

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Pastor Stephen Felker
Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Matthew 10:13-36 “Dealing with Gospel Rejection”

Intro. Have you ever suffered rejection? Of course you have. Guys, have you ever been rejected when you asked a girl for a date? Have you ever had a friend or family member reject you? Have you ever been rejected by a spouse? Rejection can be very painful!

Well I want you to know that Jesus Christ certainly knows about rejection. Isaiah gave the following prophecy about Jesus Christ, “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...” (Isa. 53:3). In Mk. 8:31 Jesus began to teach His disciples “that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...” The apostle John said, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (1:11). If you have felt the pain of rejection, Christ can certainly sympathize with you, for He’s been there!

Now in this text of Scripture Jesus warned His disciples that *they* would face rejection. He said in vv.24-25, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” (cf. 9:34; 12:24). Now if they called Jesus a devil, they may call you a devil, or a demon as well! So Jesus is saying that if they slander Me, they will slander you. The Lord's servants are not to expect better treatment than the Lord Himself received. Later in Jn. 15:20 Jesus said, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”

Now here’s the issue we face: If we publicly confess our faith; if we share our faith with others; or if we invite people to church, we can be sure that we will face at least some rejection as well.

Now some people do not seem to be sensitive about rejection. They are like the salesman that ignores 9 rejections just to make that one sale. But some others are very sensitive to rejection. We have been hurt too many times in the past, and they tend to avoid people and situations where they might be rejected. I have to admit that I have been that way. When the kids in the neighborhood picked teams, guess who was picked last most of the time? Because I stuttered as a child I had my share of ridicule and rejection.

Now here’s the problem: Jesus Christ wants us to share our faith & testimony with others, but when we do so, we will face at least some rejection, or even worse. And so too often we do not share our faith just to avoid rejection. That is not good. So I want to share with you from this text of Scripture what Jesus says about dealing with Gospel rejections.

Jesus is very honest with His disciples as He prepares to send them out to proclaim the Gospel. First, He gives them a warning. I want to give you the same warning, and it is this:

I. BEWARE OF THE TYPES OF REJECTION YOU WILL FACE

In v.17 Jesus said, “But beware of men...” Jesus told us to beware, take heed, be on your guard; watch out! Why? That is because in the previous verse He said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” “Behold”, introduces something important, something that calls

for close attention. People can attack you like wolves. So be prepared for the following responses when we try to share our faith:

A. Some Will Not Receive You into Their Homes – In v.14 Jesus said, “And whoever will not receive you ..., when you depart from that house...” Jesus warned that some would not receive these missionaries. In fact, they will shut their door and not invite them in. I have had that happen to me on a few occasions.

B. Some Will Not Listen to You - In v.14 Jesus said, “And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words...” There will be those who turn a deaf ear to you. It is so sad when you know that you have good news to share, but someone just doesn't want to listen. I wonder who is not listening right now, even as I speak? Jesus warned me that some will not listen!

As we move into the next section, beginning with v.16, the instructions and warnings become more serious. Much of the mistreatment described here was not experienced during the disciples' initial preaching tour, but came later. In fact, these verses look all the way to the end of the age. Notice what will happen to some of God's people:

C. Some Will Hate You –In v.22 Jesus said, “And you will be hated by all for My name's sake...” Why would anyone hate good, loving Christian people? It seems inexplicable. Here's the problem: when light exposes the darkness of sin, you can be sure that the darkness will fight back. This warning will especially be true of believers during the Great Tribulation.

Notice that Jesus said they will hate us “for My name's sake...” Don't take this rejection personally. They are not really rejecting you, but Christ.

Now because they will hate you:

D. Some Will Persecute You – In v.17 Jesus said, “But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.” Notice that much of the persecution will come from other religions, for notice that the persecution takes place right in the synagogue. But persecution will also come from government (v.18), and even from family (v.21). The three institutions which God established in this world are the home, government, and the church. In the last days, all three of these institutions will oppose the truth instead of promote it.

Now this persecution will take on different forms. They may slander you. Jesus said in v.25, “...If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!” In v.17 we see that for the disciples, they would be scourged. The disciples were scourged by the Jews several times. J. Vernon McGee said, “I have never been scourged in a synagogue, but I have been verbally scourged in some of our good churches.” V.18 implies imprisonment as another form of persecution. They may even put you to death, as Christ mentioned in vv.21 & 28.

By the way, what Jesus warned about came true. Everyone one of these disciples was scourged, and all but John were put to death for their faith in Christ. Fortunately in our country we are protected by law from this happening. But many are dying for their faith in other countries. Indonesia is 88% Muslim, and 10,000 Christians in have died there over the past five years. In that country 1,000 churches have been destroyed, along with 80,000 Christians' homes. By the way, Indonesia was the hardest hit by the Tsunami. There is also significant persecution in North Korea, Saudi Arabia, India, China, Sudan, & Colombia. According to the World

Evangelical Alliance's Religious Liberty Commission, 200 million Christians today live with serious persecution—threatened with prison, violence, and other actions—for their faith.

