**WHOEVER ACKNOWLEDGES JESUS**

October 21, 2018

Matthew 10:16-42

Key Verse 10:32 “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.”

In the previous passage, we learned that Jesus called his twelve disciples as harvest workers and sent them out to serve the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus calls us with the same calling to serve our campus students with Jesus’ compassion. In today’s passage Jesus talks about the persecution that his disciples would confront. Nobody likes persecution. But to Jesus’ disciples, persecution is unavoidable simply because they do not belong to the world but to Jesus. Just as they persecuted Jesus, they will certainly persecute his followers as well. So, in today’s passage Jesus teaches his disciples how to live in times of persecution. We can summarize in 3 instructions. First, be wise and innocent, Second, don’t fear men but God, Third, love Jesus more than anything or anyone.

**First, be wise and innocent (16-25)**

Out of his great compassion for lost people, Jesus was compelled to send his disciples into the world. But he knew the world toward which he was sending out his disciples was full of evil people who were like wolves. So in verse 16, Jesus says, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” In character, wolves are strong, fast, and aggressive. They know how to exploit weaknesses in their prey and show no mercy. In the same way, wicked people try to find and exploit the weakness of others. This is why many people hide their weakness. In contrast, the disciples, like sheep, were naïve and vulnerable. It seems that they would be devoured by people of the world. They would also face the devils’ intimidation. It was dangerous. Nevertheless, Jesus did not overprotect them. He sent them into a hostile world to win a spiritual victory.

For this purpose, Jesus wanted them to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (16b). Snakes understand their environment and know how to use it to their advantage. When they sense their opportunity, they strike immediately and decisively. We don’t like people who are sneaky and opportunistic like snakes. So we say, “You snake!” as an insult. But Jesus’ point is that we should be wise in dealing with issues and people of the world. Doves are known to be faithful to their partners to the end. They are symbol of purity, innocence, faithfulness, and peace. But doves are not so smart. We should not imitate doves in being naïve, but in being pure and innocent. If Jesus’ disciples are only pure, gentle and innocent they will soon become the prey of wolves. On the other hand, if they are only clever like snakes, they will lose integrity as servants of God. We need to learn the good side of both the snake and the dove. Then how can we be wise and at the same time pure? It is only through the word of God. The words of God are perfect. They truly make us wise if we really depend on them. And at the same time the words of God sanctify us. (John 17:17)

In verses 17-20, Jesus warned his disciples that opposition would arise from both religious and political leaders, and he taught them how to deal with it. The first wisdom that they need to have to deal with the opposition is to be on guard. This means they should be spiritually alert, like soldiers in battle. They would be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues (17). They would be brought before governors and kings as if they were criminals (18). Before this painful opposition, they might be tempted to shrink back and lose their identity. But this was the opportunity for them to stand as witnesses of Jesus. The time of persecution is the time to witness to Jesus powerfully. How can we do that? Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be with his disciples and speak through them. (19-20) When we depend on him, the Holy Spirit will give us courage, wisdom, and power. So we don’t need to be afraid.

In verses 21-23, Jesus warns that the scope of persecution will include family members and the whole society. Persecution by family members is particularly painful and difficult to bear. Jesus warned that brothers would betray brothers to death; fathers would betray their children, and children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. At that time, it is tempting to compromise or to deny the faith. But Jesus said, “the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” To Jesus’ disciples, the time of persecution is the time of test for our faith and faithfulness. By standing firm to the end we can prove and develop our true faith and love for Jesus. Jesus also tells us that when we are persecuted in one place, we are to flee to another (23). Fleeing is not an act of cowardice. It is God’s wisdom for spreading the gospel. When we see Christian history, we come to know that God used persecution to spread gospel widely from one place to another.

Our teacher and master Jesus was persecuted and called “the prince of demons.” So his students (disciples) will be persecuted and slandered, too. So persecution should not surprise us. It is unavoidable and indispensable as long as we belong to Christ. In fact, the disciples’ faith grows more through hardships like persecution. Personally, after I believed in Jesus, I experienced small persecution by my relatives. After I decided to marry M. Langue in faith, one day we went to my father’s elder brother’s family to greet them but on that day, we heard from them. “You are the cult among our family members and relatives. From now on, you don’t belong to us.” We were not welcomed by them and since then, we couldn’t associate with them. My grandfather’s last will was, “Never go to church.” Because of such strong anti-Christian atmosphere, all my father side’s relatives strongly oppose to Christianity even now. Relatively my own family members did not persecute me much except small opposition when I decided to go abroad as a missionary. But in my memory, all this opposition and small persecution did not weaken my faith. Rather, they made me learn more faith. Every Christian will receive small or big persecution sooner or later depending on their spiritual level.

**Second, don’t be afraid of people; fear God (26-33)**

In verses 26-31, Jesus told his disciples not to be afraid of people, but to fear God in the time of persecution. When persecution comes, persecutors usually use the strategy of planting fear. Persecution in the workplace, it may cost a person their job. Persecution through peers, it may result in being bullied, shamed and alienated. Persecution from parents, it may involve a threat to cut off the relationship, including financial support. During such persecution, we are tempted to fall into fear of the persecutors. Once fear of people is planted in our hearts, next, it tempts us to compromise to them. But in any case, fear is Satan’s typical weapon to make us intimidated and depart from God. Then how should we do in such fearful situation? Jesus urges us, “do not be afraid of them…” Then Jesus explains why.

