

# THE MESSIAH'S WARNING OF PERSECUTION MATHEW 10:16–23

## *Introduction*

There is one thing true disciples must know as they go forth for Christ. They are as sheep in the midst of wolves. They can expect to be persecuted, severely persecuted. They must “be on [their] guard against men” (v. 17).

What Christ did in this passage was warn His disciples of persecution, and as He warned them, He counselled them on how to deal with persecution. (See and notes, Mt. 5:10-12; Lk. 21:12-19; 1 Pet 4:12-19; 4:14.)

- I. Counsel 1: know two facts (v. 16).
  - a. You are commissioned.
  - b. You are as sheep among wolves.
- II. Counsel 2: be wise and harmless (v. 16).
- III. Counsel 3: beware of men (vv. 17-18).
- IV. Counsel 4: do not worry about a defence (vv. 19-20).
- V. Counsel 5: know that families will be divided (v. 21).
- VI. Counsel 6: endure to the end (v. 22).
- VII. Counsel 7: flee persecution (v. 23).

## **I. *Mathew 10:16 Persecution is a Fact***

The first counsel is to keep two facts in mind when facing persecution.

1. The disciple is commissioned and sent forth by Christ. Note the words, “I am sending you out.” It is Christ, the Son of God, who sends us forth. There is great comfort in this fact, for Christ knows what is to face the disciple. He is fully aware of the persecution that lies ahead, yet He still sends His messenger forth. Why? Because the Son of God is able to use our persecution for several ends.
  - a. He is able to teach us about God’s care as He protects and delivers us.
  - b. He is able to teach us more and more trust, maturing us as believers.
  - c. He is able to take our suffering and touch the hearts of the persecutors, leading them to surrender their lives to Christ.
  - d. He is able to deliver us through death itself into the very presence of God.

Christ knows the importance of the message, the gospel of the kingdom. It is essential for man’s salvation. Therefore, despite the rejection and persecution by many, the message must still be proclaimed so that some might be saved.

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2. The disciple is sent forth as a sheep in the midst of wolves. Being commissioned by Christ assures persecution. Christ sends His disciple forth in the midst of a world that *will* oppose the gospel; He knows that the disciple is to be persecuted. Therefore, the disciple...

- must know and expect persecution. He must not be caught off guard when it comes.
- must know that his persecution is only “light and momentary troubles” in comparison with the glory that lies ahead. In fact, “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that outweighs them all” (2 Cor 4:17).

**Thought 1.** Every believer must know that he will be looked at askance and suffer some abuse, ridicule and rejection.

## II. *Mathew 10:16 Be Prudent and Harmless during Persecution*

The second counsel is to be wise and harmless — as wise or shrewd as snakes and as innocent or harmless as doves. To be as wise or “shrewd as snakes” means to manoeuvre quietly with caution and with intelligence; to manoeuvre with a planned strategy; to be quick in seeing danger and quick to escape from it. It means to be a person of vision and initiative. It means to know one’s resources and to know when to strike and when to withdraw. It means to strike with one’s attack and message when opportunity arises; it means to withdraw quickly when danger threatens.

The disciple is also to be like a dove: to be as gentle and innocent as a dove; to be harmless; to cause no damage; to be known as a symbol of peace; to be as pure, unmixed and unadulterated as doves.

**Thought 1.** The Lord’s people and messengers are exposed to a world of evil men (wolves). Therefore, they are to do two things.

- 1) Be wise or shrewd as snakes. In facing danger, the snake acts wise. The snake...
  - tries to escape
  - is quiet
  - seeks preservation first of all
  - takes shelter out of sight if possible
  - does not expose itself needlessly
- 2) Be innocent or harmless as doves. The dove...
  - is mild and meek.
  - is innocent, harmless and inoffensive.
  - is a symbol of peace not of war.
  - bears no ill or hurt.

**Thought 2.** The Lord’s witness is to have a snakelike mind and a dove-like spirit.

- 1) He is to be wise in sensing threats and to respond without passion.
- 2) He is not to provoke nor allow himself to be provoked.
- 3) He is to guard against being wronged and to wrong no one.
- 4) He is to manoeuvre out of harm and to harm no one himself.

