

Incentives to Faithfulness in Opposition #2

Intro: The gospel has always been counter-cultural. When we practice its teachings we are put on a collision course with a world under Satan's control.

Indeed Paul affirmed to Timothy:

“But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! Certainly all of us familiar with Paul's life know well how much he suffered for his testimony of the gospel. And Timothy was urged to faithfully experience the same. But we may have not expected what Paul said next:

And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Timothy 3:10–12)

Paul said that on the authority of the Lord himself. Do you remember these words from the Sermon on the Mount?

“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.” (Matthew 5:11)

What we are seeing in these texts is that opposition from the world is the inevitable result of following Jesus and His teaching.

So then, what will enable us to keep pressing toward the goal in spite of the opposition of the world? When Jesus sent His apostles out, He did not withhold from them the possibility of opposition or even persecution and death. What Jesus said to them can also incentivize us to remain faithful in spite of the world's opposition and even its persecution. What will help us to remain faithful in times of opposition by the world around us? This morning we saw four things Jesus taught the disciples.

Four Incentives

We must recognize that Jesus our Master was hated before us.

We must trust that God will protect His people.

We must fear God more than we fear man.

We must be assured that God values the lives of His saints.

We must know that however we treat Jesus in this life will determine how He treats us at the judgment.

“Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. “But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32–33)

Jesus offers both an incentive to faithfulness and a word of warning. For Jesus to deny us at the judgment is to experience the greatest shame. When we are ashamed to confess Him and His word, then He will be ashamed of us at the judgment. It is why Paul urged Timothy:

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,” (2 Timothy 1:8)

But if we are bold enough to confess Him before others, then He will confess us before the Father. Imagine the glory of Jesus acknowledging that He knows us as His loyal followers. Wouldn't you love to have that happen?

How many of us have felt a tinge of pride in saying that we know someone important? How much more when that person knows us and is a friend! Yet nothing could possibly compare with the confession of Jesus at the judgment!

What happens on that day will be determined by what we say and do now! Don't be like some in Jesus' day we were too afraid to stand up for Jesus: “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.” (John 12:42–43)

We must be aware that the gospel judges the hearts of men and thus inevitably divides the closest of relationships.

These words of Jesus may surprise many:

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. “For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.” (Matthew 10:34–36)

Earlier we saw that opposition was inevitable. Now we see why. It is the nature of the gospel to test men's hearts. Some will believe and obey its message. Others will not believe and disobey. It sets the two groups on an inevitable spiritual collision course.

Moreover that division can penetrate even the closest of earthly relationships—even those with our family. Some of you have experienced that division. It is painful; but also inevitable! And there is a not-so-subtle pressure sometimes to choose our family over the Lord.

As a result Jesus warns that allowing anything earthly to get in the way of serving Him would make us unworthy to be His disciple, including especially our family.

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. “He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.” (Matthew 10:37–39)

These are strong words! Neither family nor persecution or even the loss of life itself should keep us from following the Lord.

We must realize that those who do receive the messengers of Christ, receive Christ, and therefore receive the heavenly Father as well.

Another thing that would help the disciples would be the recognition of the impact of their work in teaching the gospel.

“He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” (Matthew 10:40)

When the gospel is taught, the teacher shares the status of both the Father and the Son. The disciples would be consoled to recognize that the Lord viewed those who received them as receiving Him; that those who persecuted them are persecuting Him.

Likewise when we are rejected as spokesmen for God, it is not only we that are being rejected, but also the heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus!

And when our message is received then our work becomes glorious because it leads people to worship and serve the Lord and brings great blessing to them. That is good enough reason to speak up!

Paul was quite aware of both the consequences of the rejection of God’s message as we as its reception.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:14–16)

We must believe that the promised rewards of eternity cannot fail.

If on the one hand we are motivated to be faithful by the fear of punishment for cowardice, on the other hand we should be motivated to be faithful by the joy of heavenly reward.

“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. “And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward.”” (Matthew 10:41–42)

One of the key phrases in these statements is the expression “in the name of.” It is reminder that whatever our status may be as a teacher of the truth, when we persuade others to act, they share in the blessing of the truth.

Every effort to stand for the truth will be rewarded with blessing to those who act upon our words. Let this motivate you to speak the truth!

But Jesus’ words are assuring in another way! He assured his disciples that no effort would go unrewarded!. The simplest gesture of obedience will have it eternal reward! What an incentive to standing up for what is right!

Sometimes our efforts will fail to reach those we want to teach, and we may feel we have labored in vain, as Paul was wont to say. Yet in the eternal sense, every effort has its reward.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Conclusion: I hope our hearts encouraged, our courage bolstered by recalling the teaching of the Lord. We can overcome the opposition of the world; and in so doing so, we can bring blessing to those around us! Let us find hope and comfort in the words of the apostle Paul as he addresses the suffering of those who follow Jesus:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.” But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35–39)