

“A Dangerous Association” (Part 2)

Matthew 10:21-25

In the world of sports, there is some fierce competition that occurs off the field and off the court, a competition in which hundreds of millions of dollars are at stake. Shoe and apparel companies compete with each other for players that will wear their brand. Ten days ago, the number one draft pick in the NBA signed with Nike, agreeing to wear their sneakers and apparel for the next five years. He will receive \$75 million in cash, and more than \$25 million in other compensation. Oh, and he will not have to buy his own shoes and clothes from Nike; he just has to wear them.

In our culture, in our day and age, if a company or an organization wants someone to represent them, they are expected to compensate them well. They are expected to reward them with money, toys, trips, and other incentives that will presumably make their lives better, and, more importantly, make them loyal to the company.

That's how things work in marketing. If you want to successfully pitch your product, if you want maximum exposure to your brand, if you want to expand the influence and power of your brand, then not only must you have the right pitch men and women, but you must take *really* good care of them so that they *want* to represent you.

Apparently, Jesus did *not* get that memo. Oh, He actively recruited people to represent Him, to speak for Him, to be His pitch men. But He never lured them into that role with perks and privileges that would make their lives better and more comfortable. He actually warned them that their association with Him would make their lives miserable. Rather than being admired and applauded, they would be hated and harassed, mocked and scorned. Some would go to prison, others would be publicly humiliated, still others would be put to death.

In other words, their association with Him would be a dangerous association. A couple of weeks ago we began looking at a passage in which He describes this in rather startling detail. I'll read that portion again, and then we will continue to explore the kind of treatment Christ-followers can expect in this world as His representatives.

Verses 16-20. *¹⁶ “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” (ESV).*

Jesus is informing His disciples that when He sends them out on His behalf they will encounter stiff, widespread opposition. Some of it will come from regional leaders in the Jewish community, and some of it will come from world leaders who are Gentiles. They will be a perpetual source of irritation to those in authority, presumably because they will be perceived threats to the security and stability of earthly institutions and governments.

But Jesus declares that when this happens, His followers will have no reason to be afraid or anxious, because He will be with them and will supply them with everything they need to stand firm, including the very words they need to say in response to the accusations made against them.

However, it is not just religious and civic authorities that will oppose followers of Jesus. Opposition will come from even their closest relatives. Look at **verse 21**. 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,*

Jesus is saying that His message and ministry will tear *families* apart. He will be the cause of enmity and hostility in what is supposed to be a bastion of safety and loyalty and security—the family unit. *Brother* will “deliver” *brother*, suggesting that a person who opposes the witness of a Christ-following sibling will use the legal system to punish that person, and that he won’t merely be content with jail time but will seek the death penalty. But it gets worse. Unbelieving fathers will do the same with their unbelieving children, and unbelieving children will have their believing parents put to death.

Jesus is not talking about mere differences of opinion that create normal family tension and strife. He’s talking about a hostility and hatred that is so deep and disturbing that it compels a person not only to renounce a former loved one, but to actually try to eliminate him/her from the face of the earth.

I can think of nothing more painful or heartbreaking than a relationship with a family member where there is this kind of betrayal and treachery. For me personally, there is nothing more disturbing than having tension or unresolved conflict with my siblings or parents or wife or children. It eats me up inside so bad that I cannot be still or silent. I have to go to them and try to resolve the issue.

But Jesus is talking about something that may *never* be resolved, because the issue over which there is division is the most important, fundamental issue of life. It’s about whether Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah, Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). It’s over whether Jesus is the way (the *only* way), the truth, and the life and whether (or not) anyone can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). The fundamental issue of life is whether or not you are for or against Jesus. He is the dividing line of humanity, even among blood relatives.

Jesus Himself experienced this family division for a while with His own brothers. They were skeptical of Him and His identity as the Son of God until after His death and resurrection, when they came to believe in Him and became His followers. This family division has occurred throughout the history of the church, and it still is occurring today.

Which raises a natural question: are *you* prepared for it? Are you prepared for your closest family members to reject you, betray you, attack you, and even see you dead because of your association with Jesus? I’m not talking about there being family tension because of differing political views or different leanings on social issues. I’m talking about hatred and hostility because of your association with Jesus—your view of Jesus, your allegiance to Jesus, your commitment to His teaching.

You might be thinking, “C’mon! This is the age of tolerance. People don’t get uptight about these kinds of things anymore. Everyone is happy for you to believe anything you want to believe!”

Let me remind you that the only thing that is *not* tolerated today are absolutes and exclusive claims. So people have no problem with you saying, “Jesus is a way, His message contains *some* truth, and He is the life for *some* people.” But when you say, “He is *THE* way, *THE* truth, and *THE* life, and that no one comes to the Father *except* through Him,” that’s unacceptable. That’s offensive.

But as Christ followers, we cannot back off or back down from that statement, even if

others, including family members, call us narrow-minded bigots. Because our loyalty to Christ and His claims trumps all other relationships.

