

**THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING 11:**  
*Jesus' Authority over Persecution*  
Matthew 10:16–33

You might have heard this statement before: *"Every person is a theologian."* Whoever first said that correctly identified that every person has a view of God, even the person who says that God does not exist. Their thought of God might not be well developed, but they everyone has one. The question is not whether you are a theologian, the question is, *"Are you a good one?"*

I was thinking about that this past week and came up with another similar thought. *"All Christians are on a mission for Jesus."* There are some who call themselves Christians that might be doing great things for the mission, but there are some that are doing horrific things for the spread of the name of Jesus. But everyone who is a Christian is on mission. As we quoted last week, *"All Christians have the same job description; witnesses of Jesus anytime and anyplace."* Christian: the question is not whether you are a witness; the question is, *"Are you a good one?"*

As I have thought about this the past week, I have come to determine that there is one aspect of our life that will determine the answer to that last question. I am speaking in generalities here, but as I read the NT and look at the early church, if your desire is to live the safest Christian life possible with the least amount of conflict and persecution, then you probably will not be a good witness for Jesus. Let me illustrate it in this way.

We are inundated with safety these days, aren't we? Who ever wore helmets when they rode their bikes as kids? Who remembers, as I do, standing in the front seat of my parent's car as we drove down the highway? Who remembers being kids and spending all day outside and your parents had no idea where you were? If you are over 35, I bet you can relate to these things.

But today? I wouldn't let my kids do any of these things? Helmets are mandatory when they ride their bikes. Seatbelts aren't even an option, and it has nothing to do with a fear of getting a ticket. And I want to know where they are all the time (I probably even want to be able to see them from my porch). In so many ways, I try to manage their personal safety.

And we do the same thing with our Christianity. We try to manage our safety. Too often, we make decisions in our Christian life based on whether it will cost us significantly. Will speaking these words make me lose that friendship? Will saying no to my children's next event affect their future hope for school or sports? Will confronting that sin affect my job? Will committing to that ministry project mean I have less time for myself? And so on we go, trying to manage our Christian life through the lens of *"how much will it cost me."*

As we have seen over the past several months, Jesus is certainly authoritative over all sickness, nature, and disease. He is the One who has the power and authority to forgive sin. This morning, I want to add one more component to His list of strengths. Jesus is authoritative over Persecution. What I mean is that He is more powerful, more drawing, and more comforting than the worst sort of persecution we might ever experience. And He is more important, more treasurable, and even more valuable than even our personal safety.

Because of this, I hope to show this morning that we have no need to seek to live the safest Christian life possible. Certainly, I hope there are no Christians that would say they want to get to heaven and hear Jesus say to them, *“Congratulations, you lived the safest Christian life you possibly could have lived.”* No, my guess is that at the core of who we are as Christians, we desire to have God look at us and say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”*

In Matthew 10, we find Jesus sending out His twelve Apostles on a mission trip. He sends them to villages and cities in and around the northern part of Israel. This was not a trip of personal safety. We mentioned last week that in vs. 5–15, Jesus is giving them specific instructions on this very short-term mission trip. But then, if you remember, we made mention that starting in vs. 16, some of the things Jesus says are things that would happen over the years going forward in the history of the church.

Or, to say it another way, the things that we will study today and next week seem to have much more direct implications on the wider ministry of all Christians. As we go on mission for Jesus, these are some things that we can expect, both positively and negatively. What I want to do this morning is to articulate to you, both the risks that come with following Jesus. But then, after we look at a risk, I want us to see why that risk pales in comparison to following Jesus. His blessings so far outweigh the danger.

These risks or dangers are real. I don’t want to diminish them in any way. They hurt and will be difficult. But the hope is that the comfort that comes from the Lord will be the perfect salve we will need to endure them. With that, let me give you **THREE POTENTIAL DANGERS & FOUR GUARANTEED BLESSINGS OF FOLLOWING JESUS.**

### **ANGER #1: WE WILL EXPERIENCE PERSECUTION (VS. 16–18)**

I have to tell you, I wanted to put the word *“probably”* in this phrase. I wanted to say that if you follow Jesus you will *“probably experience persecution.”* But as I read Jesus’ words here and then confirm them with other Scriptures, I just don’t see it. The man or woman who is following Jesus and going on mission for Him will experience some aspect of persecution.

