

February 1, 2026

## LOYALTY TESTED: MATT 10:16-20,26-34

### Introductory Activity

**Direct and Ask:** Direct the group to page 87 of their Personal Study Guide and ask the question on the page: “What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty? What makes you loyal to them?” (You might offer some options: Coke vs. Pepsi, Ford vs. Chevy, Saints vs. Cowboys, Yankees vs. Cubs, etc.)

**Explain:** “An innate part of human nature is loyalty. People hold a variety of loyalties such as brand loyalties... Loyalty is found in choice of sports teams, television news channels, and political parties. We are loyal to these things for a variety of reasons. But the only valid reason should be, is it worthy of my loyalty? Even more poignant—is my loyalty worth dying for?” (ETB PSG, 87)

**Summarize Transition:** Today, we will see that following Jesus will require loyalty to Him and His Mission. Last week, we examined Matthew 8 and 9, in which the author records several examples of Jesus’ healing ministry. This trend continues through the end of Chapter 9. The chapter concludes with an admonition to “pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.” In chapter 10, Jesus sends His workers into the harvest.

Verses 2-4 provide a list of the 12 apostles. “The word apostle simply means ‘one who is sent.’ It contains no inherent authority other than that given by the One who did the sending.” (ETB LG, 108) Jesus sends out these 12 with the authority to “proclaim, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’<sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons.” (Matt. 10:7-8) He also instructs them on what to take, how to deal with money, and how to interact with those they encounter. In today’s passage, He is going to instruct them regarding persecution on this first evangelistic journey to the Jews and on their future missionary journeys. Let’s examine what Jesus says and be reminded that “Jesus is worth everything.” (ETB LG, 107)

### 1. SNAKES AND DOVES (MATT. 10:16-20)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 10:16-20.

**Explain:** While Jesus is sending out the apostles for a relatively easy first assignment to continue His preaching and healing ministry to the “lost children of Israel,” He is preparing them for the more dangerous missions ahead. In this passage, He first presents **The Situation Before Them**. Verse 16 is interesting if you consider the One sending them out. In John 10:11, Jesus describes Himself as the “Good Shepherd.” We might assume a good shepherd never allows his sheep to be among wolves. Nevertheless, our

#### Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

A NOTE ON EVANGELISM VS. MISSIONS IN THE MODERN CONTEXT: Evangelism is typically understood to be sharing the gospel without crossing cultural lines. Missions is sharing the gospel across cultural lines. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus instructs the 12 to focus the efforts of this journey on Jews, not Gentiles or Samaritans. This is an evangelistic journey. Later, they would go to “the ends of the earth.”

Good Shepherd is *sending* His sheep out among wolves. He sends them “not simply *toward* the wolves but trustfully moving right into the midst of wolves.” (Chrysostom in ACC, 200, emphasis added) He “tells His disciples to hang out with the wolves... to go to dangerous places where they will find themselves among evil rapacious people.” (Exalting, 136) Christians who are on mission will not retreat to the safety of their tribe, hang out only with those who warm their heart, or rest in the repose of their favorite pew. Instead, they will engage the enemy, expose evil, and face fierce wolves. That is the situation before the disciples and for those of us engaging in the Great Commission at home and abroad. As a result, Jesus tells them and us how we should conduct ourselves.

In the concluding words of verse 16, He reveals that “We are not to be as sheep in their sheepishness or in their foolishness. That is why Jesus adds the bit about the snake and the dove.” (Preaching, 287) Like serpents, we are to be shrewd and practice “wisdom and insight... [and] be ‘wise’ (ESV) or ‘wary’ (NASB).” (ETBC, 98) Like doves, we are to be innocent and “*unmixed* [in our] purity of intention.” (NAC, 173–174) Herschel Hobbs wrote, “Alone, [shrewdness] produces evil and [simplicity] results in gullibility. But together they produce the spirit which enabled the early Christians successfully to storm citadels of sin.” (NAC, 174 note 22) When we engage with wolves, we cannot let our guard down (c.f. Matt. 7:15ff). We can’t let our smarts diminish, nor can we let our holiness wane. As Leon Morris says, we are to be “smart sheep, sheep who use our heads, sheep who don’t overestimate the benevolence of wolves.” (quoted in ETBC, 98)

**Discuss:** What are some situations in which a believer should practice shrewdness when engaging evangelistically? (In other words, when should we make sure to use our smarts when intentionally sharing the gospel?)

