

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 10:16 - 10:20 (Part 2)



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In a discussion of Matthew 10:16-20, Steve Gregg reflects on Jesus' warnings to his disciples about the opposition they would face in their ministry. He notes that Christ expected his followers to live wisely and make good decisions about their health and safety, though ultimately they should be willing to die for their faith if necessary. Gregg highlights verse 17, which predicts that the disciples will be persecuted and beaten in synagogues, yet also promises that the Holy Spirit will give them wisdom to speak in their defense. Ultimately, he encourages Christians to meditate on the idea of being hated for their testimony in order to strengthen their faith.

### Transcript

Last time we were looking at this passage in Matthew chapter 10, where Jesus is telling the disciples as he was sending them out to preach, what they were to anticipate, what kind of a circumstance they were going to face, and what their own reactions were to be. Let me read the passage again because we really commented only on a few verses. 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. And you will be hated by all for my sake, or for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Well, got some interesting stuff here. Last time we talked about his statement. I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves, and you need to be as harmless as doves, but as wise as serpents.

Now, what does it mean wise as serpents? Well, it means this, beware of men. That's the very next thing he says. Serpents, or snakes, generally speaking, avoid contact with men because they know that most men are hostile towards snakes and will kill them.

Now, when the disciples are told to beware of men, what does it mean? Does it mean that they're to hide? Well, maybe some of the time they are. There are times, as he says in verse 23, that when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. There are times when they actually should hide.

There are times when they should run, and avoid contact with men. However, on this particular occasion, Jesus was sending them out, not to be separate from the men who would hate them, but to be in the midst of them, like sheep in the midst of wolves. Not sheep in some other part of the hillside, from the wolves, off in their own safe place.

But rather, they were to be in the midst of those who are hostile toward them. And after all, how could you not be in the midst of people who are hostile toward you, if indeed, as Jesus said, brother will deliver up brother. Father and child, children will rise up against their parents and have them put to death.

I mean, if it's your own family members, how in the world could you conceivably hope to avoid all those who might be a danger to you, when it could be those of your own family. I think what Jesus is saying is this, that there will be times to physically avoid people, and you need to know which people they are. It's like when Jesus said in another place, in Matthew chapter 7, he said, don't cast your pearls before swine, and don't give what is holy to dogs.

Well, that requires a bit of discernment on your part. What people does Jesus regard to be comparable to dogs or swine? Those are the ones, once you discern who they are, that you're not supposed to cast your pearls to. You're not supposed to give your spiritual truth and your, well, I should say, your spiritual secrets, as it were, to them.

They will not value them, and they'll just turn on you, Jesus said. Well, there are people that you should be aware of. You should sense that these people are not the ones who are receptive to the gospel, and they may just be there to undermine you, and maybe even to do worse than that, possibly to physically hurt you and kill you.

Now, the disciples are not to be afraid of being killed. This becomes very clear later on when he says in verse 28 of the same chapter, Do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. That is to say, don't be afraid of those who can kill you, because death is not so scary if you're ready for it.

If you're on God's side and you are killed, you are in much better condition than a person who's not on God's side, lives a much longer life, and then dies as all men do, and is destroyed in hell as well. Now, the point here is that there are people that we need to be cautious about. In fact, we need to be cautious in a sense of all people, but not fearful of people.

We should not be afraid of what they will do to us. The reason for avoiding unnecessary conflict is so that we might live on to serve God more. But if in the providence of God there is no escape, if we must die, we should not be afraid of that.

The purpose for living for most people is just to live. It seems a strange thing, but if you

ask people why they are living, most people don't have any better reason than just to live. They live in order to live.

Many times people will be involved in all kinds of extraordinary activities to try to prolong their lives. If they get some life-threatening disease, they'll spend thousands and maybe hundreds of thousands of dollars to avoid dying. They'll go to all kinds of intrusive and extraordinary measures to stay alive.

