

Romans 6:1-11

- 1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?
- 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?
- 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?
- 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.
- 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.
- 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin –
- 7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.
- 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
- 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.
- 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.
- 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 10:24-39

- 24 'The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master.
- 25 It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!
- 26 'So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.
- 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.
- 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.
- 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care.
- 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
- 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.
- 32 'Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.
- 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.
- 34 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
- 35 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 –
- 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."
- 37 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
- 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.
- 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

Sent out

Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 10:24-39

We're following on from last week with Jesus continuing to prepare the disciples for mission. They're being sent out, and he's not pulling any punches as far as the challenge facing them. He's warning them what to expect. I have to say that this passage has some very difficult things in it. And it's just as much addressed to me and you because all of us who call ourselves christians are also sent. When I was young, mission was all about particular people taking the gospel message to far off places. There seemed to be endless slide shows from missionaries in China and Africa and such like. This has changed a lot, partly because the UK is as much in need of hearing the gospel as anywhere else, and partly because the understanding has changed of what 'sent' means. The Greek for apostle, *apostolos*, means 'sent one', so the church as a whole is by its nature 'sent'. Actually it always has been. Whether we go or whether we stay where we are, we all carry the message. So even when we're on lockdown, we're sent! Maybe online, maybe by phone, whatever the means, the good news continues to be proclaimed. Nothing can prevent it. We're all missionaries, because we're all sent. The gospel message has no power if it is not shared. And that depends on the whole community of faith. But *do* we pass it on or do we sit on it?

Jesus' disciples had no formal training, no theological education. But they changed the world, because they made the message relevant to *everyone*.

The first point here is that the student and teacher relationship is crucial. *25 It's enough for the student to be like the teacher.*

Jesus is our role model. But... that means we should expect to get the same reception he got. We shouldn't assume otherwise. *'You'll be hated by everyone because of me' v22.*

At the time of the early church you risked your life being known as a follower of Jesus, but the church still thrived. As Annette said last week, the most we face now is indifference. How would we react to being persecuted just for being Christians? Would we still be committed? That's how central it should be to who we are, if you really take on board what Jesus is saying here.

It's a long way from the comfortable middle class religion many of us have inherited. I think the perception of church as being a boring non event is *why* there's so little interest in it. For Peter and the others, it wasn't about church going, it was life and death. If we fear death, well it's also about life beyond death.

The life Jesus speaks about doesn't stop at death.

Jesus' advice here is the most common phrase found in the bible. Don't be afraid. There's a double reassurance here, first *v 26 '...do not be afraid of [your enemies], for there's nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.* The world's an unpleasant place.

Many people are the enemies of truth and goodness.

This is increasingly the case if we look beneath the headlines. World leaders lie with impunity. Police kill suspects.

Half the time we have no idea what's true and what isn't.

As Isaiah predicted (5:20), they call evil good, and good evil.

But the prophetic word from Jesus here is powerful. Evil thrives in secret, in the dark, but **there is nothing hidden that will not come to light**. Evil will come face to face with justice, this is inevitable. It's only a matter of when.

Secondly Jesus turns this on its head: ***what I tell you in the dark***, proclaim from the rooftops. His message must be made known, for the benefit of the whole world. In a time when evil is called good, we need to know the truth and speak it out, this is *our responsibility*. That's scary, but we can't get around it.

Isaiah and Jesus were not popular – if we want to be popular and preach the gospel, we'll be disappointed.

28 Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but can't kill the soul.

Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Put simply, *no human being* has power over your soul.

Only God has the power over life and death. Don't be afraid, because v 29-31 God cares infinitely for each one of us, down to the very hairs on our head. If the sparrows have his individual attention then we certainly will. Whatever we face, we know this. Jesus went to the cross scared, but also knowing this. He is not done yet though by way of challenging us.

33 Whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

This is the most difficult part, because it's about our ultimate loyalty. The gospel divides people. Confessing Jesus makes us come face to face with what really matters to us. Remember that this is still about mission, and so it touches into how we like to be seen by others who we maybe look up to, and it's not cool in their opinion to be a bible basher.

Too many of us find Jesus an embarrassment.

Just as long as we know where he stands on it.

And of course this goes to the heart of families. There are many, particularly within other faiths, who find themselves estranged from parents or siblings or both through faith in Christ. Jesus faces this head on. Although sometimes it's through God's grace that our faith is grudgingly accepted by people we love.

But the gospel message becomes more radical the more we engage with the world beyond our comfort zone. It's estimated there are about 2 billion christians globally. But that leaves 5 billion who aren't. Much as we are repeatedly told about peace on earth at Christmas, Jesus is saying quite the opposite here, purely because people reject him.

34 'Don't suppose that I've come to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword.

That's not a literal sword of course! Jesus loved hyperbole. Beware of preachers who use verses like this to justify war.

We will be persecuted. Or at least ignored. Possibly by our families. So we have to decide: Christ's demands, or the world's. Evangelism, effectively persuading people to become christians, has been defined by some as proselytising, a word implying coercion into faith. In some instances charity funding isn't available without confirming you won't proselytise.

To some, the transformation of lives by Jesus is not acceptable. Pope Francis on the other hand has said that we should *love* people into faith.

What are our priorities?

For me, if we choose God we choose life.

But Jesus doesn't leave room for doubt

38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

This is an echo of Jesus teaching in all the gospels. It also echoes the old cliché about 'finding yourself', but says that you have to lose your life to Jesus to really find it.

If we're serious about our faith we have to accept that what Jesus says quite clearly is that we must be prepared to surrender everything. Give control to Him. Then His command in Matthew 28 is inescapable: go into all the world and make disciples. The cost.... is everything.

The good news is that the reward is, well, everything.
Amen.