📖 2 Timothy 3:12 → *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

In this passage, Jesus tells them that He is going to send them out as sheep in the midst of wolves. He is not sending them out to be near the wolves; No, He is sending them out and they are going to be surrounded by wolves. Any sheep up for that?

Jesus tells them to beware of men for they will deliver them over to the courts and flog them in their synagogues. He is telling them that their own people will despise them, arrest them, and hand them over to be judged according to their law. And they will be flogged (beaten with a whip, no more than 39 lashes at a time, for they thought that 40 would kill someone).

In addition, Jesus tells them that they will be dragged before governors and kings for His name's sake. They will bear witness to not only the Jews, but the world as well. This is to mean that their ministry for the name of Jesus is going to be much larger than just to the Jews and their synagogues.

I think the key phrase that is used here and will be used later on is that the followers of Jesus will be brought before the government for the sake of the name of Jesus. I take this to be both the reason and purpose for their persecution. Listen closely to this. As you live and speak forth the name of Jesus, bearing witness of Him, time will come when even governments will try to shut your mouth. They will persecute you because of the name you are preaching. But here's the cool part. Even in that time of trial, you will have the opportunity to speak and bear witness of the name of Jesus.

Think about these twelve men. We talked about them a few weeks ago. Most of them were martyred for the sake of bearing witness of the name of Jesus. But all of them were persecuted for it. Why would we think anything has changed since that day when Jesus sent these men out? It will continue to this day. It will happen for the person who cares not for his own comfort. They will be persecuted. With this great danger, Jesus gives a guaranteed blessing.

### **BLESSING #1: WE WILL NEVER BE ALONE (VS. 19-20)**

This is so reassuring. Jesus promises these men that when they go through persecution and when they stand before rulers and governors, they do not need to worry about what to say. Just imagine this for a minute. Some of you get tongue-tied when someone asks you a question in the hallway. But imagine you are being brought before rulers that have the power to do whatever they want to you and they ask you about this guy, Jesus, that you have been known to talk about. Talk about stumbling over your words.

Jesus says, don't worry in that moment. You do not need to wonder what you will say or how you are to speak. For in that moment, you will be given what to say through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. Now, let's be very clear about one main thing. This is NOT a "*get-out-of-study*" verse. This is not meant to be a verse to justify being lazy with the truth of God. In the

context, it definitely is referring to those that are brought before the courts and the fear that might come upon them at that moment. I found it funny that almost every single commentary I read this week on this verse made mention that this was not a promise to pastors to get up and “*let God speak*” through them without studying. In other words, this is not a promise for lazy preachers. Although, it has been said that some preachers feel like they stand before the execution squad each and every Sunday.

What this is, is a promise of the presence and help of the Spirit of God in that moment of trial; the Spirit of God will use you as a mouthpiece of His truth. At that moment of severe persecution, what Jesus is saying is that you will not be left alone. I hope that resonates with you.

You might go through horrific sufferings for the sake of the name of Jesus. You might be arrested and stand trial because of your beliefs in Jesus. You might be beaten and flogged for the name of Jesus. But you will never be left alone. Jesus makes this same promise when He gives the final marching orders for the church. After He tells them to “*Go, make disciples of all nations,*” He says, “*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” Whenever God specifically calls someone in the Scriptures to do something, we almost always see His promise of His presence.

And so, we are brought to the crossroads concerning living a comfortable Christian life. Yes, none of us desire persecution. But if it is the path to His presence, which will you choose? Comfort and safety apart from the presence of God, or persecution and trial with Him by your side?

## **ANGER #2: WE WILL BECOME THE OBJECT OF HATE (vs. 21–23)**

This is going to be a really difficult pill to swallow for many people. And this is why we say that this is not just talking about these twelve men. Jesus doesn’t tell them that their brother is going to deliver them over to death. He doesn’t tell them that it will be their father that will turn them over. No, generally speaking, Jesus tells these men that being a witness for the name of Jesus will create animosity even among family relationships.

There will become points of conflict in the one relationship that we normally expect to find love and loyalty. A man who comes to faith and begins witnessing for Jesus might just find out that their brother turns on them and hands them over to be killed. Worse yet, the person who comes to faith might find out that their parents, their father, wants nothing to do with them. Maybe the worse thought is the man or woman who comes to faith later in life and then tries to share with their children; Jesus says it is possible that the child will turn on them and have them turned over to be put to death.

Some of this seems fanciful to us. That doesn’t happen. Maybe the death part might not since we live in a place (at least for now) where there is religious

freedom. But persecution from family members certainly does happen today. I can tell you some stories of some friends in the last five years that have come to faith in Jesus and have been ostracized by their family. Some of you have lived that. Some of you are witnesses of Jesus, which has made you witnesses of the hate of even your families.

Jesus further tells us in vs. 22 that all would hate them. Let me pause for a moment to give a quick lesson on how to read or study the Bible. We cannot always assume that “*all*” means every person alive on the face of the earth. We must interpret terms in their context. It cannot mean every person on the face of the earth, or there would never be any converts (including each other). It is probably better to understand it as all men without distinction; all kinds of people. Jesus’ point is that there would be a widespread objection to the preaching of the message of the name of Jesus.

You might be the greatest, nicest, kindest person to ever live on the face of the earth. You might do everything you can to make people feel comfortable. Even in the church, there has been the trend the last 30 years or so to be seeker sensitive. I’m not opposed to making people feel comfortable. But what Jesus is saying is that if you are faithful to the name of Jesus, preaching His message, there will always be people that will hate you. At some point, your niceness will be shadowed by the message of the truth of Jesus—men are sinners in need of a Savior. You will be opposed for the truth of Jesus.

I am not sure I know anyone that would gladly rejoice in being hated. That surely is a great danger in following Jesus. But as Jesus explains this danger, He is sure to remind them of another great blessing.

#### **BLESSING #2: WE RECEIVE ASSURANCE THAT WE ARE FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS (VS. 24–25)**

I don’t know why a person hating the followers of Jesus surprises us. It certainly didn’t surprise Jesus & He tells them that it shouldn’t surprise them. He uses this illustration of a student/teacher. He says that a disciple is not above his teacher; a servant is not above his master. Let’s be honest, we have all witnessed students who excelled past their teachers. There are some athletes that are taught and excel beyond their teachers. But Jesus is not talking about skill level or education.

He is obviously referring to Himself. He says that it is “*enough for the disciple to be like His teacher.*” Of course it is. Our goal is to be like Jesus in all things. But being like Jesus brings with it a mixed reaction. When we are like Jesus, people will end up treating us like they treated Him. And how did people treat Jesus? Some people love Him, but let us not forget that ultimately, the majority of people hated Him.

📖 *John 15:18–20 → “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 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.”*

If we are following Jesus, we should not expect people to treat us differently than they treated Him. Jesus tells us that they made up stories about Him. They said that He was identified as Satan. This was meant to be a harsh insult to Jesus. They claimed His power was not from God, but from the enemy of God. And Jesus is clear, that if those that oppose the things of God are willing to say that about the leader, how much more so will they oppose and malign those that follow the leader? J.C. Ryle once said,

*“If we leave the world alone, it will probably leave us alone. But if we try to do it spiritual good, it will hate us like it did the Master.”*

They tell me that snakes and spiders are usually not harmful if they are left alone. But it is when they are cornered that they rear up and strike. The same thing is true of the world. When we come to them and explain the holiness of God, identify their sinful nature, and show them their need for a savior—many in the world will rise up against the Christian. The thought of believing there is only one way to Heaven and only one Truth fuels the world to rise up and strike . . . time and again. Why?

📖 *John 3:19–20 → “Men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”*

So, when we end up being hated by the world because we are exposing the Light of the gospel before them, we are given evidence that we are following in the footsteps of Jesus. What could be better than that?

📖 *1 Peter 2:21 → “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”*

And once again, we are at a crossroads. None of us want to be hated. But if being hated for the sake of Jesus brings assurance that we are walking as Jesus walked, what possible reason would you not endure that? Could it be that you love comfort more than assurance? In light of that, Jesus does draw a line in the sand in vs. 22—*“you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”* What is He saying? Those that are saved are the ones that don’t quit because being hated is so difficult.

