

The Divisiveness of Jesus

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[0 : 00] and Silas. Thanks Alan for reading. It's a great day, isn't it? Spring is in the air, the first day of spring today, Google told me when I went online. And what a great day it is.

And hardly anyone has mentioned the rugby to me yet, but I'm sure you're all waiting to talk to me afterwards about the Grand Slam. In the meantime, and obviously much more importantly, if you could keep your Bibles open, we're going to look together at that passage in Matthew 10 that Alan just read so well for us. And it's not easy, is it? It's not the sort of passage you'd choose if you were just trying to show people the good side of being a Christian.

But at St Silas, I want us to be committed to looking at even the harder bits of the Bible, letting God set the agenda, working through books of the Bible, so that we tackle the bits that perhaps we wouldn't naturally have chosen to speak on, because we're committed to all of it being God's Word and helpful for us. But for that, we need to ask for God's help.

So let me lead us in a prayer. Let's bow our heads and I'll pray for God to help us in this. Heavenly Father, we thank you for what we have seen of the Lord Jesus together in Matthew's Gospel.

We bow our knees to him as the powerful one, the compassionate one, the trustworthy one. And so we pray that you will teach us, Lord, this morning, that you will help us to follow him.

[1 : 23] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I've done an outline. It's inside the notice sheet today. So it's on the green notice sheet, just on the third side there, if you find that helpful, just to know where we're going.

I've got some friends, Adam and Bridget. They've got a dog. We don't have a dog. I had to make a commitment to Kathy when we got married that we would never have a pet. She doesn't like pets. But we have friends who have a dog, Hamish.

And I saw them one week and they'd been walking in the Lake District with Hamish. And I knew they were going and said, how was your day in the lakes? And they looked traumatized. And they said it was awful because they'd had Hamish with them and he'd run on ahead and they couldn't catch him up.

And he'd attacked the sheep. And it was apparently just grotesque. This poor sheep was in absolute agony. And they were having to yell at Hamish to get him off the sheep.

But the sheep, you know, the damage had been done and there was blood everywhere. And they were really traumatized by what had happened. Now, one of the most famous images that Jesus uses of himself in the Bible is that he is the good shepherd.

[2 : 29] And it's an image that he uses with amazing history because God's people up to that time had failed God. And one of the key reasons why was that their spiritual leaders had failed them, that they're shepherds.

And through the prophet Ezekiel, God condemns the shepherds. And he says, I myself will come one day and be the shepherd of my sheep. And then Jesus comes.

He's Emmanuel, God with us, and then announces his arrival as the good shepherd, the one who's willing even to die for his sheep. And I don't know about you, but lots of Christians find that picture very special.

It's a picture of the authority of Jesus as our shepherd, of the way that he guards us and protects us and nurtures us. It's a great picture. And yet in our passage this morning, Jesus uses an absolutely shocking picture of what it looks like to be one of his people.

I don't know if you noticed that. In verse 16 at the very beginning. Just have a look at verse 16. I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So not just a warning that if you're one of God's people, metaphorically wonder, you could be attacked by a dog like Hamish and you wouldn't see them coming.

[3 : 45] No, rather Jesus says, I'm sending you out on a mission for me. And the picture of that is that it's like a shepherd sending out his sheep into a hillside where he knows there are wolves waiting.

Beying for blood. Hunting. Why would Jesus do that if he's the good shepherd? It shows us, doesn't it, that the mission of Jesus is so important, it's even worth suffering immense cost for.

Even if it came to that, it's worth dying for, for this mission. And if you've been with us in recent weeks, you'll know why. It's because everyone needs to be forgiven by God.

We're all spiritually sick and we need a spiritual doctor. We need forgiveness. And Jesus has announced that through him, anybody can be forgiven if you just come to him.

He sends out his people to share that news with the world. The problem is that even though that's a vital message for our world today, it's hugely divisive. And we have to be ready for that.

[4 : 49] I guess that's why there's such an extensive bit of teaching here on that. So we've got three things to understand about the division Jesus causes and then three things to remember. So first of all, it's a division that flows from mission.

