

Title: For My Name's Sake, pt.1
Text: Matthew 10.16-31
Theme: Being prepared for the cost of discipleship
Series: Matthew #59
Prop Stmtnt: Following Christ is gloriously serious.

Read Text:

Former President George Bush Sr., has made it a habit to go skydiving on his birthday (every 5 years). A little over a week ago, he turned 90 and sure enough, he went skydiving. Have you ever read the disclosure statements and legal forms that you have to sign before you can go skydiving? Here is an exact quote:

I understand that I may be injured or killed, including but not limited to broken bones, internal injuries, dismemberment, disfigurement, disability, mental incapacitation, permanent or otherwise, in many ways while participating in Skydiving/Parachuting Activities including but not limited to falls from training equipment; collisions with or falls from aircraft, turning propellers, other persons, parachutes, trees, power lines, buildings, structures, machinery, vehicles, the ground, or other objects, while on the ground or in the air, while boarding aircraft, riding in the aircraft during taxi or airborne, exiting the aircraft, during the jump, during free-fall, during parachute opening, while under parachute, while landing or after landing; drowning, electrocution; explosions; fire; malfunction of aircraft or parachute equipment; meteorological condition; and acts of God. There's more.

So, given the potential of all of the things that could go wrong, why do otherwise seemingly sane people pay stinking good money to do such a thing? It all comes down to what we call the relationship between risk and reward. For the former President, the reward of the thrill of skydiving is greater than the risk. After all, what does he have to lose? Seriously, the guy has seen his family grow and flourish, he served as President, he has seen the world, and his son has served as President. So, in his case, he does not have that much to lose, so the reward is definitely worth the risk.

This text is like the full disclosure statement for followers of Christ. I think that every person who is considering become a follower of Christ ought to read Matthew 10. Jesus is making it very clear that there are risks with following him. If you follow Christ, you need to expect that people will not like you. People will reject you. Some people will seek to hurt you and hurt those you love. There is real risk involved with following Christ. But, is the reward worth the risk?

There is so much to be gained in becoming a follower of Christ. In fact, the greatest that could ever be gained is in gaining Christ himself. So, since the reward that is gained is the greatest reward that could ever be gained, then that means that there is so much that is lost in not becoming a follower of Christ. Since the greatest gain is found in Christ, the greatest loss is for those who are not in Christ. There is no middle ground. Since Christ is the greatest gain, it only stands to reason that following Christ brings with it the greatest

risk. But, that risk is worth it, since not following Christ brings the greatest loss. But, there is something more that must be understood. The reward that is gained in following Christ is guaranteed. The loss in not following Christ is also guaranteed. So, as you consider the full disclosure statement that Christ is giving about the risk, remember that while the risk is real, the risk is only temporary. And remember that while the loss of not following Christ is real, that loss is eternal.

One more thing about this text: Jesus is using the short-term missions trip that the disciples are about to take as an occasion to let them know what they are in for in following him. What we looked at last week (vs. 5-15) spoke more to this specific trip, while these verses (vs. 16-42) speak more to what is in store for them and for all who become followers of Christ. This morning I am preaching on the risk part of following Christ. Next Sunday, Lord willing I will preach on the reward part. The following Sunday will be the therefore. (risk, reward and therefore) Here is what we must be prepared for:

I. **Be Prepared for Persecution.** (16-20)

Notice that Jesus again uses the word, “behold” which draws specific attention to what he is about to say. *“I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.”* What is Jesus saying here?

A. **Your world is not friendly to your faith.**

There is no such thing as tolerance for Christians. Our culture demands that we be tolerant, but it will not afford us the same. Do not expect your world to applaud what you believe, nor who you follow. This world is not a friend to grace. It did not take the disciples very long to experience this after Christ ascended. By Acts 4, Peter and John are arrested and threatened. In Acts 5, they are arrested again and beaten. In Acts 6, Stephen is arrested and in Acts 7 he is executed. In Acts 8, persecution breaks out against the entire church. In Acts 12, James is executed and Peter is in prison awaiting his execution.

Since then, the world has ebbed and flowed in its response to Christianity. Nobody enjoys persecution, but it is disastrous for the gospel, when we are willing to change the message in order to seek the approval of the world. If the world approves of our message and methods, we are doing something drastically wrong. This week delegates from the Presbyterian Church (USA) met here in Detroit and voted to approve same-sex marriage and they voted to disinvest their monies from companies that do business with Israel. In their effort to be contemporary and acceptable, they are accelerating their free fall into irrelevancy. This is a hard but necessary thing to say. They are not followers of Christ.