### III. *Mathew 10:17–18 Do not Trust Men*

The third counsel is to beware of men. Two significant points need to be studied by believers.

1. There are the persecutors. The persecutors are three in number: men in general, religionists and the state. The believer is to beware, to be on guard and to watch — always. If he lives for Christ — really lives for Christ — he is subject to being persecuted: ridiculed, rejected, disliked, hated, murmured against, abused, physically attacked, jailed and martyred. Who will do such things to believers?
  - a. Men, people just like himself, will persecute believers. Men can, will, and do turn into brute beasts when they do not like something. Their depraved, wolf-like nature begins to manifest, itself. They become two-faced, deceptive, plotting and devious. They often attempt to hurt or destroy believers either by reputation or by force. The attack may be over a job, a position, an act or a belief.
  - b. Religionists, people in the synagogues and churches, will persecute believers. The church is full of people who have not really committed their lives to God. They just do not know Him personally, not in a real and personal way. Therefore, the believer who truly lives and teaches and takes a stand for God and His righteousness is sometimes persecuted by those within the church. They do not understand God nor His righteousness. They can become two-faced, evil speaking, gossiping, slandering, reviling and insulting. They can also scold, mock and attack face to face. They can go so far as to try to destroy a person's reputation and life, depending on the society in which he lives. The great tragedy is that persecution can and does too often take place within the walls of God's house.
  - c. Civil authorities within the state will persecute believers. Believers all over the world always have been and always will be dragged before state authorities and persecuted.

**John 15:18-20** *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”*

**Thought 1.** Note three lessons about the character of religionists.

- 1) Religionists can be so deceived that they think they do God a service by persecuting the believer (Jn. 16:2).
- 2) Churches seldom like to be disturbed. When the gospel of God is preached or a real ministry for God is attempted, the church is sometimes so encrusted with formalism and the old way of doing things that it fails to see the truth. It persecutes the man of God.

- 3) Too often church members have persecuted the Lord's messenger and teacher (see notes, Mt. 5:10-12). They have sometimes destroyed the messenger's ministry and reputation in a particular place. But God has always proven faithful. He has continued to use His servant — marvellously so. He will always use His persecuted servant who remains true to Him.

**Thought 2.** The believer is to beware of men in high positions, whether in church, state or business. The higher the position the more persecution can be exacted.

**Thought 3.** Paul was lashed *five times* by religionists (2 Cor 11:24).

2. There are two reasons for persecution given in this passage.
- a. The believer is persecuted for the Lord's sake or cause. The believer tries to live for Christ and to carry out His cause. The natural man, whether in the world or church, does not understand the things of God, so he opposes them (see notes, 1 Cor 2:14-3:4).

**Mat 5:11** *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."*

**Mat 10:22** *"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*

**Mat 19:29** *"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."*

**2 Cor 4:11** *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

- b. The believer is persecuted so that he might be a testimony to the persecutors. There is no greater testimony for Christ than a believer's standing up for Christ in the face of persecution (see Acts 24:1f; 25:1f; 25:13f; 26:1f).
- 1) Standing firm demonstrates the truth of the gospel. Its message of love and salvation is clearly seen by the persecutor.
- 2) Standing firm gives the Holy Spirit a unique opportunity to reach the hearts of those standing by with the truth of the gospel.
- 3) Standing firm is a testimony *against* the persecutors. It shows how deep the wickedness and evil of their hearts is. It shall stand as a testimony against them in the day of judgment.

**Mat 25:45-46** *"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

**Rom 2:5-6** *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God will give to each person according to what he has done.*

**James 5:10** *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

#### **IV. Mathew 10:19–20 Do not to Worry about Defence**

The fourth counsel is not to worry about a defence. A believer is never left alone defending himself against persecution.

1. God gives what is to be said. Note: He gives the answer in the very hour it is to be spoken.

**Mat 10:19** *“But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say.”*

2. God's Spirit actually does the speaking “through” the believer.
3. God stands with the believer.

**Luke 21:15** *“For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”*

**2 Tim 4:16-18** *At my first defence, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Thought 1.** When a believer is called upon to defend himself, he is often nervous and apprehensive. He wonders how to speak in his defence.