Jesus says it's as he sends them out that they become like sheep among wolves. Because the great dividing point in the human race today is how you respond to Jesus.

We see that throughout the passage. If you have a look with me at verse 18, on my account, you will be brought before governors and kings. Verse 22, all men will hate you because of me.

And Jesus was being called Beelzebub. That was another name for the devil at the time. So in verse 25, if the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household.

It's extraordinary, isn't it? In recent weeks, we've seen what Jesus has come to do. The despised come to him and he loves them. The dirty come to him and he cleans them.

[5 : 56] The diseased come to him and he heals them. Even the dead can come, the dying, he's brought to the dying and he gives them life. He's wonderful. And whoever you are, you can come to him and be forgiven and have your life transformed.

But the opposition to him is so fierce that he dies a criminal's death, nailed to a cross. He tells us, if that's how they treated him, then as his ambassadors, why do we think we would be treated any differently?

And that's really important for me to understand. I don't know about you, but I'm an optimistic person. So I tend to think, and if you're anything like me, you'll sometimes find yourself thinking like this, that the days might be just around the corner when just a few more key people in government and in Glasgow will be converted.

And it will just, there'll be this avalanche of conversions and it will just become really easy to tell people about Jesus from then on. That's my optimism. I sometimes think, if only we at St. Silas just focus on loving people, looking out for them, meeting them where they're at, surely we'll get to the point where everyone will speak well of us.

It's not going to happen. Jesus says, war to you when all men speak well of you. If everyone speaks well of us, we're doing something wrong in terms of his mission.

[7 : 18] So let me ask you whether you are really living with this kind of division today. I think one of the hardest things reading Matthew 10 today in Glasgow is that it seems alien to us a lot of the time, doesn't it?

Now one reason for that is a good reason. It's that in God's kindness we do live in a place and a time where very unusually it's relatively easy to be a Christian.

We can meet as Christians without fear. We can share our faith with other people, try and persuade them and we don't get put in prison for that. And that's God's kindness to us.

That's a good thing. But another reason why we don't see this kind of division today is because we're not really playing our part properly in the mission that Jesus sends us out on.

If Jesus causes division and we don't notice it, maybe we're not speaking enough about him.

Wherever you live, where you work, the people you spend time with day to day, Jesus is calling you into mission for him, to be his witness by the way that you live for him and by speaking about him.

[8 : 27] And I think there are two traps that we fall into. The trap of being a bunker bill and the trap of being a blender-brender. So blender-brender has lots of non-Christian friends but she just blends in with them.

She doesn't look any different. She's not making her friendships intentional. She's not praying for her friends, living differently with them, trying to speak courageously of Jesus. Instead, she just wants to be liked.

So I wonder, are you a blender-brender deep down? Bunker Bill has gone the other way. He's got so involved in church activity and with Christian friendships that he's in this kind of bubble of Christian life and he doesn't have any meaningful friendships with non-Christians.

He doesn't join his colleagues on their nights out. He doesn't know the names of their wives and kids. He's not serving the non-Christians that he spends time with. Now, I don't know which one you're more in danger of becoming, Bunker Bill, Blender-Brender, but either of them is pretty hopeless when it comes to the mission that Jesus wants to send us out on.

It means that when we have guest events at St. Silas, the God Particle Play coming up in May, or our Christmas time services, or Christianity Explored, we're not in a position to invite people along. [9 : 48] It means that the non-Christians who we know are not hearing the message that they need to hear to avoid being condemned by God forever.

Will we feel the challenge of Matthew 10 to get on with the mission of Jesus wherever we are? Let's be intentional with our non-Christian friendships. Be distinctive from them, from our friends, because we obey Jesus, and that's different.

Serve them, pray for them, love them, and make the most of every chance we get to tell them about Jesus, even if that would be costly in our friendship. So that's the first thing we need to understand. The division flows out of mission. Secondly, we need to understand that it's a division that's often extreme. Jesus warns his disciples to be prepared for thorough, extensive opposition.

In verse 17, some of the worst perpetrators are the religious authorities. Verse 17, be on your guard against men. They will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues.

