

2. Enemies of Mission: Fears within

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[0 : 00] We're looking at Matthew chapter 10 these few weeks, and last week we looked at the first 15 verses of Matthew 10. We're following on from Jesus' call to his disciples to share his compassion for the world, for their need to be told of the true shepherd, to be told of the kingdom of heaven which is at hand.

And he draws aside his apostles here to teach them about the nature of their mission. But of course not only the mission of the apostles, although there are some things that are specific clearly to them.

For example, chapter 10 verse 6 where Jesus sends them out only to the lost sheep of Israel. That's because Jesus in his lifetime, in his ministry, in that of his apostles before his death and resurrection was there sent to the people of God, the people of Israel.

But as we'll see in our reading today, he clearly is envisaging the future and the mission that will go indeed to the ends of the earth. And that's why these verses are so important also for us.

Because what he teaches his apostles here about the nature of kingdom witness is going to be exactly the same right until the end of the world.

[1 : 15] So we're going to read this morning from Matthew chapter 10 verse 16 down to verse 33. Behold, says the Lord Jesus, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues.

And you'll 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's not you who speak, but the spirit of your father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death.

And the father his child and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

[2 : 25] Whenever they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. But truly I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

It's enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If they've called the master of the house Beelzebul, the devil, how much more will they malign those of his household?

So have no fear of them. For nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be made 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 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 numbered. Fear not, therefore. You are of more value than many sparrows.

[3 : 37] 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.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless us. This is his word. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to this passage before us in Matthew chapter 10.

Last week, as I said, we saw in the first verses of this chapter, we saw Jesus giving his kingly briefing for mission to his ambassadors. Those who will carry the message of his kingdom to the world.

And we noted, of course, that these are not words written directly to us. They're words spoken very specifically in the first instance to the twelve, the twelve apostles.

And so there are many things here that, of course, are unique and specific to that particular mission Jesus was sending them out on. Nevertheless, Matthew has recorded this teaching of Jesus very clearly and the Holy Spirit has preserved it in the scriptures as a message for us.

[4 : 59] And so there are principles here that are clear and are constant right down the ages. As we saw last time, there is much that the Lord Jesus has to teach us here about the plan and progress of his gospel mission in the world.

About the proclamation and the power for that mission. About the priorities that we must have because of it. And of course, very importantly, in those verses 11 to 15, about the people and the partnerships that are possible and impossible in real gospel mission.

And all of these things we saw were directed and dictated by the gospel itself. The question for the church always is what does the gospel demand and what does the gospel insist on occasions that we must deny?

Particularly in these verses in terms of being in fellowship with others. But as we turn to verse 16 and the verses following, it's very clear that Jesus is looking beyond the immediate horizons of just the sending out of the twelve at this time.

It's obvious that he is looking forward to their gospel mission after Pentecost. If you look at verse 18, he speaks very specifically about including the Gentiles in this mission.

[6 : 23] Which in his immediate command in verse 6, he denies to his apostles. As you come down to verses 21 and 22, for example, it seems to very clearly indicate that he's speaking about the whole era of Christian mission right up indeed until the present day.

And the overwhelming emphasis in Jesus' teaching here in this chapter for his followers is that they are to expect persecution.

And therefore, that they are to exhibit in all their mission great perseverance. Now verse 16 is an abiding principle.

We are sent out as sheep among wolves. And therefore, we are to be warned, says verse 17. We are to beware of men.

Beware of human beings and what they will do because they will act like wolves against you. Verse 22. You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

[7 : 28] Now, if we even remotely believe that, that's a very sobering statement, don't you think? And yet Jesus says, but he who endures to the end will be saved.

I don't think, by the way, that when he says endure to the end here, he means necessarily the end of the world. But I think merely the end of all persecutions in mission.

Fight the good, fight. Finish the race marked out for you and for me. That's the language that Paul uses. Likewise, by the way, in verse 23, where he talks there about the Son of Man coming.

Again, I don't think he's speaking there particularly about the second coming. In the context here, verse 23 seems to refer, once again, to the immediate task of the twelve. They're being sent out through all the towns and villages of Israel.

And Matthew uses this terminology, the Son of Man coming, to mean, in many cases, the coming of the kingdom. It's a phrase that's lifted from Daniel chapter 7.

[8 : 31] It's used by Jesus, I think, to mean the coming of his kingdom in his death and resurrection and ascension to glory. You read on in Matthew's Gospel 26. You'll see that when Jesus is before Caiaphas, he actually says to Caiaphas, from now on, i.e. imminently, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds.

He's referring to his imminent death and resurrection and ascension that begins the glory of the kingdom of God. At any rate, whatever we might make of that particular thing, what we can't miss in these verses is Jesus' emphasis on persecution and on perseverance, on endurance, and in much hardship in the Christian life and witness.

He says there will be danger, there will be heartbreak, there will be opposition, there will be disappointment, there will be struggles. But that is the life of Christian discipleship.

That is gospel mission. That's what he's saying here. Now isn't that a contrast to so much of what we tend to talk about today in terms of gospel mission and discipleship?

The buzzwords in the church today are celebration and experience and worship. If you go down to any Christian bookshop, you will find that those are the kind of things that dominate the titles among Christian books, Christian music, and so on today.

[10 : 08] But if you read Matthew chapter 10, you don't find any of that kind of triumphalism, do you? It's quite the opposite. And there's absolutely no naivety from Jesus. Beware of people, he says.

They're like wolves. That's going to be your biggest problem in Christian mission. That's why he says in verse 16, you've got to be as wise as serpents.

You've got to be wise and realistic people about the Christian life and about your Christian witness. It's going to be very tough right to the end.

So don't be surprised by this when you find it, says Jesus. Be ready to endure. You might want to ask yourself, well, why should it be so tough?

And the answer is, if we look at Jesus' words and if we look at Jesus' own ministry, is that we will understand that the truth of the gospel always divides human beings.

[11 : 15] Jesus himself was a divider of men and women. Just look back at the end of Matthew chapter 9 and the end of that great account of Jesus healing every disease, casting out demons, doing marvelous things.

You read in chapter 9, verse 33, the crowds marveled, saying, never was anything like this seen in Israel. But, says verse 34, the Pharisees said, he casts out demons by the prince of demons.

On the one hand, people are saying, this is marvelous act of God happening among us. On the other, people are saying, this is the devil in person. Couldn't be more stark, could it? And the gospel message, and true gospel messengers, will always also divide.

Look at chapter 10, verse 34. Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, says Jesus, but a sword, a sword that divides.

Remember Jesus' own words in the Sermon on the Mount. How does it end? There are only two ways. Two gates, two roads. The gospel is a double-edged sword that divides people.

[12 : 36] It's the mark of false gospels and all false gospel teaching. If all the church proclaims, oh, this is marvelous, this is wonderful. And if there is nobody who rails against the message.

That's not the true message of scripture, if it's producing that effect. If the reaction to the gospel today is not the same as the reaction to the gospel Jesus himself preached, where some are becoming hungry for more and desire more, but others are closing their ears and hardening their hearts, then it's probably not the gospel of Jesus that's being preached.

And that is a hard thing to come to terms with in our Christian life and witness. That you cannot build a true gospel church without causing division.

That's a very hard thing to come to terms with. It's a hard thing to come to terms with if you're a preacher and a pastor, I can tell you. And that is why many preachers and pastors do not do it.

And why their evangelical preaching will never build a true evangelical church. Because they will not face up to the fact that division is a necessity in real gospel ministry.

[13 : 56] But Jesus is no spin doctor. And Jesus tells it as it truly is. He says you must expect that division. You must expect hardship and struggle and persecution.

And you must prepare for it. And you must persevere in it right to the end. You're going out as sheep. Powerless and weak in the world's eyes.

But not valueless in my eyes. Precious sacrificial lambs for my sake. That's what you are according to Jesus. And he says you have heavenly power.

Unseen by the world. But powerful nevertheless. Look at verses 19 and 20. Heaven's own words will be yours. Words of power.

The father himself will be speaking through you. Verse 20. It is not you who speak. But the spirit of your father speaking through you. And never forget that says Jesus.

[14 : 55] However hard things become. Because I'm with you. And I will never abandon you. And that is something friends that we need to hear again and again and again.

Notice the realism. As Jesus points up three specific areas. Where persecution and hardship will come from. The first is in verse 17.

Do you see? The first focus of opposition to the true gospel comes from where? From the religious establishment itself. They will deliver you up.

And flog you in their synagogues. He says. In the official church. The official church of Israel. But so adrift from the true gospel. So adrift from the knowledge of the true God.

That it is deeply offended and aroused against everything that the true gospel represents. So that it flogs the servants of the true gospel.

[15 : 55] In its own synagogues. Well nothing has changed has it? We ourselves have experienced that first hand. In very recent days. A religious establishment.

That loves to think of itself as a broad church. But the truth is. That it hates the true evangelical faith. When it's faced up with it. When it's actually taken seriously.

And acted upon consistently. It is hated. And it dares to disrupt a precious institutional religion. And when you do that.

It will fight against you. With all the ferocity and power. That it can muster. It will flog you in their courts. It will drag you also. To the civil courts.

That's what Jesus is saying here. Because religion. Hates real faith. Because real faith liberates. Whereas religion.

[16 : 54] Seeks to control and enslave people. Establishment ecclesiastics exist. By making people dependent upon them. And making a system dependent upon them.

So opposition will always come. From the religious establishment. But in verse 18. Jesus also says. It will come also from society. And from the state itself.

From governors. From kings. And from society at large. Well throughout history. The true faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. Has constantly been threatened.

And opposed. By militantly. Anti-Christian society. Nero. Persecuted the Christians in Rome.

The Nazis. The Soviets. Sent them to their death camps. Sent them to the gulags. The modern Western secular democracies. If not as violent.

[17 : 51] Are certainly as vehement. Aren't they? And we're seeing that increasingly. In our own nation. The media. Is always sneering. And scornful. Of any true biblical faith.

It laughs at discord. Somebody like that. Is ever on the radio. Or the television. Being interviewed. By John Humphreys. Or one of these sort of people. It's always with derision.

And that will only increase. It was just last week. That the Prime Minister himself. Told the Church of England. It was time they got with the program. Well there you are.

If the Church of Jesus Christ. Will not get with the program. It will face disdain. And mockery. And persecution. And then verse 21.

Jesus. Takes it very close to home. Doesn't he? Where he says. That this kind of thing. Will come even from within the family. And that's perhaps. The most painful of all. Brother will deliver brother.

[18 : 48] Over to death. And the father. His child. And children. Will rise against parents. And have them. Put to death. It's often. Within the family.

Isn't it? That that terrible. Hurt. And hostility. And bitterness. And pain. Become so unbearable. Maybe a young person.

Is converted. At school. Or at university. And their parents. React against that. Angrily. Or maybe it's the other way around. And it's. Children. As they grow up.

And turn against their parents. And their Christian faith. And become embittered. Against them. Or sometimes. It happens within a marriage. A spouse. One comes to faith.

And it causes great disharmony. And pain. But Jesus says. This. Is. Genuine discipleship. This is not. Failed Christianity.

[19 : 43] This is what we're to expect. Indeed. He says in verse 22. All. Do you see? All. Will hate you. For my name's sake.

And some of you. Will have known that experience. Where you felt. Very much. On your own. A complete. Lone. And lonely voice. For the Lord Jesus Christ.

In a hostile environment. And. Sometimes it seems. Just. So difficult. That you can hardly bear it. But Jesus says.

Don't be discouraged. And don't be deceived. This is not a sign. Of your failure. This is not a sign. That. That my heavenly mission. Is out of control.

Rather. He says. This is the only way. It can be for you. If you're walking. In my shoes. It's a way of division. That I lead my people in. So rejoice.

[20 : 41] When all of this. Is happening to you. For my sake. Remember what he says. In the Beatitudes. Blessed are you. When others revile. And persecute. And slander you.

On my account. Rejoice. For so they persecuted. The prophets. Who went before you. In other words. You are the genuine. Article of faith. Just as they were. And great.

Also. He says. Is your reward. In heaven. In other words. You are not forgotten. When you feel forsaken. Your father sees you.

And he will reward you. And realize. He's saying to us. This is how my mission works. What you endure. For my sake. Verse 18. Do you see.

Is for witness. For martyrdom. Where we get our word martyr from. This is how the church grows. He says. It was Tertullian.

[21 : 35] The second century apologist. Who said. The blood of the martyrs. Is the seed of the church. And Jesus. You see. Is teaching his followers. All of this. So that they will not be.

Unprepared. For lives of true witness. And discipleship. And so that they will be able to endure. Now again. It's so. Much the opposite.

Isn't it? Of what we hear today. So very often. We hear people saying. In the church today. Now. Don't speak about. The negatives.

Of the gospel up front. That will just put people off. I heard of somebody saying. Well we never preach about. Sin and wrath. And suffering. On Sundays. Because we may have visitors.

New to the Christian faith. And we don't want them. To hear those things. Well if you don't preach that. On Sundays. When on earth. Do you preach that? That's deceitful.

[22 : 31] And dishonest. Christ. And it's also the antithesis. Of Jesus' own way. In this chapter. He is absolutely up front. And clear. Jesus you see.

Knows the human heart. He knows. That there are things. Which are great weapons. In the hands of our great enemy. And the great enemy. Of all Christians.

In particular. And that is the enemy of fear. Fear. Is a great great enemy. Of Christian mission. And it can neutralize mission. In churches.

In our own lives. In our families. In our CUs. And wherever. Fear. Is so often. The great enemy within. And it's something.

That must be confronted. And must be overcome. And that is done. By facing up. To the causes of fear. Which are often very real. And often very understandable. But you see.

[23 : 28] Jesus wants to show us. Why. We will allow our thinking. To be directed. By the true gospel. We need not fear. And we can endure.

And indeed. We can advance. The mission of the kingdom. No matter what we face. In our Christian lives. That's why in verses 24. Down to 33. Jesus puts his finger.

On three very specific. And powerful dangers. That arm. The great enemy. Fear in our lives. Three times. He gives reasons. That might strike fear.

Into our hearts. And three times. This is 26. And 28. And 31. Three times. He says that great gospel word. Fear not.

And each time. He gives us an offensive remedy. The answer to fear. And the perspective. That will help us. To fear not. So let's just look at each of these in turn. First of all.

[24 : 26] Is what I would call. The sting of slander. Something that leads so easily. To silencing of our Christian witness. And verse 25.

Just shows how horrible. That sting can often be. Do you see? They call the master of the house. Beelzebul. The devil. How much more. Those. Of his household.

Here is the religious establishment. The church of Israel. And it brands Jesus. The son of God himself. As the devil.

The prince of demons. Beelzebul. It's the sort of thing that clever and. Intellectual religious experts.

Like to say isn't it. You get one of these. People on the television shows. Usually at Christmas time. Or Easter time. When the latest documentary. Has been produced. About how Jesus actually. Was born in China.

[25 : 20] In the year 500 AD. Or something like that. And all of everything. In the gospels. Is a lot of nonsense. And you have one of these people. Wheeled out. Who will sneer. At the simpleton.

Kind of Christians. Who take their Bible literally. Who believe in. Simplistic things. Like heaven and hell. Or that there are just. Two ways. Or that there's such a thing. As final judgment.

Or that there's. Such a thing. As an exclusive. Unique. Savior. In Jesus alone. And very often. They'll say something like this. Won't they? Oh dear. Well. Of course.

I used to be like that. When I was young. But I grew out of it. I've been very glad. Of my evangelical past. I owe a great deal. To my evangelical friends. Of the church.

That I belonged to. When I was young. But. You see. I've grown up. And I've moved on. And put that behind me. And. These folks. Who are so simplistic. They're quite a danger. Really. You certainly mustn't let.

[26 : 16] These kind of people. Get in control. Of the church. Certainly must. Let them get in control. Of training. For ministry. And that sort of thing. We must move on. And grow up. And become more mature. In our thinking.

You see. When you're faced. With that kind of. Thing being said. When you're being called. A fundamentalist. Which to anybody. In the street. This day. Immediately conjures up. Images of people. Who fly planes.

Into buildings. Well. How do you feel? Very often. It makes you want. To shrivel up. Into a ball. And say nothing. Doesn't it? So easy.

For this thing. Of slander. Like that. To silence us. And that assault. Comes from all. Of the directions. That Jesus. Has already flagged up. In this passage.

Comes as I've said. From the religious establishment. Where fundamentalist. Is now the swear word. That's used. For all of those people. Who simply take their Bible. Seriously. As the word of God. And if you're facing up.

[27 : 17] To that kind of sting. Especially if you're. A minister. In a denomination. Or if you're. A theology student. Studying in a faculty. There is a great temptation. Isn't there? For you to be silenced.

Because you know. You won't have recognition. You won't have acceptance. By others. Are easy to be fearful. Of that kind of slander. It can come too.

From the family circle. Can't it? Where. Particularly if you're. A young person. Converted. Your parents. And others. In the family. Relatives and so. And we'll talk about you. Behind the banks.

Well he's become a bit fanatical. A bit worried about him. Become a bit overzealous. And really. And really quite concerned. Concerned. And you don't want them to think. That you're some kind of.

Zany religious lunatic. So you want to keep silent. Don't you? You don't want them to think. That of you. It's just the same in society.

[28 : 13] In your work. In school. Or in college. Or university. Or whatever. And you know. That there are sneers. Behind your back. Because you won't. Join in. Perhaps. With the. The smutty humor.

Over coffee. Or the lewd talk. About sex. Or whatever it is. That's just going on. Or maybe. Today.

Because your friends. And your relatives. Know that you're part of a church. Like this church. That has become notorious. Because. We're willing to say. That we believe.

What the bible says. About marriage. And about sexual relationships. And that means. That some things are wrong. We can't agree to them. You don't want to be thought. To be a bigoted.

Neanderthal. You don't want to be thought. To be somebody like that. In our culture. That is so against these things. Where everything is tolerated. Except. Biblical.

[29 : 09] Christian morality. You don't want to be associated. With the bigot of the year. Cardinal Keith O'Brien. Because he has been willing.

To speak out in the press. Has been branded that way. By Stonewall. People. But Jesus says. When we feel all of these things. And we do feel them keenly.

Jesus says. Do you see in verse 26. Have no fear. Of them. Who slander you as devils. And he gives a reason for it.

In verse 26. Do you see. For. Nothing. Is covered. That will not be revealed. Or hidden. That will not be made known. In other words.

As Hebrews chapter 4 says. Nothing. In all creation. Is hidden. From God's sight. Everything. Is in covered. And laid bare. Before him. To whom.

[30 : 03] We must. Each. Give account. God is true. Jesus is saying. And the truth will out. And there is a judgment coming. When all. All.

Will be laid bare. As it truly is. And God will. Vindicate. His people. Who have stood for him. And you need not fear. And that's why.

In verse 27. He says. The answer. To that kind of slander. Is bold truth. Proclaim the truth of God. From the housetops. He says. Don't be silenced. God is true.

Never forget it. And so proclaim that truth. Don't be silenced. The gospel proclaims. Hidden things. Says Jesus.

Invisible things. To the world outside. Things that are visible. Only by faith. In this present world. But the day will come. When everything. Will be revealed.

[30 : 57] And declared openly. As it truly is. And Jesus says to us. Who believe. And trust him. Live now. In the light of that great unveiling. Don't be silenced.

By the bitter sting of slander. Another reason. That we often fear. Is because of what he speaks about. In verse 28.

The real dread. Of violence. And persecution. And that may be very real. And is very real. In many parts of the world today. And that can lead so easily.

Can't it? To compromise. And to paralysis. Verse 28. Speaks of those. Who truly. May kill the body. Through violent martyrdom.

Of Christian people. That wasn't just an issue. In the first century. We're told that in the 20th century. There were more martyrdoms. Than in every other century. Before.

[31 : 52] Put together. In the 21st century. Looks as if it's only going to get even worse. Just read the. The literature. That comes monthly.

From the Barnabas Fund. Or from Release International. And you'll see the truth of that. And again. That comes today. In the world. From many sources. It comes from. The religious establishment. In many countries.

We're seeing it increasingly. Following. The Arab Spring. Aren't we? With Muslim. Religious establishments. In Egypt. And other places. It also comes of course.

In those that bear the name of Christian. In parts of Eastern Europe. And so on. And in Greece. Many in the Orthodox Church. Violently persecute.

Evangelical Christians. Comes also from the family. I know friends. Who have told me. Of converts. That they've had.

[32 : 46] To Christianity. From Muslim backgrounds. Who have simply disappeared. And nobody knows. What's happened to them. In this country. Because members of their. Extended family.

Have discovered. That they've come to Christ. And have very probably. Killed them. It comes also. From secular society. And from governments. In many parts of the world.

Still. And we know that. And as I said. The Western secular culture. That we live in. Is just as hostile. Well. Although.

It's not yet. Through state. Sponsored violence. But nevertheless. We are seeing. Aren't we. Increasingly hostile. Statutes. Put on. The statute book. Laws against.

Incitement. To religious hatred. Laws about. Sexual equality. Charity. Legislation. And so on. That are increasingly. Being used against. Christians. And will be increasingly.

[33 : 39] Used against. The church. Because. A church. That stands. By biblical truth. Offends. The gods. Of our world. Today. The gods. Of pluralism.

The gods. Of sexual. Assertion. We're seeing. Changes. To the charity. Legislation. Some of you. Would have. Read. That just last month. Plymouth Brethren Church.

Down south. Was. Was not allowed. To have charity status. Because of some of the beliefs. That they hold. Increasingly. This is going to happen. As churches. If they did.

Refuse. To have. Same sex weddings. The threats are there. That charitable status. Will be removed. And what Jesus is telling us. In Matthew chapter 10. Is that you are to expect. All of this.

And a whole lot more. And a whole lot worse. But he says. In verse 28. Again. Do not fear them. Even those.

[34 : 34] Who have the power. To kill the body. Do not fear them. Says Jesus. Rather. He says. Fear him. Fear God. Not only is God true.

Says. Jesus. He is great. He is the one. Who has power over life. And death. Both in this world. And in eternity. That fear.

Says. Proverbs 9 and 10. That fear. Is the beginning. Of real wisdom. In life. Fear the Lord. Says Psalm 34. Verse 9. Fear the Lord. You his saints.

For those who fear him. Have no lack. Fear him. Ye saints. And you will have nothing else to fear. Says the old hymn.

And Jesus says. That is true. Because God has you in his hands. Even now. And even more importantly. As verse 33 says. God has you in his hands.

[35 : 33] Ultimately forever. He's speaking of the last judgment. Everyone who acknowledges me before men. I also will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me.

I will deny before my father who is in heaven. So fear not. Says Jesus. Live in the light of that great day. The day of unveiling. And the day of a great verdict.