The question I have is, for what? Stay alive for what? Well, of course, a lot of them will say, well, to stay alive to see my children or my grandchildren grow up or whatever. But I mean, it's all going to end somewhere. Isn't it the case that God can decide when is the appropriate time for you to die? I'm not saying that if there's something that can easily be done to prolong your life, that you shouldn't do it.

I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that there are people who are just feverishly trying to survive at all costs, no matter how unnatural, no matter how expensive, no matter how many bills it's going to leave with the family or whatever. They just refuse to die.

And if they succeed to stay alive, what do they have to look forward to? Well, they're going to die sometime a little later on. And, you know, death is inevitable. But the question is, why does the disciple of Jesus want to live on? Well, he wants to live on for the same reason he wants to live now.

And that is to serve Jesus Christ. It is because he sees his life, or she sees her life, as nothing but God-given opportunity to promote the kingdom of God. When God no longer sees the need for them to promote the kingdom and wants to take them out and take them to heaven, the believer should have no problem with that.

I mean, if God sees no way that he wishes to use me here on earth any longer, then I have no reason really want to stay here. I'm ready to go home. I'm ready to be promoted and go on to be with God.

That's a desirable thing. The apostle Paul said, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. That is, to die is better than to stay.

But to live is to fulfill the will of God and to fulfill the will of Christ. Now, if Christ wants me to live, then I want to live. If Christ wants me to die, then I want to die.

That's fine. Either one is fine with me. Death is no tragedy to the Christian, and living to be a ripe old age is not a goal of the Christian life.

The goal of the Christian life is to serve God, to fulfill the interests of the kingdom of God, as God has put me here to do, and to do so faithfully for as long as he wants me to do it. Now, that means there will be times that I will avoid certain unnecessary dangers. I will not go driving my car the wrong direction on the freeway, even though I'm not afraid to

die.

It would be a foolish thing to do. It is not what God wants me to do, and it might foreshorten my service to God unnecessarily. I believe there is a stewardship that I am entrusted with of my body and of my health, and that to a certain extent, I am obligated to try to stay alive so long as ordinary, wise decisions can keep that happening.

I'm not going to just jump into a lime kiln or something just to go to heaven soon. I'm going to live my life as wisely as I can to preserve it. If somebody wants to kill me, I will probably try to go somewhere else where I don't have to confront them, unless, now, see, it's important to note I say unnecessarily.

It may be necessary for me to confront people who want to kill me. It may be unavoidable. It may be that obedience to God puts me right in the place where my life is in immediate danger.

In that case, God can either preserve my life by supernatural means, or he can allow me to die. That is fine. My own attitude must be I am not afraid to die.

I am willing to stay alive, and I'm not willing to die by foolish choices that I make out of the will of God, but I am willing to die in the will of God because I desire to please God in living and in dying. That is the attitude Jesus is advocating to the disciples. He tells them in verse 28, which we haven't come to yet, but he says, Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body and cannot kill the soul.

That's fine. Let them kill the body. It's not a big deal.

However, earlier he says that they should beware of men and avoid unnecessary dangers. They should be as wise as serpents. They should foresee evil before it arises, and if it is unnecessary to stay in its path, they should get out of its path.

He says there will be times when you cannot get out of its path, and you will be arrested. He says in verse 17, They, men, will deliver you up to their councils and scourge you, that means whip you, flog you, in their synagogues. This actually did happen to some of the disciples, perhaps all of them.

We know it happened to Peter and to John in the book of Acts in chapters 4 and 5, and we know it happened to Paul on occasions. We don't know whether all the apostles had this experience, but some of them did. Maybe they all did.

But the point is that in obedience to Christ, in preaching the gospel, they will not avoid all danger. They should avoid unnecessary danger. But there is danger, and there is hardship, and there is even death that occurs to the disciples of Jesus as a part of the necessary course of their obedience to God and of their mission.