[10 : 55] Shocking, isn't it? But it happens today. In societies where there's an established religious order that people perhaps go to for their moral teaching, it's often those religious leaders that are the first to persecute Christians.

It's true in many Islamic societies. We might find it becomes increasingly true in Scotland. We might find that other churches around us value their acceptance by wider society more highly than they value God's word.

So if at St Silas we stand by God's word, by what Jesus says, we'll find ourselves increasingly criticised by people and churches who want their Christianity to fit in better with the values of our age and keep moving their values to fit in.

If we insist that Jesus is the only way to God, that the only way to be saved is through him, then a denomination or a church network that's desperate to be liked by our pluralistic culture are going to want to shoot us down if we have that message.

If we insist at St Silas that marriage is God's great idea for one man and one woman, a denomination that's desperate to be liked by our secular liberal culture will want to shoot us down.

[12 : 12] They'll want to marginalise us. We have to be ready for opposition from religious authorities because Jesus says in verse 17, be on your guard.

Be on your guard. Verse 16, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Learn from both of them. Now snakes are very good at surviving, aren't they?

They're crafty. They don't go out of their way to be in danger and we shouldn't either. We shouldn't want to be persecuted but doves are a picture of innocence. Our overriding priority is that we're faithful to God that we follow him.

The extent of division that Jesus describes is shocking. There's no spin, is there? He wants us to be ready and with organisations like Open Doors and our news channels today, we're all too aware that there are Christians around the world today facing this kind of persecution, facing genocide for holding to Jesus.

Thankfully, in Scotland, we are safe from that. You could say we've got a great opportunity in Scotland to make the most of but even here, of course, there might be really significant costs to speaking up about Jesus in your workplace or among your own friends or family and the extent of the division cuts through to the people we love the most.

[13 : 36] Have a look with me at verse 34. Do not suppose that I've come to bring peace on 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, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Very shocking, isn't it? Now, Jesus here quotes words from the Old Testament from the prophet Micah.

God was using Micah to condemn his people at the time for their immoral behavior and one of his most awful examples was the way family was turning in on itself and yet Jesus is warning us that as his word goes out among the people we know that he has arrived with the authority of God's king, we will see that same effect going on.

It's not his intention of course but he brings out the worst in other people. I think of a friend, Millie. She was born into a loving Muslim home, a middle class family.

She went to a mixed school and yet when her family found when she was 17 that she had a Bible in her room, she had to walk out of the house, she ran out and she knew she'd never be able to go back.

[14:54] She's now, she's older, she's got a family, she's a Christian, she still can't see her mum. Her family won't let her go and see her mother because of the shame that they feel it brought on them that she had a Bible.

Why is that? Why is Jesus this divisive? Well the answer is that it's because you have to put him first. That's our third thing to understand about his divisiveness.

It's a division that's caused by new ties. It seems to me as I read this there's a clear connection between verse 35 and verse 37. Have a look at verse 37.

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.

Jesus calls us to put him before everything. Here's the issue. As Jesus, as people put Jesus first it creates the conflict that he's been describing here.

[16:04] Why? Well to illustrate this think about Star Wars. A few months ago the world went Star Wars crazy again didn't it? With the new film which I haven't seen yet because we've got little kids.

But even if you're not a Star Wars fan I think virtually everybody in Glasgow will have heard of Darth Vader. Darth Vader who joined the dark side of the force. Now the first three Star Wars films that were made were episodes 4 to 6 of the Star Wars story.

And Darth Vader from the start is absolutely horrible. He is the arch enemy and you can't relate to him he's so evil.

This evil force. But then they made the prequels that told the story of how he becomes such a villain. And the remarkable thing about it when you watched episodes 1 to 3 was that he didn't start out by loving evil.

He didn't just say one day I'm going to be evil because I love evil things. What happened was that he loved something good but he loved it too much. So if you think about it what did Anakin Skywalker do wrong to end up as Darth Vader?

[17:10] He loved his wife. but he loved her so much that when he heard when he was worried that she was going to die he was willing to do anything anything at all to save her life.