B. **We do not have the normal means of protection.** (16a)

We do not fight as the world does. Jesus calls us sheep. Sheep cannot defend themselves. We do not fight back with threats, violence, executions or terror. We are at the mercy of those who do.

C. We must be on guard. (16b - 18)

Be wise like a serpent but innocent as a dove. In other words, do not be naïve nor gullible. We are to be crafty, discerning and yet not evil, vindictive or deceitful. Recognize that there are evil people in this world who hate God and will hurt you. There will be people who say evil things about you at work. You will be mistreated. You will be accused of doing evil things. Notice the words of certainty that Jesus uses to describe what will happen. “They will deliver you over” (17), “and you will be dragged” (18), “when they deliver you” (not if they deliver you over) (19).

The point that Jesus is making is that persecution is in store for those who follow Christ. Look for it. Anticipate it. Be prepared for it so that you are not surprised by it. You do not go looking for it nor asking for it. You are not to play this macho-Christian role daring someone to persecute you so that you can look all spiritual. This is not about you; it is about Christ. So, as a sheep, you are vulnerable, but do not be stupidly vulnerable. Recognize what you are up against and what this world really thinks about Christ. We will be called hateful by people who are truly hateful. When you simply embrace the truth, be prepared for the fangs, the claws and the knives to come out.

D. God will take care of the rest. (19-20)

This is an amazing promise! In fact, this promise and the outworking of this promise is so good and so satisfying that it is worth the persecution that you endure just to be able to experience it. Let me set it up this way. Our greatest need is to know God. Our greatest need is also our greatest delight. But for most of us, who have professed faith in Christ, there are times of doubt. We wonder if we truly believe. We wonder if the faith we profess is our faith by conviction, or a shallow belief of convenience. What would it be worth to you to know that your faith is real? What would it be worth to you to know that your faith is so true that for you there is no fear in life and no fear in death? Meaning, there is no threat, no taunt, no accusation, no intimidation, no attack that anyone could hold over you?

Do we not want to know how we would respond in the face of persecution? What would it be like then, to be hauled into court before our accusers and instead of having our head swimming in confusion and our hands wringing in nervous terror of what they may do to us, we discover, much to our surprise that we are calm, composed and amazingly articulate? Do you see what Jesus is saying here? Do you get this picture? When a defense attorney is preparing his client for trial, he will coach him on what to say. He will practice with rapid fire questions and accusations at him to prepare him for the real thing. And yet, when the actual trial begins, and the accused takes the stand, the defense attorney cannot answer for him. But not us! Do you see this? Jesus is saying, “don’t panic. When you get on trial, the Spirit of my Father will speak through you.” And when He does, you (and everyone else) will be amazed. You will wonder, where did that come from? I did not even plan to say those things. What would that be worth to you? What would it be worth to you to know that you were the actual mouthpiece of God? You, your mouth, your voice, your words were the actual instrument that God Almighty spoke

through to witness to his truth and glory. What would that be worth to you to know that you are indeed his own? Would that not embolden you? Would you not feel safe, even in the midst of the wolves? Would that not be like having a table prepared for you in the midst of your enemies? That is what David said the Lord does for us? He invites us to sit down and eat, even in the midst of our enemies because he's got us covered.

II. **Be Prepared for Betrayal.** (21-22a)

Here is the sad truth. Do you remember what Satan said about us to God in Job 2.4? "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life." That is, many people will turn on their own families in order to save their own lives. It is actually rather common. Terrorists are known to force new recruits and members to kill their own families as both a test of their loyalty and to ensure that they will remain loyal, because they have no where to go back to. Either kill your family or be killed. The Atlantic magazine recently ran a story about a boy named Shin, who was a prisoner in a North Korean prison camp. He reported to a guard that his mother and brother were planning to escape. His mother and brother were executed before his eyes, while he, at the time, thought that they deserved to die. The physical and psychological terror inflicted upon him and others makes for very difficult reading. It is beyond words to describe what we are capable of doing to one another. The depth of evil in the human heart seems to have no bottom.

Christians are easy targets. And this warning is not just for the early days of the church. Our world is just as brutal and barbaric as it has ever been. Jesus is reminding us that the true colors of your faith may be revealed when your life is on the line. There may come a time when you cannot save your life or the life of a family member without denying Christ. What will you do? What you do then will be determined by what you believe and do now. Are you prepared to stand alone for Christ? Are you prepared to be betrayed, even by your family?

