



## Matthew 10:5, 21-33

Trinity 2, June 14, 2026

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***These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them... “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>23</sup> When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. <sup>24</sup> A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. <sup>26</sup> So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”***

I remember the first roller coaster, the first *real* roller coaster I ever rode. I’d ridden in the small, county fair sort of roller coasters in the past, but this was the first one I rode that I had to be tall enough to ride. A *real* roller coaster. It was the “American Eagle” at Six Flags Great America in Gurnee, IL. “The tallest and fastest racing wooden coaster on the planet... [Beginning] with a nerve-racking 127-foot ascent... your anticipation is rewarded with a hair-raising 147-foot drop.” (sixflags.com)

My mom had told me outside the queue that if it looked too scary, I *could* go to the Camp Cartoon Network part of the park with her and my younger brother; but there no way I was missing *this*. I was brave, not scared! I was excited! My first *real* roller coaster! I was done with that *little* kid stuff.

And so there we were, my dad and my older brother and I, side-by-side *waiting* in line. Then *waiting* at the loading platform. Then *waiting* in our seats as the ride operators clicked the lap bars into place. I could hardly stand the wait any longer, I was *filled* with nervous excitement and anticipation. And *then* the ride started, with that 127-foot crawl up the lift hill, the chains clinking away underneath us. And as I looked down at the retreating earth below, the cars on the interstate getting smaller and smaller and with *still* a way up that hill to go, I suddenly realized that I wasn’t feeling so brave anymore.

I shouted to my dad a question about if anyone had ever died on a roller coaster before. And he replied something to the effect of, “Sometimes.” And suddenly, I wanted to be in Camp Cartoon Network. I did not want to be on that roller coaster. Suddenly that metal lap bar felt like prison bars. I was locked in with no way out. I was going to die, and I was going to go out surrounded by screams—not of terror, but of laughter and joy! And when we finally reached the top of that hill and hung for a moment suspended above that 147-foot drop, the *only* feeling I had left was pure fear. This was not going the way I had *expected* it to go.

That might also be how the twelve apostles felt at different times in their ministries, or at least they

certainly *would* have felt that way had Jesus not briefed them first as He does here in our text. The text we're considering today comes on the heels of last week's Gospel reading, the *calling* of the twelve apostles, their commissioning.

Jesus had called His disciples to Him. He looked at them. He said, "You're ready. I'm sending you out. You are to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Go to these towns and tell them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near. Tell them I have come, that My reign has begun, that I am the Messiah. Tell them that the Kingdom has arrived with Me. And I'm going to give you authority. You will cleanse lepers. You will heal the sick. You will cast out demons. You will raise the dead. Don't worry about what you're going to say, because the Holy Spirit will give you the words to speak. Oh, and don't worry about carrying any extra money or taking any extra tunics with you. Because you can just stop at a house in the town where you are, and they'll take care of you there."

You can just picture the disciples, can't you? Filled with nervous excitement, they can't wait to get going! This is going to be great! This is going to be a glorious ride! There they are, all jostling to get to the front of the loading platform. **"Here I am! Send me!"** (cf. Isaiah 6:8) And they're ready to climb onto that ride, and then Jesus keeps on speaking.

Jesus has more to say. "You know, a student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. They've hated and rejected Me, and they will do the same for you. You're going to be hauled into court. You will stand before kings and rulers. You will be persecuted; you'll be run out of town! You'll be attacked. You'll be hated by all! Families will come apart because of you, maybe even your own family will." This is probably not the way they were expecting this to go.

We don't hear what they have to say in response to any of this, but maybe they were thinking like Jeremiah was. When the LORD had first called Jeremiah as a prophet, he had *tried* to resist. He said he was too young. Didn't even know what he *would* say. The Lord said, "Don't worry about that! I am the one sending you! And I'll tell you what to say! And I will be with you, and I will deliver you." In other words, there was nothing to be afraid of, this prophetic ministry was going to be a glorious ride!

But then when Jeremiah actually got *onto* that ride, it wasn't what he thought it would be. There was nothing glorious about it. Jeremiah was being flogged and put into chains and ridiculed every time he spoke. He was hated by all, and he was not having a good time. And so, he said, (in our Old Testament reading) **"O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me... For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long."** (Jeremiah 20:7-8)

Jeremiah wanted to get off the ride, but he could not. He couldn't leave that ministry any more than I could have gotten out of that roller coaster, because God's Word held Jeremiah in place like a lap bar. He was locked in. God's Word in His heart *prevented* him from doing anything else. He explains: **"If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."** (Jeremiah 20:9)

And the same would be true for these twelve to whom Jesus now speaks. There *would* be a time when they would try to stay silent, when they would run and hide, when they would swear they did

not know the Man. But *then* the Lord would rise and redeem them, and He would return to them, and He would restore them, and He would revitalize them with the Holy Spirit. And they would speak. Oh, they *would* speak. They would be unable to do otherwise.

