

Local Missions (Part 3)

Matthew 10:16-25.

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Introduction

Recap of part 1 & 2.

Theme: “Heads up – persecution on the way”

V. 16 – The difficult task of being both shrewd and pure amid persecution.

1. Persecution: Both Religious and Political. (VV.17-20)

- a. Historical context.
- b. So far, not our reality – but the reality of many.
- c. The greatest lawyer ever: the Holy Spirit.

2. Persecution: Both at Home and Socially. (VV.21-23a)

- a. Historical context.
- b. Reality of many – both here and elsewhere.
- c. Prudence

3. Persecution: It's a Badge of Honor. (VV.23b-25)

- a. A theological “issue”.
- b. “*Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness*” (Matt. 5:10-12)

Conclusion

One fact: Persecution and resistance only arise *in the path* of evangelism.

Recap – Sermons 1 and 2

As we've been studying missions, we've placed a strong emphasis on our local responsibility. Two sermons ago, we laid the foundation: there is a clear agenda, a desperate need, and all of it must be carried out with compassionate hearts. If we have been saved by Jesus, then naturally, we desire for others to be saved as well.

Last Sunday, we explored the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples as they carried out this work.

- A. Do it with a group.
- B. Do it locally.
- C. There is financial support available.
- D. Enter through the open doors, move on with closed doors.

All of Jesus' instructions are timeless—they were effective yesterday, they remain relevant today, and they will continue to guide us tomorrow. These commands are also borderless—they can be implemented in any nation, tribe, or community.

Our last sermon's illustrations focused on the role of the local church:

- Healthy church planting often begins with just a few families who carry a deep desire to reach their neighborhood.
- A revival in Geneva was sparked and sustained by the local church.
- In Canada, "door-to-door" evangelism is often seen as intrusive and culturally ineffective. Therefore, our local church must find ways to genuinely engage with the community. Our neighbors need to see that we are truly open to them—that our doors and hearts are wide open.

Today's Sermon: Persecution.

I find it amazing that Jesus is so loving, and as a leader, he always has the well-being of his disciples in mind. From this, I've learned three characteristics of a good leader:

- Jesus is transparent. He lets His disciples know there will be resistance as they do the work.
- Jesus gives them a heads-up. He tells them what the future holds so they'll know how to respond when the time comes.
- Jesus is realistic. His disciples had their "heads in the clouds," thinking ministry was "a bed of roses"—but it wasn't.

That's why Jesus said, *"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves."* I find the task of being both shrewd as snakes and pure as doves very challenging. How about you?

The Three Areas of Persecution

I. Persecution: Both Religious and Political. (VV.17-20)

Here, Jesus reveals that on His account, His disciples will suffer both political and religious persecution. In the immediate context of this mission, the disciples did not face such resistance. However, in the broader First Century context, the disciples did indeed endure severe persecution.

In fact, the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself bears witness to this. He was executed under two charges: blasphemy—for claiming to be God incarnate (a religious charge brought by the Sanhedrin), and treason—for claiming to be a king (a political charge brought by the Roman authorities).

In our Western society, we have not yet experienced persecution of this magnitude. In other parts of the world, however—such as China, North Korea, India, and the Arab world—this is already a reality. Even here in the West, including Canada, we face a low-key form of persecution. Here are some examples:

- By affirming the Christian worldview that marriage is between a man and a woman, by default, society deems us “homophobic.”
- By affirming the Christian worldview that man is the head of the family, by default, society deems us “sexist.”
- By affirming the Christian worldview that Jesus is the only way, only truth, only life, by default, society deems us “intolerant.”

All of these charges are primarily social, but they can quickly escalate into legal ones. However, do not lose heart—we have support: the Holy Spirit is the greatest lawyer of all. Let’s consider what that truly means:

- No! It does not mean God will put on a suit and show up in court to defend us.
- No! It does not mean God will acquit every lawsuit brought against us.
- Yes! It does mean that God, by His indwelling presence in you—through inspiration, sound counsel, daily Bible reading, prayer, and Sunday gatherings—will equip you to face (or wisely avoid) persecution in your own context.

