

Lesson 24

Sobering Decisions

Icebreaker:

Do you want to be a martyr for Jesus Christ?
Why or why not?

Introduction:

In the Scriptures the Greek word for martyr is “martus”. It simply means a “witness or testimony” and does not necessarily convey the idea of death. Throughout Scripture the word is associated with giving evidence to something. Death became associated with the word martyr because those who witnessed were convinced of the validity of their testimony even to the point of dying for what they believed. As Christians we should live as martyrs, giving evidence of a changed life in Christ through our words and deeds.

Reading The Scripture:

The Twelve Are Sent Out to Preach the Good News

Matthew 10:24-42

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: “Follow Me: A Message from God”, a Journey with Jesus)

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to **SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD**. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take **his cross** and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it. He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." And it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. And they went out and preached that men should repent. And

they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Peace on the earth. Jesus came to establish peace between man and God, not peace between all men.

Micah 7:6. SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD.

His cross. The thing which will bring about his suffering and death.

The Commands:

1. Therefore, do not fear them.
2. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light.
3. What you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.
4. And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul;
5. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy body and soul in hell.
6. Therefore, do not fear.
7. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

The Lesson:

Jesus was a pragmatist and He didn't use hype to motivate His disciples. He told them the truth. They will be persecuted for their faith and the message they proclaim. Despite the message of impending persecution, Jesus issues several commands for His disciples to follow that fly directly in the face of the fear they feel.

He literally commands His disciples not to fear men but instead to fear God. By issuing a command, Jesus is forcing the disciples to make a decision. Will they choose to be governed by God or their feelings? The rationale for choosing God is simple. Men can kill the body, which is not going to live forever anyway. But they have no power to destroy the soul, which will last forever. Only God has that power. So it is better to fear God than men.

Jesus comforts the disciples by telling them that He will be actively engaged with each of them in bringing forth their testimony. In fact, He will guide them in what to say. *"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light."* In this case Jesus is saying He will communicate with them through dreams and visions. There are several references to this:

"Now a word was brought to me stealthily, and my ear received a whisper of it. Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, and made all my bones shake. Then a spirit passed by my face; the hair of my flesh bristled up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; a form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice:" (Job 4:12)

"It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." (Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17)

A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, immediately

we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:9-10)

Jesus also tells His disciples, “*What you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.*”¹ In this case Jesus is saying He will communicate with them audibly, like a whisper in their ear. This is extremely common. God has been speaking to men ever since the Garden of Eden. Some men refuse to hear God’s voice and others choose to disobey it.

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment He replied this way: “The foremost is, ***HEAR***, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ “The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31)

Did you notice it? The first commandment is to **HEAR**, followed by love. God is equating loving Him with hearing His voice in order to obey it! Another of Jesus’ statements supports this, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*” (John 14:15).

Following are just a few references to disciples hearing Jesus’ voice:

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” (John 10:3-5)

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:27)

“Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18:37)

And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.” (Acts 9:4-6)

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear His voice.” (Hebrews 3:7)

Group Discussion:

1. Many Christmas cards start off with the phrase from Luke 2:14, “Peace On Earth, Goodwill Toward Men”. How does this view measure up with what Jesus said, “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword?*” (A more accurate rendering of Luke 2:14 is, “On earth peace among men, with whom God is pleased.” In other words, “There is peace on earth only among those with whom God is pleased.” Jesus primary purpose was to reconcile men to God, not to bring peace to the earth. He knew that what He was proclaiming would divide people. They would either be for Him or against Him.)
2. Which is more beautiful, the white lily or the red rose?

¹ In Israel, housetops were flat roofs where people gathered when the weather was pleasant. Since houses were close together, people could shout from their housetops and proclaim to an impromptu audience.

3. List the attributes of each and come to a group decision.

The Lesson - continued:

The early church recognized the importance of an individual's testimony concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and developed symbols to represent the two aspects of his witness. The Lily of the Valley was white, signifying the good deeds of the saints. It represented an individual's testimony before men while he was alive. The Rose of Sharon was red, signifying the blood of the martyrs. It represented an individual's testimony before God in the manner of his death. Both flowers are aromatic. Just as the flowers fragrances are pleasing, a Christian should be pleasing to God whether he lives or dies.

Is it better to live for your faith or die for your faith? The Apostle Paul struggled with the same dilemma. In the first chapter of his epistle to the Philippians he deals with the issue. At the time of writing his epistle in 62 AD, Paul was under house arrest in Rome awaiting sentencing for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Would he live or would he die?

Listen to what he said. ***“Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith.”*** And Paul did live on. He was released from prison later that year and spent four more years on the mission field. He was imprisoned again and martyred for his faith in 67 or 68 AD.

Paul's decision whether it was better to live or die was not motivated by the fear of death or personal loss. Those issues had been decided when He first believed. Following Jesus' instructions to “fear not”, Paul made the decision that Christ would be exalted in his body whether he lived or died. This should be the focus and purpose of every Christian's life.

Paul used two tests in helping him make life and death decisions:

- Is it for God's glory not just my own? (For me to live is Christ and to die is to be with Him)
- Is it in the best interest of others not just mine? (I regard others as more important than myself)

Group Discussion:

4. Will you choose to not fear death? (Do you really believe your own message concerning Christ?)
5. Will you choose to not fear personal loss? (Do you love the things of this world too much?)
6. Will you choose to not fear persecution? (Do you live for the praises of men or God?)

Footnote:

Both white lilies and red roses are used to weave a victor's crown. Every believer will receive one, symbolizing those whose faith overcame through life and those whose faith overcame through death.

Point of the Lesson:

Fear of men is overcome by faith in God

Application:

- Pray every day for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His harvest.
- Preach the gospel to at least one individual this next week trying to stay as close to how Jesus said to do it.