

## **Kingdom: A Journey Through Matthew**

Sent by the King  
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### **SENT BY THE KING Matthew 9:35-10:42**

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 9. We're going to start in just a minute in verse 35, so at the end of Matthew 9. Today is the 200-year anniversary of the day when Adoniram and Ann Judson boarded a ship and set sail for India on a journey that would eventually lead them to Burma, modern day Myanmar, to be the first Baptist missionaries to ever go to an unreached people around the world from this country. You may remember, if you've been at Brook Hills for a while, about the letter that Adoniram wrote to Ann's dad to request permission for him to marry this father's daughter. And so I want to remind you of a little excerpt from that letter.

Imagine this—especially those of you who are dads with daughters—getting this letter from a perspective son-in-law. Adoniram wrote,

"I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world; whether you can consent to her departure and her subjection to the hardships and sufferings of missionary life; whether you can consent to her exposure to the danger of the ocean, to the fatal influence of the Southern climate of India, to every kind of want and distress, to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all of this for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home and died for her and for you, for the sake of perishing immortal souls, for the sake of the glory of God? Can you consent to all this in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory with the crown of righteousness, brightened with the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Savior from heathens saved through her means from eternal woe and despair?"

What would you say? Ann's dad said, "Yes." The couple was married and a year later, 200 years ago today, they left. And Ann's dad would never see his daughter again. She would lose her life sharing the gospel. Yet, through her work and Adoniram's work, today there are nearly 4,000 Baptist churches with about half million followers of Christ in the heart of Buddhist Burma, Myanmar. I don't know anybody who's written that kind of letter. It seems very strange to us. But this is a very normal letter in light of the text we are looking at today.

So here's the deal. Over the last few weeks we have seen the authority of Jesus in His teaching and preaching (Matthew 5-7), the last two weeks in His healing (Matthew 8-9). And I hope that over the last couple of weeks especially as we have talked about Jesus' authority over cancer, and tumors, and diseases, and natural disasters, and sin, and death, that you have been encouraged—that your heart has been strengthened—especially those of you who are walking through all kinds of trials and suffering in your life. But we would miss the point of the last two weeks if we only thought that Jesus' authority was good news for us. Because the reality is, this is good news for the world.

We're surrounded by a world immersed in evil and suffering and trials and sickness, natural disaster, sin, and death. And it is good news to say to people here and people on the other side of the world, "The King has come and He has authority over all these things. And one day He's going to assert His full and final authority over these things." And we know that because He did it—He died on the cross for sins, and He rose from the grave in victory over death. And the aim is not simply for us to celebrate this good news, though we are indeed to celebrate the good news.

But the purpose is not just to celebrate good news in the comforts of this place. The purpose is to spread good news from this place throughout this city, and from this city to the ends of the earth. But as we do that, we need to realize that just as we have seen Jesus facing opposition in Matthew 8 and 9, we will face opposition as well. And so there is cost that accompanies the spread of this good news. And so the question before us in this text today is, "Are we willing to pay the price to spread this good news? Are we willing to risk the comforts of this world—our possessions, our plans, our dreams? Are we willing to risk our safety and security in this world to spread this good news in here and from here to the ends of the earth?" Because this is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

So my prayer is in this text, just to let you know what I'm praying for today. I'm praying that God will so grip our hearts with the good news of the kingdom, that students will risk their reputation in their schools, on their campus, to spread the good news of the kingdom. I'm praying that God will so grip the hearts of brothers and sisters all throughout this church who will risk their reputation in their workplaces to spread the good news of the kingdom. I'm praying that together, God will so grip our hearts with the good news of the kingdom, that we will not fear any man here or on the other side of the world. I'm praying that we will give our lives, lose them if necessary, for the spread of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. That's my simple prayer. And I think this text will do it under the power of the Holy Spirit.

So we're going to start in verse 35 where we left off last week. It's really a summary of what we saw in Matthew 5 through 9 summed up in verse 35. So we'll start there and we'll read a couple of verses. We're just going to pause along the way as we go through this passage. Matthew 9:35 says,

*"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*

## **The Condition of the Lost**

### **See their size.**

So verse 35 is basically a summary of everything we read in Matthew 5 through 9. Verse 36 gives us a portrait of Jesus. "*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*" So let's see the condition of the lost—the condition of those who need the good news of the kingdom. What compels the compassion of Jesus? Well, first, see their size. He saw the crowds. When He saw the crowds He had compassion on them. So probably around 200 cities and villages in Galilee at this point—maybe around three million people. And when Jesus saw the crowds,

He literally felt agony. The word here for His compassion is not just an emotional move, it's a physical agony.

