

**Reading:** Matthew 10:16-42

**Theme:** Warnings and Encouragements.

Last week we saw Jesus sending the 12 apostles out on a short-term preaching tour and noted what He told them in preparation for that. Yet they had also to be prepared for not only their short-term work, but also their future work, a life-time work that would end violently for all but one of them; a work that would provoke great hostility, hatred and bitter opposition throughout the world then and for all time! The disciples and we may think that because we do good and tell the good news of Jesus, we would be welcomed, well treated and honoured. Yet Jesus had to prepare them and us for opposition and hardship. He does so in this remarkable chapter in which He intertwines a series of warnings and encouragements.

I want to quickly look at these warnings and encouragements this morning for they are also relevant to us. Some of us here may feel we like Christian things, even that we would like to be a Christian, but we need to realise that if we become a Christian there can be opposition, hatred and grief from surprising sources. These things are said not to put us off from following Christ, for we have greater encouragements to follow Christ - as we will see. I'm going to look at 5 warnings and 5 encouragements from 10:16-42 I would encourage you to think on this chapter for yourself for further benefit.

### **1. Five Warnings.**

**A. A warning about self:** danger lies in our own beings. It expresses itself in many ways – foolish, wrong words and behaviour, lack of wisdom, a ‘romantic’ view of the Christian life and of serving God. Jesus dealt with such foolish, unwise and naïve notions. He points out in v16 that society is like wolves and believers as sheep! This means the world around us is a dangerous, hostile place. We are to expect trouble and not be surprised if it comes! Our behaviour has to be wise - shrewd as snakes and gentle as doves. We need to be

prudent, discreet, wise - knowing how and when to speak, when to shut up, knowing the difference of the offence of the gospel and being offensive by our attitude and manner.

We are to be wise and also to be on our guard against men, not to have a naïve idea that people will like us if we become or because we are Christians, that all people are good and only need to understand our good message! We are to realise people are going to be against our message and us as its messengers. Our lives, if lived right for Christ will expose them, contradict and condemn their lives, ideas, thoughts and so we are to beware of society around us. We are to give no harm and avoid causing harm or offence in our attitudes, actions etc. and we need to be simple hearted, but not simpletons!

**B. A warning about family:** in v21 Jesus brings a stark warning. Here are those we are related to, love and they have love for us, but if we are Christians, they can so readily mock us, turn against us, ignore and cold shoulder us, be against the things we believe and cherish. Jesus warns that in certain conditions they could betray us and even hand us over for execution! It may sound harsh, but Christ's words have been proved true in the past and even in current times. This unnatural hatred and bitterness can be provoked from our family, but it is not only from our family, but we see also:

**C. A warning about society at large:** society at large can oppose Christ and His people, His servants. Jesus warns here of the local councils i.e. ruling authorities - the synagogues in His day and so the religious authorities; warns of civil powers - Kings and governors and tells His disciples of the things these could do - flog, imprison, maltreated, try, persecute and even kill them.

Why? Why would family and society hate such ones? Surely, they and we would expect the opposite, for Christians are those who should do good, who will tell the good news, be those who try and

be honest, trustworthy, reliable, would want to work and earn their way in life and want to help others. Surely our family, friends and society at large would welcome such ones with open arms! Yet Jesus warns the disciples and us that this will not be the case.

Why is this? The reason is given in v22a - it is because of Jesus! We need to understand that naturally people have an antagonistic hatred, apathy or indifference to God and Jesus, which at times will spill over into persecution of Christians. Basically, mankind is against God and the things of God. This can show itself in various ways, but when presented by lives showing Christ, lives that proclaim there is the living God who can be known, who has to be faced, their natural bias against God can gradually or suddenly flareup and unexpected opposition and persecution arise against Christians. Jesus warns of this again in v24-25. Basically, they hate Him and He, as the Teacher and Master, knows His servants and disciples will receive the same treatment. The disciples and ourselves are warned not to be surprised if this happens both from society or even our own families.

