

COVENANTS, COMMANDS AND PROMISES, OH MY

i. The text: Matthew 10: 16-23

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, 18 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. 19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. 21 Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, 22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23 When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

ii. A Chilhowie story.

Culture has been changing for years. Now it has become official.

This is my father's world

- I. For most of Christian history, Jesus' warnings in this passage have had a particular application.
 - A. We can look back at the early church in the book of Acts or in subsequent times until Constantine when what Jesus said would happen was a day-to-day reality.
 - B. Other eras of church history have had similar times of persecution, such as French Huguenots.
 - C. Even today, many Christians live under the thumb of persecution, and PHPC has had a tradition of praying for the "persecuted church" in communist countries or those dominated by Islam.
 - D. But for most Americans, Jesus' warnings here have had more of an academic flavor. We know persecution has happened and is happening to others, but it typically does not touch us personally.
 1. For most of its history, America's culture and its laws have been defined by Christians or those who grew up under Christianity's influence. Defining principals such as the Golden Rule, marriage

and divorce, and even the honoring of the Sabbath have been ingrained and encoded for centuries.

2. I grew up in small town America, the Bible-belt South, where Christianity has had its longest lasting impact on society.
 - a. Going to church was a cultural expectation; once inside, the Gospel may or may not be preached, and the people in the pews may or may not be Christians.
 - b. But certain standards of life were defined. Certainly not perfectly – it was the South with its peculiar prejudices.
 - c. Stanley Bros. album – Saturday night / Sunday morning.
- E. An incident on the wrestling team.

II. Context: Jesus sending out the disciples.

- A. At end of ch. 9, he's gone around to various cities and villages;
 1. He sees large crowds with huge needs which spur his compassion, but there is only one of him limited in time and space at this point.
 2. He chooses and sends out his disciples to meet these needs.
 3. He instructs his disciples on how to go about their task.
- B. Today's passage, he is going to warn them about the inevitability of opposition to the kingdom and persecution of its ambassadors.
- C. Opposition to the kingdom of God is recognizable as a common theme throughout the history of Biblical redemption.
 1. From Satan in the garden of Eden, a spiritual warfare started.
 2. Throughout the OT, God's people faced persecution – Abel, Noah, Joseph, the people of Israel in Egypt, then in exile to Babylon, and especially the prophets – fiery furnace, lions, sawn in two, thrown into pits.
 3. In NT, we see Jesus persecuted and killed in the gospels, Stephen and James martyred, and Paul chased from city to city on missionary journeys, and imprisoned for his faith.
- D. Church history, starting in Acts, begins in the crucible of persecution and continues over the centuries in various forms.
- E. The sources of persecution are various
 1. It may be Satan himself who tempted Eve and who desired to sift Peter like flour.
 2. From religious establishment such as false prophets in OT, or the Pharisees and Saducees – religious conservatives and liberals – in NT.

3. From governments, both foreign and domestic.
 4. From neighbors like Ahab who coveted Naboth's vineyard.
 5. From family like Joseph's brothers.
 6. Even from within the church itself.
 - a. Paul warns the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20) that there will be fierce wolves **from among you**.
 - b. Episcopal bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori – head of US church – recently took on the apostle Paul himself in a recent sermon wherein she criticized him for delivering a Philippian slave girl from both the demon that possessed her and the owners who oppressed her.
- F. Matthew has a way of abbreviating and amalgamating some of the familiar stories of the synoptic Gospels. He organizes some of his materials in a thematic way, not necessarily a chronological way.
1. We see some of these warnings in Luke given in a different context when Jesus sent out 72 in Luke 10.
 2. Matt seems to have collected various aspects of Jesus' teachings and warnings on in our passage today.
 3. Most of what Jesus warned about did not take place on that first venture.
- G. This seems to be a practice run.
1. He will send them out at this point, and they will come back to give reports and get feed back.
 2. In the mean time, he wants to make sure that they know that this is not going to be one of those "Your best life now" sort of deals.
- III. So, you want to be a Christian, you want to be a disciple, you want to be Christ-like, here's your mission (5-15), and here's what's in store for you (16->):
- A. Persecution from men – civil authorities, religious authorities, even within one's own family.
1. We have an instance of family persecution within our own congregation; a young lady who became a Christian at college; but this was not received well by her mother who turned her out of her home and had her belongings put out on the curb of the street.
 2. We have an instance of persecution by the government: the IRS which has singled out Samaritan's Purse – an organization we have regularly sponsored – for audit.

