

The Price for Real Kingdom Witness

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[0 : 0 0] helpful. Good, we turn now to Matthew's Gospel. Willie has begun a series here in the middle of Matthew, and we're looking at the next section here. So Matthew chapter 10. So please turn there in your Bibles, Matthew chapter 10, and we're reading from verse 16. Matthew chapter 10, and reading from verse 16, we're thinking about what it is to be a real witness for the Lord Jesus and for his kingdom. So let me read here from verse 16 of Matthew chapter 10.

Behold, 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 the synagogues, 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. 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.

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. 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 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 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 on your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows. 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. May the Lord bless his words to us this morning.

[3 : 37] Well, good morning, everyone. Do turn with me to Matthew chapter 10. And we're looking at this morning at the price of real kingdom witness. Last time we saw how in verses 1 to 15 of Matthew 10, Jesus gives his kingly briefing to his ambassadors in preparation for real kingdom witness. Not notice in words directly to us today, but to the unique 12 apostles who shared in the earthly ministry of Jesus. So of course, there were things there that were specific for their personal mission. Nevertheless, this chapter is a message that's recorded in scripture for us today. The principles span the ages. And so there's much for us to learn about the unfolding plan of God's mission to the world, but the undiminished power for that mission in the proclamation of the unchanging gospel. In the unselfish provision for that mission that is demanded from all Christians. And of course, in the uniting partnerships that we will need as we engage in that. All of these are directed and dictated by the gospel itself. What does the true gospel demand of us? What does the true gospel witness insist that we must deny? These are always key questions that we must be asking. But now as we turn to chapter 16 and following, it's very clear that Jesus is looking beyond the immediate horizons of simply these 12 and their mission within Israel. He's looking on to their later mission beyond Pentecost to the whole world. Back in chapter 6, Jesus sent them out only to the Jews in the land of Israel. But here in verse 18, he explicitly speaks about Gentile mission.

And indeed, the whole passage has in view the church's witness right to the very end. And the overwhelming emphasis in Jesus' teaching here is that they are to expect persecution and therefore they are to exhibit perseverance. Verse 16 here is an abiding principle. Real Christian witnesses are like sheep among wolves.

So, verse 17, be warned, you must beware of men and their wolf-like attacks on that witness. It's very sobering, isn't it? Look at verse 22. You will be hated by all for my name's sake.

There will be persecution where there is real Christian witness. And so we must persevere. It's he who endures to the end who will be saved, says Jesus. It doesn't mean that I think only those alive at the end of the world will be saved, but rather those who fight the good fight, who finish the race that's marked out for them, persevering, not shrinking back. Remember the continuous message of Hebrews.

And by the way, verse 23 there, I think Jesus is also not referring to the second coming at the end of the age. He's talking there about the specific task of the twelve, isn't he? Going through the towns of Israel.

[7 : 10] That's what he was speaking about back in verses 5 and 6. And he says that won't happen before the coming of the Son of Man into his kingdom with power and authority. That is, I think, in his resurrection.

In chapter 26 and verse 64, Jesus says that to Caiaphas at his trial. He says, soon, from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power in the clouds of heaven.

And that's fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel chapter 7 about the Son of Man coming to the throne of God to receive his everlasting kingdom. The coming in Daniel 7 is up to heaven. It's not down from heaven.

But anyway, whatever way you take that, you can't miss, can you, Jesus' clear message in these verses about the church's real witness. Expect persecution and exhibit perseverance.

There will be an all-real Christian witness. There will be danger, there will be heartbreak, there will be opposition, there will be disappointments, and there will be struggles aplenty.

[8 : 20] And that is real Christian discipleship. That is real Christian mission. Quite a contrast, isn't it, to a lot of what we hear today in modern church Christian circles.

We hear a lot about celebration, a lot about praise, a lot about experience, about power, about impact, about winning favor with people. But there's no triumphalism at all with Jesus here, is there?

There's no naivety. Beware, verse 17, beware of people. They will be wolf-like in opposing you and in attacking you. So you need to be wise as serpents in your life of Christian witness.

It's going to be tough till the very end. So don't be surprised and be ready to endure. Why must it be so tough, you might ask?

Well, because, Jesus says, the gospel, the true gospel, will always divide. Look back to chapter 9, verse 33 and 34.

