

Title: “How to Die”

Chris Ryan

Matthew 10:21-23

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Service Readings: Jer. 20:7-13; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

If we are not facing death, do we truly understand and appreciate the work of Jesus Christ on the cross?

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

I want to begin by reading a portion of a sermon written by a very well-known preacher in Texas. This particular message is titled “You are very powerful” and here is a portion of what he says:

You Are Very Powerful. What you're up against may be big, but it's no match for you. The same power that raised Christ from the dead lives in you... A power so strong, that the Red Sea parted from Moses. That's the power that's in you. You're not ordinary, you're not common, you are very powerful....

How much further will you go, how much more will you accomplish... if you'll start seeing yourself for who you really are? ... What barriers can you overcome? What dreams can you accomplish if you'll get rid of a weak, defeating, I'm-ordinary mentality, and start seeing yourself the way God made you to be, as very powerful? ...

You can't go around magnifying all the negative. You need to magnify what God put in you. He didn't just make you powerful, he made you very powerful. You can be very powerful, and cancel it out with the wrong mindset.

Now, I normally would not include someone else's sermon in my message, especially from someone who has such a wrong understanding of Jesus, but I feel compelled this morning because his message is all too common in the world, today. So many preachers solicit this type of message because it brings in the crowds, the money, and the even the fame. Why? Because it is a message that everyone loves to hear. Who doesn't want to believe that success in this world, and salvation in the next is in their own hands? Who doesn't long to believe that with just enough faith in Jesus they can subjugate him to their will? It is a message that is so powerful it draws millions of people to people like this Jesus, but in doing so, pulls people away from Jesus – the *real* Jesus.

And so, when I hear the *true* words of Jesus, and when his message is one that contradicts so forcefully the message of these preachers, I feel compelled to respond, especially because I know that there are people in this sanctuary right now who are attracted to these preachers and the false message that they bring. And so, I'd like to re-read a portion of the gospel passage, starting in verse 21:

²¹Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²²and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the

one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When 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.

And continuing in verse 26:

²⁶“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸And 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.

This is a very different message than what I opened this sermon with. There is quite a bit here so I'll jump straight to the point: Jesus did not receive the wrath of God on the cross so that we could live a happy, healthy, and selfish life. No! His death atoned for our sins. We were heading down a path that would separate us from God for all eternity. And if you want to talk about the power we had.... We had none! We were completely powerless to change this outcome in any way. And so I promise you this, if I was dead in my sins and unable to change where I was heading, the very least of my concerns would be the promotion that I might not get or the or the dreams that I might not realize.

And this is what is so dangerous about these preachers with their false messages. They cover up the reality of who we are without Jesus, about where we will go without his saving work, and instead replace it with a message that promises no pain, no suffering, no cross to carry as we go through this life.

But our gospel passage makes reality very clear! What Jesus has done for you, he now calls you to proclaim. You are to stand on the mountaintop and shout it at the tops of your lungs. You are to bring the message into your homes, your workplace, your community. You are to risk your reputation, your possessions, your standing in the community, even your *life* for the sake of this message.

But I want to pause here and make something very clear, otherwise I risk preaching a message just as false as one from those preachers. In this passage, Jesus is not demanding this from us. He was not demanding it from the apostles, either. They had not yet seen Jesus handed over, tortured, crucified, died, and then risen so we can forgive them if they took this as a command. But for us, on *this side of the resurrection* we know the whole story. And so we can understand Jesus' words more completely. This is not law, it is not a command. It is a response. If the reality of Jesus' work on the cross has made an impression on your heart, a *real* impression... if in your heart you know who you are and what you deserve apart from Christ, and if you truly believe that what he did, he did out of the deepest love for you, then you cannot help but announce it to the world. And in so doing, Jesus says that you will be hated, despised, subjected to mockery, and subjected to humiliation. You may lose that chance at the promotion you worked so diligently to earn. You may even lose your life. But what you will gain is the participation in conversion of souls. What you will gain is the knowledge that you played some part in some person's salvation.

You see, this has nothing to do with the quality of your life this side of heaven. In fact, it is quite the opposite. But what you will gain when you meet Jesus face to face, when God restores a new

heaven and earth, and when he walks among us, will make every trial and tribulation worth the pain and suffering.

You might remember Coach Joe Kennedy. He was a Bremerton High School coach that committed to God that he would give thanks at the conclusion of each game for what the players had accomplished and for the opportunity to be part of their lives through football. After his first game in 2008 he took a knee, silently and alone and prayed; it lasted 15 seconds or so. Eventually some of the players noticed and began to ask if they could join him. Over time, he began offering motivational speeches after the prayer that, at times, included religious content. Seven years after this first game, and after growing opposition from the district, he was placed on administrative leave. The lawsuit he filed as a response would eventually land in the Supreme Court where he would finally be vindicated for his actions. He would settle with the school district and also be reinstated as a coach, but it would have all come at a heavy price. For throughout those years, he experienced opposition to his faith and pressure to abandon it, at least in public. All he had to do was it cost him.

Now his experience has a favorable ending, but not all of them do. Even yours might not. There may come a time when even *you* are persecuted for your beliefs – and maybe you are being persecuted right now! But don't be discouraged. This is what Jesus warned us about. It is not a surprise to him and it should not be a surprise to us. And persecution should never cause us to question or abandon our faith! Instead, it should encourage us to proclaim it even louder, even more public for we can know that we are doing the will of Jesus when the world persecutes us! But we must not let our fear of that persecution dissuade us to bring a watered down message of Jesus to the world. We must proclaim the real Jesus. We must be truthful in our message, just as Jesus was truthful in his: being a disciple of Jesus is difficult, painful, and even deadly. But it is a message worth suffering for and it is a message even worth dying for. It was for the disciples; is it for you?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

You have warned us about false teachers in the world and this morning I pray that you would guard our hearts against them. I also pray that you would protect our thoughts and our words so that what we proclaim is the true message of salvation and not something watered down and false. Amen.