

Characteristics of Missionary Disciples Part 1
Matthew 10:26-33

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Tomorrow it begins for many of you. Later this week it begins for more of you. By next week all students will be back in school. The return to school ripples through society in a lot of different ways. Families with school age children have to get into the school routine which includes earlier bedtimes. Traffic patterns return to normal volumes with families back from vacation. Malls are quieter during the week and busier on weekends. Almost everyone gets into that production, work and study mindset that comes with the onset of a new school year.

Part of the return to school ritual can include obtaining new clothes and school supplies. When I was in Junior High, I remember my Mom doing my school shopping for me. I hated shopping especially for clothes at that age. I still do to an extent. But my Mom loved it. So she would get the clothes and the school supplies.

One year she brought home this backpack from a place called Logos Christian Bookstore. It actually said the name of the store on the back of the backpack. Mom was very excited about it. I was horrified. I couldn't wear a backpack that promoted a "Christian" book store to school. People would make fun of me. But I was a little too shy to say something about it. Mom was so pleased with it. Besides it didn't actually say "Logos Christian Bookstore" but "Logos Books." Maybe I would get away without anyone really noticing anything.

I went to school with the backpack and no one commented for a couple of days. But on about the third day, I heard the voice of one of the most outspoken kids in my class. As we exited school he said very loudly to a friend, "Hey Joe, did you see the backpack Anderst is wearing? It comes from a place where they sell religious books." Then he laughed loudly and everyone near me took note of the backpack. I scurried home out of embarrassment disgusted that he had done this. Yet I didn't say anything to my Mom. I knew that as a Christian I was supposed to stand up for Christ. So I thought this was just part of it even though I was afraid.

The next day, I took the backpack again. And when school was done loudmouth following me out. "Oh no," I thought to myself. What's he going to say now? But he didn't say anything. All I heard was what sounded like someone clearing their throat. Then I heard another sound something like "pfft." I looked around and saw him standing behind me kind of grinning. But I didn't think much of it – until a couple of other kids got behind me on the sidewalk on the way home. I heard one of them gasp "look at what's on his backpack." I was sure they referred to the Logos logo. So I decided to just ignore them and go home. But when I got home, I looked at the back of my backpack. There was a blob

of something that the loud guy had worked up in his mouth and then spat onto my backpack. He hit a perfect strike. It hit the backpack near the top and ran down the whole length before dripping on the ground.

Well that was it for me. I had enough of this torment. I just wanted it to stop. So I showed my Mom the backpack. Then I told her I would not be bringing it anymore. I didn't need the abuse. The next day, I think the loudmouth asked me about my backpack. I made some excuse and he left me alone. I gained relief from the torment. But I remember that whenever I saw that backpack in storage over the next years, I felt a twinge of guilt. It reminded me of how I caved to this person's mockery really over my faith. It's like I feared his taunts more than I cared about standing up for Christ.

That became a pattern in my life for the next few years. I was a closet Christian. I distinctly remember another time in high school when an opportunity arose for me to identify myself as a Christian that I deliberately avoided. Persecution came and I buckled under its weight. In those days, fear overruled my faith and belief that God had this in hand.

If you're a Christian here today, I wonder if you have experienced persecution or rejection because of your faith in Christ. If so, how did you respond? Sometimes we can let our concerns over what others think of us overpower our concern for what God thinks of us. We want to please God but we can't see Him. Yet our tormentors are right in front of us. If you denied Christ, as I did, we're not alone. Jesus' closest disciple, Peter, denied him the night of Jesus' arrest. There were other times when the disciples lived more in fear than in faith. Yet eventually they stood up for their faith even under severe persecution. Today, we're going to see how Jesus' built up their courage to remain true to Him when times of persecution came. In fact, we see will that **Jesus and His promises provide missionary disciples with courage.**

Now if you haven't been with us recently, you might be wondering why I am not presenting this message to a conference of missionaries. You might be saying "I'm no missionary. So why is he talking about how Jesus provides missionary disciples with courage." Yet we have learned that Jesus not only calls people to become every day disciples or followers of Him. He also commands Christians to become missionary disciples – followers who will go and proclaim the good news or Gospel of the kingdom that Jesus brought in with His coming. So though not many of us are career missionaries, all Christians are missionary disciples in their own context. Jesus focuses on this in the second major section of teaching in Matthew. Today's passage answers one question. Why can missionary disciples have courage in

the face of persecution? We're going to explore that and then evaluate our own courage level when it comes to remaining true to Christ when it's tough.

