes not from our weak, sinful selves, but from being held by God.

Fear not, the Father holds you fast. The world may oppress you. Politics may drive you crazy and fire up your arguments. Family may misunderstand you. Nobody may want to sit next to you on the bus, or the plane. But Christ confesses you. The Father values you. The Spirit strengthens you. So, stand firm! Confess Christ! And fathers, lead your families in the same fearless faith. Happy Fathers' Day; fear not!

I would like to bring this word to a close with a quote from today's psalm, 91, verses 1, 9 thru 10. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust' ... If you make the Most High your dwelling – even the Lord who is my refuge – then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways." Amen.

May the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard our hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria!**