[9 : 29] The gospel will bring forth faith. They marveled at Jesus' ministry, but also it brings forth unbelief. Verse 34. He's demonic, said the Pharisees.

The true gospel always divides. And the true gospel messenger always divides. Look at chapter 10, verse 34.

Not peace, says Jesus, but a sword of division. That's what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, wasn't it? Remember the end, chapter 7. There's only two ways.

And only two ways. There are two gates. There are two roads. Dividing two groups of people forever. And so according to Jesus, it's a mark of false witness, where all people acclaim the message as wonderful, as positive, as popular.

Where everybody says, oh, you're wonderful witnesses. If the reaction to a church's witness, and indeed to a believer's witness, is not the same as the reaction to Jesus, that is some desiring and hungering more, but others hardening their hearts and hating it and rejecting it, then it can't be true witness to the true Jesus, can it?

[10 : 50] And that's a very hard thing to come to terms with. You can't be a true witness to Jesus Christ without being hated.

You can't build a true gospel church without being hated, without seeing division, without seeing ongoing division. That's what we'll see in the parable of the sower, isn't it?

It goes on, that dividing. And that is very hard. It's very costly. That is very, very painful. And many Christians, of course, will shrink from that. Many Christian leaders will shrink from that for obvious reasons.

But Jesus tells it as it is. Expect hardship and opposition and persecution. And prepare for it and persevere in it right to the very end.

You're going to be as sheep. You will be weak. You will be foolish in the eyes of this world. But not valueless to him.

[11 : 57] Because you are precious, sacrificial lambs for his sake. And in the midst of it, you will know truly heavenly power. Unseen by the world, but at work through you.

Look at verse 19 and 20. Heaven's powerful words will be spoken by you. For it's not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

However hard, however painful, he's saying, I am with you. And this is the crucible of real witness to the world. It's for my sake, he says in verse 18, to bear witness before them.

And that's a wonderful encouragement, isn't it? But notice the realism. Notice how Jesus points to three very specific areas from which this hardship and even this persecution is going to come.

First is verse 17. It's going to come from the religious establishment itself. They will flog you in their synagogues, in the National Church of Israel, which is so adrift from the true knowledge of the true God and from the real gospel of salvation that will attack everyone who actually bears witness to that truth.

[13 : 13] Well, so it is still today. Many of us have known that firsthand. The institutional church despises the true evangelical faith, the word of Christ, the word of his apostles, when it's really believed, when it's really acted upon.

We want our church to be broad as long as it's narrow enough to keep those kind of fundamentalists out of it. Because man's religion has always hated and always opposed real faith.

Because, of course, real faith liberates. Whereas religion seeks to control and enslave, make people dependent upon its priests and its prelates.

So Jesus says, beware of church men, synagogue men, because they will hate you. And so will, secondary, so will society as a whole.

So will the state itself, verse 18. Governors and kings and the laws that they will turn against you. So it's always been Nero persecuted, butchered the Christians in the first century.

[14 : 24] The Nazis, the Soviets, dragged them off to gulags, to concentration camps. And the media today and the ruling elites today laugh and scorn those who publicly confess their allegiance to biblical truth.

And in our nation, that is getting shriller and louder and more aggressive all the time. And Jesus says, you're to expect it and endure it.

And alas, also, we're also to expect opposition, verse 21, from within the home and the family itself. And surely that's perhaps the most painful of all.

Brother will deliver brother over to death. The father his child. Children will rise against parents and have them put to death. It's almost unimaginable, isn't it? And yet so often there is great hostility from parents.

Perhaps when a child is converted and turns to Christ. Or sometimes it's the opposite. When it's a parent in later life that finds the Lord Jesus Christ and the family are shocked. Or perhaps a husband or a wife.

[15 : 42] But you see, Jesus is saying, that is genuine discipleship. That's not failed witness. That's not a bad witness. He says, doesn't he, verse 22, real witnesses will be hated by all for his name's sake.

Not loved by all. Sometimes that can feel very acute, very lonely. When you have to be a lone voice.

When no one is standing with you in your family or in your social circle. Sometimes it's almost too much to bear. But Jesus says, no. Don't be discouraged.

It's not a sign of failure. It's the only way it can be if you really are walking in my shoes. Because it is a divisive path that you'll tread.