Matthew 10:26-33 (ESV)

²⁶“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³²So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Last week we saw Jesus alert His disciples to the reality of persecution in their missionary work. Today we see Jesus encourage His disciples to persevere through persecution. Jesus first commands them to be courageous. “So have no fear of them.” He doesn’t say “I hope that you gain some courage for this” or “I hope this will strengthen you a little.” He says “Have no fear of them.”

Now does that work? Say you are afraid and someone else comes along and says “don’t be afraid.” Does that deal with your fear? Maybe. Sometimes their encouragement or their presence in a situation can be enough for us to gain courage to persevere through whatever’s coming. But other times we can receive the command to be courageous yet still experience fear on the inside. Sometimes we need good reasons to “have no fear.”

That’s what Jesus provides in the next verses. He gives the disciples reasons why we can be courageous in difficult situations. **Why can the disciples be courageous? Reason #1 – The truth of God’s message will one day be revealed.** Verses 26 and 27 again – “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.”

What is Jesus talking about here? Well he certainly says that they need to spread his teaching to others. They need to proclaim it from the housetops. To us, that seems like a weird place to go announce news. Most of our housetops have pointed or peaked rooves. So if we went up on our rooves and starting proclaiming God’s word, people would likely call the fire department to get us down from there. But in those days, people lived in villages or cities where lots passed by their homes. Their houses had flat rooves. They would store grain up there and other stuff they couldn’t find room for in the house. You could walk up there. So if you stood on your roof and proclaimed a message, you were in a good spot for your message to be heard.

So Jesus says “Go public with this message.” But why would that provide a reason not to fear? Would it give you courage if Jesus said to you – “Have no fear because you must go public with my teaching?” That might bring more persecution. That doesn’t really seem to be a good reason. Yet he’s tying the command to not fear to what follows. “Nothing is covered that will not be revealed or is hidden that will not be known.” The interpretation that makes the most sense to me is that one day the truth of God’s message will be revealed. The truth about Jesus ministry will be known. The persecutors will be proven wrong in their persecution. If that’s what Jesus means, then this does give reason for courage. The message you spread is not some hokey religious cocktail that we hope people will drink. We proclaim something true and this message will one day be vindicated.

It’s kind of like the difference between a salesperson who does their job just to get a pay check compared to the salesperson who actually believes in the product they are selling. You can sometimes tell the difference. The salesperson who wants the pay check says the company sales pitch just to try to get you to buy it. But the salesperson who really believes in the product and thinks it can better your life will talk persuasively and enthusiastically. They will share from the heart that this is something we really need because they believe that it delivers what it promises. We can be courageous in the face of persecutors because Jesus Christ, His life and teaching and person are all true. There’s something encouraging and fortifying about proclaiming and living in truth. So do not fear your persecutors because this message will be shown to be true.

Jesus goes on to provide another reason why the disciples can be courageous amidst their persecutors. Before I actually give you the reason, we have to wrestle with the text a little. In verse 28, Jesus says, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Basically Jesus uses an argument from the lesser to the greater. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. So there he’s talking about other human beings. Humans have the ability to kill one another – to take another person’s physical life from them. Now that’s a scary proposition. We very likely would fear someone who tried to take our life. But though humans can persecute Christians unto death, there is someone who has even more power.

Jesus says we should fear Him more. Why? He has the power to destroy both soul and body in hell. Now who has this kind of power? Well some think it’s the devil. But there is no other place in the Bible where Jesus or God

commands His disciples to fear the devil. We are called to resist him, beware of him and hold up our shields of faith to resist his flaming arrows. But we're not commanded to fear him.

