

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

H . Jesus Equips the Twelve Before the 3rd Tour of Galilee

Part 3: How to Handle Opposition and Persecution as Jesus Did

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #105

MT 10.16-23 (Parallel Texts: None)

16 *"Pay attention: I am sending you out like sheep surrounded by wolves. Therefore become as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. 17 I command you to be constantly on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues."*

18 *"You will be brought on my account before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they arrest you, I command you not worry for a minute about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who is speaking through you.*

21 *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

23 *When you are persecuted in one place, I command you to flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

=====

NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Probably Capernaum, in Galilee
Timeline	Oct. (Month 21, just before the 3 rd Tour)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	H. Jesus Equips the Twelve Before the 3 rd Tour of Galilee
Title	Part 3: How to Handle Opposition and Persecution as Jesus Did

COMMENT:

Jesus repeated the identical content of today's reading at least two more times during his ministry, once in "Stage V: the Later Judean and Perean Ministry" (LK 12.1-11), and again at the very end of his life during "Stage VI: Passion Week," in his "End Times Discourse" (MK 13.9-13). The passage commanded the apostles and all believers to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to remain bold in witnessing and preaching during seasons of persecution.

In the immediate context of the upcoming third tour of Galilee, the warning was necessary because the hatred and opposition of the Jewish leadership to Jesus was growing, and the apostles would therefore experience some hostility while they were out preaching. They needed to be ready for persecution, even thrive in it, rather than being discouraged and deterred by it. As in all things, Jesus was their example in this.

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

H . Jesus Equips the Twelve Before the 3rd Tour of Galilee

The hostility of the world against Jesus and his message would not end with his third tour of Galilee. It would continue throughout their ministries until the very end of this age, increasing in intensity at various times, and peaking in the last great gospel outreach to the nations immediately prior to Jesus' final coming to earth. Therefore, Jesus used language with the apostles in MT 10 that reached far beyond their first ministry assignment. He repeated these words several more times for emphasis over the next year of discipleship training.

Persecution creates a unique, special opportunity for the advance of the gospel. As Jesus said, it throws the door wide open for Christians to witness to “governors and kings,” who are listening to determine the truth of the testimony, and the character of those who give it. People who are willing to die for the truth of their claims demand the attention and hearing of their interrogators. Trials and interrogations; faithfulness unto death under persecution—these are the fast tracks to influencing nations and cultures from the top down. Jesus knew this well.

Discipleship and real ministry are not for wimps. It is not for those who glory in human praise, either from believers or non-believers. It is not for those who treasure ease and comfort, or being pampered. Jesus called sinful people with serious flaws and shortcomings to follow and serve him. They began their journey with him as far from him in character and life-style as a monkey trying to imitate a world-class violinist. However, they were committed to obeying him, because they sincerely believed he was the King of the universe.

People like that are willing to suffer for the privilege of serving him, and consider it the highest honor of their lives. These are the kind of people that Jesus was talking to in this training session.

So Jesus commanded his disciples to stay constantly on guard regarding our attitude toward enduring hardship and suffering for his sake. We are like sheep among wolves in this fallen world. Opposition and even persecution is the norm. There ought to be no surprise when it comes.

Along with his command, Jesus gave a precious promise. The Holy Spirit will fill us, strengthen us on the inside with boldness and the ability to see the glory of suffering for him, and speak through us with the perfect words that need to be spoken in that setting. This is GOD'S plan for multiplying the gospel, and growing his church: persecution. So the Spirit will rise to the occasion within his servants to enable us to seize the moment with a power that nothing else in the world can match, or imitate. This is Jesus' sure promise in times of persecution.

The power and inner ministry of the Holy Spirit works within us in proportion to the outer forces that oppose us in our circumstances. We will always have much more of the Spirit's power than the circumstances require. The apostles would experience the Holy Spirit's power in persecution many times. It was this same power that carried Jesus through all of his earthly persecutions. They needed to be “wise” enough to trust in the Spirit every time persecution came.

Jesus gave one more command regarding persecution. To flee it! This is surprising at first glance, but it is also brilliant strategy. If the apostles (and all disciples) are brave by the power of the Spirit, won't we stand firm and refuse to run? Yes and no. Once apprehended, we will be bold to witness without succumbing to fear. On the other hand, a guerrilla gospel movement that avoids arrest, and continues to move about proclaiming Jesus will do two critical things. (1) It will sow more of the gospel seed in more places, insuring a greater harvest over time, and (2) it will draw even more attention from the authorities and people in the society because of its pesky ability to avoid being snuffed out, so the witness to “governors and kings” will also be multiplied.

This is why we must be “*shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves*” in handling opposition to our evangelism. We must shrewdly know when and how to “flee” effectively to the next city, to witness there and beyond. The longer we can stay free to witness, the better. It is not fear that causes disciples to flee persecution, it is wisdom in moving on to sow more seed in another place. On the other hand, when we are apprehended and come under interrogation, we seize the opportunity to witness right there, no matter who we are talking to.

The relatively short time of ministry for the disciples on Jesus' 3rd Tour of Galilee was on the job training in preaching and handling opposition and persecution wisely, in the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit. These principles would guide the attitude of the Church in the first three centuries of its growth and development, which were characterized by times of opposition and persecution. These commands, and the promise of the Spirit were

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

H . Jesus Equips the Twelve Before the 3rd Tour of Galilee

intended by Jesus to guide all believers until his final coming. They are therefore crucial for each of us to learn and obey.

APPLICATION:

We will all experience opposition and persecution in various forms when we boldly minister in Jesus' name. Jesus calls us to follow him with enough love and passion to joyfully endure any kind of suffering or loss with an attitude that considers it a privilege to pay any price for him. The New Testament is full of that kind of faith, and all of the apostles demonstrated it over and over again after they received the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Eleven out of the twelve would eventually die as martyrs. Ministering in Jesus name requires people of bold, robust commitment and willingness to sacrifice anything for his sake.

Are you walking every day in the power of the Holy Spirit to the degree that you are willing to suffer persecution, and any other kind of loss joyfully?

That attitude is what Jesus desires to produce in each of us, in just the same way as the twelve apostles. HE is worthy!