

September 13, 2026

“Pursuing the Kingdom: It Won’t Be Easy” (Part 1)

Matthew 10:16-28

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Today, we’re going to continue on in our discovery of what it means to pursue the kingdom of God. As we’ve seen so far in our journey through the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has taught us that God’s kingdom should be our primary pursuit as followers of Him. And there is a part of following Jesus that we love talking about. We love to talk about His blessings, His provision and His promises among other things. And all of those things are absolutely true. Jesus is gracious. He is faithful. He gives us hope and peace that the world cannot give. And He promises never to leave us or forsake us.

But there is another side of following Jesus that we don’t talk about quite as much. Following Jesus can be, and often is, difficult. And Jesus never hid that reality from His disciples. In fact, one of the remarkable things about Jesus is that He never tried to make following Him sound easier than it really was. He didn’t say, “Follow Me and everything will go the way you want or think it should.” No, instead, Jesus tells His disciples the truth. And the truth is that the mission of the kingdom will not always be easy.

In the passage we’re going to look at today, Jesus continues His instructions that He began in the verses we looked at last week. [set the scene] But, here, the tone changes. And Jesus is going to say, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” Now that’s not exactly the kind of statement you would use as a recruitment tool to gain more followers.

Imagine going to a job interview and the person that’s hiring says, “We’d love to have you join the team. Just so you know, there’s wolves out there and they’re waiting to devour you!” You might ask, “Is there another position available?” But Jesus doesn’t hide the danger. He tells His disciples exactly what they are walking into. And there is something important about that.

You see, Jesus doesn’t promise His followers an easy mission. But what He does promise is His presence in the midst of the mission. That’s what makes the difference. Jesus knows what’s coming for His disciples as He sends them out. He knows there will be opposition, that they will be misunderstood, and some will hate them and reject the message. He even knows some will seek to kill them. And yet He still says, “Go.”

And that brings us to the central message of our passage this morning, when we pursue the kingdom of God, we must remain faithful even when following Jesus becomes difficult. Jesus is preparing His disciples not simply for ministry success but for ministry faithfulness. You see, as we pointed out last week, we tend to view success in ministry incorrectly. But in God’s economy, faithfulness is the key. And that is a lesson we desperately need today. And so, if you are able, please stand in honor of God’s Word as I read from Matthew’s gospel. [Read Passage]

Jesus begins with the verse I quoted earlier in vs. 16 by saying, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” And we’re meant to notice the contrast. Not to make it too obvious, but we all know that in this scenario sheep are the prey and wolves are

the predators. Jesus doesn't say, "I'm sending you out as wolves among the sheep." He says, "I'm sending you as sheep among wolves."

Now, He's not saying that the disciples are weak, per se, and He's definitely not saying there is any weakness in Himself or the message He is sending them with. But His point is that the disciples are going to be vulnerable because the mission of the kingdom will put them into direct conflict with the values and powers of the world around them.

Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. There are times, and those times are increasing all the more, when the truth of God's word will directly conflict with the values of the culture in which we live. Whether it's the issue of human sexuality, or gender, or pick any other hot button topic of our day, when we chose to stand on the truth of God's word opposition will come. That's the reality.

But then notice, after stating the reality of the situation, Jesus then instructs the disciples by saying, "So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." What an interesting combination. The disciples are being called to be gracious and to love people. But they are not called to be gullible to be wise in their dealings with people.

There are times when wisdom means knowing when to speak and when to remain silent. To recognize that an argument isn't going anywhere and to walk away from unnecessary conflict. This was part of Jesus' instructions earlier in ch. 10 when He told His disciples when to remain in a town and when to shake off the dust of their feet and leave it.

But notice the other half of Jesus' command here. He doesn't simply say, "Be wise." He says, "Be innocent as doves." In other words, don't allow the hostility around you to turn you into the very thing you are opposing. That's an important word for us today.

Sometimes we become so concerned about fighting evil that we begin to resemble the anger and cruelty of the world around us. Jesus says, "Be wise," yes, "but remain gracious." In other words, stand for truth, but remain loving. Speak boldly, but don't become hateful. It is possible to stand firmly for biblical truth without treating another person as your enemy.

The goal isn't simply to win an argument. The goal is to represent Jesus. And when our primary concern is representing Jesus rather than defending our own ego, we can respond to the opposition that comes with wisdom and grace. And Jesus immediately tells the disciples why they need those things.

For vs. 17 says, "Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues." Again, notice that Jesus doesn't sugarcoat it. He says, again, "Beware." There will be opposition. And notice, too, that Jesus says this before He sends them out.