### **DANGER #3: WE MIGHT EVEN BE KILLED (vs. 26–28)**

It is fairly likely that following Jesus the way He wants us to follow Him, will expose many of our greatest fears in life. Of course, we have looked at two of them. Anyone here think that persecution of being hated is something that excites you? No, my guess is that most would admit that brings fear.

In these next several verses, Jesus tells His followers three times that they should not fear. At first, He tells them not to fear because the truth will eventually be exposed. He says that nothing is covered that will not be revealed. Truth will eventually triumph. There is nothing hidden that will not be known. This helps us on so many ways. If the truth is going to be revealed in the end, what possible motive is there to hide the truth from people now? The only thing I can think of is that we love our comfortable life too much.

Jesus gives us an opportunity to put our fears into perspective. Think about it, if you are going to suffer, shouldn't it be for something or should I say, Someone important? What they learned from Jesus privately, they were to announce publicly. They are to shout it from the rooftops.

All of this is good and nice, but when Jesus gets to vs. 28 and tells them a 2<sup>nd</sup> time to not fear, listen to his reason. We should not fear because the worst thing they can do to you is to kill you! At this, we respond, *“Excuse me, Jesus, I must have misunderstood You; I thought I heard you say that we should not fear those that can kill me.”* To which Jesus answers, that's right.

It is like He is reaching out to them, to us, and gently reminding us, *“Friends, those people that can do things to your body have no real power. There is no reason to fear them. They can't really do anything serious to you. Yes, they might end your life here, but they can never touch your soul.”* And with that, we have to deal with our faith . . . our belief . . . do we really trust that when we die, as a Christian, that we will spend eternity with God?

Listen, I'm not trying to dismiss this. I understand, this is no light thing. On many levels, this is a very heavy statement. We are talking about the end of physical life. And this brings us front and center with our fears of life and death. It brings us to a reality that this life is not the end of all things. Too many people, too many Christians, have a hard time planning for tomorrow, let alone for eternity. We way to often live for the here and now instead of eternity. We have a hard time investing in our retirement 30 years from now, investing in 30 million years from now is completely foreign.

But that is what Jesus is arguing. We need not fear men. That fear alone is a dangerous foe in our life. Proverbs 29:25 says that the fear of man is a snare.

It was in the 1500s, during the reformation in England that a man by the name of Hugh Latimer was standing before the King of England for preaching the

gospel. As the story goes, he entered the room and said to himself, "*Latimer, don't forget that you are standing before the king.*" And then he is said to have paused and said, "*Latimer, but don't forget that you are standing before the King of kings.*" When John Knox, another reformer (Scotland), died, this is what they wrote on his tombstone: "*Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.*"

Can you imagine that on your tombstone? How can someone live their life in fear of God and not man, even in the threat of physical death? The only explanation I can come up with is that they have a really good perspective of the resurrection. You see, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead gives us hope that when we die (not if), we will be resurrected as well. The resurrection gives the fuel to the fire that burns out the thought of comfortable lives.

There is no doubt that the danger of physical death for being a witness of Jesus is hard to contemplate. But with this great danger, Jesus gives a very special word of blessing to us. This comforts me and I hope will you as well.

### **BLESSING #3: WE WILL EXPERIENCE GOD'S SOVEREIGN CARE IN OUR LIFE (VS. 29-31)**

Jesus gives an illustration of God's sovereign care. Sparrows were the cheapest birds in their culture. They were the birds that the poorest people would have bought for sacrifices. He tells us that the going rate is two of them for a penny. A penny for them was about 1/16<sup>th</sup> of a day's wages. That means one of them would be about 1/32<sup>nd</sup> of a day's wages. They were the cheapest bird and Jesus says that not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the Father's care.

Why does He tell us this? To remind them and us that nothing happens on this earth; that there is never any persecution of His people without the Father's permission. There is no chance. There is no accident. There is no luck. It is not like someone is going to persecute you and God doesn't know about it. There is no martyr in our world right now that God doesn't know exactly when and how they are going to die.