But rejoice, he says, because it is for my name's sake. And whatever they may say, that actually is the root of their real hatred for you.

[16 : 48] It's hatred for him. And remember the Beatitudes. Blessed are you, said Jesus, when everyone eulogizes you and loves you?

No. When they revile you and persecute you and slander you on my account. Rejoice and be glad for so they persecuted the prophets before you. You are genuinely one of them.

And great is your reward in heaven. You are not forgotten. Your father sees and he will reward you. Fear not. And realize how real Christian mission works.

It's always this way. What you endure for witness, verse 18, do you see? That is how the church grows and advances.

The very word witness, marturion, is the word martyr. And always, it's been the blood of the martyrs that is the seat of the church. As Tertullian, the great second century church leader, said.

[17 : 55] And the Lord Jesus is telling all his followers precisely that, right here, very plainly. So they won't be unprepared for lives of discipleship.

And so that they will persevere amid persecution and pain. And again, that's something, isn't it, that's very often hidden, very often totally ignored in the modern church today.

You'll hear people saying, don't, don't tell the negatives of the gospel too soon to people. Don't tell them that up front. It'll scare them. It'll put them off. Just speak about the positives.

Speak about the love. Speak about the fellowship. Speak about the joy. Don't speak about sin and wrath and judgment, things like that. The struggles that you face as a Christian.

That's not just dishonest and deceitful, is it? That is the very opposite of what Jesus teaches and what his approach is.

[19 : 03] Jesus knows the human heart, you see, and he knows that all of these things are weapons in the hands of the great enemy of all people, including Christians, which is the great enemy of fear.

Fear is the great enemy of real gospel witness. Fear can neutralize real witness in churches and in families.

In fact, in all of our lives, fear is the great enemy within. And that's why it must be confronted and that's why it must be overcome. And that is done by facing up to the real causes of fear, which are often very real, very unavoidable.

but then showing why, if we allow our thinking to be shaped by the realities of true gospel perspective, then we needn't fear and we can persevere and we can play our part in advancing the witness of the kingdom of Jesus.

And that's what Jesus is doing here in his teaching. In verses 24 to 33, he puts his finger on three specific and very powerful dangers that will arm that great enemy fear and thereby wreck our mission.

[20 : 16] Three times he gives reasons for fear to strike our hearts and three times he says, fear not that great gospel word. Three times, verse 26 and 28 and verse 31.

And he also, each time, gives us an offensive remedy which is the answer to fear and he gives us the perspective that will enable us not to fear. So let's look at these in turn.

First of all, in verses 24 to 27 is the sting of slander. The sting of slander that so easily leads to silencing our Christian witness.

But, says Jesus, God is true. So go on proclaiming him aloud. Verse 25 shows us how horrible that sting can be.

If they call the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household. That's what the National Church of Israel called Jesus Christ, the Son of God himself.

[21 : 22] They called him Beelzebul, the Prince of Demons. They called him the devil. Those kind of establishment religious experts, you know, they get wheeled out still today, don't they, on the BBC to sneer at the kind of gullible simpletons who read the Bible so simplistically as they say.

Who believe simplistic truths about heaven and hell and about final judgment and about there being only two ways to live and all of that sort of thing. Instead of the multiple shades of religious grey.

Those kind of people who naively still talk about only one way of salvation in a pluralistic world like ours. And very often they'll say things, won't they, like, well of course I used to think like that too.

But of course with education and maturity I grew out of it. I'm very grateful for my evangelical past when I was young but of course we must move on, mustn't we?

In fact, I can now see so clearly that these kind of simplistic fundamentalist ideas they're not just wrong, they're actually terribly dangerous. We certainly mustn't let these kind of people get any way into having a part in training people for ministry and things like that.

[22 : 44] And indeed for nearly a century in this country real gospel faith was systematically expunged from all ecclesiastical training.

And that is why our mainline denominations in the United Kingdom today have almost entirely lost the Christian gospel and are now in terminal decline and will disappear altogether.

But you see that kind of slander really does sting because it's not nice to be called demonic, to be called evil, to be called dangerous. And it's designed isn't it that kind of talk not just to discredit but to wound and to silence people.

We're seeing all kinds of that kind of attitude actually all around us today in public life, aren't we? And this COVID crisis has brought out that kind of nasty instinct in spades, I think.