Why? Because Jesus wants them to understand that when they encountered any opposition it wouldn't mean the mission had failed. And that's important. Because sometimes we assume that if God is in something, everything should go smoothly. But Scripture doesn't teach that at all.

Joseph followed God and ended up in prison. Jeremiah faithfully preached for years the message of God's coming Judgement to the people of Judah and not one single person listened to his message. Daniel prayed faithfully and was thrown into a lion's den and then was miraculously delivered by God. But then Paul preached the gospel and was beaten,

imprisoned and he was eventually martyred. And Jesus Himself was rejected by His own people and crucified.

Opposition and difficulty do not always mean that we have failed. In fact, the opposite is true. Jesus would later tell His disciples on the night of His betrayal, "In this world you will have trouble." Not that they wouldn't have any trouble, or that they might have all little trouble. No, He says, "You will have trouble. But take heart, for I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) And Jesus wants His disciples, and us, to understand that truth before we encounter any opposition.

And vs. 18 further makes this point when Jesus says they will be brought before governors and kings "for my sake to bear witness before them and the Gentiles." Notice the phrase "for my sake." He is making the point that their suffering isn't meaningless. That God can use their suffering as an opportunity to put the gospel before people who otherwise might never hear it.

That's an incredible perspective. Sometimes the circumstances we would never choose become the circumstances God will use to reveal Himself to others. The Apostle Paul understood this. When he was imprisoned, he didn't say, "Well, this is terrible. My ministry is over." No. He wrote letters. He preached. He encouraged believers. He witnessed to the guards. And God used Paul's imprisonment to advance the gospel. And that should challenge the way we think about difficult circumstances.

Maybe our first instinct, when we find ourselves in a difficult situation (assuming we haven't put ourselves there) shouldn't be, "How do I get out of this?" Maybe we should first ask, "Lord, how can I represent You in this?" "What are you trying to accomplish through this difficult situation in my life. And that doesn't mean we shouldn't seek relief from suffering. Of course not. But it does mean we recognize that God can work in those circumstances in ways that He never could otherwise.

Well, next, Jesus addresses one of the fears that was probably going through the minds of the disciples as they were listening to Jesus, "What are we going to say?" What if we don't have the right words? What if we don't know how to respond? So, Jesus gives His disciples an extraordinary promise, He will give us what we need in the moment.

He says in vs. 19–20, "When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how or what you are to speak... For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Now, this doesn't mean Christians should never prepare. Of course, we should study God's word. We should think through cultural events and issues carefully and critically. We should know what we believe and be prepared to explain the gospel.

Isn't it interesting that one of these very same disciples, Peter, would go on to instruct the church in his epistle, "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." (1 Pet. 3:15)

Jesus is saying to His disciples that they need to be so in tune with Him so that when they were brought before authorities there would be no need to panic. Why? Because they will not be alone. The Spirit of God will be with them. And there is something deeply comforting about that, isn't there. God doesn't simply send you into difficult situations and then stand back and watch in hopes that you figure it out. But He goes with you.

Maybe you've experienced this. You've gone into a conversation thinking, "I have no idea what I'm going to say." But then the right words come. A Scripture comes to mind. Or a story or thought, and afterward you think, "Where did that come from?" Well, we know that it came from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives to bring about the purposes of God.

Jesus then continues on in His instructions and moves from public opposition to something even more painful, the opposition from the people closest to us.

Vs. 21 says, "Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents." These are painful words for us to hear and I'm sure they were for the disciples who heard them the first time. Jesus is saying that loyalty to Him can sometimes create division even within families. Some of us, unfortunately, know this to be true firsthand. Jesus knows that when one person within a family embraces Christ and another rejects Him, conflict can sometimes result.

Why? Because Jesus demands our ultimate allegiance. There can be no relationship more important than our relationship with Him. Our relationship with Jesus needs to be more important than our relationship with our parents and siblings. More important than our relationship with our children and even more important than our relationship with our spouse. Because our relationship with Jesus is the source and power to properly love others. We love because God first loved us. He demands our ultimate allegiance and when that is given it will cause conflict with those who do not agree.

And that conflict can lead to outright hatred as Jesus then says in vs. 22, that "You will be hated by all for my name's sake." Notice those words again, "For my name's sake." The issue isn't that Christians should try to be offensive and, therefore, hated. To be hated is not the goal, for that's not a "winning" strategy. The issue is that faithfulness to Jesus can sometimes offend people simply because they reject what He represents, a threat to their autonomy.

And there's an important distinction here. If people reject us because we're arrogant, rude, or obnoxious, we shouldn't automatically call that persecution. Sometimes people don't like Christians justifiably because, a lot of times, we as Christians have behaved badly. That's not persecution. That's poor representation. Jesus is talking about suffering for His name sake and not our own.