She'd become his ultimate thing. And so when something other than God becomes your ultimate thing your whole moral compass changes. You define what's right and wrong differently and your actions become in God's sight evil.

It's a brilliant picture of what idols do to any of us. An idol is anything that takes the place of God in your life. A false God something that you love and serve and trust to give you what only God can give you.

And what you love most will shape your behaviour because you'll serve that thing. When you love a good thing like family or friends or career or money or sex a good thing more than you were ever meant to it distorts your views about right and wrong and it leads you to sin to live in a way that God says is wrong that's what sin is.

Now when Jesus arrives into the life of somebody in Glasgow today he stamps his authority he says no I'm God's king I made you I love you I died for you I bought you you've got to put me first now.

[18:29] And he's not saying don't love your families your parents your kids God invented families he values families but what I have to accept and what my kids have to learn is that I love my children best when I love Jesus more than them.

I love my parents best when I love Jesus more than them. When Jesus calls anyone to put him before their idols it's a huge threat to the things that their friends and family and our wider society value the most and people push back they fight back just think about the idol of family again God invented families but what about when the cohesiveness of a nuclear family a particular family unit is the ultimate value for that family that's what they treasure over everything else and then a young Christian couple in that family tell their parents that they're not going to be around on Sundays anymore when they go and visit for the weekend because they're committed to their church family and they're going to be back for church.

It causes division. When they tell their parents they can't go on the holiday that they want the whole family to go on because it's too expensive or they can't buy the home that their parents dreamed of them living in because they're giving their money sacrificially to support gospel work it causes conflict in a family.

Or there are the idols of comfort money career and then a young Christian man or woman tells their parents they've decided to go and live abroad for the gospel or to give up on a promising medical career or engineering career because they want to train for full time Christian work.

It leaves parents confused and angry because our society idolizes career and money and we're infected by that. Idols are the things we cherish the most and Jesus threatens them powerfully when he says worship me.

[20 : 24] That's why his message is so divisive. So those are our three things to understand. It's a division as we go out on mission for him it's a division that's often extreme be ready for that and it's a division that's caused by new ties to him.

So first with that how can we continue with the mission of Jesus? You know I almost wonder as I read it whether you'd get to a point as Jesus describes that division where he'd say so don't go on mission because it's really hard but instead he says so don't be afraid.

So we need to remember three things as we go out on mission. Of course we need to carry on just look at what he asks for from us in verse 27. He says what I tell you in the dark speak in the daylight what is whispered in your ear proclaim from the rooftops.

Jesus wants us to expect division and be willing to shout from the rooftops of Glasgow the news about him. So three things to remember. First of all remember a watching father.

If you have a look down at verses 26 to 31 three times Jesus says don't be afraid. He knows that fear neutralizes mission.

[21 : 41] Let me ask when you think about being more bold for Jesus are you afraid? I'm afraid of that. Well Jesus picks up on three fears and assures and assures us each time.

First there's a fear of slander. You might be thinking I just can't bear the idea that people will be talking about me behind my back. What does Jesus say?

Verse 26 So do not be afraid of them there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known.

In other words there will be a day when God holds everyone to account for what they've said. We can trust God to deal with what people say about us. But what about the risk of violence against us? Well even then Jesus says we fear the wrong thing. Verse 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

[22 : 45] So when we weigh on the cost of mission we're actually weighing up the cost of whether we'll be a Christian at all. And Jesus says don't fear the violence of men fear the judgment of God that without Jesus we deserve for our idolatry.

We face that unless we follow Jesus. Trust him and obey him into mission. But if Christians are even dying for their faith in the world around us does Jesus care about that?

Does God really watch? Well Jesus then gives us the reassurance that our heavenly father is always watching that he cares deeply about what is going on. Look at verse 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid you are worth more than many sparrows.

Our perfect father is watching as we speak of Jesus and to him we are extremely valuable. No Christian dies outside of his will and he will hold people to account for what's going on.

[23 : 52] Don't be afraid because of our watching father. next remember that we have an offer of life in verse 39 Jesus says whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake

