

Matthew 10:17-20

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As Jesus prepares His disciples for the mission they are about to undertake, He prophesies about what will happen to them for His sake and promises that God's Spirit will be in them and speak through them when they face these persecutions. He also tells them that they will take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The parallel gospel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 13:9-11 and Luke 12:11-12.

After His metaphors of warnings and advice, Jesus clarifies who the wolves are. The twelve are to *beware of men*. Jesus then gives five short but specific prophecies. He shares three prophetic warnings, one prophetic twist in the reach of the gospel, and one powerful prophetic comfort they can rest in *when* they face the danger.

As Christ shares these things, at least three interesting dynamics are in play.

Within the immediate context Jesus is preparing His disciples for this particular mission to preach the good news to the House of Israel that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 10:7). He is giving them their orders for this mission, telling them where to go and not to go, what to take with them and what not to bring; and He is giving them practical advice and warnings. But in a broader context, He is preparing them for their life mission.

This occasion appears to be the first time Jesus tells His disciples to go do the work without His direct oversight. Jesus has already taught them with His words. He has shown them how to live and make disciples by His example. And now He is empowering them to be the disciple-makers and harvesters of His kingdom. This mission is to the house of Israel. It is but the first of many missions they will undertake for the kingdom. It is noteworthy that a key element to making disciples is to send them out to do ministry for themselves. Teach-send-teach seems to be the example we are given to follow. Discipleship is to be active. We learn to be disciples by making other disciples.

At the same time Jesus is giving His disciples orders, advice, and caution for this particular mission, laying a foundation for their lifetime of mission work, Jesus is also prophesying. Jesus is not hiding what will happen to His disciples if they continue to follow Him. Jesus selected followers who were willing to die for the cause. He is now instructing them on how to be shrewd. Jesus wants courageous followers who will face death, but not foolish followers who die unnecessarily.

The first of the three prophetic concerns is: *they will hand you over to the courts*. The Bible does not say if any of the disciples were arrested and handed over to the courts on this particular mission. The tone of the disciples' reports following a similar mission that Jesus sent a larger group of disciples on suggests that no one had yet been arrested (Luke 10:17). The first time the Bible mentions that some of Jesus's disciples are arrested is in Acts 4:3, when Peter and John are handed *over to the courts* of the Sadducees. It seems likely that men would do this in order to curry favor with leaders, from whom they might receive some earthly benefit. The disciples are to be aware of this, and proceed with caution.

The second prophetic concern is: *they will scourge you in their synagogues*. This too does not appear to happen now. But it does happen later. After the apostles were arrested by the Jerusalem Council, miraculously freed, and arrested again, the Council "flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40).

The third prophetic warning is *and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake*. The impact that God's kingdom will have through Jesus's disciples will not only stir up local conflict but will garner the attention of regional *governors* and national *kings*. It is unlikely that this happened during the disciples' first mission when they went to the house of Israel.

The Book of Acts does not share any details of specific occasions where the twelve were brought *before governors and kings*. Though it does say that James was executed and Peter was arrested and was to be executed on the order of King Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1-5). After this, the narrative of Acts shifts to the Apostle Paul to focus on his missionary journeys. But one of the Book of Acts' main focuses for the final quarter of its account is Paul being *brought before* the Roman *governors* Felix (Acts 24) and Festus (Acts 25:1-22), and King Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:23-26:32), before Paul was transferred to Rome where he was to stand trial *before* Caesar.

John tells us that he was on the Island of Patmos when he received the vision of Jesus and received His message to the seven churches (Revelation 1:9). The reason John was on Patmos was because he was exiled there, and this order could only have come from someone with the authority of a Roman governor. And while the Bible does not trace the lives of most of these disciples, Church tradition testifies that all three of these prophetic warnings occurred on multiple occasions and in many different places.

Jesus is clear that these arrests, and beatings, and appearances before governors and kings occur *for My sake*. There is an implied double-meaning in this phrase. The reason *men hand over* the disciples and *scourge* them is because they want to stop them from preaching the Kingdom of Christ. If the disciples would stop living and preaching for Christ's *sake* and follow the patterns of the world, the persecutions would cease. They will be arrested because they live for Christ's *sake*. But the second meaning is that the arrests, and scourgings themselves occur for Christ's *sake*. That is, these persecutions testify to the faithfulness of their witness. The disciples' faithfulness under fiery trials serves as a witness to God and they are *for the sake* of His glory. To willingly embrace suffering and shame *for* Christ's *sake* will lead to the greatest rewards of this life (Romans 8:17b, Revelation 3:21). Christ will glorify those who glorify His name by willingly suffering for His *sake*.

Jesus continues this thought. These things will be *a testimony to them*. Their patient suffering will be a sign and a witness of Christ's kingdom to the ones who are persecuting them. In faithfully enduring suffering and loss, Jesus' disciples will bear testimony even to those who persecute them. Again, this demonstrates the wisdom of Jesus' selection of disciples who were willing to fight and die for the cause of following Him.

Jesus then gives a prophetic twist when He adds the phrase *and to the Gentiles*, to the phrase *as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles*. The *Gentiles* who will be involved in arresting and scourging the disciples will be Roman authorities. The disciples' testimony will impact Jew and Gentile alike. Jesus is informing the disciples that ultimately the kingdom of heaven is open not just to the Jews but to everyone. He already told His followers this in His remarks about the Roman Centurion's faith (Matthew 8:11-12), but now He is letting them know that they will be the ones who deliver this message *to the Gentiles*. This remark also is a clear indicator that Jesus is not exclusively speaking about this particular mission because He has forbidden them to go by the way of the *Gentiles* as they preach the kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6).

After prophesying these sobering warnings and surprising twists, Jesus gives His disciples a prophetic promise of comfort. He tells the disciples *but when they will hand you over*, indicating clearly that this is inevitable. And *when* this happens, *do not worry about how or what you are to say*. He tells them *not* to be anxious *about what* things they *are* supposed to say or even *how* they *are* to say them. The reason they don't need to *worry* about *what* they *are* to say in these situations is because *it will be given* to them *in that hour*. Someone *will* let them know *what* and *how* they *are* to speak in these situations. And that Someone is The Holy Spirit. *For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you*.

Jesus promises, as He will again after the Lord's Supper, that God *the Spirit* will be with them (John 14:16-17, 16:5-15). It is worth observing that here Jesus says that *the Spirit is of the Father*, while in John 16:7 Jesus promises that He will send *the Spirit*. These verses testify the Trinitarian truth that *the Spirit* is both of the *Father* and the *Son*. Jesus affirms that when these situations occur *it is not you* (disciples) *who speak*, rather *it is the Spirit who speaks* (not only with, but also) *in you*.

Jesus's remarks align with what takes place on and after the Day of Pentecost when God's *Spirit* comes to dwell within His disciples (Acts 2:1-4).

Biblical Text

But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.