They would be warned and they would be arrested and they would be thrown into a cell. And they would break out of that cell and they would return to their preaching stations. They would be hauled before governors and kings, and they would be tried, and they would be persecuted. And they would say things like, ***“I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”*** (Acts 21:13) And they would. Because ***“a disciple is not above his teacher,”*** so these disciples would be treated like *their* Teacher. Some would be beheaded. Some would be crucified, maybe even upside down. Some would fall by the sword. Some would be left exiled and all alone. This was going to be a bumpy ride, and they were locked in their seats, hands and arms to remain inside the vehicle at all times. This was not going to go how they might have thought that it would go.

And I’m sure you’ve maybe had a similar experience. Well, maybe not *totally* similar, but *you’ve* felt a bit of that ***“you will be hated by all for my name's sake.”*** You’ve been there at the family barbecue; that cousin that makes you nervous when he talks loudly singled you out. He said, “Hey, according to your Bible only Christians are going to heaven. You think I’m going to hell? What about Aunt May over there, she doesn’t go to church. Is she going to hell too?” And then there’s that awkward silence, and *everybody* is looking at you.

Or you’ve been there at work. Your company has rolled out a new company-wide policy, *mandatory*. They tell you, “You *need* to do this if you want to keep your job here.” You don’t agree. You’re pretty sure God’s Word doesn’t agree. Doing it will compromise your integrity. It will eat you up inside because you know it’s wrong. But if you *don’t* go along, it’ll cost you your job and your health insurance and your means of supporting your family.

Or you’ve looked around, and you’ve noticed it’s Pride Month. And you know what God says about that particular sin. And you know that *pride* over sin is the exact opposite of *repentance* over sin. And you know what you believe. But you also know that if people found *out* about what you believe, well, then ***“they [will] persecute you in one town, [and you’ll have to] flee to the next.”***

You’ve experienced this. You’ve experienced *all* of this. And if you haven’t yet, you *will*, because Jesus says, ***“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.”*** It’s coming. It *does* happen in the life of a Christian. And it will happen in yours.

What do we do? What are we going to do? Here we are, hanging suspended over this long dark dangerous drop, and we are *not* feeling brave! How can we go through what Jesus is telling us we *will* go through? How did Jeremiah go through it? And how did those Apostles?

Well, in the years since my first roller coaster ride, I’ve figured out how to enjoy them. It didn’t take me very long. The secret is—you have to trust the system. That is to say, the very lap bars and shoulder harnesses that are pinning you down and locking you in place and feeling *so oppressive* to you when you *want* to get off the ride—you have to trust that they won’t let you down. You have to

tell yourself, “Thousands of people ride this ride every day without accidents. People who know what they’re doing inspect this equipment daily. There are all these backup systems to keep the cars from flying off the tracks. *They* don’t want me to die here anymore than *I* want to die here. The steel lap bar is very strong, and the seatbelt is going to keep me safe.”

That’s what Jeremiah did too. He concluded, “***But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me.***” (Jeremiah 20:11) He did the only thing that a guy trapped on a roller coaster can do. He put his trust in the very Word that held him in its grasp, the very Word that was responsible for his situation in the first place.

That’s what the disciples would do as well. Because Jesus doesn’t *just* send them out with a list of warnings. He’s speaking with them, He sees the fear in their eyes, He *knows* what they’re thinking. And after *all* that fearsome warning, He promises, “I’m not sending you out all alone. I’m sending you out with *My* promises.”

And so, He says, “Don’t be afraid of any kings or governors, don’t be afraid of them. They can destroy your body—so what? Be afraid of the one who can destroy your soul! The only one who can do that is My Father in heaven, and—guess what?—He’s not going to do that! When you acknowledge Him, He holds your soul in His hand, and He will not let anything happen to it. And when you take your last breath, your soul will be in peace with Me until I come back.”

“And do you see those birds over there? You could buy a couple of them for a penny, they’re worth very little. And you know what? My Father knows when any one of them falls to the earth, and you are worth *so much more* than the birds are. And He knows you so intimately, so closely, so personally, that He knows *exactly* how many hairs you have on your head. Yes, I’m sending you out among the wolves, but you do *not* go out alone. Do not be afraid.”

And the same is true for you. No, being a Christian doesn’t make life easy. In fact, following Christ *guarantees* that your life will *not* be easy. Life under God’s hand can be a real roller coaster, jerking you around here and there, with great big drops that terrify. The Word of God, pinning you in place—you will lose friends and gain enemies because of it.

But remember the Word of God which has put you on this ride in the first place. Remember what God has already promised you back at your baptisms. He promised that none of your enemies, whether physical or spiritual, would prevail against you. He has slotted *you* for the resurrection. That means your *sin* does not have the final say in shaping your life. The heartaches and disappointments do not have the final word. *Christ* does, and He has already pronounced it to you: “Your sins are forgiven.” As Christ has risen from the dead, so you, too, will rise. That’s His promise.

And so, in this life, as Paul says, we are *crucified* together with Christ, and yet we live. Yet not you or I, but Christ lives in us. And the life that we now live in this flesh, we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. (cf. Galatians 2:20) Life by faith. That sounds like Jeremiah or the Apostles riding the roller coaster of life in the flesh and putting their eyes firmly on the Word of God that God Himself had given them. You do the same. Hold onto His promises, confident that our Lord and Savior will not let you down. He will take care of you. May God grant us such a faith. Amen.