

The Matthew 10:17-31, 32-42

Confessing Christ above all.

Dr. Martin Luther King Junior was well known as a man who spoke openly about his beliefs. He spoke for equality under God. He spoke for an end to the slavery of the black people in America. And speaking out about what you believe can be a dangerous thing in our world. Many people have died for expressing their beliefs. Dr. King was one of those people. This passage from Matthew is about speaking out about what we believe. Jesus tells his disciples that speaking out as a follower of His is difficult, and it's dangerous, and it will bring a lot of division. So why should we do it? There are at least 3 good reasons in this passage:

**** God will speak for us, God will stand up for us and God will save us.**

**** 1. GOD WILL SPEAK FOR US**

**** Verses 19-20:** *“But **when** they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be **given** what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”*

God wants **His** people, to confess what we believe. And as Jesus speaks these words to his disciples, he is telling them to EXPECT persecution. Expect to be arrested, expect to be flogged. In this context, Jesus **knows** his disciples will face very difficult times because of their faith in him.

But Jesus' guarantee to them is that they will be given the right words to speak in whatever situation they are in. Notice that he doesn't say that he will protect them from the pain, or that he will deliver them from prison. He doesn't say that he will even stop them from being killed. He says, “Don't worry, you will be given the right **words** to say!”

What really matters is that we confess what we believe in. Jesus' promise to us is that we will always be given the words that we need. And it doesn't matter if we are hurt or injured or even killed.

**** 1. GOD WILL SPEAK FOR US**

**** 2. GOD WILL STAND UP FOR US**

Jesus tells us not to be afraid of confessing our faith, even under persecution – and he gives us three reasons to begin with:

**** 1.** The truth will come out in the end anyway! Verse 26: *“There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed.”* On judgement day, everyone's going to know the truth. Isn't it better that they know it now, rather than later?

**** 2.** People can only kill your body. verse 28: *“Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

In other words, what's the worst that can happen? You can lose friends, lose your job, be ridiculed or injured. They might even kill you. But that's all they can do! They can't take heaven away from you!

**** 3.** You are worth a lot to God. verse 31: *“So don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.”* God doesn't even let a **sparrow** fall to the ground without allowing it to happen. Even the hairs of our head are numbered. God knows us and cares for every one of us.

These are three good reasons to stand up for Jesus in your faith. The truth will come out, the worst they can do is kill your body, and you are worth a great deal to God. But here's a bigger reason than all of those. In verses 32-33, Jesus says:

****** “ *‘Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.’* ”

In other words, ‘Stand up for me, and I will stand up for you. Disown me, and I will disown you.’ When you get to judgement day, the only way you’ll walk into heaven is if Jesus is standing up for you! If you’ve disowned him on earth, he will simply disown you in heaven.

1. GOD WILL SPEAK FOR US

2. GOD WILL STAND UP FOR US

3. GOD WILL SAVE US

People often see peace as a good thing. And people often associate the love of Jesus with peace. Yet Jesus tells us in this passage, in verse 34:

****** “*Do not suppose 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...*” and so on. The gospel does not bring **peace**, but a **sword**. What does Jesus mean by this?

The confusion comes when we only think about Christianity as a beautiful message that brings light into people's dark world – a message of love that transforms lives. When we share the gospel of Jesus with people, it's not always peaceful because people don't always accept it! If I tally up all the people that I have shared the gospel with and then split that up into the people who accepted it and the people who rejected it, guess which list is longer? The rejections! Because even though the gospel is a message that saves, it is also a message that condemns people when they reject it. It's a message that brings hope and love, but it's also a message, when it's rejected, that brings hate and division. Sometimes, people will reject and hate YOU for telling them about Jesus.

**** III – Seagulls.** The people of this world are a lot like Seagulls. Seagulls are very interesting animals. They're around every time you go to the beach. They're around every time you have hot chips. As soon as you throw one chip, they all gather around. They walk all over each other to get every chip you throw.

But here's an interesting fact, and something NOT to try next time you're at the beach... If you catch a seagull, and tie a coloured ribbon around one of its legs, you will sentence it to death. Because when you tie a ribbon around the leg of a seagull, you make it stand out from all the other seagulls. You make it different. The other seagulls will notice it's different and they'll attack it with their claws and their beaks, hammering through it until they draw blood. And they'll keep going until it's a big bloody mess. And usually dead.

The world that we live in is a bit like a society of seagulls. When you stand out as different, even in your own social group or your own family, people can turn on you. Your own friends. Your own family. When we follow Christ, he actually calls us to tie a ribbon around our leg. Jesus tells us that those who follow him will lose their life. This isn

t a verse he just addresses to missionaries. he doesn't say: “Hey, if you become an overseas missionary, you could lose your life!” No. he says “If you follow me, you WILL lose your life. All of you.” WHY? How?

Because we will stand out if we follow Christ – which means we will open ourselves up to persecution, to ridicule and to rejection, even from our own communities and families.

For some people, confessing Christ means your family **could** physically kill you. For others it means losing their job, or facing harassment or been thrown out of their own home. There was a Jewish man in Canada who became a Christian. His parents disinherited him and held a mock funeral for him to symbolise that he was dead to their family.

Jesus calls us to stand out. To give up our life to Him. And that can mean the people who are closest to us – our society or even our own families, can turn against us. And do you know what Jesus says about that?

Jesus says we should EXPECT IT!

Jesus says that he hasn't come to bring peace, but a sword. In order to bring the peace of heaven that God has promised us, Jesus has given us a message which divides the people of this world. The gospel is a sword because it divides loyalties. It can divide daughter against mother, father against son, families against each other. And why? Because the gospel is a message which puts God above all else, even family. God calls on us to have an allegiance to him and his gospel above ALL other things and ALL other people. And if you're not sure if Jesus really means that, then listen to verses 37-38 – Jesus says:

*** “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”*

To take up your cross and follow Christ means you will LOSE your life because you will love *Him* first. It means denying your **own life**. Your life does not belong to you, or your work, or your mother or father or husband or wife or children. Your life belongs to **Jesus**.

As hard as it is, we need to tie that ribbon around our leg, so everyone can see it. Often we won't face persecution because we conceal that ribbon from the world. But as hard as it is, and as difficult as the consequences may be on this earth, concealing our faith is a denial of Christ. And the result is that *He* will deny us. So let's **not** conceal our faith. It's not about bashing people over the head with the Bible every chance we get. But it IS about always looking for, and making, the opportunities to speak. It's about **NOT BEING ASHAMED** and **NOT BEING AFRAID** to be open about our faith when the opportunity arises.

God **promises** us that:

1. He will speak for us
2. He will stand for us, and
3. He will save us.

Let people who meet you walk away saying *“I know what they believe!”* And you don't need to start with strangers. Start with those who know you the most. Those you see every week. Your family, people at work, friends, neighbours. Make sure that *they* know that you stand for Christ, and that you're not ashamed of Him.

Let's pray now that we will have more opportunities to take up our cross in 2007 and stand out. If you're game! Pray.