It's like, imagine seeing the person you love the most in this world in deep hurt—in deep pain. And your heart inside you just wants to burst—physically burst—for them. That's the word we've got here for Jesus' compassion when He sees the crowds.

### **Feel their suffering.**

See their size, and feel their suffering. He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Shepherdless sheep, wandering around. This is a picture of a world in sin. It's not just 1<sup>st</sup> century; it's 21<sup>st</sup> century. A world in sin, running after the pleasures of this world, thinking, "This possession, this person, this relationship, this activity, this or that is going to satisfy my soul." Shepherdless sheep, running from one thing to the next, thinking, "This is going to do it... This is going to do it..." Dead end... dead end.... Every single road this world offers—roads of success, roads of sex, roads of money, roads of relationships, pleasures—every single road this world offers ultimately comes up empty. It leads to suffering. The design of the evil one in this world is to entice with that which is empty. And crowds buying it.

### **Realize their separation.**

See their size, feel their suffering, and realize their separation. In verse 37 Jesus said to the disciples, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.*" So when Jesus chooses this word, this language of harvest, we need to remember that in Scripture, harvest language is most often associated with judgment. We don't have time to turn to some of these places, but Isaiah 17:10-11 says the harvest will be a heap in a day of sickness and incurable pain. Joel talks about bringing the nations to where God will sit and judge them. "*Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full...Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision!*" (Joel 3:13-14). Basically, the picture in Joel is there are multitudes of people in the valley of decision before the Lord of the harvest, who holds their eternity in His hands.

It's what Jesus is going to talk about (we'll see it in a couple of weeks), Matthew 13 when Jesus describes ultimate judgment in harvest language where the wheat, the righteous, will be given toward eternal blessing; the tares, the unrighteous, will be cast into a furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Same language in Revelation 14:14-20. So don't miss this: when Jesus saw the crowds, He knew that it wasn't just temporary suffering that was going on around Him—it wasn't just disease, it wasn't just sickness. He knew that there was ultimate, eternal separation represented before Him, and if nothing changed in the crowds of people that were around Him, if they did not know and hear and receive the good news of the kingdom, that they would be eternally separated from the Father—eternally cast into damnation and destruction. This compelled compassion in Him.

So how much more so for a crowd of people today, full of men and women who have this same Christ in us, to see the crowds? Open your eyes this today. Not to 200 cities with 3 million or so people, but to a world with 7 billion people in it. Seven billion people. We've talked about this before. The most liberal estimate would put the world at about one-third Christian, and that's people who claim to be Christian. In many contexts, this identification is more of a social or political identification as a Christian. Likely, nowhere near all of these people are actually followers of Christ. But even if we assume they were, all one-third, all actually followers of Christ, that still leaves over four-and-a-half billion people in the world who are without Christ and on a road that leads to an eternal Hell. I won't even pretend that we can grasp that. Only God on high can grasp that! But just to even think about it for a second.

So see their size, feel their suffering, and realize their separation. This is the condition of the lost. Do we realize the gravity of eternity here? This is more important than sports, or money, or sex, or success in this world. There are people around us today and every day that are eternally lost. There's an urgency here, isn't there? Harvest time, urgent, the harvest is ready. Go.

You don't sleep in during harvest time. You get up early during harvest time; you go to bed late. You get up early. Go to bed late. There's an urgency here. We don't have time to play games with our lives, right? We don't have time to play games in the church. There's no coasting through comfortable Christianity. There's no way to do that when this harvest field is real. We don't have time to waste our lives confessing Christ and immersing our lives in the pleasures, and pursuits, and possessions of this world. That's a recipe for wasting your life in this world. How to waste your life in this world: spend it on the pleasures, and pursuits, and possessions of this world. But to make your life count, leave behind these things and cling to Christ, and go into the harvest field.

## **The Commission of Christ**

So this is what Jesus does. It leads to the commission of Christ, what He calls us to do. Now before we get into this, let me just say we're about to read some verses that are startling when you realize that this is the Jesus you're following. So it's really easy to kind of detach yourself from this passage and say, "Well that was just the disciples then." And we're going to see in just a minute, there were some specific things that Jesus said to His disciples in this passage that were specifically for them at that time and that place. For example, He's going to tell them, "Don't go to the Gentiles. Go just to Jewish people." And we know that that's not what He says to all disciples of all time. He says to these same disciples and to all of us of all time in Matthew 28, "Go and make disciples of all nations, of all kinds of people." But it's clear that many of the things He says here, and especially the closer we get toward the end, are absolutely applicable to all disciples of all time. Because we see the same things reinforced all throughout the New Testament, especially by the time we get to around verse 24, but even some of the stuff before then as well.