**Explain:** When sharing the gospel in a dangerous area of town, be aware of your surroundings. When sharing the gospel in a home, be aware of the situation. Also, we should be careful who we trust and those around them. When sharing on the mission field, be aware of laws and customs. I remember sitting at a university dining hall table in a closed country having Bible study with no Bibles on the table. Having them out would have drawn attention to those practicing their faith in this hostile situation. Instead, we discussed what they had been studying privately. In verse 17, Jesus presents **The Opposition Before Them**. The same opposition faced by those students at the dining hall table.

Reread verses 17

**Explain:** Consider the individuals who are going to “hand over” the missionaries and evangelists to be flogged. It is those to whom they were sharing the gospel. As the apostle experienced the book of Acts and missionaries and evangelistic Christians experience today, delivering the great gift of the gospel will be met with opposition and persecution by those to whom we are delivering the gift. But we should not let The Situation or

Augustine writes, “Innocent as doves that we may not harm anyone; cautious as snakes that we may be careful of letting anyone harm us.” (ACC, 201)

“We are called to be martyrs, not maniacs; we are to be simple hearted, but we are not to be simpletons.” (Spurgeon, 122)

“They will not shelter you, but ‘deliver you up;’ they will not arrange for your entertainment, but for you accusation before councils; they will not load you with decoration, but lash you with scourges in their places of public assembly.” (Spurgeon, 122)

An anonymous ancient preacher wrote, “they will whip you in their synagogues. Where there are prayers and praise and readings or sacrifices, there they will punish the apostles.” (ACC, 200)

the Opposition Before us stop us because Jesus next presents **The Opportunity Before Them** and before us. In verse 18, He explains that the opposition is really an opportunity. The early apostles were simple men with no connection to the upper reaches of Roman government. Their initial mission was to speak to everyday people. Yet, Jesus wanted the “governors and kings” to hear the gospel as well. The everyday masses would bring them before such powerful men through false accusations. As a result, the missionaries would “bear witness” of the truth before leading officials. Opposition can lead to opportunity. Even today, this is true. It is true in the safety of the United States. When we face minor persecution, we have the opportunity to explain ourselves to those who persecute us. When we go into unsavory situations, we have the opportunity to explain why we do so. (ex. What are you doing in this part of town? Don’t live out in the nice part of town? I do. Let me tell you why I am here...) Even in nations and regions where it is truly unsafe to share the gospel, opposition provides opportunity. In his book *Companion God: A Cross-Cultural Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, G. T. Montague writes, “In countries today where Christianity is outlawed, more people learn about the gospel in the courtroom than on the street.” (quoted in NAC, 175 note 24) But what do we say and how do we say it when we find ourselves in these situations? Jesus tells them and us not to worry about it. In verses 19 and 20, He reminds them and us of **The Spirit in Them** and us.

**Explain:** Jesus is not negating the necessity of preparation. We are to study our Bibles. We are to learn methods of sharing the gospel and defending the faith. But when we face opposition, whether it be during a home visit, an evangelistic effort at the fair, or before wolves in a foreign country, we should not be anxious about our response. Instead, we should depend on the Spirit to empower us, embolden us, and unencumber our thoughts. As Spurgeon said of the early apostles, “They speak and yet they speak not: God is silent and yet he speaks by them.” (Spurgeon, 123) The same Spirit works in us to speak.

**Summarize Transition:** Jesus is sending out His first messengers. He still sends out messengers. Platt reminds us, “When you go to danger, when you’re sheep in the midst of wolves, you need His presence and power more than anything else.” (Exalting, 137) We need His power to be smart and holy. We need His power stand in the midst of opposition. We need His power to “bear witness” of the truth. We cannot do any of that alone. Only living *in Christ* is it possible.

In the next passage, Jesus is going to continue encouraging His sheep as they prepare to face the wolves.

## 2. SPARROWS AND HAIRS (MATT. 10:26-31)

**Read** (or have someone read) Matthew 10:26-31.

### Notes:

“the disciples would not be persecuted because they were criminals but rather because of their relationship to Jesus and their proclamation of His gospel” (ETBC, 99)

“The danger of our lives increases in proportion to the depth of our relationship with Christ.” (Exalting, 138)

“We are so prone to sit back and settle for religious routine and comfortable Christianity, because its safe. And the world like us in that mode.” (Exalting, 138)

“Both the content of what they were to say as well as the manner in which they were to say it would be given to them at that hour.” (ETBC, 99)