The solemn foretelling of persecution goes on and becomes even more foreboding, for:

E. Even Some Family Members Will Betray You – Christ speaks of our dear ones turning to foes. In fact, Paul warned in 2 Tim. 3:3 that many people in the last days will be “without natural affection,” that is, without natural family love. This is really bad. In v.21 He said, “Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.” This should come as no surprise. In vv.34-36 Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’” There Jesus is quoting from Micah 7:6. This kind of reaction is actually a fulfillment of prophecy! Different values, morals, goals, and purposes will set us apart from others.

Some of you are experiencing these verses right now. When one person in a family accepts Christ and another family member does not, you can have division in the family. If a Jew becomes a Christian it is not unusual for his family to have nothing to do with him or her any longer. If a Moslem becomes a Christian, they are often put out of the family, or even put to death. If a Catholic becomes a baptized evangelical Christian, he or she may be rejected by their family.

Betrayals have been common in the persecution of Christians. For instance in China in the days of Mao Tse-tung a nation of nearly a billion people was systematically brainwashed by a ruthless regime, and a diabolical attempt was made to stamp out Christianity through a policy of betrayal. Many Christians were betrayed by their family.

Associate Press reported recently (March 19, 2006) that an Afghan man who allegedly converted from Islam to Christianity is being prosecuted in a Kabul court and could be sentenced to death, a judge said Sunday. The defendant, Abdul Rahman, was arrested last month after his family went to the police and accused him of becoming a Christian.

Now folks, what we read about in chapter 10 is likely to become more and more of a reality even right here in America. Are we going to be defeated by the devil’s treats of persecution and rejection? No one likes rejection. No one wants to suffer physical injury and discomfort. But are you going to allow the devil to keep you from Christ and keep you out of heaven, just to avoid persecution & rejection? Or are you going to allow the devil to keep you from being the Christian God wants you to be, just to avoid persecution? Listen, Jesus was willing to suffer rejection, suffering, and death for us. We should be willing to suffer the same for Him.

I have given Christ’s warning regarding rejection & persecution. That’s the bad news. Now we must consider how we can have victory over the forces of darkness. So let’s move on to the next point:

II. BE WISE IN YOUR RESPONSE

In v.16 Jesus said, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” The cautiousness and wariness of serpents had become proverbial. It refers to insight into the nature of one’s surroundings. So we need discernment.

We need to be sensible, thoughtful, & prudent. We are not to be sheeplike and gullible. Being wise as a serpent will enable the Lord's ambassador to see trouble coming and to be prepared to avoid it, or properly handle it. We also need the right disposition. We are also to be harmless as doves. Being harmless as a dove will enable the Lord's servant to display the Spirit of Christ when trouble does overtake him.

Now I want to share some specific examples of how we are to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

A. It Is Wise to Avoid Persecution – Jesus said in v.23, “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.” Don’t be dumb and just let people beat up on you! When the wolves are chewing at you, don’t just stand there and be totally passive. No where does the Bible teach that a kingdom worker must stay in the same city where he and his family are threatened and harassed. Instead, we are to move on. So we ought to be wise enough to seek self-preservation. A living witness may do more for Christ than a dead martyr.

In v.14 Christ says we are to shake the dust off our feet and move on. After traveling through heathen territory Jews had the custom of shaking the dust off their sandals. They were afraid that otherwise in their own country a levitically clean object might be rendered unclean. What Jesus is saying, therefore, is that even an Israelite place that refuses to accept the gospel must be considered unclean, as if it were pagan soil. Paul did this in Acts 13:51. Now this particular practice would not have the same meaning today.

Now this is one way that we are to be “harmless as doves.” We are to flee, not retaliate. Paul wrote in Romans 12:17, “Pay no man evil for evil.” They may hate you and slander you and even try to physically hurt you, but we should not respond in like manner. We ought to be like Jesus. Peter said of Him, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

Now based on these verses, we can also say this:

B. Don’t Spend Too Much Time with Unreceptive Hearts - In fact, Jesus also says in v.23, “For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”¹ Why spend time telling someone about Jesus a second time, when there are plenty of people who haven’t heard about Jesus or the first time? As long as there is a shortage of workers, we must make the best use of our time. Don’t waste your time with hard hearts.

Now another wise thing to do is this:

C. Turn Persecution into a Witness Opportunity – Jesus said in v.18, “You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.” All of the apostles were arrested and brought before national leaders. And they always took advantage of the opportunity to share their faith in Christ with these important people. We do not have easy access to people in high places. So sometimes God will allow us to be persecuted so we can get access to such people.

¹ McGee believes this means until He is manifested before the nation (p.59). Phillips believes that the Jewish mission originated in Matthew 10 will be resumed during the Great Tribulation, which will be followed by the Second Coming (p.190). This interpretation is supported by v.22, where Jesus said, “He who endures to the end will be saved.” That same expression is found in Mt. 24, which refers to the days of the Great Tribulation.

D. Always Remember: Some Will Believe! – Jesus spends about 23 verses talking about those who reject the Gospel. It's not until we get to the last 3 verses of this chapter that Jesus tells of those who receive us and our message. Some will offer aid and comfort in times of persecution. So my point is this: We should be faithful to share the Gospel with others, because there will always be at least some who will accept Christ as their Savior.

III. DO NOT FEAR THEM

Are you paralyzed by fear? Well our Lord has a word for you! Jesus said in v.26, "Therefore do not fear them." In v.28 Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body...." And for the 3rd time in v.31 Jesus said, "Do not fear...." "Do not fear" is one primary message here. When many hear about the possibility or even likelihood of persecution, they may turn from Christ out of fear. And one primary application of the command to "fear not" is found in the immediate context. Based on vv.32-33 we see that we should not fear confessing Christ openly before men. God has no "secret service." The public confession of faith in Christ is one evidence of true salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

Now the primary way we overcome fear of men is to fear God. The fear of God is the fear that cancels fear of everything else. There is a fear that makes cowards and apostates; there is a different kind of fear that makes heroes and apostles. He who fears God is afraid of nothing else.

Stalin was the cruel communist leader of the Soviet Union. One of his schoolmates became a bishop. He came to Moscow and decided to pay Stalin a call. Stalin agreed to see him. While getting ready for the visit, the bishop agonized over what to wear - bishop's attire or laymen's clothing. After much thought, he decided not to take any risks and put on a conservative business suit. When the bishop entered Stalin's office, this detail did not go unnoticed. Instead of a greeting, Stalin said, "You're afraid of me but not of Him?" (pointing his index finger first at himself and then at the ceiling).² That bishop failed to direct his fear solely toward God.

Now Christ gives several reasons why we should not fear those who reject the Gospel, and who persecute us.

A. God Knows What They Are Doing – Jesus said in v.26, "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." The enemies of the gospel may do their dread deeds under the cover of darkness, but God sees them, and His people are to be bold in speaking out against the wickedness of the age.

Sometimes God uncovers plots against His people. In Acts 23 we read that over forty men joined in a conspiracy to ambush and murder the apostle Paul. But Paul's sister's son heard about the plot, and informed the Roman officials, who protect Paul. Time and again plots against the apostle Paul were uncovered!

Furthermore:

B. God Will Deal with Your Persecutors – Notice what Jesus said about those who reject the Gospel in v.15, "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" Sodom was one of the most wicked cities in

² *Parade Magazine*, July 28, 1981 [Illus.#C-104].

the ancient world. Yet Jesus says that people who reject the Gospel, and persecute Christians, will face far greater judgment.

So instead of living in fear, we are to trust God to deal with our persecutors.

C. Their Harm Is Very Limited - Jesus said in v.28, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." It is so foolish to be more concerned about the body than the soul. "You can kill my body, and think you have defeated me, but all you have done is given me a swift ticket to glory!" For the apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:8 that "to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord."

Martin Luther caught this truth when he wrote:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever.

Within 60 years after the death of Jesus, the mighty Roman Empire began a war against the Christian faith. They demanded that Christians bow the knee to Caesar as Lord, and yet they could not do it because only Jesus is Lord. So they threatened to throw them to the lions, and did so. They poured pitch on their bodies, tied them to poles, and burned them to cast light on the darkness. They crucified some, and beheaded others. And yet, their war against God's people was an utter failure because Jesus has removed the sting of death and the fear of death. They knew that through death they would pass into the presence of Jesus. And for every Christian they killed, several more were saved by the power of God to take their place. The threats of death were totally futile in stamping out Christianity in those early days.

I want to give you another reason not to fear in any situation:

D. You Are Important to God - Jesus said in vv.29-31, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." We do have personal worth to God. You are so valuable that God sent His only Son to die for you (Jn. 3:16). Therefore, He will protect us from harm unless He has some higher purpose for our suffering. Furthermore, God is concerned about all of the details of our lives. Even the hairs of our head are numbered. God sees the sparrow fall to the ground, and God sees when a hair falls from the head of one of His children. There is no need for us to fear when God is exercising such wonderful care over us.

Conclusion: (Visualization of application of the message) Rejection by family, friends, and your peers can be very painful, especially if self is still on the throne of your life. But that is nothing compared to being rejected by Christ at the final judgment. In Mt. 7:23 Jesus describes what He will say to many on Judgment Day. He will say, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" In Mt. 25:41 we have more ominous words, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Ah, but Christ wants to receive you. He wants you to spend eternity with Him. He said in John 6:37, "...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." But you must come to Him now, when you have the opportunity, when the Spirit is calling. Come to Jesus!

Most of you have already come to Jesus. You have already committed your life to Christ. My invitation to you is to recommit your life to Christ. Will you make a commitment to be a witness for Christ, regardless of the cost? Christ died for you. What will you do for Him? Are you going to look to the world for happiness, or to Christ?

Sources: Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Vol. 4* (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Philips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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