



Matthew 10:21–23

21 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Reflection

Today Jesus' predictions about his disciple's future ministry move from bad to worse. Yesterday he predicted that both Jew and Gentile alike would turn against them, that they'd be flogged and imprisoned. But nothing hurts more than your own family turning against you. In summary concludes Jesus, 'you will be hated by everyone because of me.' Certainly some cheery words for us to dwell over this morning.

But before we do so, and just stepping back a little, we find ourselves this morning in the second major discourse or speech in the gospel of Matthew. The first was the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapters five to seven which was all

about the kingdom of God. This second speech found in Matthew 10 is all about mission. For that reason it's been called the 'missionary discourse'. Some divide it neatly into three parts. Firstly, in verses 5 to 15 Jesus instructs his disciples, preparing them for their short term mission to Galilee. Next, in verses 16 to 23, Jesus previews the disciples' role as missionaries in the future. Finally, in verses 24 to 42, Jesus lays out the principles for missionaries in every era.

And so today's three verses are Jesus' final words to his disciples about their mission to the world before moving on to speak about mission in general. Jesus' words to his disciples are bleak. There's talk of family betrayals, death, persecution after persecution, and fleeing from one town to

the next. And like all of Jesus' words, these words come true. History tells us that ten of the twelve disciples were put to death, betrayed by the Jewish nation, their own brothers, and fathers and children and either executed by them or handed over to the Romans to do the job on their behalf. As the book of Acts unfolds time and time again we see the disciples flogged and imprisoned, run out of town after town, by both Jew and Gentile alike, always in danger. Just listen to what the Apostle Paul's life was like from 2 Corinthians 11:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

How did the apostles respond to treatment like this? Again in the New Testament, time and time again we find responses like this

one in Acts 5:

40b They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

How could the disciples respond like this? What drove them not only to rejoice in the face of suffering but to never stop teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus until all but two of them were finally

caught and put to death? I'm not sure. But I suspect it was by the power of the Holy Spirit who was sustaining them, empowering their ministries, giving them strength in their hour of need and also no doubt reminding them of what Jesus had told them in verse 22 of our passage when he said 'the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

The same is true for you and I. If you've put your faith in Jesus then the same Spirit who lives in the disciples lives in you, and he will be there to give you strength in your hour of need and remind of Jesus' promise. Jesus promises that the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. No matter how tough life gets, whether it's a relationship, or family breakdown, persecution, even cancer, stand firm; because

whether it's persecution or sickness or famine or sword, nothing, on heaven or earth or under the earth, not even death itself can separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ because Jesus promises us that 'the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

Think

Take some time to meditate over these verses now. You may feel like you're constantly on the outer, often having to flee conversations and situations and relationships that aren't honouring to God. Or perhaps right now you are being persecuted and even hated for your faith. Some of you no doubt are feeling betrayed by a family member, cut off and hurt by them because of your belief in Jesus. I know it

hurts, but in this moment consider that Jesus experienced all these things and more. Jesus was rejected and despised. And he knows exactly how it feels to be betrayed by a brother; his name was Judas and he was closer to Jesus than any brother, he walked with him night and day for three years and even sent him out on mission with the power to do miracles in his name, and yet despite it all Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Jesus knows it hurts, but far better than just knowing and empathizing he came to do something about all the hurt in our world. He died and rose again from the dead and through faith in him we can to, because of his death no longer has any hold on us. It's no longer the enemy, simply a doorway into an eternity in which there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

Prayer

Close this time with prayer. Christians on mission in our world suffer. They experience pain, and betrayal and death – the world is not worthy of them. Pray for them, thank God for the glory that they are bringing him. Pray also that he might deliver them from evil and persecution. Pray that you might seriously consider joining them all the while realising that every Christian in every situation is on mission for our God. Plus of course anything that God has placed on your heart this morning.