Because we've seen that anybody, it doesn't matter how eminent they are, anybody who dares to dissent from the prevailing narrative that this virus is the only threat to life, that nothing else matters.

[23 : 59] Anybody who suggests that there might be other issues to consider, they're immediately attacked, aren't they? They're branded dangerous, they're actually branded as evil. And they're being censored from all media, being called names, they're being utterly discredited, they're being called Beelzebel, the devil, evil.

It's exactly the same kind of instinct, isn't it? It's deep in the human heart, comes from self-righteousness and sanctimony. But it's very effective because it's personally very horrible, isn't it, to be at the sharp end of that kind of nasty slander, character assassination.

So it's very, very easy for that sting of slander to silence us from spreading the truth of the Christian gospel in the world and into people's lives.

And the assault of that slander comes from all of those three directions that Jesus has highlighted. It comes, as I've said, from the religious establishment who sneer at those who love the gospel, who call them fundamentalists and things like that, other ecclesiastical terms of abuse.

And it's hard not to want to keep your head down. It's hard not to want to keep your mouth shut, especially if you're looking for recognition as a scholar or as a student or as a churchman in the denomination seeking the respect of your peers.

[25 : 23] It's very hard to be faithful in the face of slander and scorn. And that comes often also from the family circle as well.

Youngsters converted perhaps at a summer camp and the parents are horrified and they tell their friends so he's become fanatical. It's very concerning. Well, there's great pressure, isn't it, for that teenager to keep quiet, to not engage in gospel talk because their parents think they're mad.

And of course, it comes from society too all around us all the time, from school, from college, from your workmates. There's sneers behind your back because you won't engage in the lewd humor with everybody else.

Or the sneers and the talk because they know that you belong to a church that's willing to say that, well, the Bible teaches that homosexual activity is sinful and must be turned away from.

Or that there are two sexes made by God, male and female, not the 99 ridiculous genders that the BBC tells us there are. And so because you go to that kind of church, you are a bigoted Neanderthal on the wrong side of history.

[26 : 46] In a society where everything is tolerated now except Orthodox Christian morality, it's very easy, isn't it, to want to be silent, to hide the shame of belonging to the prince of demons, to Beelzebul and his kind of people.

But Jesus says, look at verse 26, have no fear of them who slander you as devils.

And he gives a very powerful reason, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. That is as Hebrews chapter 4 verse 13 puts it, nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.

Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. God is true and the truth will out.

And there's a day of judgment coming when all will be laid bare as it truly is. And he will vindicate his people. So you need not fear.

[28 : 02] So do not fear and verse 27 go on proclaiming the truth of God from the housetops loudly and publicly because the answer to that kind of slander is truth.

And God is true. Never forget it and never be silenced. You see, the gospel proclaims hidden things, things that are hidden, invisible to this world's blindness but are revealed to Jesus and his people in the dark as it were.

But the day will come when it will all be out in the open. It will be exposed to the searing light of God's judgment. And friends, that is the only judgment that we need to care about.

Not man's slanderous judgment of us now. So live now in the light of that day says Jesus. Don't be silenced by the bitter sting of slander.

It's hard and it's horrible but it is the mark of Jesus' genuine household. Another source of fear is what verse 28 speaks of.

[29 : 18] The dread of violence and real persecution. Do not fear those who kill the body. While facing violence, certainly facing martyrdom surely is hugely stressful.

Hugely fear-inducing. And it will so clearly lead, won't it, very often to paralysis, to compromise. That's not just a first century issue, it's a 21st century issue.

in many parts of the world today. It's well known, I think, in Christian circles that the 20th century saw more people martyred for Christ than all of the 19th centuries that preceded it.

And you just need to read in the Barnabas Fund news or in Release International news to see that that's true today. And again, that real persecution comes from the same sources.

It comes from the religious establishment. We see that today, don't we, in many Muslim countries. Increasingly in Hindu nationalist India. But you see it also from Orthodox Church hierarchies in Russia and the other Eastern nations.

[30 : 31] And terribly, you still see it coming from families. That's something that has been seen in recent times in this country. Muslims converted to the Lord Jesus Christ have often just disappeared.

and some surely have been murdered by their families in honor killings. And of course, many secular governments will do the same thing like in China today where the Communist Party is ruthlessly suppressing Christians more and more and more.