3. We have routinely seen persecution in academic settings where Christians are marginalized and ridiculed in the class.
 4. We have seen persecution by religious authorities such as the issues encountered by those within the Episcopal church who have opposed the ordination of gays and attempted to keep their church property – presiding bishop of US Episcopal church would rather sell their properties to Muslims for under market value than let conservative congregations – whom she views as competitors – purchase it at full value.
- B. To be sure, all of these are forms of persecution are milder than those which the early church contended and with which many Christians around the world still have to contend today.
- C. But our cultural context is changing rapidly. I am not here to prophecy anything, but it is not hard to envision how things might play out.
1. Society is on the verge, and indeed has crossed the line at many places, of calling evil good and good evil.
 2. If we dare to call ourselves and all sinners to repentance – like we do at every Lord’s Supper – and whether those sins include greed, murder, gluttony, or sexual promiscuity – straight or gay – If we oppose the concept of gay “marriage,” then we are deemed the evil ones in our society, and this may well put us in line for institutionalized persecution.

Supreme court?

IV. Having warned, how does Jesus say to handle persecution?

- A. Preview in sermon on the mount: Matt 5:11-12 – Blessed are you when men shall persecute you and revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake; rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
- B. Don’t be surprised; be on guard; come to expect it – “Beware of men.” In the case of Bishop Schori, beware of women, too.
- C. Don’t be naive. “Be wise as serpents.”
 1. After the Eden episode, the Bible doesn’t usually present snakes in a positive manner.
 2. But there is something to be recommended in their watchfulness.
 3. I Cor 14:20: **Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be**

infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

4. On the one hand, we might give people the benefit of the doubt; but on the other hand, do not believe that man is basically good.
- D. Be without guile. “Be innocent as doves.”
1. Holding two seemingly disparate concepts in tension.
 2. Apostle Paul, who lived in the Roman world filled with such tensions, constantly instructed the churches on just this matter:
 - a. Phil. 2:15 – *Be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*
 - b. Col. 4:5-6 – *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*
 - c. Eph 5: 15-16 – *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*
 - d. Rom 16:15 – *I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*
 3. Rom 12:18 – *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* It’s not always possible.
 - a. Don’t bring it on yourself by unrighteous living. I Peter 2:20 – For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?
 - b. Living near DC, we should know how scandal-mongers and political enemies scrape the records of the past to find dirt. NSA now gives even more resources.
 - c. But this is nothing new – Daniel was a man whose enemies could find no wrong, so they had to contrive new laws which they knew he would violate. Live in such a way as that no one can find the dirt.
 - d. Peter finishes: But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.
 - e. Armed with this attitude, Acts 5: 41 records that John and Peter rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name. Must have brought Peter particular joy given that he had denied Jesus at his pre-crucifixion trial at the same locale.
- E. Don’t be anxious – “Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what

you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

1. This does not mean we can be lazy, nonchalant, or unprepared.
 2. This takes faith in the midst of persecution.
 3. But what a comfort to have a calmness.
 4. Paul gives great example of exactly what Jesus was talking about when on trial in front of Felix, Festus and Agrippa in Acts 26
- F. Endure - “The one who endures to the end will be saved.”

V. Endurance

- A. By this, Jesus warns us not to compromise the Gospel.
1. It is the great temptation of our day; it is what the main line churches have done for 100 years.
 2. If we tell sinful people (including ourselves) – gluttons, greedy, or gay – that they can continue to live without repentance, then we have left them slaves to their sin, and we have left them to their eternal doom.
- B. The Gospel is that the kingdom of God is here.
1. It doesn't always look or feel like it, and there are times when it takes faith to believe it.
 2. But this is our Father's world. And though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
 3. I Jn 4:4 – *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*
- C. Our text ends with a promise of Jesus return. *I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*
1. I don't know how that fits into the apocalyptic narrative. There will be more on that when we get to Matt 24.
 2. But we will be ridiculed for thinking this way.
 3. Ultimately, these are spiritual battles, God's battles; and Jesus is the king of God's Kingdom.
- D. We are more than conquerors.
1. Paul, in the face of death itself proclaims: *The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. (II Tim 4:18)*
 2. In the face of persecution: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For*

your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.