**Explain:** We skipped over verses 21-25. In these verses, Jesus reveals the harsh reality of the great hatred that will be inflicted upon His followers. He then offers them a kind solace by explaining that their experience of persecution will mirror His own. “Therefore,” He tells them, do not fear because **The Future Revealing of Man** is coming. The proclamation of the gospel will reveal the hearts of men and, in the end, God will reveal the hearts and deeds of all mankind. We should “anticipate the future, and be not overwhelmed by the present.” (Spurgeon, 127) The good, the bad, and the ugly will come to light at God’s judgment seat. And since God is the great revealer, we should imitate Him in this life by revealing the Kingdom message to all men. (c.f. Spurgeon, 127)

Verse 27 is where we get the phrase “shout it from the rooftops.” In that day, the large flat roofs were used to proclaim important messages. (c.f. ETBC, 101) Verse 27 does not mean that Jesus was sharing secret, esoteric knowledge with the disciples. Instead, the verse poetically presents the reality of their training and their future mission. Through them, there would be **A Great Revelation to Man**. As the ancient bishop John Chrysostom wrote, “He was conversing with them quietly in a small corner of Palestine. In contrast with this tone of voice, they would soon be preaching with boldness of speech that would in due time be conferred upon them... For they were soon to be commissioned to speak not to one or two of three cities but to the whole world.” (Chrysostom in ACC, 205)

**Discuss:** In church life, we often spend time quietly studying the Word in small groups. We also often speak of sharing the gospel with our friends and family in private settings. Jesus instructs His disciples, and us, to declare the gospel from the rooftops. How can you, your small group, or church boldly and loudly proclaim the gospel today?

**Explain:**

- **Individually:** Peter stood boldly on the day of Pentecost and proclaimed the message of Jesus to the Jews. Paul and others travelled the Mediterranean and boldly proclaimed the Kingdom to the Roman world. Men and women throughout church history have stood boldly before opposition and proclaimed the Truth of Scripture. How can our lives as tradesmen and women, office workers, homemakers, timbermen, schoolteachers, or nurses compare to these great men and women of the past? Are we to stand on our tailgates in the grocery store parking lot and declare the gospel? Maybe. Are we to commandeer the doctor’s office waiting room and proclaim the Truth? Maybe, if the Spirit leads. Are we to climb onto the roof of our homes and install loudspeakers to replay last week’s sermon? It could be done. More likely, we are to boldly share the love of Christ with those deemed unlovable because of drug addiction. We are to boldly hold to biblical conviction when asked to do something unethical. We are to boldly respond with Godly wisdom, not condemnation, when a coworker or friend is making bad decisions.
- **Small Group:** Small groups throughout the ages have boldly proclaimed the truth. There was that small group of Moravians in the early 1700’s who attempted to sell themselves into slavery as a means of sharing the gospel with enslaved people. When the law forbade it, they moved to the Caribbean and voluntarily lived and worked in harsh conditions to fulfill their mission. There was the Cambridge Seven in the late 1800’s who left everything for the gospel. These seven prominent athletes and aristocratic young men gave up their fabulous lives to move to the Far East and serve in Hudson Taylor’s China Inland Mission. What can

your small group do? Could you give up everything and move as a group to the mission field? Possibly. Or maybe you could intentionally live out your faith as a small group. Adopt a class at the local school and provide supplies for a party or for an upcoming activity planned by the teacher. You could adopt a road in the community and commit as a group to pray for and make a gospel visit to every home on the road in the next three months. Your group could volunteer to give all the kids' Sunday School teachers one Sunday off and teach the kids' classes. Being bold as a small group does not mean being outlandish. It means being intentional. To paraphrase a minister from the past generation: unless we become intentional about good intentions, our good intentions are nothing but that.

- **Churches:** Local churches throughout the centuries have done great things for the gospel. The church at Antioch was a multiethnic congregation that sent out the first missionaries in answer to God's call. The Brooklyn Tabernacle, before it became a large and famous church, prioritized prayer gatherings and welcomed the outcast. The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham boldly proclaimed the Truth of Scripture and created a welcoming atmosphere for college students. The story goes that in their early days, a carload of college students showed up. The next week, they brought their friends, doubling the size of the small church plant. Now the Summit Church is filled with young people, and it challenge these college students to give two years after graduation to missions and ministry. To date, the church has sent out over 2,000 young people to plant churches, with more than 700 serving internationally. **What can your church do?** Prioritize missions and actually call out the called? Pray boldly and intentionally for your community? Create a welcoming environment and challenge young people to serve the Lord? This spring, our church will boldly proclaim the gospel by distributing at least 100 Bibles and Bible studies related to the resurrection of Jesus. We are challenging each other to participate by: donating to purchase the packets (\$25/each), providing the names of the unchurched or unbelievers in our community to receive the packets, and participating in the distribution of the Bible packets. This is not outlandish or extraordinary. It will not go down in the history books. But imagine the impact it could have on 100 homes leading up to Easter.

