



## Following Jesus: Enduring

March 6, 2016

Matt 10:16-31

In our “Following Jesus” series, we’ve described following the most compelling person who’s ever lived, Jesus, who gives us the most compelling mission in life: fishing for people, not just for “fish.” Following Jesus is not merely about learning facts or studying; learning increases greatly when we practice our faith. Learn and practice go together.

Jesus explains the “Rules of Engagement” for His disciples. He made it clear that following Him would bring wonderful and eternal benefits. However, he also said that it would be very challenging and disruptive. Following Jesus is more than working long hours with low pay – it could cost you your very life.

Matt 10:16-31

*I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.* <sup>17</sup> *“Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.”* <sup>18</sup> *On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.* <sup>19</sup> *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,* <sup>20</sup> *for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* <sup>21</sup> *“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”* <sup>22</sup> *All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.* <sup>23</sup> *When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.* <sup>24</sup> *“A student*

*is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! <sup>26</sup> "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. <sup>28</sup> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*

v 16 **Jesus sends them on Mission.**

v 17 **Expect Opposition** Disciples shouldn't expect that everyone will like/love them. It won't be popular or easy. Some bad things will happen: arrests, beatings and confrontations. Our message is confusing, ridiculous and offensive. You'd better be "on guard" or "wary" of people. Lower your expectations – raise your commitment. Be wise. But also, don't be surprised. Jesus describes the cost of discipleship. Yet, this is when the mission of Jesus bears fruit. As Tertullian said: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

**If you follow Jesus....EXPECT OPPOSITION:** What Jesus describes comes as a consequence of following Him. He lists 4 things:

v 17b 1.) **If you follow Jesus** they will "**hand you over**" to **authorities**. It's the term used when Judas betrayed Jesus. Followers of Jesus will be flogged, arrested and end up in difficult local settings as well as facing the Roman Empire with its courts and judicial systems. Jews and Gentiles will both persecute you. The Jews will come at you with religious anger; the Romans with political hostility.

v 21 2.) **If you follow Jesus** expect **family tension**, disruptions and animosity. It may lead to betrayal, rebellion and people in your family may die.

v 22 3.) ***If you follow Jesus*** not only will you be handed over to judicial systems and not only might you lose your family, but “**all people will hate you.**” You may have to flee from your home and become a refugee. This is HARD! The supreme happiness in life is knowing that we are loved. But Jesus says if you follow me, you will be HATED. But the truth of the matter is that we ARE loved by Jesus. That’s THE relationship that ultimately matters.

v 24 4.) ***If you follow Jesus, you will be treated like Jesus.*** Jesus was betrayed, flogged and crucified. Jesus’ words were lived out in the early church when Stephen was stoned. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down. All the disciples were martyred, according to tradition, other than John, who was exiled. Jesus didn’t only bring peace; he also brought a sword. Following Jesus could be very costly!

**EVERYONE suffers in life.** Not only did we cause pain when we were born, but there will be pain when we die - The mortality rate is 100%. Death (and taxes) are certain. We wish certain things didn’t happen, but do. Like Paul’s thorn in the flesh we’d like for them to be removed but some aren’t. We must respond to this, too. But these are things which are part of life. Everyone faces them. They aren’t chosen. But what this is about = **choosing suffering.**

**Persecution** has happened throughout church history and is now happening around the world, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. An Asbury member, Jim Furman recommended a “The Voice of the Martyrs” book entitled: “**I Am N.**” “I Am N”(Voice of the Martyrs). When ISIS militants moved into northern Iraq, they began marking Christian-owned homes with the Arabic letter, “n.” The “n” means “Nazarene” – that is, the people who live in these homes follow the Nazarene – Jesus, rather than Allah. Having the “n” painted to your door is the equivalent of Nazis forcing Jews to wearing the Star of David. It’s a drastic life-change. You are faced with an ultimatum: convert to Islam or pay the tax. If not leave or you will die. Any Christian who remains in Iraq pays a high cost. Pastors have been beheaded in front of their families. Christians have been taken from their homes and

never seen again. Teenagers may be forced into service to ISIS or beaten or killed. Children who will not renounce Jesus have been shot. Since 2003, more than 1 million Iraqi Christians who refused to renounce Jesus have fled Iraq. Where do they go? They are refugees. Many of them live in refugee camps. The reality is that their life situation is unlikely to improve – ever.

Not only in Iraq, but Christians throughout the Middle East and Africa are facing persecution: Somali, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, and the Philippines. Pastors are jailed, churches are destroyed, and families are beaten, threatened and intimidated. Yet, these are people who are CHOOSING to suffer for Jesus. It's incredibly tragic, yet they are willing to sacrifice everything on behalf of the gospel. They could renounce their faith, but they've found joy in Christ. They aren't "super Christians." They are people just like us. They live in anguish and pain. They face uncertainty. Yet they live in the light of eternity. In a place like Iraq, where there's been so much death, the message of eternal life is of great interest.

Their stories should be shared as they are current and real. We should keep them in our prayers!

However, this isn't happening to us. Being a Christian may cause some tension, ridicule and insults; but we're not currently being imprisoned or executed for our faith in America.

The book, **Good Faith**, describes how Christians are increasingly being perceived by American culture. 2 words:

- 1.) **IRRELEVANT** – Church leaders aren't relevant, churches aren't relevant, and people can live a good life without God.
- 2.) **EXTREME** – The culture doesn't understand why anybody would attend church, give their money or volunteer, pray, or try to share their faith with someone else. People who do these things are "extremists." The book has a very good response in Chapter 16: "**Firm Center – Soft Edges**"

By "Center" it means our core beliefs. That should be firm. That is, we know and are committed to our faith.

By “Edges” it means how we relate to people. That should be soft. That is, we are kind.

Some people have firm centers and firm edges. They know what they believe and they are tough with others. Some people have soft centers and firm edges. They don’t know what they believe, but they are very rigid in their interactions. Some people have soft centers and soft edges. They just go along with the flow.

Soft Edges means that we demonstrate kindness and civility to others. We are to have a “firm center,” but also have a soft edge.

In the midst of extreme hostility, let me point to 3 things Jesus tells His followers:

1.) “**Don’t WORRY**” (v 19); “**Don’t be AFRAID**” (3x). Instead: **Trust God**. God is the One ultimately in charge. People can say things and hurt us by their words and actions, however, they have a temporary effect. No matter what happens to us, we are never unprotected or alone. God is with us.

A.) God knows and cares. B.) “The Holy Spirit will be with you.”

2.) **Don’t SHUT UP**. Don’t whisper. Don’t hide in the dark. Instead: Speak up. Proclaim. Be loud. Reveal. Don’t conceal - tells us not to conceal things. Let your light shine, don’t live in fear. Vs. 26-27. We don’t have to be obnoxious, arrogant or condescending; but neither should we lose our voice.

3.) **Don’t QUIT**. *He who stands firm to the end will be saved*. Jesus’ Parable of the Sower said that being planted wasn’t the same as producing a harvest. Starting a race isn’t the same as finishing it. We can’t lose sight of the **reward**. Following Jesus is finding the pearl of great price – it’s of incredible value. Finding the love of God is what matters – not having wealth or power. And all of these temporary things will go away.

**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.**

**Romans 8:31-39** What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in **Christ Jesus our Lord.**

How do we stand firm? We can't make it up. It comes from the Holy Spirit. Remember the resurrection. Let that be your eternal worldview. Love God. Pray. Trust the Holy Spirit. Know the Bible. Be in Christian community. Serve.