To expand on that illustration, He reminds them that the Father knows the hairs of your head—they are all numbered. For some, this is a very large number; for others, not so much. Now, this is hard for us to grasp, but really should bring much comfort at any point of suffering. When it says that He knows how many hairs are on our head, He is reminding us that He knows, not that He has to calculate them.

The point is that God's authority and sovereign care extends even to the tiniest of details in our life. And if God is sovereignly caring over the little details, do you think He understands and knows about the big things . . . say, being killed for your faith?



To drive the point home further, Jesus hits the nail on the head one more time. You are more valuable than many sparrows. He will take care of us, even when people seek to destroy our bodies. And this is where we are at crossroads once again to not live the safest Christian life we can. We can be His witnesses, even in the face of death, because we know that He genuinely cares for us.

And so, we have seen that we will experience blessing, but we will never be left to ourselves in that suffering. If we follow Jesus, we will become the object of hate, but that simply confirms to us that we are following in the footsteps of our Savior. And it is even possible that some people that follow Jesus will experience death, but it should remind us of God's sovereign care. And so, which path will you choose? To help you choose, let me offer one last word of advice from the mouth of Jesus.

**Vs. 32–33** → There are two ways to view these last couple verses. We can either view them negatively or positively. We can view them as a great warning. And it really is. Jesus does tell us that if we deny Him before men, He will deny us before the Father. Or we can look at the positive aspect of this passage. If we acknowledge Him before men, He will acknowledge us before the Father. And while both ways are seen in this passage, I want to end with this as the 4<sup>th</sup> Guaranteed Blessing . . .

#### **BLESSING #4: JESUS WILL CONFESS US BEFORE THE FATHER (VS. 32–33)**

Of course, there is a condition. If the world so consumes us; if the world so wraps us around its finger; if the people of the world become to us greater than Jesus—then we will deny Him before others. And the consequences of that are devastating. He will deny us before the Father. I can't imagine.

But if we follow Jesus; if we care not for the persecution that He is sovereign over; if we decide that being loved by Him is more important than being loved by others; if we decide that being a child of His for eternity is even more important than living for 70 years instead of 40 here on this earth—we are told that He will confess us before the Father. He will tell the Father, *"Bob, he's one of mine. Steve, he is my guy. Judy, she belongs to me. Sarah, she's mine."*

This does two things for us. For one, it brings us assurance of our salvation. It is a promise that we can cling to when persecution happens in our life. But it also grounds us to the reality that nobody goes to the Father except through Jesus Christ. And we cry out with the voices of the Christian church. Jesus is *"the way, the truth, and the life."* No one comes to the father except through Him. (John 14:6)

📖 Acts 4:12 → “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

And so we walk out these doors today remembering it matters not how much we talk about God. Everyone talks about God. It matters how we are confessing Jesus Christ! We can run from a life of comfort by confessing His name, knowing that He is with us all the way.

### **Conclusion: Latimer & Ridley<sup>1</sup>**

- Earlier, I mentioned Hugh Latimer. He was a protestant reformer in England who came under severe persecution for preaching the gospel of justification by faith alone. Along with him was a man by the name of Nicholas Ridley. These were two men who were not satisfied with a comfortable Christian life. They were two men committed to following Jesus through persecution to the other side of glory.
- As the story goes, both Ridley and Latimer were burned at the stake in Oxford on October 16, 1555. As Ridley was being tied to the stake, he prayed, *"Oh, heavenly Father, I give unto thee most hearty thanks that thou hast called me to be a professor of thee, even unto death. I beseech thee, Lord God, have mercy on this realm of England, and deliver it from all her enemies."*
- Ridley's brother had brought gunpowder for the men to place around their necks so death could come more quickly, but Ridley still suffered greatly. With a loud voice Ridley cried, *"Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit..."*, but the wood was green and burned only Ridley's lower parts without touching his upper body. He was heard to repeatedly call out, *"Lord have mercy upon me! I cannot burn...Let the fire come unto me, I cannot burn."* One of the bystanders finally brought the flames to the top of him to hasten Ridley's death.
- Latimer died much more quickly; as the flames quickly rose, Latimer encouraged Ridley, *"Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out."*

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1501-1600/bishops-ridley-and-latimer-burned-111629990.html>