- 1) Some may distrust their ability. They feel incapable. They have seldom if ever appeared anywhere to defend themselves (see *Moses*, Exo 4:10-12; *Jeremiah*, Jer 1:6, 10).
- 2) Some may distrust their emotions. They are nervous and extremely apprehensive about standing before people. Having to stand before others defending themselves doubles their nervousness.

**Thought 2.** We need to trust God for what is to be said. This does not mean we should not be praying and thinking, but it means that God is to be trusted for the defence. There is a reason for this: only God knows the hearts of the persecutors and any others who are present. Therefore, He alone knows what needs to be said to touch their hearts or else to serve as a witness against them in the future.

## JOHN 16:13 GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” **John 16:13***

The Holy Spirit guides believers through three things.

1. The Holy Spirit guides by speaking the truth. Christ said that He had many things to say to the apostles, but they were not able to “bear” (handle, grasp) them, not yet. He would share them later through the Holy Spirit. Christ tells the Spirit what to say and how to guide believers. Christ, of course, is the One who knows the weaknesses and the needs of men. He knows by personal experience (Heb 4:15-16). Therefore, He is the One who is appointed by God to instruct the Spirit in His guiding ministry. This should cause our hearts to leap with great joy and confidence, for the Lord knows exactly what we face — knows by experience.

**Rom 8:14** *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”*

**Psa 48:14** *For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.*

**Psa 73:24** *You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*

**Isa 30:21** *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”*

**Isa 42:16** *I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.*

**Isa 48:17** *This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.”*

2. The Holy Spirit guides by leading into all the truth. The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of Truth.” He speaks only the truth and guides “into all truth”. The truth, of course, is Jesus Christ Himself. The Spirit leads the believer to Christ, the Truth, and teaches him “all the truth” about Christ. (See *Jesus the Truth*, Jn. 14:6.)

**John 15:26** *“When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”*

**1 John 4:6** *We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.*

There is victory through the Holy Spirit (Jn. 15:26-27). He is the believer's Counsellor, his Comforter through persecution (Jn. 14:16). He is the believer's Spirit of Truth through persecution. The truth will prevail through all persecution. (See Jn. 14:17.)

**Mat 10:19** *"But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say."*

**Luke 12:11-12** *"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."*

**Luke 21:15** *"For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict."*

3. The Holy Spirit guides by showing (announcing, declaring) things to come. After Jesus arose, the Holy Spirit was the One who led the apostles to write the New Testament and to foresee the things revealed in its pages. Since that day, the Holy Spirit is the One who takes the things revealed in the Word and shows (declares, announces) them to the heart of the believer.

**1 Cor 2:9-10** *However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*

**1 Cor 2:12** *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.*

**Thought 1.** Note two critical facts.

- 1) The believer must be dependent upon the Holy Spirit's leadership in learning the truth.
- 2) The believer's growth is progressive, coming only from the Holy Spirit's opening up the Word to him.

**1 Cor 2:13** *This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him. □*

## V. *Mathew 10:21 Families will be Divided*

The fifth counsel is to know that families will be divided. A person's own family can become his greatest persecutor. Why? There are three reasons.

1. Because of the believer's commitment to Christ and His righteousness. The family often lives a worldly life and cannot understand a godly life. The family, therefore, opposes a family member who ceases to participate in certain functions and traditions (2 Cor 6:17-18; 1 Jn. 2:15-16).
2. Because of the family's orthodox religion or church. The converted family member may wish to change religions or churches. The family opposes such a move.
3. Because of the believer's commitment to Christ. The believer should become a dynamic witness sharing the graciousness and love of the Lord. Such an active witness is sometimes an embarrassment to a family.

**Mark 10:28** Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

**Luke 5:27** After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him.

**Luke 14:26-27** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

**Luke 18:29-30** "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

**Thought 1.** A true believer is a man of conviction, believing that Jesus Christ is truly the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He adheres to this truth, living and bearing witness to it. Such conviction and unswerving testimony are seldom understood and often opposed. Because of this a believer sometimes has to choose between obedience to Christ and obedience to his family.

**Thought 2.** Nothing hurts more than having our own family oppose us when we make a decision to follow Christ. When our families oppose and persecute us, it hurts us deeply.