He says about them in verse 18, You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. Well, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin on a couple of occasions and gave testimony there in the book of Acts, chapters 4 and 5. The apostle Paul gave testimony before Felix and Agrippa and other governors and rulers, and he probably gave testimony before Nero as well. So this fulfilled the prediction of Jesus, that they would be a testimony both to the Jews and the Gentiles in the very fact that they would be arrested, and that would put them in a position to preach to those that were their captors.

And so this really did happen. Of course, it didn't happen on the occasion that Jesus is telling it. Jesus is giving these instructions in Matthew 10.

At least Matthew records them in the context of Jesus sending the twelve out on a short-term mission. These things that he's predicting at this point actually happened much later in their ministries. But Jesus says in verse 19, But when they deliver you up, that means when they bring you to trial, and maybe even deliver you up to death, do not worry about how or what you should speak, for it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak.

For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now this is a very important and interesting passage. Jesus is describing a scenario where the disciples are actually on trial for their lives, and they're brought before the courts.

Have you ever been on trial for anything? I've had to go before a judge because of traffic violations before, and I must confess, although when I'm not there it doesn't seem like that would be so daunting, when you're actually there in the courtroom, and you're actually the defendant, and you're actually standing before the court in front of everyone else in the courtroom and giving an answer for having gone over the speed limit or whatever you've done, for one thing it's humiliating, and for another thing it's a little scary because they can slap a big fine on you, but I mean that's just traffic court, I mean I know they're not going to send me out and execute me for having turned the wrong way on a one-way street or something like that. Now Jesus is talking about the disciples being taken to court on charges of possibly a blasphemy or sedition or whatever. Jesus was charged with those things, and he was crucified with those charges, and his disciples would be facing similar charges.

And here they're on trial for their life, and he says when you're in that condition, he specifically says don't worry. Now we know that Jesus taught against worry. In the Sermon on the Mount he said don't worry about food, and don't worry about clothing, and don't worry about tomorrow, and that's a challenge to us, is it not? Even in the best of times, even in times where our life is not immediately threatened, it's not the easiest thing in the world to have no anxiety about the future.

And yet he's talking about a situation where they are on trial for their lives, and he says

don't worry about this. Here he says don't worry about how or what you should speak. Now it's interesting over in the parallel to this in Luke 21, he words the same statement a little differently.

In Luke 21, 14 and 15, he says therefore settle it in your hearts, and he's talking about this very thing when they're on trial for their testimony, he says therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. Boy, we think of Stephen in the New Testament in the book of Acts as an example of this.

The wisdom with which he spoke, his accusers were not able to resist, the Bible says, same idea. But notice he says do not meditate beforehand on what you will say in your own defense. That means that he's picturing a situation where you don't have a defense attorney, and you're being called on trial, and you're going to have to answer for your own actions before the judge.

And of course you're sitting in jail awaiting your trial, and the great temptation would be well I'm going to tell him this, I'm going to say this, and you know to work out your defense. He says no, don't even premeditate about it, don't even think about it, because he says I will give you words to speak. Or as he puts it in Matthew, it will be not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father in you.

This is I think the first time in the ministry of Jesus that he spoke of this kind of ministry of the Holy Spirit, namely the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, giving thoughts, giving words at the time of need to his people. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of your Father in you will give you the words to speak, he says. I remember a long time ago when I first entered the ministry, when I was 16 years old, I really wanted to live by faith, and I had never really understood or known much about it before, and so I really wanted to honor everything Jesus said in this way, and I was asked to speak at a church, and actually I was in a band, and our band was asked to play at the church, but our band was an evangelistic tool, and really we only played music for the sake of preaching the gospel, and so I was invited to have our band play at this church, and then for me to preach at the end, and to give an altar call, and I had just entered the ministry, I had very little experience, and I knew about this invitation, I think it was probably a couple of months in advance, and I was very tempted to really come up with a really good sermon, and to write a good sermon to have, but I thought about these verses, and at the time I was not thinking in terms of the context, where you're on trial before a court, and I probably mistakenly felt it would be wrong for me to prepare a sermon.