We should never be rude or obnoxious and then claim we're suffering for Jesus. Our calling is to live with grace and truth. But if we faithfully follow Jesus and someone rejects us because of Him, Jesus says, "Don't be surprised because this the reality of what happens with the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world collide."

And then Jesus gives His disciples one of the most important instructions in the entire passage. When opposition comes, don't give up.

Jesus says in vs. 22, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." The emphasis here is endurance. Following Jesus is not simply about how you start. It's about persevering to the end in faith. Anyone can be excited about Jesus at the beginning when everything is going to go well and they think it will always be that way. But what happens the first time you are mocked for your faith? What happens when your family doesn't understand? What happens when "that" prayer doesn't seem to be answered?

Jesus says, in the midst of it all, "Endure." There is a difference between enthusiasm and endurance. Enthusiasm says, "I love Jesus when things are going well," but fades when

life gets hard. There have been lots of people who have walked away because they were enthused by Jesus. But endurance says, "I still trust Jesus in every circumstance even in the hard and difficult things."

Think about a marriage. The wedding day is beautiful. There are flowers, music and promises made. But marriage isn't proven on the wedding day. Marriage is proven years later when life gets difficult, the hard times come, and two people have to make the choice to continue to keep the promises they made.

In the same way, our faith is demonstrated through perseverance. As the old saying goes, the Christian life is not a sprint. It is a marathon. And the hardest part of the marathon isn't the beginning. It's in the midst of the race when you're tired and you feel like you can't go any further. That's when endurance matters. And Jesus is there to carry us through to the end.

But Jesus doesn't tell His disciples to endure by hiding away in fear. He tells them to continue proclaiming the message even when it becomes dangerous.

In vs. 26 says, "So have no fear of them." That command appears repeatedly in this passage. Don't fear them. Don't be afraid. Why? Because people can harm the body, but they cannot ultimately destroy the soul.

Jesus says this very thing in vs. 28. And, here, Jesus is putting everything into perspective. People can threaten us. They can criticize us, reject us and embarrass us. They can physically harm us and even kill us. But they cannot take away what ultimately belongs to God. That's why Jesus says, "Do not fear them." Jesus' disciples could have confidence that the truth would prevail, so they should go out and preach it with boldness, despite the danger of persecution.

And then, back in vs. 27, He says, "What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." In other words, don't keep the message hidden. The gospel is meant to be proclaimed. As followers of Jesus, we have been entrusted with the good news of the gospel that can save someone's soul from destruction, so don't be afraid to share it.

People need to hear that sin and God's judgment are real. But people also need to hear that Jesus is real and that He loves them and that He died for them and He rose again and that forgiveness and salvation are available through faith in Him. So Jesus says, "shout the message from the rooftops! The King has come and He has brought salvation with Him. Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand.

So, as we come to the end of this passage, we discover that Jesus never told His disciples that the mission would be easy. But He does tell them that it will be worth it. He certainly doesn't promise that everyone will receive them. But He does tell them that He will be with them.

Brothers and sisters, the truth is, there may be times when following Jesus costs you something. It may cost you popularity. It may cost you a relationship. It may cost you an opportunity. It may cost you comfort. It may even cost you your life. But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Why? Because your life is ultimately in the Father's hands.

So pursue the kingdom. Go where the King sends you. Speak the gospel truth He has entrusted to you. Be wise and innocent. Be courageous and compassionate. And when the

road becomes difficult, remember the words of Jesus, "Fear not." Because the King who called you is with you to the end.

So don't quit. Don't be ashamed. Don't give up. Remain faithful to the message and the mission of the King even, and especially, when life gets hard. Because when everything else is gone, when the applause of the world has faded, when the opinions of people no longer matter, one thing will remain, Jesus Christ is Lord. And He is worth following. Let's pray.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding us that we never walk alone. Give us wisdom to live faithfully in a world that does not always understand or welcome the gospel. Help us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Give us courage when we face opposition, strength and grace when we are misunderstood or rejected. When we are afraid, help us remember that our lives are in Your hands. When we are discouraged, help us endure. When we are tempted to quit, remind us that Jesus is worth following all the way to the end.

Make us faithful witnesses of Your kingdom. Give us opportunities to proclaim the gospel and the courage to speak when those opportunities come. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Benediction:

May the Lord give you wisdom to walk faithfully in a hostile world, courage to speak boldly for Christ and grace to remain faithful when following Him is costly. Go in the strength of the Spirit, unashamed of the gospel, faithfully acknowledging Jesus before the world. Amen.