

## Missionary Qualities for Every Christian *'Vocally Courageous!'*

Passages: 1 Peter 3:13-17  
Matthew 10:26-39

Have you ever heard that famous quote from St. Francis of Assisi-- "*Preach the Gospel by all means possible...and if necessary, use words*"? It may sound nice (and make us feel more comfortable), but the fact is that, according to Jesus, **words are always necessary!** Every *visible demonstration* of the Gospel must be accompanied by *words of explanation!* That's what today's text is all about. We are called to be "vocally courageous!"

We'll look at that text in a minute, but first, **let's pray.**

You may not be aware of this, but the whole of Matthew's Gospel keeps repeating one central and overarching theme: namely, that **Jesus is King**, not only of Israel but, **of the entire world!** Think about it with me:

- **In the first chapter of Matthew**, Jesus' human ancestry is traced back through the kingly line of David. Jesus has all the necessary credentials to be King of Israel—the King of the Jews!
- But then, in **Matthew 2**, something strange happens. Kings from the East arrive, bringing royal gifts to honor this new-born child. It's as if the whole world recognizes His glorious reign!
- When we turn to **Matthew 3**, Jesus has reached the age of 30. He is finally old enough to begin his Kingly ministry. And that's when John the Baptist steps forward to baptize (or anoint) Jesus with water. His Kingship is, then, confirmed by a voice from Heaven and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.
- But, of course, not everyone admires this King, Jesus. In **Matthew 2**, we read of how Rome's appointed king, King Herod, feels so threatened by the future reign of this child that he slaughters all the baby boys in Bethlehem. The real enemy of Jesus, however, is none other than the Prince of darkness, Satan. In **Mathew 4**, Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to directly

confront the devil; the one who, ever since the Garden of Eden, has challenged the authority of God and claimed to be the ruler of this world. In this confrontation, Jesus demonstrates that Satan has no hold on Him. With that important clarification, Jesus can begin His Kingly ministry of re-establishing God's Kingdom on earth, freeing the world from Satan's grasp.

- Indeed, as Jesus gathers His first disciples around Him on a remote hillside in Galilee (in **Matthew 5-7**), He lays out a description of what His kingdom will look like. Of course, He stands at the centre of it all... for He is the only man who is truly poor in spirit, truly compassionate, truly meek, truly merciful. He is the only one who truly hungers and thirsts for righteousness, or is truly persecuted. For He is the light of the world; He is God's city set on a hill, whose light must not be hid! He is ultimately the one through whom God's Kingdom comes and through whom God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven!
- But, here's the real dilemma! To the untrained eye, Jesus is just another nobody! Born in Bethlehem and raised in the northern town of Nazareth in Galilee, how would anybody ever know that this man was destined to be the King over the whole world? That's why, as we move into **chapters 8 and 9** of Matthew, Jesus concentrates his efforts on two key tasks: (1) He **visibly demonstrates** the Kingdom through signs and wonders (healing the sick and driving out demons), and (2) He **verbally proclaims** the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven in His preaching and teaching ministry. In both word and deed, *Jesus makes clear what is unclear; he makes visible what is invisible*; namely, that **the Kingdom of Heaven has come to earth!**
- This, in fact, continues to be the central theme in **chapter 10**. Even though Jesus has moved into a new phase of ministry by choosing and sending out 12 disciples (who He now calls His 'apostles'), this two-fold focus of *demonstration and explanation* must remain the same! Although, in verse 1, we're told that Jesus **"...gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and heal every disease and sickness"**... in verse 7, we see that He also commands them to speak: **"As you go, preach this message: The Kingdom of Heaven is**

**near!”** Clearly, any visual demonstration of the Kingdom of Heaven had to be followed by a vocal explanation about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Why? Because **actions alone can easily be mis-interpreted!** Indeed, this very thing happens on several occasions in Jesus’ life. Let me give just 2 examples:

1. In chapter 9, Jesus did an amazing series of miracles. First, He healed a paralytic. Next, He healed a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years. Thirdly, He raised a girl from the dead. Then, Jesus healed 2 blind men. Finally, He delivered a demon-possessed man who could not speak. Pretty impressive, right? But the Pharisees totally *mis-interpreted* these miracles! *“It is by the Prince of demons that he drives out demons”*, they said.
2. In Matthew 16, when Jesus is alone with His disciples, he asks them, *“Who do the crowds say that I am??”* By their response, it’s clear that there was still a lot of confusion in people’s minds. They may have been quite impressed with the miracles that Jesus did, but *without words which clearly explained who Jesus was and what He had come to do*, the people were making sorts of *incorrect* assumptions—*“He’s John the Baptist, or one of the prophets come back from the dead.”* Only Peter, who had regularly heard Jesus’ teaching, was able to answer correctly—*“You are the Messiah!”*

Jesus miracles were wonderful! But they also became the seedbed of all sorts of strange speculation. **That’s why Jesus preached!** And that’s why He told **His Apostles that they, also, needed to preach**; they needed to explain the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, *identifying Jesus as none other than the long-awaited King-- the Messiah— who has come to earth to reverse the destructive powers of sin and Satan!* He has come to save and restore the world to the Father’s original intentions and to the beauty of its original perfection!

