

Matthew 10:24 to 39 – 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer
Amen

Chapter 10 starts by dealing with a very significant moment in Jesus' training of his disciples and of their ministry.

It was at the beginning of chapter 10 that Jesus prepared to send them out on their own, with instructions to stay among the Israelites and proclaim the gospel, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and drive out demons, no mean task, but that was what he had been preparing them for over the previous months.

Because now not only had the disciples witnessed the sermon on the mount, but when he came down from the mountain he cured lepers, cured a centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law so they would have witnessed miraculous healing by then as well.

However the apostles experience was now much broader than that, because by now they had experienced the opposition to Jesus' teaching and healing, and I'm sure that they had realised that if they went out in Jesus' name that the same opposition would be applied to them.

However despite the months of training Jesus still thought it necessary to give them a pep talk in order to ensure success, and last Sunday John spoke about verse 1 to 23 and today we pick it up at verse 24.

Jesus' pep talk is both for encouragement and to serve as a warning against expecting too much, and verse 24 is Jesus warning them that they are not Jesus and that not everything will work for them and that they and we shall always need to turn to God.

Then Jesus says, "It is enough for the disciples to be like the teacher"; this is expressed slightly differently in the Revised English Bible, this reads, "The pupil should be content to share the teachers lot" which is a bit more specific.

Jesus is warning them that the way people treat me will almost certainly be the way that they will treat you, which in a broader perspective means that if we want to inherit Jesus' glory in heaven then we will have to accept our suffering here on earth, and of course if people call Jesus a demon then they are likely to call the disciples demons as well.

Jesus said in verse 26, "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."

This is fairly straight forward because God knows everything about us, Psalm 139, one of my favourites, explains it beautifully, Psalm 139 starts, "Lord you have searched me and you know me".

Verse 27 is similar to verse 26 except verse 27 is saying don't be frightened to speak the gospel, in fact if necessary shout it from the house tops which may well be safer for us in the long run.

Because in the next sentence Jesus says, “Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell”.

So if you want to stand up for Jesus in any way, either in church or in the community don't consider what other people my or may not say, but consider what God will say if you don't.

Jesus reminds us that while we shall all eventually lose our physical lives one way or another, we can all, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, save our souls alive, if no matter what life throws at us, we to stay faithful to Christ.

Verse 29 to 31 reiterates how close God is to us, in fact he is always walking along side us, the Emmaus story of Jesus walking along side two disciples demonstrates that, all we have to do is realise it.

Verse 32 is clear, “If anyone declares publicly that they belong to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven. But if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my Father in heaven.

On first reading what Jesus said in Verses 34, “I haven't come to bring peace but a sword”, seems to be in contradiction of the man we know as Jesus; after all Isaiah refers to him as the prince of peace, and indeed there are many references to him in terms of peace, and rightly so, because Jesus came to bring peace with God.

However it is a fallacy to think that Jesus came to bring peace on earth, he didn't, he came to bring peace between Humanity and God.

I was brought up during the Second World War, I remember doodle Bugs, bombing raids and VE day, and since then there's been wars virtually continuously, a good deal of world history is about wars. Jesus did not come to bring peace on earth.

In St Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 5 verse 1, we have, “Therefore since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus came to bring peace between humanity and God.

And again in St Paul's second letter to the Corinthians St Paul wrote in chapter 5 verse 18, “All this has been the work of God. He has reconciled us to himself through Christ”.

Christ came to bring peace between us and God not to bring peace to the world, that's for us to do, and perhaps one day, through the grace of God and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we may succeed.

Verse 35 is also difficult, “For I have come to set man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

Jesus is warning the disciples that when they are out on their own they will be faced with those who will want to oppose them and he warns them and us that ones foes may well be members of our own families.

Jesus says it may be those who will not want to hear the gospel and could well cause rifts in families, but it should be the gospel that causes the rift not our style of presentation.

Indeed Jesus is also warning us that we may encounter opposition today from those who do not want to hear the gospel under any circumstances, however it is presented.

Verse 37 says whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Now Jesus is not asking us to love our families less, indeed scripture is clear in it's command to honour our father's and our mother's. No Jesus is not saying that.

Jesus does not want us to stop loving our families with all your hearts, but for the sake of the gospel we are to put Jesus at the top of our priority list. Now for me that arrangement works perfectly well, because I, like many other people look on my family as a gift from God and therefore God clearly comes first.

Verse 38, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me". This is not quite straight forward in that Jesus is not talking about the difficulties we may have at work or at home, nor is he talking about a severe disability we may have, Jesus is talking about being prepared to die for the gospel if the need arises.

Now fortunately of course we here in the United Kingdom are very unlikely to be in physical danger due to our faith in Christ and as such we may never be asked to carry our cross in that way.

But nevertheless we may still be in mortal danger, not from violence but from apathy, apathy may be the cross we may have to carry.

Just recently the leader of the Parliamentary Liberal party Tim Farron resigned as leader because his Christian faith was at odds with the party's manifesto on marriage, I admire him because he decided to carry his cross even if it meant sacrificing his political position.

Jesus was telling his disciples that when they go out there on their own they were to be themselves, and that they were to be totally committed.

Many years later St Paul demonstrated what Jesus wanted from them, and if you read the book of Acts you will see that St Paul went through horrendous hardship, persecution, ship wreck all manner of beatings for preaching the gospel of Christ and he never faltered, an inspiration for all of us.

Finally verse 39, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life For my sake will find it".

This verse, from an individual point of view, is arguably the most important in the passage.

It is about the possibility of losing our lives if we are not careful and of the possibility of finding true life in Christ, and it is vital that we know which activity achieves which result.

Jesus is saying that if we try to keep our lives to ourselves, if we ignore the needs of people around us, if we put our own interests before the interests of other people in everything we do, then we face losing our lives on the day of judgement.

But if we give our lives to Christ, if, in obedience to Christ, we put the needs and interests of other people before our own, if we surrender to Christ so that he can use us in his work of salvation, then we will, save our souls alive.

As we sit let us pray

You came, Lord Jesus Christ, to teach us the way of life that you require, to show us how we are to serve you and our neighbours; make us receptive to your teaching and to your gospel, and help us to live a life of service to you, without counting the cost, to the glory of your name.

Amen