II. Persecution: Both at Home and Socially. (VV.21-23a)

Let me place you in the perspective of a Middle Eastern person, rather than those of a Western one:

- **The Western mindset** tends to focus on the individual. For example, a Christian parent may bring their children to church every Sunday. However, if a child chooses atheism or secularism, the father may feel disappointed—but it typically doesn’t result in further consequences for the child.

- **The Middle Eastern mindset** emphasizes family, community, and religion as inseparable parts of one's identity. Therefore, if a family member chooses a different religion, that personal decision may lead to being cut off from the family's inheritance. Socially, that person may be despised—because in this context, family, community, and religion are deeply intertwined.

By the way: When Jesus says, “everyone will hate you because of me,” he is **not literally** saying that everyone will hate Christians. He is just saying that society, in general, will do so. That's the correct understanding of the word “everyone” here in verse 22

Though these verses may resonate more deeply in a Middle Eastern context, some in Canada also face resistance at home because of their faith in Christ. Consider spouses who don't share the same beliefs, children who drift away from the church, or even anti-Christian cousins eager to disrupt Thanksgiving dinner by raising controversial topics.

To raise awareness, it's worth pointing out—once again—some of the most common social accusations made against believers:

- By affirming the Christian worldview that marriage is between a man and a woman, by default, society deems us “homophobic.”
- By affirming the Christian worldview that man is the head of the family, by default, society deems us “sexist.”
- By affirming the Christian worldview that Jesus is the only way, only truth, only life, by default, society deems us “intolerant.”

How to deal with such a hostility? Jesus teaches us the value of both resilience and prudence. He commends us to stand firm for in faith – and to flee when needed.

III. Persecution: It's a Badge of Honor. (VV.23b-25)

“Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”

This statement has sparked various interpretations among scholars: some believe Jesus was referring to his Second Coming; others interpret his words figuratively; and some think he was speaking literally. Most likely, there is truth in all these interpretations.

When viewed in context, Jesus' words may sound very straight-forward:

- In keeping with the context, Jesus told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” he was simply saying they wouldn't be able to do everything on their own—or all at once.
- In keeping with the context, Jesus was simply telling them, 'I'll see you soon.' his disciples went to the neighboring towns north of Israel, and they were expected to return to him before heading together to the south—Jerusalem and Judea.
- In keeping with the *greater* context, Jesus – the Son of Man – will indeed return, and we all wait for his Second Coming.

In fact, if we were to put his heart into words, it's as if Jesus tells us each morning: good morning—there's a world waiting to hear the gospel, and I'll see you soon.

"Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness"

(Matt. 5:10-12)

When a Jewish child had the privilege of being taught by an elderly rabbi, his greatest desire was to become like his rabbi. In today's final verses, Jesus gives new meaning to the interaction between a rabbi and a disciple: he introduces the idea of persecution.

The disciple's desire is to become like Jesus; he does not desire persecution – never! However, he ends up suffering resistance along the way. If Jesus was called Beelzebul-possessed (demon-possessed), his disciples should expect to be called all kinds of names as well.

Keep that in mind: if you stand up for the sacredness of marriage, they will call you homophobic. If you stand up for Christianity, they will call you intolerant. If you stand up for righteousness, they will resist you.

Conclusion

- Persecution and resistance should become a badge of honour to our lives.

A Few Questions:

1. Have you ever been persecuted/resisted for the sake of righteousness?
2. What makes you think you were persecuted for the sake of righteousness – and not something else? Have you examined your own heart in that matter?
3. Was it politically, religiously, or socially?
4. Was it at home, in church, or at work?
5. Has that stopped or helped you in pursuing righteousness in your own home/community/work/church?