Yet there is another whom the Bible tells us to fear in a healthy revered way. Fear the Lord. Fear God. The vast majority of Christian commentators throughout history have concluded that the "him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" is God Himself. So here's the second reason Jesus gives to encourage His disciples. **Reason #2 – God has greater power over body and soul than any persecutor.** Now how can this encourage someone facing persecution? Well, there are times when Christians face death for their faith. That is an awful and tragic event. But it is far less tragic than when a person dies apart from God. That person faces the destruction of body and soul in hell. So the disciple facing death by his persecutors can at least gain courage with the fact that God has them covered for eternity. They know that they do not have anything to worry about after they die. But the person who chooses to fear men more than he or she fears God will face much worse problems after their death.

I think we need to spend some time further with this verse to gain a grip on the sobering reality of Jesus' words. First of all, many people today deny the existence of Hell. They categorize it as some old medieval belief that needs to be tossed in the dustbin of history along with fairies, mermaids and trolls. But the New Testament and especially Matthew consistently quote Jesus' references to Hell. (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 33) The word translated "hell" here is "Gehenna" which referred the fires in the refuse piles outside of Jerusalem. There was a constant fire or burning in Jerusalem's dump. Jesus uses that to illustrate Hell. It will be a place of torment, suffering and a lack of satisfaction of desires. In Mark 9:47-48 Jesus says [47] And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, [48] 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' (Mark 9:47-48 ESV)

Jesus says it is God who has the power to destroy both soul and body in hell. Yet if we acknowledge that there is a hell – and if we acknowledge that Jesus talks about God here, we have some more challenges. What does the word "destroy" mean? Does this somehow imply that God will take those who have rejected him and annihilate them after judgment? Will He wipe them out so they cease to exist?

Some Christians have concluded destroy must mean "cause to cease existing." Why? They cannot come to grips with a God who would put people in a place where they will suffer for eternity. How could a loving God do that? Or

how could God be just in doing this? Isn't it an overreaction on His part to send people to Hell for eternity when they have only sinned during the years of their lifespan? When the issue is posed like that, annihilation becomes an attractive alternative. It is seen to rescue God's character and deal with the ongoing and apparently needless and cruel suffering of those in Hell.

But I do not agree with those who conclude "destroy" must mean annihilate or cause to cease to exist for several reasons. The word, translated destroy, does not automatically mean cease to exist in the Bible. Sometimes it does. Other times it is used to refer to the ruin and loss of all that a person or a kingdom once had. If someone says "I have been destroyed by the stock market down turn," it doesn't mean they've ceased to exist. It means they've experienced financial ruin. In the book of Revelation, the prophecies talk about the beast going to destruction. But later he is thrown into the lake of fire where he will be tormented forever. So he is destroyed but he still exists.

The argument that a God of love would never do this is made from a human perspective. We find it difficult to believe in a God who both loves and oversees eternal punishment. But we are not qualified to dictate what God should be like. We don't know the whole picture. Or the charge that eternal conscious unending torment is an overreaction to earthly sins may reveal how lightly we view sin and its destruction. Adam and Eve just took a piece of fruit from a forbidden tree. No big deal, right? Except that act set off the chain reaction of sin entering the world and leading to all kinds of suffering and hurt and evil. In fact we all deserve to go to Hell for our sins, yet God has mercifully provided rescue from Hell.

Though annihilationist's might believe they gain something by concluding Hell is not forever, they might lose a lot more than they realize. If Hell is not forever and you just cease to exist after you die, why bother entering into the difficult calling of following Christ? Why not just live like we want? Oh, you'll miss out on heaven. But if I die and cease to exist and don't know I'm missing out on that, will it really matter? And if annihilationists are right, might we lose our motivation for evangelism or proclaiming the good news of what God has done in Christ?

To face up to the fact that Jesus talks about His Father who has the power to destroy both soul and body in Hell for eternity deeply disturbs me. And that's part of why Jesus reveals this to us. When we look at the unsaved people in our lives, they're not just taking a different path. They are on the road to an eternity of hell. When they die, we won't be able to say "their suffering is over. Their suffering is just beginning!" If this does not motivate us to a deeper and

earnest prayer for lost people around us and a desire to share the good news with them, I don't know what will. I know this disturbs those of you who have children or parents or other family members or good friends or coworkers who do not know Christ. I pray that this moves us to cry out more deeply to the Lord for His mercy and open doors to share with others about Christ.