**D. A warning about the effect of the gospel:** they were to preach the good news, but were warned of the consequences of the gospel as it would divide! It would divide not only public opinion, but as we read, also divide families. The gospel divides people. If people receive the good news, they are saved, then they become God's child and are headed to heaven. Those who do not receive the good news, or welcome it, or make the Lord Jesus their Saviour, remain children of the devil, are in Adam and hell bound. The hatred of the one they are controlled by i.e. the devil, affects their thoughts and blinds their eyes and causes division between them and the children of God. It is if a sword has been brought into lives and divisions occur. History has shown that real swords were used and these words were literally fulfilled.

**E. A warning about making the right choice:** many do not like these warnings and do not want their family relations to turn on them, or in some cases to be put out of their families or livelihoods. Yet in v37-39 Jesus says that we all need to make the right choice. Let me make clear that in these verses Jesus is **not** saying “*Family and friends are unimportant*”. The Bible has much to say on the importance of family life, on marriage, on true friendship. What He is saying is that there is a danger we can love our families in a way that will prevent us, hinder us from loving Jesus Himself.

We are to love Jesus first and foremost and that should heighten, improve our love and care for our loved ones. Yet God is the King of Kings and must have the highest place in our love and affections. He must be loved most of all as He alone deserves such love. As much as we should love our parents, children and family; our love for Christ must be greater. Yet we are also warned about loving our own lives too much and holding back from trusting Christ as our Saviour, or serving Christ even if it means suffering and death! We may keep our little earthy life, feel that being a Christian is too harsh and hard and yet we could lose eternal life. Yes, we do need to be warned to count the cost, but then make the right choice for our eternal well-being. Now see:

## **2. Five Encouragements.**

**A. Encouragement concerning God’s help:** we may feel that we would never keep up being a Christian, especially if such trials come on us. We may feel so helpless and weak. In that you speak for us all and feel as the apostles did! Our keeping going on in the Christian life is not of ourselves, but we have someone to help us, keep us, to enable us and aid us. Jesus points us to this One in v20 - God the Holy Spirit. In these verses we see He is given us to help us speak words of defence when facing trial and imprisonment.

Moreover, God the Holy Spirit is at work in every believer. He is the One who applies the things of God to us, makes the word of God living and powerful in our lives; He helps us, equips us, witnesses to us that we belong to God and are His child and He empowers us in our Christian lives. A Christian is not on their own, but has this One as Comforter and Encourager. He is the special love gift of God the Father and God the Son to the people of God. What a wonderful encouragement of God's help is given to us.

**B. Encouragement concerning God's power:** those who would hurt and kill God's people may strike terror and fear into them, but Jesus says "*Don't be afraid of them!*" What? But they will kill, torture, maim, destroy and persecute us! Yet Jesus' words still stand - we are not to be afraid of them! The Lord Jesus goes on to explain why such ones are not to be terrified of... v28. Yes, they can kill, maim and hurt the body which will truly be painful, but only to the body and they cannot in any way affect our eternal souls.

If we are a Christian, at the end of our physical life, no matter whether it is painless or very painful - our death only serves to usher us into heaven itself and to be with our Saviour. Incredibly Jesus says we are not to fear even being killed as a reason not to believe in Him, for if we fear man because of his power to kill our bodies, **how much more** should we fear the Lord who can destroy both the temporal body here on earth and eternally punish our eternal souls and eternal bodies in hell. This should be a further reason to make peace with Him and trust the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour.

What an encouragement concerning God's power, for God is greater than any person, dictator or world power. If He is our God, we are to have things in perspective, see things as they really are, when our physical life ends it puts us out of man's reach, but never out of sight of God's power, reach and love. We are reminded that even in life this power is for us and we have:

**C. Encouragement concerning God's care:** it is incredible that this almighty God has a tender care for us as His dear children. We are shown this in v29-31. Our God knows when the little sparrows falls down to the earth and we are more valuable to Him than many sparrows - as we are His children, saved by the death of the Lord Jesus. In fact, God has set His love and us, worked a miracle of His grace in us, has made us His child, Jesus is praying for us and has prepared us for heaven and heaven for us. He cares for us so much that even the hairs on our head are known to Him. As much as we love our children and they us, I doubt we have such care or knowledge and it is right to respond to such love and care by loving Him most of all!