First of all, because truth wins in the end (26-27). In verse 26b, Jesus said, “… for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.” Usually persecutors resort to deception and suppress the truth. They try to control everything secretly. Sometimes it seems that the power of darkness wins over the truth. But according to Jesus’ teaching, their prevailing does not last long. The truth will be disclosed and made known. Evil will be exposed. Because above all God is in control for everything. When we have such confidence that after all truth wins, we can overcome fear and proclaim the gospel boldly (27).

Secondly, God alone determines the final destiny of us all (28). Even though persecutors may seem to have great power, it is limited. They can kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul. No one wants to suffer and die. Human beings have a strong desire to live in this world. So life-threatening persecution is very challenging to anyone. Then how can we overcome? Jesus says, “fear God who has power to destroy both soul and body in eternal hell.” As we know, death is not the end of our life. After that, there is judgment. Hebrews 9:27 says, “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..: Since there is an eternal destiny after death, that is more important than life on earth. That is why persecutors do not have real power compared to God. Their threat is limited to our mortal bodies. But God has almighty power to determine our final eternal destiny. He can give eternal life or eternal condemnation. This God should be the One we must fear indeed. When we fear this God, we can be free from fear of mere men. Then we can stand firm in our faith and witness to Jesus.

Another reason to fear God, not people is that God loves us and values our lives (29-31). Sparrow are very small creatures, and pennies the smallest coins. But Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.” This fact reminds us that God cares even smallest things on earth and how much more he cares for us? Jesus gives us another example; our hairs. Who can know how many hairs we have? Nobody. But God knows it exactly. The number of our hairs changes every day. It means God cares us each day and everyday. In Lamentation 3:22-23, when the prophet Jeremiah was in great anguish, he was greatly comforted by God’s never-failing love. He confessed, “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” The most powerful and greatest evidence of God’s love and care for us is that he gave his One and Only Son Jesus Christ as our perfect and everlasting ransom for the forgiveness of our sins. Here we can understand what “fear of God” means. It does not mean to be scared of God. It is to realize God’s awesome love and power which is far greater than anyone or anything else; even the power of sin and death. As we realize that we are the object of God’s great love, awesome respect and deep love arise within us. As we have such awesome respect and deep love for God, we become free from fear of people who persecute and threaten us. Apostle John experienced this love and testified, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.” (1Jn4:18a)

When we fear God instead of people, we can be courageous and wise. We can overcome adversity and persecution. What then does Jesus want us to do? Let’s read verse 32. “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.” Jesus wants us to acknowledge him before people. Here the word “acknowledge” means to openly express our loyalty and love to him; it is to confess Jesus publicly whom we truly believe. We must acknowledge Jesus at any cost. If we are in favorable circumstances, it is not so difficult. But at the threat of losing everything-including our lives-we can have a second thought. At this moment, we should remember Jesus’ warning: “But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.” (33) Our current short decision on earth determines our eternal destiny.

**Third, love Jesus more than anything or anyone (34-42)**

People expect the Messiah to bring peace on earth. He does-that is true. Jesus is called “the Prince of Peace.” But many people don’t understand what true peace is. They think peace is a problem-free life. This is great misunderstanding. Jesus’ peace rests in people’s hearts when they truly believe in him. But at the same time, believing in Jesus also brings severe conflict and division. That’s why Jesus is called “a stumbling block” for unbelievers as well as “the cornerstone” for the believers. (1Peter 2:6-8) For example, when one member of the family believes in Jesus as Lord, and loves Jesus most, the other family members feel betrayed. They think that the Christian stirred up conflict and broke their family unity. This leads to persecution. This kind of troubles are very painful but not surprising because their spiritual belongings are different. One is with God and the others are against him. So Jesus said in verses 34-36. “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law- a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” The point of this picture is that because of believing in Jesus, even close people like family members will be spiritually divided and become against each other and spiritual order will be tested. When it happens, there will be a temptation for believers to love their family members more than Jesus simply not to make their family members feel betrayed and pain. But Jesus said what we should be careful of in such time in verses 37-39. Let’s read these verses. “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is *not worthy of me*; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is *not worthy of me*. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is *not worthy of me*. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” We love our parents. We love our children. We love ourselves. Then, how can we love Jesus more than these? Here, we have to remember the order of love. Jesus is our Creator; the source of our existence; our life. Without him, we could not exist, could not breath, could not eat nor talk. Jesus is our Redeemer. In order to rescue us from the slavery of sin and death and Satan, he paid the full payment of our sin by his own holy blood. That’s why he alone is worthy to receive our supreme love as the first priority of our life. In fact, this is the very purpose of our life. For this purpose, we were created and saved.

Today, Jesus has taught us how to live in times of persecution. We should be wise and pure by depending on God’s words and Holy Spirit. We should not fear people, but fear God only by remembering who God is. We should acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior in any circumstances by remembering our eternal destiny. We should love Jesus most at any cost by remembering what Jesus has done for us. Then God will surely acknowledge and reward us in our eternal home heaven.