Jesus has given the disciples and us two reasons why we need not fear our persecutors. One – there will come a time when the truth of Jesus' words and life will be made known. Two – we fear the one who has a far greater power over body and soul than our persecutors. These reasons require missionary disciples to take a long term view of things. We might not see the day when there is widespread realization that Jesus' teaching was true. We might still die! So these reasons for encouragement require us to expand our viewpoint beyond the next few weeks and our own comfort zone. It requires us to go beyond the viewpoint that says – "I am willing to spread God's good news – as long as I can keep my house and my family is safe and grows in prosperity and I am relatively comfortable in life pursuing the goals I want to pursue, then I will be a missionary disciple. Sometimes Christians lose their lives for their faith – like we talked about last week – 100 Christians a month die for their faith around the world. We need to adopt the eternal view – not the short term comfort view.

But after this very sobering reason, Jesus provides great comfort that can give the disciples great courage.

Reason #3 - 10:29-31 - God has intensive care like compassion for His children. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Think of a sparrow – how insignificant to the functioning of the world. The fall of a sparrow does not impact stock markets or the test you're writing this week or the traffic patterns on Anthony Henday or the project you face at work or the illness of your child. Compared to those, the sparrow is of utmost insignificance. Yet, God pays attention to the fall of one of these little birds. If God is so aware of the happenings of an insignificant little bird, He is aware of all the happenings in our lives. He's watching over us on our wedding day and on sick days. He pays attention when we get baptized and when we go to work. He's aware of that nagging pain we carry that we should probably get looked at some time. He knows the route we take to work or school. He's aware of people we get along well with and people we have difficulties with. He knows our struggles, fears and anxieties. He knows all about our bank accounts and needs.

He watches over all of our loved ones when we're unable to. He has an even deeper concern for our loved ones who don't know Christ than we do.

He pays more attention to us than an ICU nurse pays attention to a patient on life support. In fact, he knows the number of hairs on our head. Now no one goes around and counts their hairs. But God knows. I wonder if he has a room in heaven that has the constantly adjusted hair totals for each of us. If we wanted quick summary of hair numbers for everyone here, God could rattle them off. But God knows the exact number of something that we don't know about ourselves. His knowledge of that shows how closely and deeply He pays attention to each of us.

Jesus has given us some very powerful reasons for courage amidst persecution. He didn't just state them. He died and rose again to prove the truth of His Words. He died to purchase us protection from the one who destroys both body and soul. He died to enable a reconciled relationship with the Father who shows intensive care like concern for every area of our lives.

If you don't know Christ, Jesus also calls you to come to Him. God desires to forgive your sin and reconcile you to Himself. You can come to Him today by putting the entire trust of your life upon Christ and not yourself.

Christians, Jesus calls us to have courage amidst persecution. One way we do this is to acknowledge Him before men. Jesus says in verses 32 and 33 "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge them before the Father. If we deny Him before men, Jesus will deny us before the Father". He forgives when we deny as He did Peter. But Jesus calls us to move past our denials of Christ to acknowledging Him publicly.

In a way, many of us have done that just by being here today. I want to close our time by giving you another opportunity to do this. Maybe you have hesitated to let others know that Christ is your Lord. Maybe there have been times when you denied Christ in word or action. But now you see clearly what He has done and what He commands. I am going to give you an opportunity to practice what Jesus commands. In a moment, I want to invite anyone here who acknowledges Jesus as their Lord to stand if you are able; or lift a hand or in Brad's case, lift your head. This is a serious thing. There might be people even here who might persecute you for being a Christ follower. I want you to prayerfully consider this and not do it just because someone else is doing it.

But Jesus calls his disciples to acknowledge Him before others. So I give you that opportunity now. If you want to acknowledge Jesus as your Lord, Savior and Friend, please stand, or raise a hand or raise your head now.