In a related passage Jesus said, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:26). Here, Jesus isn’t talking about His followers being attacked by unbelieving family members. But He is saying that following Him *does* affect your relationships with your nearest and dearest loved ones. It does change the dynamics of those relationships; it does change the level of your commitment and the degree of your loyalty to family.

By the way, in ancient Near Eastern thought the words “love” and “hate” did not always refer to one’s feelings or affections. They often had reference to one’s allegiance. Jesus isn’t saying that His disciples must hate their loved ones in the sense that they should dislike them or keep their distance from them. He is saying family members should not come before Him. Commitment to Jesus must take precedence over all other commitments.

Jesus used the word “hate” because He wanted there to be no doubt about the high cost of discipleship—that He demands utmost allegiance and absolute loyalty, and that when it comes to our relationships, loyalty to Him trumps loyalty to anyone else, including our nearest and dearest loved ones. Even if it means bearing the wrath of our loved ones who have turned their backs on us.

But Jesus isn’t finished. **Matthew 10:22a.** *22 and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.*

Jesus turns from family hostility to a universal hatred for His followers, which suggests pervasive rejection of the disciples. “All” cannot mean every individual without exception (for then there would be no point in their preaching), but it does indicate widespread and strong opposition in every area of the world (Morris, PNTC).

Again, this is not because of our political views or our stand on social issues or the causes to which we are committed. It is for His name’s sake. “Name” represents all that Jesus is and stands for. But don’t forget that the name of Jesus means salvation, and the angel told Joseph to name Him Jesus because He will save His people from their sins (1:21). Could it be that a reason there is hatred and hostility directed toward that name is because people don’t want to be confronted with their sin?

Let’s get back to being hated by all. I don’t know how you feel about being hated. I’m sure you prefer to be liked than hated. But some of us, if we were honest, care a great deal what people think of us, and spend a lot of time and energy trying to get people to like us. And perhaps one of the ways we do that is by avoiding controversial subjects, like the absolutes of Scripture or the exclusive truth claims about Jesus. Perhaps we are careful to say things that we think people want to hear, things that make us seem agreeable and tolerant and pleasant to be around. Perhaps, when push comes to shove, we minimize our association with Jesus or distance ourselves from Jesus to make us more appealing to our friends or colleagues. Or maybe, when we are put on the spot, we deny Him altogether so that we can save face and enjoy the approval of our peers.

Jesus anticipated that some who call themselves Christ-followers would struggle with their deep-seated need to be people pleasers. Which is why He says in the last part of **verse 22b**, *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

Maintaining our loyalty and commitment to Christ, even in the midst of intense

opposition and persecution, is expected by Jesus. It is a serious thing to succumb to peer pressure or any kind of pressure and then deny Him. There was a saying in the early church that Paul quoted in 2 Timothy that goes like this:

¹¹ The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself (2:11-13).

In other words, denying Jesus is a serious matter. Of course, one of the people Jesus was directly addressing in Matthew 10 was Peter, who later denied Jesus three times on the night of His crucifixion. But we also know that Jesus restored Peter to a position of great responsibility in the church, and that Peter was ultimately martyred for his association with Jesus.

And don't forget, the reason Peter was able to endure after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension is because he had the Holy Spirit living in him, enabling him to stand fast and stand firm, even in the midst of great suffering on behalf of Jesus. And that same Holy Spirit lives in each of us, too, so that we, too, can endure to the end and be saved.

But that doesn't mean we have to endure persecution if there is an opportunity to go to somewhere else that it is not as dangerous. Look at **verse 23**. *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.*

The natural question that arises from those who are undergoing intense persecution is, "Do I have to stay in this situation, or can I go somewhere where it's not so hostile?" Jesus anticipated this question as well. And He says, "No. You don't have to stay. You can flee to another town to avoid persecution. Go to the next town, and if it gets bad there, keep moving."

Someone wisely said that "Jesus calls His followers to bravery but not foolishness" (Blomberg, NAC). While God certainly uses persecution and even martyrdom to accomplish His purposes, it is not something we have to put up with if there is a way of escape. Paul certainly did this in many cities on his missionary journeys, often escaping at night or in a clandestine way so that he wouldn't be harmed.

The last part of verse 23, however, is not so clear. The statement is important, for it is introduced with "*Truly I say to you,*" an expression Jesus used when making solemn and significant statements. But it is not clear exactly what we should understand by "going through (or literally, "finishing") the towns of Israel" and by the coming of the Son of man. *Finish* in this context would seem to mean finish going through the cities and towns of Israel on the preaching trip that the Twelve were about to begin. But it is not easy to see what the coming of the Son of man could mean in this connection.

While the term, "coming," normally refers to the Second Coming—the return of the triumphant Lord at the end of the age—that does not seem to be what is in mind here. There are at least half a dozen legitimate interpretations of this phrase held by reputable New Testament scholars.

