

Following Jesus Upstream

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Matthew 10:21-33 NKJ ²¹ "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ "A disciple is not above *his* teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *will they call* those of his household! ²⁶ "Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. ²⁸ "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

A few years ago, my sister and I went canoeing on the rock river east of Mayville. We left her car at the takeout point and drove to the start. We were three quarters of the way down the river before she realized she left her keys in my car. At that point we could have paddled back upstream, the current wasn't that strong, but we chose instead to walk back. How often have you found yourself in a situation where you had the choice of paddling against the current? Did you do it or did you decide it was too much work?

Paddling up stream, swimming against the stream, is not an easy thing to do. It's much easier to go with the current. Hence, we have the phrase, going with the flow. Jesus warns us in our text, and not just in our text but in all our readings this morning, that he is going against the current. If we are going to follow him, we too must go against the current, and not a slow easy current either, but a very strong and powerful one. At the same time, however, he promises that the strength to do this will come from him.

If you open your bulletins again and look at our Old Testament reading. Jeremiah is simply exhausted from fighting the current. **"Everyone mocks me." "The word of the LORD was made to me A reproach and a derision daily."** He is simply tired of fighting the current. He is ready to give up but the Lord will not let him. He finds strength in Him. **"But the LORD is with me as a mighty, awesome One."**

Or look at our epistle reading. **Romans 6:12 "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."** Paul describes going against the current, not against the pressure from the world, but against your own sinful desires. It is so easy to give up against the sinful temptations of our own nature. God forgives us anyway so why keep swimming against that current? What Paul describes here is a task like Sisyphus', eternally pushing that rock up the hill, an endless task against our own sinful desires. But Paul reminds us that we have something that Sisyphus never had. **Romans 6:23**

the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Although it seems endless on this earth the victory is assured through Jesus Christ.

In our Psalm of the day the psalmist says, "**a thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand.**" There is a strong and powerful force sweeping away all those around you. Yet Psalm 91:1 "**He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.**"

And then finally in the sermon text, which talks about the persecution that we will endure but then the salvation that the Lord will deliver to us. The battle is only endless on this earth. We have been given strength and rest and victory through Jesus Christ. While we live on this earth, we are always the church militant, but the victory is already ours through Jesus Christ.

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It's nearly impossible to swim against the current. You fight and you fight and you fight and if you give up for even a few minutes to rest, you lose ground. Swimming against the current is exhausting and seems impossible, and it's so much. But the question is why are you doing it? Is the goal worth it?

Our text today talks about this, here Jesus says it's going to be hard and there are going to be some terrible consequences, but the end, the goal is our salvation, and furthermore if it may seem impossible but Jesus will bring us to the finish.

Jesus always told us it would be tough and here He reminds us in no uncertain terms just how terrible it will be. It's bad enough that we are delivered to death, but that it should be our own parent or our own child that would do it, the very people we love the most. This is probably the worst thing that could happen.

Richard Dawkins tries to use all the bad things that happen as proof that Jesus was just a man. If he was really God, he claims, why didn't he tell his disciples not to do these things? In many places he clearly does, in other places he clearly states that this is what we can expect in this life, and again in still other places he clearly says they will even do it in his name. Jesus knew these things were going to happen because we are sinful. Rather than these things causing us to doubt or lose our faith, we should recognize that this is exactly what Jesus said would happen.

The end is the Lord's Salvation. Here we have the word telos. Telos means not just end but the finish, the completion. The Lord has a plan and how much it might lead through darkness and danger the result, the finish, is a wonderful thing indeed. All my time in Africa and India I had to "endure" and I use that word very lightly here. What I "endured" there is nothing to what a Christian must endure in this life. What I endured in India and Africa wasn't such a problem because I knew it was only temporary. I knew that I would soon be going home. So too we have much that we endure in this life but what is that to us when we know that this life isn't our home.

²⁹ "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Our text says "he who endures," and that might at first sound like this is something that we are doing. But other passages and indeed even other verses in our text remind us that the power to endure is not in us. What did we read in our epistle but that we are by nature slaves to sin, and every one of us would remain such and indeed keep on sinning, and even turn back to sin, unless the Lord changes our hearts. The natural course of man is always towards sin. Each of us would indeed lose faith and go with the flow. Our Savior reminds us that we are worth more than sparrows.

Sparrows are sold Jesus says for a copper coin. This was about 1/16th of a worker's daily wage, so that would be about \$5. Sparrows are sold for \$5 then they are eaten. Yet not even one of the falls to the ground without the Father allowing it to be so.

The point here is that yes there is persecution but only to a limit. God allows a lot of bad things, but He also puts limits on it. He watches over you all the time. Not even a hair falls without Him allowing it. We don't need to lose heart.

We endure through His will to the end the completion that He has in store for us.

AMEN

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.