**And that’s the backdrop for today’s passage!** You see, in today’s passage, Jesus drives home the point that **the Apostles have to speak!** Jesus calls them to be *‘vocally courageous’!* I say “courageous” because **this vocal aspect of their ministry was going to be the most difficult!** Think about it: When you do nice

things for people, everyone is your friend! But, the moment you start explaining that you do these good deeds because *“Jesus Christ is the King and Lord of the universe who has come from heaven to fix up our broken world and revive our wounded spirits, and that I’ve been sent out to be His agent of renewal”*,...well, I guarantee that’s when people will start to look at you in a funny way! And if you go so far as to tell people that *“this Kingly name of Jesus is the only name in heaven and on earth by which we can/must be saved/healed/ restored/ delivered ...”*, it will really get you into all sorts of trouble!

Just take a look at **Acts 3**! When Peter and John were empowered by Jesus to miraculously heal a beggar outside of the Temple, everything was wonderful! Crowds gathered round; people were thoroughly impressed..., that is, until Peter started to preach and explain how the miracle took place! ***“It is in Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through Him that this man has been healed. So, turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out and that times of refreshing may come from the Risen Lord...”*** Well, you know what happened next! Peter and John were thrown in prison. And yet, even the next day, in front of the Sanhedrin, they kept on explaining the miracle, saying, ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to us by which we must be saved!”***

As I said, good deeds are nice. They can draw people to the church and even win us friends. But as soon as you start explaining the invisible reality that stands behind every one of these good deeds...that all these good things come Jesus Christ, the Lord of Heaven and Earth...well, that’s when we, as Christians, begin to sound a bit crazy!

That’s simply because of the fact that *there are many ways of seeing reality (“worldviews”)*:

- some see the world through a *materialistic worldview* (which says that nothing exists except what we can measure and test);
- some see the world through a *dualistic worldview* (which says that there’s a physical world and a spiritual world, and that we need to deny our physical desires and passions in order to attain the spiritual);

- some may even see it through a *deistic worldview* (which says that God exists but He's far away, unconcerned with our daily lives).

**The worldview that Jesus teaches us, however...the one that He whispers to us in the dark... is a worldview in which the invisible realm of God's Heavenly Kingdom now overlaps and intertwines with the visible reality of this universe.** Even though you can't see it, Jesus Christ has already begun to reign on earth! He is this world's true **King and Lord!**

Not only is this the worldview that we, as Christians, personally live by (motivating us to live holy lives), but this is the worldview that stimulates our love for others, prompts our generosity and good deeds, and encourages us to be patient and forbearing. This is the worldview that also brings light to our understanding of how this world works, where it is headed, and how we should engage in God's agenda to save and redeem humanity.

But, as I've said, **this is also the worldview that can get us into trouble!** It can easily conflict with all the other worldviews....**particularly when we begin to speak about it!** And that's why, in verses 26-27, Jesus tells His apostles not to be afraid.

***<sup>26</sup> "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. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."***

In effect, Jesus is saying to His apostles that, *although not everyone can see what you see, there will come a day when this reality of my Lordship will be revealed in its overpowering fullness.* That's what He means when He says, "**...there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.**" *One day, the invisible reality of the Kingdom of Heaven **will be proven to be the only correct worldview!** One day, every eye will see and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!*

And this is the biggest reason why Jesus' Apostles needed to keep speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven, even when people rejected or didn't appreciate this concept; **because, quite basically, it's true!**

But, there's one more point that Jesus wants to make here. As the Apostles go out and preach about this invisible reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, they also need to keep in mind the fact that, *whenever people cannot see what they see, it isn't necessarily the people's fault.* For the fact is that there is one who deceives them and misleads them! As 2 Corinthians 4:4 says,

***“The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbeliever so that they cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”***

That's why, in verse 28, Jesus says to them:

***<sup>28</sup> 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.”***

Now I know that most commentators think Jesus is talking, here, about **God**. In fact, most Bibles (like the NIV) place a capital letter on the word “the One” or “Him”, **as if this is the only possible interpretation...** But it's not! In fact, I would suggest that *God is not even in the picture*—not yet, anyway!