And so they're going to startle you a little bit to realize that this is the Savior you are following. And at the same time, I know there are people who don't even have a relationship with Christ, or you may have a nominal relationship to Christ. And if that's you, I hope you will see not only hard words from Jesus, but why Jesus' words make sense. I hope that if you don't have a relationship with Christ, or if you are coasting along in a nominal relationship with Christ, I hope that today you will see that the love of Christ compels your life. Not just church attendance on a Sunday. The love of Christ just brings up everything in you before Him. And I want to remind Christians that this is what the love of Christ compels in us.

### **Jesus beckons us to pray.**

So what does Jesus tell us to do, commission of Christ? It is two-fold. One, Jesus beckons us to pray. "Therefore," verse 38, in light of all this, "*pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" So Jesus doesn't say, "Look at the need. Here's the harvest, now go." We're going to get to go in a second. First thing He says is, "Here's the harvest. Here's the need. Now get on your knees and pray. And ask God to send out workers. Ask God to send them out into the harvest field."

This is what I pray for this church all the time. I pray that God will send out workers from this body every single week into the harvest field of our city. And every month, month after month, year after year, from this body, into the harvest field of the world. I pray that God will send out workers into this community right here into downtown, into marketplaces, businesses, workplaces, into Homewood, into East Lake, and Gates City. Then to other places like Seattle, and Kansas City, New York City, and who knows what other cities in the future in North America and other countries in the world. I pray continually for people to leave. I get a little worried it's going to happen and I'll be by myself in the building we gather together in to worship. I pray though that this body would be a sending base of laborers week after week, month after month, year after year. No spectators. Everybody sent into the harvest field. Let's all pray that way! Jesus answers prayers like this. He is answering prayers like this. The Lord of the harvest is sending us out in all kinds of different ways in this city, beyond this city, across the street, and overseas.

I got an email this morning from one of our mid-termers, Andrew, whom we sent out a couple months ago. He's serving in Southeast Asia among an unreached people group. And he wrote me. This is just perfect for this text today. I get this while I'm going over my notes for today. And he sent me this email. He's talking about the beauty, the way he described it, how much he misses the beauty of the body of Christ at Brook Hills. And then he said, "Being on this side of the world really reminds me of one of my favorite quotes from Jim Elliot. 'Our young men are going into other fields because they don't feel "called" quote on quote, to the mission field. We do not need a call. What we need is a kick in the pants.'" May God send us forth! Then Andrew writes, "The harvest is very plentiful as I've seen with my own eyes. I'm praying that God will continue to raise up families and singles to go to the unreached."

So Andrew's praying Matthew 9:38, I'm praying it, we're praying it, and the Lord of the harvest is sending out laborers. That's what we do—we pray. Lord, all of our lives; Church at Brook Hills, all of our lives are on the table. You're Lord, so we're not holding on to anything. Or if we are, we need to repent of that. So our lives on the table. You use us wherever You want. If the best place for us in the kingdom is right here in this city, then leave us here and we'll rejoice in that. If the best place for us is in East Lake or Gate City, we're going there. No strings attached. No questions asked. If the best place for us is in Homewood, Southside, we're going there.

I don't know if you know, but last week, just a preview worship gathering—not really a lot of publicity or anything—close to 200 people gathered together in Homewood/Southside. People have said, "You know, we're going to leave behind some stuff we even like at this campus in order to more effectively make disciples in our community."

So blank check. "Lord, if You want to lead me to New York City, or Kansas City, or Seattle, or if You want me to go to North Africa and serve with J.D. and J.J, Eastern Europe to serve alongside the "W"'s, or East Asia with Chris and Leah, or with Andrew in Southeast Asia, or with Ryan and Bethany who are preparing to go to Central Asia—putting together a team—or who knows what other teams are forming and are going to form in the days ahead. Blank check. Here's a group of 4,000, 4,500 people who we're saying, "Send us out." God answers that prayer in wonderful ways in Birmingham and beyond Birmingham.

So part of my prayer today is that God, in this text, would send out laborers—that some of you today, that in some of your hearts, you would in just a fresh way, realize that the place where you work is not just a means to a salary to provide for your family, but the place where you work is a place where you have been sent by the King for the spread of the

kingdom. That you'd have fresh eyes tomorrow morning when you arrive at work and you realize, "I'm here for the spread of the gospel."

And not just at the workplace, but where we live. All the stuff we do. So in my life, I'm a coach of the six-year-old Rangers, Oak Mountain Baseball, sent by a King to coach the Rangers. Every place where we find ourselves we're representatives, sent out, laborers, we're in the harvest field. We're laborers in the harvest field. I'm praying that God will wake us up to see a fresh, in a new way, the fact that we're laborers in the harvest field.

At the same time, I'm praying this today, that God will for some of you prick your heart for the first time with the idea that He may be leading you to go way out of your comfort zone—whether that's into East Lake/Gate City, or somewhere else in North America, or somewhere else among the nations. Or maybe God has been speaking that in your heart and today is going to use this text to confirm that in your heart, and to realize that "Yes, He is leading me somewhere else." I'm praying that God will do some things. Small groups that may say, "You know? Maybe we can more effectively make disciples in our community by doing what they're doing in Homewood/Southside." I trust the Spirit of the Lord to send out laborers according to His wisdom. He knows where we can best be positioned for His kingdom. Let's put the blank check on the table and say, "Lord, send us out. Send us out." And He'll answer that.

### **Jesus summons us to go.**

So Jesus beckons us to pray. That's the first thing He does. But we don't just pray. Flowing from that, Jesus summons us to go. Which leads us into chapter 10. "*And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.*" So you can see the authority of Christ being transferred to His followers.

*"The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them..."*

You see one word mentioned three times: "*Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*" Go. "Don't go here. Go there. And as you go, do this: proclaim, '*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*'" In other words, proclaim the same thing that John the Baptist said, the same thing that Jesus said. Now you say it, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So go and preach the gospel.

What we see is just instruction after instruction, promise after promise, encouragement after encouragement. And I've got it split up into I think 10 or 11 things that Jesus says here, and so what I want us to do is flowing from this, we're just going to walk swiftly through them and see. Now, remember, this is the Savior you and I follow. And the language here at the beginning of Matthew 10:1 when He says, "Jesus called them to Himself," the word is literally, "*He summoned them to Himself.*" The imagery in this word is like a military commander gathering together soldiers. Military commanders don't gather together soldiers to give them options to consider for their life. Military commanders gather together soldiers to give them commands to obey, instructions to implement. And so this is what Jesus says to His disciples then. And I think the basis of the New Testament shows us pretty clearly the implication is to the disciples now.

What does He say? One, go to great need. So He says in verse 7, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Then He says in verse 8, "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." Think about that. "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." What is Jesus calling disciples to do here? He's calling them to go to the diseased to heal the sick. So go to the sick, not the healthy; the sick. Go to the dying. Raise the dead. Go to those who are dying—who are dead. Go to the despised. Cleanse those who have leprosy.

We talked about this in Matthew 8. Lepers, you don't hang around lepers. You don't get near lepers. They're unclean. You don't even get close to them. Jesus says, "You get close to them as my disciple. The people that nobody else will get near, you go to them. Go to the despised, and go to the dirty, the demon possessed. Those who are most tainted by sin, go to them." Jesus is saying, "Go to the people that the world ignores, that the world oppresses, that the world grinds down. You go to those people. Not the people that it's easy to go to, but the people that it's hard to go to. Not the places of small need, but the places of great need. Go to great need."

Now listen to what Jesus says. "As you go," verse 8, last half of it, "*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.*" So follow this. Jesus says, "As we go to the diseased, the dying, the despised, and the dirty, to these places of great need, as we go to the needy we will learn to trust His provision. Don't take money. Don't take a bag. Don't take an extra coat, extra sandals, even an extra pair of shoes. Don't take excess." Jesus says (this is beautiful), "As you reach out to the needy, you will find that I am sufficient to meet your needs." So go to great needs and I will meet your needs along the way. Go to great need.

Go to great danger. This is where Jesus starts talking about how they will be received, and the news is not necessarily positive. Verse 11 says,

*"And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you."*

In other words, they don't accept you.

*"And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."*

Then he says, verse 16, "*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*" "Like sheep among wolves." Think about this: what is the responsibility of the shepherd? To protect the sheep and to guard the sheep against wolves. So here is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of our souls, saying, "Why don't you, sheep, go hang out with some wolves?" Be as foolish as sheep. That's the picture here—foolish sheep.

Sheep are some of the most helpless and foolish of all domesticated animals. Just the slightest sound can send sheep into frenzy, and when they find themselves in the middle of danger, sheep have no defense. The only thing they can do is run, and they're really, really,

really slow. So, based on that, the dumbest thing a sheep could do is to go wandering into the middle of a pack of wolves. And Jesus says, "You do that."

Jesus is saying to them, and by implication to us, "You will go by My commission into dangerous places. You will find yourself, follower of Christ, among evil, rapacious, vicious people, and I will have you there," Jesus says, "by My design." That is so very different than the way we think about Jesus, isn't it? Like, "Surely Jesus would never lead us into a place that is not safe. If it is costly, if it is not safe, if it is dangerous, then clearly that's not working. Jesus, who loves me, wants me to go." What if, in many cases, that's actually the criteria about which you determine that is where Jesus wants you to go? Be as foolish as sheep.

So people see sheep wandering in the middle of wolves. People around them say, "They're nuts. They're clueless. They've no clue what they're doing." Jesus says, "That's what it means to be my disciple." As foolish as sheep.

At the same time, be as smart as serpents; be as smart as snakes. So how do you do that? How do you be a foolish sheep and a smart snake at the same time? And here's the picture. Jesus is saying, "Go without reservation, without hesitation, into danger. And when you're there, be smart." This is Jesus, right? He's brought before Pilate, before Roman officials. He's going into the teeth of danger like a sheep led to a slaughter, Scripture tells us. At the same time, He is wise. He doesn't needlessly insight anger or trouble. He's wise. Be as foolish as sheep, be as smart as snakes, and be as pure—as innocent—as doves. When you're with the wolves, don't let the wolves have anything against you when it comes to your purity. Do not be abrasive, inconsiderate, belligerent. Be innocent. In the middle of it all, show them what innocence looks like in action. And listen to the promise Jesus gives us here. Verse 17, "*Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues.*" So here's how this plays out. Sheep in the middle of wolves.

*"And you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."*

Oh, that's great. As we go into danger, we will learn to depend on the presence of Christ. Mark it down, you follow Christ for the spread of the gospel into the midst of danger, and you will never ever, ever find yourself alone. "I will be with you," He says, "and I will give you everything you need to speak, to preach." This is where the presence of Christ becomes real, right? We live our lives brothers and sisters in presumptive safety and security in this world, surrounded by the comforts of this world that we can manufacture. We don't need the presence and power of Jesus to do that. We give our lives for the spread of the gospel like sheep in the middle of wolves in really hard places, in the city, really hard places in the world. We will need the presence and the power of Christ to do that.

Jesus says, "You will need My power and My presence because you will be betrayed." We will be betrayed. Verse 21, "*Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.*" Jesus says the same thing later in this passage (verse 34-36), how the gospel, the good news of the kingdom, divides families. Family members will turn against you or at the very least, lack understanding of you, either through trusting in Christ, or through wanting to spread the gospel of Christ. You will be, mark it down, misunderstood when you give your life in

sacrificial obedience to the commission of Jesus Christ. And some of that opposition may come from the places you would least expect.

We will be betrayed; we will be hated. Verse 22, *"...You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."* You will be hated by all. Now that doesn't mean that every single person will hate you as a follower of Jesus, because many people will come to faith in Christ. But the picture is, all kinds of people, whether it's family, government and religious establishment, what we're seeing here in the Book of Matthew is that you will be hated from all corners. People will not like you when you proclaim Jesus. They will hate you. Why? Well, we'll get to that in a second. But we need to realize this. We say, "If we'd all just become like Jesus, the world would love us." Not true! How do we know that's not true? Because the world hated Jesus, so if we all become like Jesus, then we will experience what Jesus experienced from the world.

And it makes sense. You think about this. We can go into this city and around the nations, doing nice deeds, performing acts of service, doing things, helping people, and as long as we don't mention the name of Jesus, we will be loved and applauded by the world. You do the exact same things—nice deeds, acts of service, living out the gospel of the kingdom in our deeds, and speak to people and say, "Jesus is the only way to be forgiven of your sins, and apart from Him, you will spend eternity away from God in Hell." The world will laugh at, mock at, rise up against... everything they did to Jesus.

It's so key. It's easy for us week after week to do nice things and good deeds in this city. And we need to do those things. But we need to do them with proclamation of the gospel at the center of what we're doing, knowing that in the process, we will be opposed, hated. We will be persecuted. Verse 23 says, *"When they persecute you in one town..."* not if they persecute you. Jesus just assumes it. *"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."* You will be persecuted.

Now, again, this is one of those places we know... Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." We know this is not just for these disciples then. Now, one potential misunderstanding I want to make sure to counter. There are some who hear this and think, "Okay, well, then I need to seek after persecution," or "I need to seek after suffering," or "seek after people who will hate me," and this or that. That is not what this text is telling us to do. This text is calling us to seek Christ—follow Christ wherever He leads—and know that as you cling to Christ, persecution, suffering, hatred will come your way. But the goal is not to say, "Well, I'm going to find the most dangerous place in the world then and go and be a martyr—heroic martyr." That's just plain selfish. The goal is to follow Christ and say, "Wherever You lead me, I will go. And whatever comes my way, I'll trust in You." You will be persecuted.

And we know that because of what happened to Jesus. Verse 24,

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

So follow the logic here. If Jesus is our teacher, if Jesus is our master, and we want to become like Him, then the same thing that happened to our teacher and our master will happen to us. Jesus was betrayed. Even one of the men He's talking to right here in Matthew 10 will betray Him. So we can expect to be betrayed. Jesus was hated. We've

already seen that. Jesus was opposed. Jesus was obviously eventually crucified. He was called Satan, Beelzebul. And they'll call you evil for what you will say.

This is where we come to this reality that we've got to face as followers of Christ. The danger of our lives, in many ways, the danger of our lives actually increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ. Do we really realize that? Do we really believe that? I mean, that's the unavoidable conclusion of what we're reading here in Matthew 10. Hear this loud and clear. If you want a safe and comfortable life in this world, then stay away from Jesus. Do not be fooled thinking that as you grow closer to Christ things will get easier in this world. You get closer to Christ; He's growing more and more in you. And you're proclaiming Him and you're sharing Him, things will get much, much harder in this world.

It brings us to the question then that we've got to ask. Do we really want to be like Christ? And this is so key. I'm convinced this is why so many of us here in Birmingham church culture are so prone to sit back and settle for a routine religion and comfortable Christianity, because that is very safe. And the world likes us there. As long as we do our own thing, attend church on Sunday, keep our faith to private matter, to ourselves, we will face little risk in this world. The only problem is we will know so very little of Christ. Do we really want to know Him? Do we really want our lives to be identified with Him and proclaiming Him? It's what we're about to get into even more intentionally. These are not just things I'm saying. This is what Jesus is saying. Do you really want to be like Christ? Church, knowing this, do we really want to be like Christ?

Now, it's pretty heavy at this point listening to this. And you can almost see Jesus just making eye contact with these guys as they're hearing that sheep in the middle of wolves, betrayed, flogged, beaten, hated. And He looks at them and He sees fear in their eyes. So He says, "Fear will tempt us." The same thing that we have—fear. And so what He does three times in the verses to come, He says, "Don't fear." Verse 26,

*"So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear [there it is the second time] those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."*

Third time, fear. "Don't fear, don't fear, don't fear." Jesus knows that there is fear here. He knows that there is fear for people living in the context where they could lose their life for proclaiming the gospel. But it doesn't even have to be in that context. There's no question that fear is one of the biggest obstacles to you and I sharing the gospel on a daily basis in a place where it is more than legal to share the gospel. It is one of the main reasons why we are so silent in our work places, in our neighborhoods, and so hesitant to share the gospel with the person right there. There's fear. There's fear and so Jesus addresses that. How do you overcome that fear?

Here's what Jesus says. He says, number one. "See with an eternal perspective." Verse 26, "Nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known." In other words, don't be afraid of this world and its ways and its thoughts, because one day, this world will be exposed. This world is an illusion—the ideas of this world, the pleasures of this world, the things that the gospel of the kingdom confronts. You think that's hard. One day

it's going to be clear: the gospel of the kingdom is true; the gospel of the kingdom is real; the gospel of the kingdom is what everybody needs. Trust Him! Eternal perspective! Don't worry about what man will say in the moment. Worry about what God is doing in eternity. He will uncover all that is true and right. So give yourself to proclaiming that which is true and right. And trust Him with an eternal perspective. Speak with a holy boldness. I love the imagery here. What God whispers to you through His Word, proclaim it from the rooftops. Don't light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Let it shine. Speak the truth of God clearly and boldly. Holy boldness and sacrifice with reckless abandonment. This is my favorite part of verse 28. In the face of fear, Jesus says to these guys, *"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."*

Jesus knows that we will be tempted to be afraid of man and what man can do to us. So Jesus says, "You don't need to be afraid of man. The worst thing he can do is kill you." Are you encouraged by that? For me to say to you as your pastor, "Okay, let's go to North Africa. You go to North Africa. You have no reason to even be concerned. The worst thing that can even happen to you is you die." How's that good news? It's good news only if you have died with Christ and your life is with Him. And you have no reason to fear anything in this world because you know to live is Christ and to die is actually gain. So that going to North Africa and dying is great! This is weird! Do you really believe this?

Do we really believe this that we have no need to clutch so tightly to the safety, and security, and comforts of the stuff that we think we need? Don't fear man that only has the power to kill you. Fear God. Fear God more than man. It is said of saints of old that they feared man so little because they feared God so much. May that be true of this church. All they can do is kill you. These are intense instructions here. It gets even better.

So fear will tempt you. But, Jesus says, "The Father will take care of you." It starts talking about sparrows. *"Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."* See the picture that Jesus is painting that the Father rules us sovereignly. God the Father, He's sovereign over the smallest sparrow in the sky. He knows the details of your life. He will not let anything happen to you that is not a part of His good pleasing and perfect will, even when it's difficult. He rules us sovereignly.

He knows us completely. He knows every one of the thousands of hairs on your head. He knows how many there are. He knows every detail of your life. He knows you better than you know yourself.

And he loves us deeply. Are you not much more valuable than they? Many sparrows. Don't worry! Brothers and sisters, don't worry! The one who calls us to the wolves is good and He loves us. So we don't have to fear.

Jesus says, "Confess publically." Verse 32, *"So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."*

Confess Him publically. Affirm testimony in Him. Do not sit back in silence. Speak up. Just to bring this down to a very basic level to the people that you go to school with, that you're on campus with, the people in your workplace, the people in your neighborhood—have they heard from you just joyful, public, identification with Christ? Do the people you work with know how grateful you are that Christ has saved your soul from the clutches of sin through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave? Is that public knowledge? Not just implied. "Well, they know I go to church." Big deal Birmingham. Do they know from your lips that Christ is supreme and He's the only Savior of anybody's soul?

You even talk in a conversation at the workplace about God and love of God. Things are still all right. But you start mentioning Jesus saving us from our sins, then things just get really weird—tense. And the beauty here (don't miss it) is the beauty of Jesus saying, "You publically testify about me before men, foresee the day when God the Father in heaven will publically testify about you in Christ. Confess Him publically.

Love Him supremely. You get into verse 34. We see again the division in family. "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth*" Jesus said. "*I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" That ought to make for a good Christmas Eve text. Peace on earth. Not really!

*"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 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."*

The picture here—love Him supremely. Jesus is supreme! You think about the people who mean the most to you in this world. I think about Heather, my wife. I think about my kids—Caleb, and Joshua, and Mara Ruth. I think about the love I have for them. And the whole picture here, and it's what we see in Luke 14 too, that love for Christ is so supreme that love for them just pales in comparison. Luke 14:6 says it looks like hatred in comparison to a love for Christ. Supreme love for Christ is what drives a dad to say, "Yes, you can marry my daughter and take her to die overseas." Love for Christ is the only driving factor there that could compel a dad to say yes to that. And He's worthy of that kind of love. Love Him supremely. Which leads to the end of the passage.

Verse 38, "*And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*" So follow this. Here it is. Last two things Jesus is saying here. Number one, take the ultimate risk. Take the cross. Pick up your cross, Christ-follower, and die. Lose your life. Take the risk—ultimate risk. Let go of your life, and in the process, follow this, take the ultimate risk; you die to all the stuff of this world. Take the ultimate risk and you will find the ultimate reward. Lose your life to find your life.

Isn't that wonderful? You think about what we just read. It's just filled with all these tough commands: betrayed, hated, persecuted. Here's what's going to happen to you. And you would think this would end with a very gloomy picture. Instead, this passage is ending with joy and satisfaction. Don't miss this. Contrary to what the world believes, we definitively do not find our lives by indulging in the pleasures, and the stuff, and the safety, and the security of this world. That's a recipe for losing your life. You want to waste your life? Spend it on the pleasures, and the stuff, and the pursuits, and the possessions, and the safety and security of this world. Just spend it there. You'll waste it all. You'll lose it.