And the truth is, friends, that our secular Western governments, our post-Christian governments are just as hostile. We don't see state-sponsored violence yet against Christians.

Not yet. But we do see state legislation that is being used increasingly to silence Christian witness. The hate crime bill that is before our Scottish government today is nefarious in the extreme.

It's deeply sinister. It wants to potentially even criminalize discussion in the home about matters of religion, matters of sexuality. with your children around the dinner table.

[31 : 42] Encouraging children to inform upon parents. It's like something out of East Germany under Eric Honecker. Behind the Iron Curtain. The kind of stories that I used to hear when I was growing up.

So don't be naive. In our nation today, as in much of the West, we are sleepwalking into more and more secular totalitarianism.

And the events of this last year have only served to accelerate that advance. The liberties that we have become so used to in the West are the fruit of hundreds of years of culture-shaping Christianity.

They are the blessing of the overflow of God's truth into national life. But as that truth becomes more and more systematically rejected, well, so that tide of consequent blessing has been ebbing out for decades.

And soon, all that will be left is dry sand. Strewn with all the detritus and all the filth that was once covered over by the waters of God's common grace.

[32 : 58] And friends, with that will come real persecution. Just like pastimes, threats, pressures to conform, and real punishment if you do not conform.

Expect it all, says Jesus, and worse. But, verse 28, do not fear. Do not fear that and do not fear them.

Even if they do have power to kill your body. Rather fear Him, fear God. Not only is God true, He is great.

So go on fearing Him alone. He alone is the one who has power of life and death both in this world and eternally. And it's that fear of God, that fear alone, that's the beginning of wisdom in life.

That's the message of Proverbs over and over. Fear the Lord, you His saints. For those who fear Him lack nothing, says the psalmist. As we sang, fear Him, you saints, and you will have nothing else to fear.

[34 : 12] God has you in His hands even now. But even more importantly, He has you in His hands ultimately. Verse 32, everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.

So fear not and live today in the light of that day. Don't be paralyzed by the threat of persecution, even real violence, even the threat of death itself.

God is great. So go on fearing Him alone. But there's a third fear that I think is implied here in verses 29 to 31.

And it's the fear that comes from what I call the desolation of divine distance. When God seems to be so far away, when He seems to have abandoned us to our troubles.

And that can so easily lead us to a great loss of faith and a loss of confidence. And maybe this fear is the one that actually causes more casualties than any other.

[35 : 19] When life's hard, when it seems that our prayers are unanswered, and it seems that heaven is His brass, and we're saying to ourselves all the time, where are you, Lord? Where is He? Why am I suffering so when I've been faithful to You and not faithless?

Why have You allowed these awful things to happen in my life? Why didn't You heal my beloved loved one when I prayed to You?

Why haven't I seen these loved ones of mine come to faith when I've prayed and prayed and I've witnessed for so long? Where are You, Lord? Are You really there? Are You there at all?

And often when that's our agonized cry, so often the world or maybe our families or even the religious establishment would join in that chorus, wouldn't they?

Look at what you could have had, says your family, if you hadn't been so fanatical, leaving that good job, leaving all those prospects for that ridiculous calling to Christian ministry.

[36 : 30] Or look what you could have had, says the world, when your CV has just been quietly passed over because the things that you've done are worthless in there. Who cares that you've given up time and opportunity and money to serve the church in mission?

Or that you've given up time and money to train yourself to teach the Bible and share the gospel with others? What a waste of time that is in the world's eyes. Or look at what you could have had, says establishment religion, if you just hadn't been so hardline and so inflexible.

You could have had that chair of theology. You could have been the dean of faculty. You could have been a bishop, maybe even an archbishop. What a terrible waste of such great ability.

Where is that evangelical God of yours? What have you really gained from him and his gospel? There's so many quiet snubs out there, so many barbed comments, just the cold shoulder, the scorn of the world, the scorn of the church, the scorn even of family.

I'm sure many of us have sometimes felt that sense of desolation, of divine distance. It makes you wonder, is God really there? Is any of this really worth it?

[37 : 54] Have I been barking up the wrong tree all the time? It's not a new phenomenon though, is it? Psalmist in Psalm 42, my tears have been my food day and night while they say continually, where is your God?