I said, well, if I prepare a sermon, I'll just have a prepared sermon for my own mind, but if I prepare nothing, if I don't premeditate what I will say, then the Holy Spirit will speak through me, and it seemed to me that the only way to really speak with God's spiritual anointing was to have no preparation, and so I actually did that very thing when I got

there to preach, I had put the temptation away many times during the previous months while I was anticipating this thing, I put aside all temptation to prepare, or to think in advance what I would say, and so I just opened the scriptures at random, and began to speak on them, and to tell you the truth, I don't today think that that is what this scripture requires of preachers. I believe that he is saying here that you should not premeditate how you will defend yourself in court, and the Holy Spirit will come up with your words of defense, he is not necessarily saying preachers should never premeditate what they're going to preach, but that was my attitude at the time. The point is, however, God did honor it, God did bless it, and actually quite a few people were saved that night when I preached, but the fact is, I think Christian ministers and Christian people in general can trust in the Holy Spirit more than we are accustomed to doing.

In the world we are taught to prepare for our own defense, maybe not even in court so much, because very few of us relatively go to court as a defendant, but just in relationships in general, when we are accused, when we are gossiped about, when people are trying to destroy our reputation or whatever, we are in a sense on trial in a situation like that, and how often do we just jump to our own defense, or premeditate how we will defend ourselves, when in fact we could just be as harmless as doves, and allow the Holy Spirit to give us words when we are compelled to speak. Anyway, the disciples were told that they were not to worry about whether they would have an adequate defense, they should simply trust that Jesus would give them the words, as it says in Luke 21, or as it is put in Matthew, that the Holy Spirit in them, the Spirit of their Father in them would speak. Now in verse 21 Jesus said, Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against their parents and cause them to be put to death.

And you will be hated by all for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved. Now Jesus said we would be hated by all people. The word all here doesn't necessarily mean every last individual will hate you.

Obviously fellow members of the body of Christ aren't supposed to hate you, and probably won't. But there are people who will, and they will be of all types. When he says you will be hated by all, I think what he means is there won't be any category of people excluded.

That there will be people who hate you in your own family, there will be people in your own nation, there will be people who hate you in other nations, there will be people maybe even who hate you in your own church. But the point is you are not to be in this business of being a Christian in order to be popular. Being a Christian involves inviting hatred from people.

It's amazing how flabby so many Americans are, including American Christians. They can't stand a little rejection, they can't stand a little criticism. Boy, I mean if somebody

looks at them cross-eyed it ruins their whole day.

We are so hypersensitive, and we almost demand that people not say any jokes. Nowadays there are laws that forbid people to make racial jokes. I'm not saying racial jokes are good, racial jokes are bad.

But if I were of a minority race and people made a joke about my race, I wouldn't have to feel offended all day long about it. Being hated by certain people, it's wrong for them to hate me, but it's right for me to expect it. Now Jesus is not talking about being hated for your race or for anything else but for your testimony.

You are hated for Christ's name's sake. People who hate Jesus will hate godly Christians. And in a sense that's a flattery to the Christian.

If people hate me because they hate Jesus, then in a sense their hatred of me means that they see enough of Jesus in me, the very one they hate, to associate me with him and hate me for his reasons, that is for his sake. And that is a flattery to me. I would like to be enough like Jesus that people who hate him hate me.

In fact, I don't want to make people hate me for any other reasons. I want to be congenial and loving and kind and likable. But if somebody hates Jesus but they don't hate me, then that's an insult.

It means whatever it is they hate about Jesus, they don't see that in me enough to hate me too. And that's something for Christians to meditate on. We should not seek to be popular among those with whom Jesus is not popular.

Actually there's more on that in these immediate verses. We'll have to take them next time, however, because once again I see by our clock we have run out of time. So tune in again next time and we will continue our studies in Matthew chapter 10 in the life of Christ.