The most likely view, in my opinion, is that Jesus is referring to His coming in triumph after His death and resurrection. Having defeated sin and the powers of darkness through

His shed blood on the cross, and then having defeated death in His resurrection, Jesus emerged victorious in His appearance to His disciples. There was certainly triumph in that coming and there is also a further commission to the disciples to take the message to the whole world. In this view Jesus would be saying that the disciples are to carry on with the task to which He sent them, but that they would not have completed it before His work on earth reached its climax (Morris, PNTC).

Jesus goes on to summarize this whole passage by emphasizing once again the reasons for the hatred and hostility directed toward His followers. **Verses 24-25.** *24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.*

Jesus is making the point that a disciple cannot expect to be more highly regarded or treated better than his teacher, because the teacher is greater than the disciple. The teacher is the original source of the message and ministry. So if the teacher suffers persecution, his disciples can expect nothing less.

But what is puzzling is that in our study of Matthew thus far we have seen Jesus doing a lot of *good* things—healing the sick, the blind, the deaf, and the lame; curing diseases, casting out demons, forgiving sins, and raising the dead. Some of these are things that no one else had ever done...or could do. We have also discovered that when Jesus taught the crowds were amazed because they had never seen someone teach with such authority (7:28-29). We have seen that in His interactions with people He was extraordinarily loving, compassionate, and kind. And all of these things might lead one to assume that everyone admired and adored Jesus.

Yet that was not the case. The Pharisees called Him a child of the devil, and accused Him of being demon-possessed Himself. And even though He was popular with the common folks of Galilee, they would eventually turn against Him, too. He would become so despised that He would be put to death.

Why? Why was He hated? Why was He an irritant? And why would His followers continue to be irritants to the world long after He ascended into heaven?

I want to answer these questions by using Jesus' own words. He said, *19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:19-20).*

Why is Jesus hated? Why are His followers hated? It's not because they do bad things. It's actually because they do good things. But that good exposes the bad in unbelieving people, and that exposure doesn't feel good. It makes them feel ashamed, inadequate, guilty. It makes them feel condemned, even though Jesus said that He did not come into the world to condemn the world. If they don't believe in Him they *feel* that condemnation, and they blame Him for it, which is why they attack.

The fact is, Jesus makes people squirm, and so do His followers, because they are light, and darkness hates the light. So, don't expect to be well-liked and esteemed at the office, in your classroom, on the construction site, or among your neighbors. Because there is something offensive about Jesus, and it's in you as well if you belong to Him. Don't be surprised if people react with anger and disgust and hostility toward you. If they did it to Him, why not you?

I want to come back to the issue we started with in the beginning of this message. I told you that successful companies and organizations are very generous with those who represent them. If they ask someone to endorse them, they compensate him/her very well. Matthew 10 tells us that the compensation Christ-followers receive from representing Jesus is hatred, hostility, and persecution. So why would anybody in their right mind want to represent Him? Who would ever sign up for that?

Paul said in Romans 8, *“For I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”* (v.18). And then he expanded on it in 2 Corinthians 4 when he was describing his own hardships. He said, *“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So,”* he says, *“Here’s how we cope: we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen”* (vv.17-18). That’s another way of saying, “we make a conscious effort to think about this life in relationship to eternity.”

We’ve been called to His eternal glory in Christ. That’s our real life. That’s the realm of our real existence. For us who know the Lord Jesus Christ and have received Him by faith, this world is not our home; we’re just passing through. We are *citizens of heaven*. That’s where we presently have an inheritance waiting for us that can never perish, spoil, or fade, according to Peter (1:4).

We live for a very short time on this little planet called earth. And some of what we experience here may be painful and unpleasant and downright difficult. But our real life is in heaven, around the throne of our Lord, King Jesus. And let me assure you that the perks and privileges the athletes and spokespersons get for representing a company here on earth, is nothing in comparison with the reward we get in heaven for representing Jesus on this earth.

A Dangerous Association (part 2) **Matthew 10:21-25**

Main Idea: Followers of Jesus can expect to experience hostility and hatred because of their association with him, but have been given the resources to thrive in such conditions

Interaction with Hostile Opponents (16-23)

Compared to Sheep among Wolves (16a)

The nature of wolves

The vulnerability of sheep

Survival Techniques (16b)

Wise as serpents

Innocent as doves

Widespread Opposition (17-20)

From fellow Jews (17)

Public shaming before in court

Public flogging in synagogues

From Gentiles (18-20)

Dragged before kings and governors (18a)

Bearing witness before kings and governors (18b-20)

Confidently unprepared

The perfect Defender

From Family (21)

From Nations (22-23)

Universal rejection (22)

Instructions to keep moving and spreading (23)

Reasons for Hostility and Hatred (24-25)

Relationship of Teacher and Student

Guilt by Association