Where is your God? And the answer, Jesus said, is that not only is God true and therefore to be proclaimed aloud, not only is God great and therefore to be feared alone, but far from being distant, far from being disinterested in us, God is near and therefore he can be trusted always.

On verses 29 and 30, wonderful, they're absolutely true. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny and not one of them will fall to the ground without your father?

but even the hairs of your head are numbered. He cares about and he even controls every fall of a hapenly bird and he numbers the very hairs of your head.

It's funny, when I read that verse, it always makes me think back to watching when our girls were little and they'd be sitting between their mother's legs and having their hair brushed repeatedly and pleated, put into pleats and the tender care that that took of a mother with her children.

[39 : 34] But even more than that here, I don't think she ever counted every single hair that was being pleated. He counts every single hair. That's how much love, that's how much care that he has for every one of his dear children, including you.

Even including me. He's near. And therefore, says verse 31, fear not because you are of more value than many sparrows.

remember God's word to Moses at the burning bush about his people enslaved in Egypt, groaning in agony, thinking that God had abandoned them forever, totally unaware that even then, in fact, even through all of that, God was working out his wonderful purpose of redemption to bless them forever.

And in Acts 10, Stephen speaks of God saying, I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people. I've heard their groaning and I have come down to deliver them.

And yet as that, they didn't know it, did they? They didn't feel it. And maybe many of us are feeling like that today, that God is distant.

[40 : 59] Perhaps he could have no interest in me. How could he? I'm so useless. I let him down so badly, so often, even this week, even this day.

No wonder he's silent. No wonder he's abandoned me. And your confidence is sapped and your faith is teetering. And you're afraid and you're afraid it's all wrong.

You've wasted your time. Well friends, if that's so, then verse 31 is a word especially for you today, isn't it?

Especially for all of us. Fear not, you're of more value than many sparrows. And God cares greatly, even for the very least of them. you're of more value.

How do I know that, you might say? Well, you know that because he has seen our affliction. and he did come down to deliver us all the way to the awful cross at Calvary where he gave himself for you and for me so that we might belong to him forever.

[42 : 19] He saw and he so loved that he came. Do you think that having done that he's going to abandon you now or ever?

Never. He's not distant. He's near. I'm with you always, he's promised, even to the ends of the world. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Even amid all these struggles that you will face surely and certainly right till the very end, but God is near. So go on trusting him always.

Fear not and take heart and keep on. That's the message of this chapter. Take heart. If they did it to me, if they said it of me, they will say it and do it to you but rejoice.

It's enough, isn't it? For a disciple to be like teacher, for a servant to be like master. It is all for me. It's for my name's sake. An old Puritan amid great persecution once said, he who stands closest to his captain is a sure target for the archers.

[43 : 43] and we follow a crucified captain. But take heart, rejoice because everyone verse 32, everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge before my father in heaven.

Count the cost. Yes, you must. But make sure that you count that cost in eternal terms. and make sure that we also count the cost of not standing and being counted publicly before the wolf-like howling of men.

Verse 33, whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my father in heaven. that's real too. To deny him, to deny his gospel who loved us and who's with us all the way, that can only lead to a loss unimaginable and eternal says Jesus.

Friends, our Lord is teaching us here that real witness to the real Jesus and the real gospel it claims everything. Real discipleship is a life that brings persecution.

It's being sheep among wolves. And so real discipleship must be a life of perseverance to the very end despite all these fears within.

[45 : 16] Don't be silenced by the sting of slander. God is true. So go on proclaiming him aloud. Don't be paralyzed by the dread of violence and it may come maybe sooner even than we think but God is great.

So go on fearing him alone. And don't ever be desolate thinking that God is distant and doesn't care. He is near. And you can go on trusting him always.

He sees, he loves, he cares. and above all live now in the light not not of these light momentary troubles but live in the light of the eternal weight of glory that outweighs them all.

Everyone who acknowledges me before men I also will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven. Let's pray.

Our gracious heavenly father how we thank you that your word to us is truth and light and therefore it gives us life and strength for life perseverance in the face of every fear within stirred up by every hatred and persecution without.

[46 : 56] But we thank you Lord that we know that you are true that you are great and that you are near always even to the end to help us to go on proclaiming our Lord Jesus fearing you alone and trusting you always for the sake of your great love for us.

We ask it in Jesus name Amen.