Think again about the situation. Jesus is sending out His Apostles to preach. He tells them not to *fear the people* who might not agree with this radically new worldview. Rather, they are to *fear someone else*. Who? They are to *“fear the one who has the power to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.”* The expression ‘body and soul’ is a shortcut way of saying the entire person. In a collective sense, it means ‘*humanity*’. Now, tell me, who has the power to **destroy** humanity? Who, in fact, is already at work **destroying** humanity? **‘The Destroyer’**, that's who! In Revelation 9:11, Satan is called “*Apollyon*”, “the destroyer”. Interestingly, the verb form of “*apollyon*” is found here, in today's text!

Jesus is warning His apostles to be on their guard against Satan, the destroyer. He is out to deceive the world with all sorts of other interesting worldviews! But they are worldviews that will always omit the most important truth of them all—that

Jesus Christ is Lord and King of this world! Satan is out to *destroy humanity* by getting people to turn away from Jesus, the source of life!

As NT Wright spells it out so clearly in his book **“Evil and the Justice of God”**; *“Satan...is opposed not only to humankind... but to creation itself. ... The height of the Satan’s aim, in other words, is death: the death of humans and the death of creation itself... Death is not an arbitrary punishment for sin; it is its necessary consequence, since **the turning away from the living God ... is the spiritual equivalent of a diver cutting off his own breathing tube.** The biblical picture of Satan is thus of a non-human and non-divine quasi- personal force which seems bent on destroying creation in general and humankind in particular...”* (p 109)

And so, Jesus is telling His apostles that they must *fear* Satan, *not for what he might do to them*, but **for what he is doing to the world**; fear the incredible damage he is doing to the work of redemption; fear the destruction he is wreaking on the human race! And, most of all, use this healthy fear of Satan to motivate you (even more) to share the invisible reality of God’s Kingdom with those who’ve been blinded by his deceits and can’t see what you see!

A prayer prayed by Henri Nouwen might be helpful at this point: *“Lord, help me to see others not as my enemies or as ungodly, but rather as Thirsty People. And give me the courage to offer your Living Water which alone quenches deep thirst.”*

As I said earlier, you and I don’t need to fear Satan *for ourselves!* As Jesus explains in verses 29-31...

***<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. <sup>30</sup> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.***

What is the greatest antidote to fear? The greatest antidote to fear is to have a Biblical worldview; a worldview that reminds you, over and over again, that God is love and that you are precious to Him, and that nothing can happen to you

without His agreement. *“He who watches over you never slumbers nor sleeps!”* “He will never leave us or forsake us!” And what’s more, one day He will finish His New Creation, bringing all things back to Himself and restoring this world into the perfection He always intended for it! **That is the antidote to all fear.**

I think there’s only **one more comment** that I’d like to make here, and that has to do with the content of our message. Yes, we are called to be **vocally courageous**, speaking about this in-breaking Kingdom...but how? There are two things that stand against us:

1. **The language of kingdom doesn't make sense to people today.** (Just this week, for example, someone in my book group suggested that we should no longer speak of Jesus as ‘King’ since people today have no real concept of what that means!) So, **what words can adequately convey this invisible worldview?** What words can explain the reality of Jesus’ Lordship without sounding too pious, too *‘other-worldly’*, or just too silly! We need to find meaningful ways that help other people to see what we see!
2. **The history of the church (and its misinformed, misaddressed preaching) has caused people to switch off.** In a recent article in Christianity Today, the results of a survey done with non-Christians was published with the top 4 reasons why people are put off by Christianity.
  - a. You don’t listen to me.
  - b. You judge me
  - c. Your faith confuses me
  - d. You talk about what is wrong instead of making it right.

Jesus commanded his apostles to preach about the kingdom of God. Is this true for us? I clearly believe so, but perhaps we need to consider another way. Perhaps we need to focus our language around words such as *“grace”, “love”, “peace”* and *“forgiveness”*. These are all *invisible* words – by that, I mean that these are words that, by nature, go beyond the tangible and the concrete and align directly with the invisible reality of Jesus and His Kingdom. These are the best words to convey the true reality of Jesus’ **Kingship**. Ultimately, our worldview proclaims that **He is the humble King, the selfless King, the self-giving King**. Our words must, therefore, convey this truth!



Furthermore, we believe that every loving act of justice, mercy, and kindness comes from Him; every taste of goodness, truth and beauty flows from Heaven; every wonder of nature and every scientific discovery is His gift to us! Indeed, our worldview sees **Jesus is the ultimate source of all healing**, for His greatest longing is to bring all sickness, anger, discord, and broken relationships under the control of His love. He is the One who will eventually deliver us all from our physical defects, our addictions, and our emotional bankruptcy. This is who our King really is—a friend of sinners who not only forgives but will deliver the world from every impurity, disease, sadness, and loss; in His Kingdom, every hurricane, tornado, tsunami, and flood will finally be stilled.

**Isn't that a worldview that you and I can speak about?** Isn't that what we're here for, and why He sends us out-- to offer an explanation... a way of seeing reality, that centers around Jesus, this world's only Lord and King.

Let's pray.