

It is getting harder and harder to be a Bible-believing Christian in America today. People are calling us hateful, bigots, homophobes, misogynists, intolerant, and arrogant for believing basic truths that Christians have believed for 2000 years. And I think it will only get worse. So Jesus would have us be ready. Fallen human nature is far worse than we like to think. The depth of evil is far greater than we suppose. Effective will be the disciple who knows these things before the day comes.

Let's consider three points from this passage: when on mission, expect opposition, fear God not man, and pledge your allegiance to Jesus. The main point is that as disciples of Jesus, we should expect trouble but Jesus is for us and He is worth it.

I. Expect Opposition (16-25) – 16a, 21-25 – Jesus sends us out as sheep in the midst of wolves. What typically happens when sheep are in the midst of wolves? I have a video . . . It is not kid-friendly. It's a massacre. Sheep aren't much for fighting. Jesus is warning us that we should expect to get eaten out there. We are going out into the midst of danger. As we go out, we should expect to be persecuted. We will encounter opposition because of our allegiance to Jesus **18, 22, (24-25)**.

If we just leave the world as is, we won't experience trouble, but as soon as we try to do them spiritual good, we will be hated just as they hated our Lord. Listen to Jesus in **John 15:18-21**. We shouldn't be surprised. We should expect it, even welcome it. **Matt 5:10**. / Afflictions are *not only the result* of missions but often the *means* of mission (2 Cor 4:10-12). God often uses suffering to expand the Kingdom and get the gospel out. As John Piper puts it, "God has appointed our pain to be part of his powerful display of the glory of Christ." Tertullian (160-225): "The oftener we are mown down by you [Romans], the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."

Historian Stephen Neil mentions suffering as one of the main reasons the early church grew so quickly. He said, "In the earlier records what we find is calm, dignified, decorous behavior; cool courage in the face of torment, courtesy towards enemies, and a joyful acceptance of suffering as the way appointed by the Lord to lead to his heavenly kingdom. There are a number of well-authenticated cases of conversion of pagans in the very moment of witnessing the condemnation and death of Christians."¹ Look again at **17-18**. To bear witness to them (*marturion*). The way some rulers and the Gentiles will hear the gospel is because of the disciples being flogged and dragged. Persecution and mission go hand in hand. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Jesus said, when they persecute, flee to the next town and preach the gospel there.

In Acts, right after Stephen is put to death by having large rocks thrown at him by the Jewish leadership for believing in Jesus, we read this in Acts 8:1: "And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." Persecution spread the ordinary believers around to go preach the word, just like Jesus said in Acts 1:8: first Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria and eventually to all the ends of the earth.

Now, verse 23 is considered a real problem verse by many. One commentary I looked at offered 7 different alternatives to what this verse means, but the plainest reading is the best option. Look at it again **23**. The you is the disciples, the town of Israel mean just that: the towns of Israel. And Jesus says he will come before they even make it beyond Israel. Now, many liberals say Jesus was flat wrong. One famously said, Jesus thought he

¹ 21 Servants, 510.

was going to grab hold of the wheel of history and instead was crushed by it. But that is a misunderstanding of what Jesus means. We often misunderstand this because we don't know our OT.

I mentioned this a few weeks ago but this phrase "Son of Man comes" is basically a quote from Dan 7. Let me read Dan. 7:13-14: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." This so important to get. This coming is a coming from earth to heaven, not a coming from heaven to earth. This is not a descent, but ascent of the Son of Man. The vision of Dan 7 is about the Son of Man establishing an eternal kingdom that will outlast all other worldly kingdoms. Dan 7 is about the inauguration of the Kingdom and Jesus has already said that Kingdom is at hand.

This is not about the Second Coming but about the enthronement of Jesus. Jesus was not wrong! He was a prophet. This is about the inauguration of the Kingship of Jesus. And we know this is the correct interpretation because we interpret Scripture with Scripture. **16:28**. Son of Man coming means the establishing of the Kingdom in the 1st C. **26:63-64**. It is about vindication. **28:18**. His disciples will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes and is enthroned and vindicated against his enemies.

Ok, so expect opposition. And how should we respond to this opposition. Jesus tells us to do three things:

1. Be wise 16 – wise as serpents but as innocent as doves. Be shrewd but be Godly.

2. Beware 17-18 – This happened in the book of Acts. Peter and John were brought before the Council in Acts 4. What did they do? Boldly proclaimed Jesus. **4:8-13, 17-21, 5:27-33, 40-42**. Paul was flogged with 39 lashes on five different occasions! The reason they chose 39 was because the thought that 40 or may kill him. Five times. Can you imagine what is back looked like?

3. Be confident 19-20 – Don't worry about having the right words. The Spirit will be present and at work in you and through you.

II. Do Not Fear Man (26-33) – 26, 28, 31. Do not fear people. Why? He gives two reasons.

1. God is the judge **26-28, 32-33** – all that is covered will be revealed. God will sort it all out. As Rom 12, says, "leave it to the wrath of God." Vengeance is his. He will repay. Or as 1 Pet 2 says, be like Jesus who entrusted himself to Him who judges justly. If you are His, you win. The truth will triumph. One time the English Reformer Hugh Latimer was preaching before King Henry VIII. He was about to step on his toes and he thought to himself in the pulpit, "Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The king is here." Then he gained perspective and thought to himself, "Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of kings is here."²

For now, Bible-believing Christians must be content to be misunderstood, misrepresented, vilified, slandered, and even abused, but at the end of the day, God will make all things right. / We named our third son Knox after John Knox, the courageous Scottish Reformer. He used to say, God plus one equals a majority. Everything will be okay in the end.

² Boice, 181.

Do not fear the haters; fear the Lord. All they can do is kill the body but they cannot kill the soul. Fear God who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Don't fear human judgment, fear divine judgment. Knox was known as a man who feared God without any other fear. At his funeral in the eulogy it was said, "Here lies one who neither flattered nor feared any flesh." Let us be those only focused on divine approval. As Colonel James Gardiner put it, "I fear God, and therefore there is none else that I need fear." Don't fear man, the best they can do is kill your body.

2. Don't fear man because of God's providential care **29-31** – Jesus asks us to consider the minutia of creation. You can get two sparrows for a penny. Yet, not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father. Even the hairs of your head are numbered. Therefore. Because of God's meticulously sovereignty and care, fear not. You are of more value than many sparrows. He knows all. He is sovereign over all. Nothing happens to us that hasn't first passed through God's hands. How encouraging is that? Nothing happens in this world without his permission. As Luther would say, "The devil is God's devil." We learn from Job that he is on a leash. As Whitefield put it, "we are immortal till our work on earth is done." How freeing is that? And that which does come to us from the Father is for our good. Rom 8:29

As Spurgeon put it, "I have learned to kiss the waves that throw me up against the Rock of Ages" One of our newer songs is "Christ Our Hope in Life and Death" and part of it says this: "What truth can calm the troubled soul? God is good, God is good Where is his grace and goodness known? In our great Redeemer's blood Who holds our faith when fears arise? Who stands above the stormy trial? Who sends the waves that bring us nigh Unto the shore, the rock of Christ?" /. Don't fear man because of God's providential care.

III. Pledge Your Allegiance to Jesus (34-42) – First I would say that if you are not a Christian, G. This will cost you. . . . / For believers, pledge your allegiance to Jesus, even over family **34-37**. Jesus comes in and demands priority. And when this happens,, too often, peace is not the result. Choosing Jesus and his ways will at times set sons against fathers and daughters against mothers. Some of you are experiencing this now, and it is not easy, but Jesus is worth it. We should love him more than our family.

We should pledge allegiance to Jesus over family, but also over our own life **38-39**. Worthy disciples must take up their cross. We are used to the cross, but evoked horror in the 1st century. It was Rome's preferred method of execution for slaves and rebels. It was public and cruel. Ultimate shame. Jesus says his disciples must be ready for a savage death and public disgrace.³ JC Ryle said, "Happy is he who thoroughly understands, that though Christianity holds out a crown in the end, it brings also a cross in the way." Jesus is worth it. If you find life you'll lose it, but if you lose your life for Jesus you'll find it. Here he is talking about martyrdom but there is a principle for all of life. If we seek to make life about us, we'll lose it. We'll never gain what were after because we are after ther wrong thing. But if we lose our life for Jesus, if we step off the throne and enthrone King Jesus and live sold out for him, we'll find life. Because that is what we are made for. As Augustine put it, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

We pledge allegiance to Jesus over our own life and pledging allegiance to Jesus means helping those laboring for Jesus. **40-42**. God will reward those who take care of his laborers in the same way he'll reward his laborers. We all have a part in the mission. We are all called to be ambassadors to Abilene and we are called to either go or send and support work for the nations. Go or send or disobey. And as we support ministers and missionaries, God looks upon even something as small as a cup of water with favor.

³ France, 411.

Let's be a people who honors ministers and missionaries. Let's give generously. Let's encourage verbally and in writing. Let's read and reply to newsletters. 3 John 6: send them in a manner worthy of God. 3 John 8: "Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth."

Friends, as we are on mission let's expect opposition, let's fear no man but only God, and let's pledge allegiance to King Jesus over all lesser loyalties. As disciples of Jesus, we should expect trouble but Jesus is for us and He is worth it.