For those who have followed Christ. Don't be paralyzed. By the dread fear of violence even. And persecution. And martyrdom.

Because God is great. He has you in his hand. Then the third thing Jesus warns us of here. It's what I would call the desolation of divine distance.

And God seems to be to us so far away. It seems that he's abandoned us in our troubles. And so easily that can make us feel small. So easily that can lead us to lose all confidence and faith.

[36 : 37] Can't it? Perhaps this causes more casualties than any other. In our Christian life. When life is hard. When our prayers just don't seem to be answered.

When it seems like the heavens are as brass. We're all on our own. And we're saying where are you Lord? Why am I still suffering?

And I've been trying to be faithful to you. Why did you allow my beloved partner in life? Or my father or mother. Or sister or brother.

Why did you allow them to be taken from me in death prematurely? Or maybe. Why Lord. When I've prayed so long. Have I not been healed? Or has my loved one not been healed?

Or why Lord. Am I finding it so hard. I'm not making any breakthrough. And witness with my friends. That I've prayed for for so long. Or maybe just now.

[37 : 37] For some of us. Why Lord. Are you allowing us to be evicted. From this building that we love. See.

Just the same way. The religious establishment. And the world. And even our families. So often join in that chorus. It helps to undermine. Our feeling of God's presence.

Look at what's happening to them. Surely God must have abandoned them. Otherwise it wouldn't be happening. Or maybe like this. Look what you could have had.

You'd just been more reasonable. If you hadn't been so hard lying. You lie awake at night wondering. Well maybe that's true. Perhaps there is something in that. Perhaps God has abandoned us in our foolishness.

Or look what you could have had. Says your family. You just hadn't been so fanatical. And out of your mind. Leaving a good job. With all its prospects. And hope. For some ridiculous calling.

[38 : 37] To mission in that foreign country. Or to ministry in the Christian church. Some of you young students. If you find that in the future.

God is calling you. Into full time Christian service. You'll face exactly those things. From your families. Or look at. What you could have had. Says the world.

As your CV. Is passed over. Because of the things that you have done. In the last 10 years of your life. Are just considered as worthless. In the eyes of the world. Who cares. That you've given up time.

And opportunities. And money. To go and teach the gospel abroad. Or to go and serve Christ. By preparing yourself for ministry. Who cares about that? God. God. We're not interested in you anymore.

Look what you could have had. You hadn't done those things. Where is your God. When you need him now. Again and again.

[39 : 37] When there's the. The quiet snubs. Or the hidden barbs. Or the scorns of the world. Friends. We've often felt those things. Haven't we? Perhaps we're feeling them right now.

There's nothing new. Psalmist of Psalm 42 says. My tears have been my food. Day and night. While they say continually.

Where is your God. And the answer you see. When we feel like that. Says Jesus. Is not only. Is God true. And is he to be proclaimed.

Not only is God great. And therefore to be feared. But far from being distant. Far from being disinterested. God is near. He says. And he can be trusted.

Verses 39 and 40 here. Are as wonderful. As they are true. Sorry. Verses 29 and 30. Are not two sparrows. Sold for a penny. And not one of them.

[40 : 34] Will fall to the ground. Apart from your father. But even the hairs. Of your head. Are all numbered. It's not just that he sees. Every sparrow.

He controls. Every single fall. Of a tiny little bird. To the ground. And he numbers. The very hairs. Of your head. Says Jesus. He's near.

And he loves. Everyone. Who is a beloved. Child of his. Including you. And me. He's near.

Says Jesus. Therefore. Verse 31. Fear not. Why? Because you are of more value. Than many sparrows. Do you remember the Lord's words.

To Moses. At the burning bush. About Israel. In Egypt. The people of Israel. Groaning. Feeling abandoned. By God. Totally unaware. But through all of this.