**Thought 3.** In some cases the most severe opposition comes from family members. The reason is twofold.

- 1) They feel their influence should be respected.
- 2) They feel that the whole family is affected by what its members do.

These two feelings are normal for a family, but the believer knows and has committed his life to the truth of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the believer is convinced that what is needed is for the family to be converted, not for him to deny his faith. (See outline and notes, Mt. 10:34-37).



## **VI. *Mathew 10:22 Endure Persecution to the End***

The sixth counsel is to endure to the end. Again, the believer must expect persecution. All men of the world will oppose him. Why? "Because of me [Christ]." The genuine believer lives and witnesses to the name of Christ which is the name of righteousness and self-denial (see *Cross and Discipleship*, Lk. 9:23). The world and its people oppose any life style that demands total self-denial.

The person who endures to the end shall be saved. Note several things.

1. There is an end to persecution. It is only temporary; it will end.
2. Endurance is possible. A believer can endure. God will bear him up through the persecution.

*Heb 12:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

3. Salvation and deliverance are waiting for the person who endures: a life of glory and reward.

*James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

*2 Tim 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

*Rev 2:10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

**Thought 1.** Note the words, "All men will hate." This means the whole world, everyone in the world: religionists (v. 17), the state (v. 18), and the family (v. 21).

**Thought 2.** It hurts to be the object of talk, ridicule, slander, gossip and abuse. The believer must remember three facts.

- 1) It is for Christ's sake.
- 2) It assures salvation.
- 3) It assures a glorious reward (Jas 1:12).

**Thought 3.** Persecutors are mere men. They can oppose and cause trouble; they can even kill the body. However, several things need to be remembered.

- 1) Persecutors cannot kill the soul.
- 2) The body will soon die anyway. Why sacrifice eternity for what amounts to just a little more time?

- 3) The persecutors are *mere men* who shall die themselves. And then they shall face the eternal judgment of God (Heb 9:27; see Isa 51:12).

## VII. *Mathew 10:23 Flee Persecution*

The seventh counsel is to flee persecution. Note what Christ had already told His disciples.

1. If the disciple's message was rejected, he was to leave the house or the city. He was to get out quickly and quietly.

*Mat 10:12-14* "As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town."

2. He is to be as wise as a serpent in sensing and fleeing danger (Mt. 10:16).

Now, for a third time Christ says: "When you are persecuted... flee." There are at least three reasons why Christ instructs us to flee.

1. Christ cares for us, for our safety.

*1 Pet 5:7* Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

2. Christ wants other people to hear the gospel. Some are receptive. It is better to minister to those who are receptive than to cast one's pearls (the gospel) before swine or to have the wolves destroy one's life.

3. Christ wants a witness against all rejecters. They need to know just how terrible their sin and shame, coldness and hardness, bitterness and enmity are against God. If they can see their true heart in this life, perhaps they will surrender to God and His love. If not, then they will see the witness of their persecution stand against them in the terrible day of judgment.

**Thought 1.** Courage and conviction for a cause is not a common thing, but it is not rare either. Some are courageous and some are committed to a cause; we often hear of such courage and commitment to causes. Note two significant points.

- 1) In life there are two types of commitment among men.

=> First, there is reasonable and rational commitment. Such commitment can be so strong that it will endure persecution to death.

=> Second, there is fanatical and hysterical commitment. Such commitment can be so unreasonable that it flings itself into martyrdom.

- 2) There are several things that make the believer's courage and commitment different and distinctive.

=> First, believers suffer for a commitment to *the truth* as revealed by God in His Son (Jn. 3:16).

**1 Pet 2:20** *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*

=> Second, believers attempt to escape persecution and to prevent it. They obey Christ and flee if possible. They do not court danger and recklessness.

=> Third, believers stand against persecution only when they cannot escape it. At that point, they stand firm for the Lord and His faith, trusting God to bear him through all.

**Phil 1:29** *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,*

**2 Tim 3:12** *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*

**Thought 2.** The genuine believer will accept martyrdom for his faith, but he does not seek it. He seeks life and freedom so that he can continue to proclaim Christ. His message is a message of life and the sanctity of life. How then can he invite death? ■