This care speaks loudly, declaring that our God and Saviour knows all that will happen to us and He is not indifferent, but knows all, including the sufferings, mocking, persecution and taunts. He not only knows, but He cares for us and will justly repay those who do such things. Maybe we will not see that on earth, but unless they repent of their sin, they will be repaid most certainly in eternity. We have this lovely encouragement of God's care now.

**D. Encouragement concerning God's ownership:** we could be tempted not to acknowledge Jesus, what He's done for us and we disown Christ and even knowing Him - which is a Hebrew way of saying "rejecting Christ". To acknowledge Him certainly means that we receive Him as our Saviour, that we publicly acknowledge such, but not necessarily in an unwise public display if times and situations are hostile - again v16b is to be applied.

Yet if we have Christ as our Saviour, a far more radical and important event occurs - **He owns us as His!** One day when our lives will end, as all our lives will, it will not be a matter of our church attendance, intellect, family, morality, religiosity, generosity or qualifications.

All that will matter is that Christ will say in effect “*They are mine. They are with Me.*” Many on that day will cry one thing and another - as we see in 7:21-22 and yet Jesus will say to them “*Depart from Me, I never knew you!*” Such ones never had taken Jesus as their Lord and Saviour; they might have trusted in their own goodness and abilities, what they felt or did, but never acknowledged Jesus as their Saviour and so will not be owned, but disowned in heaven by Him.

Do we personally know we belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to us? Have we trusted the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour? We are to realise as God works in us, draws us to Himself, that He receives us before we receive Him! Our security is that He owns us as His and will never abandon us or let us go. This ownership by God is a great encouragement and should encourage us to keep on going on in the Christian life.

**E. Encouragement concerning God’s reward:** God not only gives eternal life, but He gives a reward on top of that for the faithful, loving service His people give to Him. Remember this is in the context of suffering and persecution! It could be a dangerous thing to come out publicly as a Christian in some societies, or even to own we are or help a Christian! Jesus knows it is the case. He owns that for a prophet or notably righteous person it may be worth risking exposure for. Yet for some, well they’d be unnoticed and considered unworthy for risking one’s life for. Yet they are worth receiving because they are a Christian, God’s child, even if they are an unknown and uncared for believer!

Any kindness, the least kindness done to the least believer is not unnoticed by the Lord Jesus and will be rewarded by Him. Jesus says in Matthew 25:40, that such things done to the least of believers are done as if they had done to Him! This puts the dignity upon every Christian and at the same time, puts a duty upon every Christian! Jesus told His disciples **v40!** In a lesser way, as we receive each other

as believers and care for one another, so it is as if we do the same to God the Son and the Father! This puts a spanner in the works of some Christians who pick and choose between believer and unbeliever on whims of emotion, or wealth, class or acceptability. They are the losers in terms of fellowship, love, enriching of joy and of heavenly rewards!

I have rattled quickly through this passage. There are lots of loose ends, but I wanted us to be left with a view of the seriousness of the Christian life as we've noted both its warnings and also noted its joyful encouragements and therefore the joys that are part and parcel of our Christian life. Depending on our personalities and circumstances, we will need one or the other stressed to us the more. For some the warnings are given to counter our glibness, a light-hearted attitude towards Christian things. For others, we need the encouragements to counter our looking on the black side of white so often. Yet for us all, both the warnings and the encouragements apply and are to be noted and worked out in our lives.

I feel our Saviour is so kind here, as He doesn't want us to be uninformed and be simplistic, but He taught us so we could learn of His wise and gentle teaching and we be prepared for all that lies ahead and be helped to live so that people will think the better of Him and have much higher thoughts of Him i.e. we live for His glory!