I do not know too many things that are more devastating than being betrayed by a family member. To realize that someone of your own flesh and blood turned on you in order to save their own skin or advance their own cause just about takes all of the wind out of your sails. Some of you have had family members cheat you out of money, or manipulate and steal your inheritance. And while the money part is certainly an inconvenience, the real kick in the gut is to realize that you have a family member who was willing to throw you under the bus. You wonder, what is it about me that my own family would turn on me and do this to me? Imagine having a family member turn on you and have you arrested and imprisoned because of your faith in Christ. Jesus is asking the question, are you willing for that to happen? Do you realize that this is possible? Do you realize that this can be and may be a consequence for being a follower of Christ? Are you willing to consider Christ more precious than the loyalty of your family?

We are not yet prepared for this type of pressure. We do not yet realize the war that we are in. We are still trying to get everyone to like us and trying to get everyone to like

God. Christianity's message to the world has been, vote for God because he wants you to be happy. So, under the guise of God wanting me to be happy, we have attempted to erase the commands of God and the cost of discipleship. Sacrifice does not sound very happy, so we get rid of that. Obedience does not sound very happy, so we get rid of that too. The commands of Christ? Commands? Isn't that legalism? Jesus does not give commands, does he? He is too loving to do that. After all, loving someone means that you approve of what they want to do all of the time without ever challenging them, right? Isn't that love? Do you realize what has happened don't you? We no longer have any categories of right and wrong. We no longer have any convictions to live for or die for. We are not prepared for what Jesus is describing here, unless we have clear-cut convictions that are rightfully established by God's Word that we believe now and follow now, and embrace now.

As you are aware, during W.W.II Germany developed a series of death camps for the Jews that they arrested in the countries that they controlled. 6 million of them were killed, but not all of them. Many of them died before they were gassed. Survivors have told a number of accounts about this and one of the themes that came out was this. The people who lived soft and pampered lives were the first to succumb and die. All Jews were sought by the Nazi's. Rich, poor, young or old, it didn't matter. You lost everything. Everyone was equally poor and equally vulnerable. But, here was the difference. Many of the pampered had no experience with hardship. They never knew what it was like to endure harsh conditions. So, when the unthinkable happened, and their soft, predictable life was completely blown up, they could not handle it, at all.

Here is my fear. My fear is that American Christianity has, for the most part, not been serious about the cost of discipleship. We do not make a big deal about Matthew 10. We have tried to present a cushy Christianity and the result has been pampered people. Our idea of sacrifice is missing the 1st quarter of the football game because church went a little long. We have no context for these verses even while our brothers and sisters around the world are experiencing some of these very same things right now. I am saying to you that it is coming. "You will be hated by all for my name's sake." If your idol in life is for people to like you, then do not try to follow Christ. You cannot truly follow Christ and get everyone to like you at the same time. It will never work. What is so difficult is when the people who hate you are the ones in your own family. Following Christ can be very lonely. Is it worth it?

III. **Be Prepared for being Maligned.** (24-25)

Disciples are not above their teachers. This axiom has lost some of its punch in our culture. We assume that students can challenge their teachers and be disrespectful to them. In fact, many parents actually encourage this, which is mind-boggling. If you teach your children to rebel against authority, they will most likely do it to you, no matter how cool you think you are. In the 1st century world, the teachers basically owned their students. The disciple was more like a slave to the teacher. Everyone understood that the students were clearly under the teacher. So, whatever happened to the teacher in

moderation could be expected to fall upon the students in excess. But, this is lost on us. We have this idea that the church has an image problem with the world. If we had a better public relations department and did cool events and had cool videos, etc., then we could get our world to think nice things about us.

We do not have an image problem, we have a message problem. The world hates our message because they hate the Messiah. This is so hard for us to really accept. We think that if we would just be nice (and of course, we must be), but if we would just be nice then people will respect us, love us, and say kind things about us. That may happen here and there, but stop and think about that for a minute. Do you think that you are nicer than Jesus? Do you think that you can be nicer than Jesus? If this world crucified Jesus, who was perfectly nice, the epitome of nice, the ultimate definition of nice, how do you think they are going to respond to you?

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul talked about the countless beatings he experienced and the times he was near death. He said, "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

Do we expect better treatment than Jesus? Should we expect better treatment than Paul? No. So, here is the summary: We should expect to be persecuted, betrayed and maligned because Jesus was. But no matter how much we are persecuted, betrayed and maligned, our suffering does not compare to his. In fact, our suffering is a privilege. His suffering is our grace. We will not suffer perfectly, but he did. And he suffered in our place that we might be forgiven, even when we do not suffer perfectly.

But, this is not the end of the story. But, with this full disclosure statement on the part of Christ, why would anyone be his follower? Why would these men to whom he spoke sign up? As we will look at next week, persecution is serious, but persecution does not last. Jesus does. You can live for Jesus, or you can live for yourself. You just can't do both.