You find life by letting go of those things and clinging completely to Christ. This is where you find life. This is not a call to misery. This is a call to joy in Christ. So when I say, even as a pastor, to us, "Okay, let's let go of the stuff in this affluent world, let's put aside possessions, let's throw aside pursuits." I'm not saying this for your harm; I'm saying this for your good. For our good! I'm going to let go of these things because Christ is better. And the reward (don't miss this) is not just for us. It's also for others in the process.

So that's what happens next.

*"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

So it's not just a reward for us. It's a reward for people who see that Christ is better than all the stuff in this world. It's a reward for people who realize there's good news in the King. And they receive Christ. And they find His joy. And they pass it on, and they find His joy. This is happening. I was talking with Jonathan. He just got back from North Africa. He was working with a team that we sent out over there and then some other folks who are there. And he said, "David, we just saw Matthew 10-like stuff, Acts-like stuff happening everywhere over there." He said, "The harvest is ripe! People are coming! More people are coming to Christ than they're able to even begin to track in these areas that they were in." In North Africa, places that have been for a very long time, for generations, opposed to the gospel. And it's happening like this. Matthew 10.

So one lady being brought to a clinic in a wheel barrow—sick, almost dead. Diseased and dying, right? Brought to a clinic. Some followers of Christ care for her at the clinic and share the gospel with her. She's nursed back to health and she comes to faith in Christ. Then she goes back to her home and she shares to her household about her faith in Christ. And upon sharing her father takes her aside and beats her. Most of the persecution, overwhelming majority of the persecution, happening in that part of the world and in many parts of the world doesn't happen from government; it happens from household. It's exactly what Jesus promised would happen. And so, this woman stands firm in her faith, clings to Christ even through the midst of persecution in her own household. Eventually, her father who beat her comes to faith in Christ. And now her dad, Jonathan says, is like an evangelist going around to villages sharing the gospel with all these different people. And he's not alone.

In one household, an 80-year-old grandmother with a crowd of people in her house, Christians come and share the gospel. It's late at night. They go through the story of creation, from creation all the way to Christ. And now it's going to lead to the consummation of the kingdom. And 14 people in the household say, "We want to trust in Christ to save us. We want to become followers of Christ." It's late at night. They're rejoicing and say, "All right, it's time to go to bed." And these new followers of Christ say, "Well, no, we can't go to bed. We want to make sure we can tell this story tomorrow. So we want to make sure we have the details right so we can share with other people tomorrow."

So they stay up until two or three in the morning. Next morning, these 14 go out. Jonathan said, "And it's not just some special trips. They're just doing it in their everyday lives, wherever they go in villages, canyons, mountain-places around there. And the gospel is spreading; all spearheaded by an 80 year-old grandmother who's at the house sending out laborers." It's happening!

And then persecution happened along the way. So one guy sharing the gospel, he gets thrown into prison for sharing the gospel. So there's government persecution. He's thrown into prison. Well, he gets into prison; he shares the gospel with other guys in prison. They come to faith in Christ. And so the gospel starts spreading in prison. Finally he gets released and he's saying, "Praise God I went to prison because now the gospel's spreading in that prison!"

And then he just talked about how these guys are going through suffering, they're going through persecution. But that's not the first thing out of their mouth. The first thing out of their mouth is reward—joy. I mean, this pales in comparison to reward. Do we believe this? Do we want to see that happen in this city—people going in our everyday lives and experience opposition here and there, but experiencing reward that far outweighs the opposition? Guaranteed—we give our lives to verbally proclaiming the gospel in this city, we will not regret it! Guaranteed.

Do we want to be a part of this in this city? Do we want to see the Spirit of God doing that in this city? And do we want to be a part of it around the world? So we say, "Yes. Yes. We will live for this. We will die for this." So this is the prayer of the church.

## **The Prayer of the Church**

How do we move then? How do we move from an affluent, Birmingham style of Christianity to a New Testament Matthew 10 style Christianity? Two prayers. Only God can do this in us. One, God, give us supernatural awareness to condition of the lost. Help us to see what you see. Help us to see the students around us on our campus like You see them. Help us to see the people we work with like You see them. Help us to see. Help us to get below conversations like weather and sports to conversations that matter for the next trillion years. Help us to feel the urgency of eternity with people that we work with who are not guaranteed another breath. God, give us supernatural awareness to the condition of the lost.

And God, give us sacrificial obedience to the commission of Christ. Obedience to the commission of Christ is the only proper response to those who celebrate the good news of the kingdom—Jesus has died on the cross. He's risen from the grave. We sing it. Now shout it. Laborers sent from the harvest field.

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