**Pray:** Take a moment to discuss how you, your group, and your church might boldly proclaim the gospel. Pray that the Lord will provide guidance, wisdom, and courage to obey His call.

**Explain:** When individuals, groups, and churches begin to boldly proclaim the gospel, there will be pushback. Jesus focuses on that in this chapter of Matthew. He also reminds His disciples and us of **The Protecting Reliability of God**. In verses 28-30, He gives two reasons to obey His call. First, we practice courage because the world has no ultimate power over us. Yes, people can physically harm us and even kill us, but that should not scare us. One ancient preacher likens the threat of death to the destruction of a garment. He writes, "If a mad man destroyed someone's garment that is worn over the body, his victim would think of him as the inflictor of an injury, but there would be no harm to the victim's nature. In the same way if unbelievers murder the body that is worn over the soul, the soul is grieved by the murder, but there is no harm to the soul's nature." (ACC, 206) Instead of fearing those in the world, we should fear the Lord. We should display a reverential awe of the only truly powerful Judge and practice obedience to His call. Second, Jesus values you!

Notes:

**TEACHERS NOTE: PLEASE EMPHASIZE OUR SPRING OUTREACH IN YOUR GROUP TIME AND DISCUSS HOW YOUR GROUP CAN BE INVOLVED.**

The great King of the Universe knows the challenges faced by the smallest and least “valuable” bird in the market. The King of the Universe knows every last hair on your head. If He knows such things, He surely knows the challenges faced by those who boldly proclaim the gospel. Do not fear the world. Obey the Lord.

**Summarize and Transition:** In this passage, Jesus reminds His disciples not to fear but to proclaim the Word boldly. It is a challenge to us as individuals, small groups, and churches to do likewise. In the next passage, He will dig deeper into this subject and remind us of the consequences of not obeying.

### **3. PEACE AND SWORDS (MATT. 10:32-34)**

**Read** (or have someone read) Matthew 10:32-34.

**Explain:** This passage could be a little difficult to understand and easy to misinterpret if removed from its context and the broader teaching of Scripture. One important thing we should know here is that Jesus is not speaking of “losing your salvation.” Instead, He is speaking in the context of boldly proclaiming the gospel in the midst of persecution. To “acknowledge” is to confess Jesus as Lord. “Confession is...the fruit of faith.” (ACC, 210) Those who truly confess Christ as Lord and boldly proclaim the gospel will face persecution. Those who continue to acknowledge Christ while facing persecution are true followers of Christ and will be acknowledged by Christ. Those who disavow Christ in the face of persecution might have never truly confessed Christ as Lord. They will then be disavowed by Christ. Now we have to be careful here. Remember Peter, one of the closest and most trusted disciples of Jesus, denied Christ in the midst of persecution. Yet, as we see in the gospels and the book of Acts, he went on to serve the Lord faithfully. He did so after an encounter with Christ and repenting of his actions. So, let’s be careful not to use this passage as a means to pass judgment. Instead, let’s use this passage to encourage ourselves to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of persecution because persecution will come.

Jesus speaks of this in the verses we skipped before. There, He says that even families will be torn apart by hatred of the gospel and those who proclaim it (vv. 21-22). That is what Jesus is getting at in verse 34, where He says, “Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” When we read passages like Isaiah 9:6 and John 14:27, we are reminded that Christ brings peace to His disciples. However, that inward peace often leads to division. Leon Morris writes concerning our peace with God, “And that means war with evil and accordingly hostility against those who support the ways of wrong... his coming presents a challenge to which people respond differently... for some who oppose Jesus do so passionately, as do those who become his followers. And where strong and opposed feelings are held, conflict is inevitable.” (quoted in ETBC, 105) We should do all we can to maintain civil relationships with those around us. However, simply by proclaiming the gospel and biblical Truth we will incur malice.

**Summarize and Transition:** The purpose of this section of Scripture is to encourage us to faithfully proclaim the message despite persecution because hatred of the gospel and those who proclaim it is inevitable.

### **CONCLUDE**

We began our time together talking about brands or sports teams to which we are loyal. Those are fine and good, but ultimately do not matter. They should not divide us. Our loyalty to Christ is more consequential. It should motivate us to live rightly and proclaim the truth of Scripture boldly.

#### **Challenge:**

- How are you going to boldly proclaim the gospel as an individual, a small group, or a local church?
- Ask the Lord to give you the strength to do so and not lose courage when facing hardships from others.