[41 : 34] God is working out. His great plan. And purpose. Of redemption. But God says to Moses. I have seen. And I have heard. The affliction of my people. And I've heard their groaning.

And I've come down. To deliver them. See God was not distant. Although they felt. That he had gone all together.

And when you feel like that. And when I feel like that. God is not distant. He's interested in you. He's near you.

And that. Must give you confidence. When your confidence is set. Must give you strength. When your faith is. Is teetering. And when you feel like. You must fear.

Because you're on your own. And if you're feeling like that today. Verse 31. Is especially for you. Fear not. You are of more value.

[42 : 37] Than many sparrows. Says the Lord Jesus Christ. You might say to me. How can you be sure? How do you know that?

Well friends. I know that. Because this table. Down here. In front of me. Tells us. That God.

Our great redeemer. Came down. He came down. From the glory of heaven. To die on the cross of Calvary. Because he saw. And he loved. And he came.

To those. Whose very hairs on their heads. Are numbered by him. Do you think he would ever. Abandon you. Having done all of that. For you.

That this table proclaims. Of course he can't. He's near. He said. I am with you. Always. Even to the end.

[43 : 33] Of the age. Even amid all the struggles. And the suffering. That you may face. And that you surely will face. If you are to be true. To the Lord Jesus Christ. He is.

With us. And will never. Leave us. Nor forsake us. So take heart. Says the Lord Jesus. If they did it to me. And if they said it to me.

Then also. They will say it to you. But rejoice. When they do that. Because it's enough. For the disciple.

To be like his master. For the servant. To be like his teacher. If it's all for me. It's for my name's sake. Says the Lord Jesus. And you follow.

A crucified savior. But take heart. He says. And live for that great day. The day when.

[44 : 28] As verse 32 says. Everyone. Everyone. Who acknowledges me. Before men. And I will also acknowledge. Before my father in heaven. Count the cost.

Says Jesus. Yes. I'm putting it right up. In front of you. But. Count the cost. In eternal terms. Not just in temporal terms. And count the cost also.

Of not standing. Verse 33. Whoever denies me. Before men. I also will deny. Before my father in heaven. That's real too.

Isn't it? To deny him. And his gospel. Who loved us. And who is with us. All the way. Well that can only lead.

Says Jesus. To a loss. That is just unimaginable. So yes. Says Jesus. The mission. Of my kingdom. Claims. Everything.

[45 : 23] Everything. Of you now. Discipleship. Is and will be. A life of persecution. It will be a life of sheep. Among the wolves. And therefore. Discipleship.

Must be a life of. Perseverance. Right to the end. Despite all the fears within. But don't be silenced. By the sting of slander.

God is true. And proclaim him. Aloud. On the rooftops. He says. And don't be paralyzed. Even by the dread fear of violence. Because God is great.

Fear him alone. And you will never have to fear any man. And don't ever be desolate. Thinking God. Is distant. And he doesn't care. God.

Is near. And we can trust him. Always. Because he sees. And he cares. And he loves.

[46 : 22] And above all. Says the Lord Jesus to us. Live. Now. Not. In the light. Just of these. Light and momentary troubles.

But in the light of the eternal weight of glory. That outweighs them all. Let verse 32. Be etched. Into our minds and our hearts.

This morning. Everyone who acknowledges me. Before men. I also. Will acknowledge. Before my father. Who is in heaven. Let's pray.

Heavenly father. How we thank you. For the honesty of your word. That opens our eyes. To the truth about this world. That opens our eyes. And our hearts.

To the greater truth. Above and beyond this world. Of your mighty power. And of your wonderful love. And grace.

[47 : 22] Towards every one of your feeble servants. What a comfort. Lord. To know that we need not fear. When we fear you. And when we trust you.

And when we seek to follow you. Rejoicing. To be known as the people of Christ. The people of the cross. So Lord.

As we come to this table. That leads us once again. To that cross. Would you keep us near. To our crucified savior. And so bless us.

In all that we do. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[48 : 31] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.