**May 12th 2024 Exaudi Sunday**

**Text: Matthew 10:24-31** 0721

**Theme: Our Expectation in this Life.**

May the grace of Jesus Christ strengthen and sustain us in trials and temptations. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: At the time of the founding of this country an American man by the name of Nathan Hale was captured by the soldiers of Great Britain, tried, and hung for treason, for the reason that he was found to be a spy. He was giving information about the movements of the British army to the leaders of the American Revolution. Just before he was hung, it was reported that he said: “My only regret is that I have but one life to give for my country.” This man gave his life for something he believed in very deeply. He had the conviction in his heart that the cause of freedom was worth giving his life for. Now it is not the purpose of this sermon to determine whether or not his cause was just and right, but to see his firmly held conviction which led to his life being taken because of it. When he had decided to begin his task, he knew that the punishment of being caught in the act of spying would be death. It was not something which caught him off guard. It was no secret to him that this was the case. Yet he went through with it anyway, because he felt that his own life was less valuable than the freedom of his country. Thus his actions as a spy helped the Americans in defeating the greatest military power on earth at the time. This man is to be admired for the deep convictions which he held leading to his death. Whether his cause was right or wrong, he felt that this was right and good and did what he felt was necessary. I speak of this only as an illustration of a greater truth taught in Scripture. Nathan Hale and the cause which he fought, and died, for was not a spiritual cause, but an earthly one.

However, there is a fight which rages on this world, and has raged since the fall into sin. That fight is a spiritual fight. God told Satan just after the fall into sin: *“I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.” (Gen 3:15)* You see, from that moment on there was two distinct peoples inhabiting the face of the earth: the seed of the woman, and the seed of Satan. They are both truly the seed of Adam and Eve, but one is the seed of unbelief and one is the seed of faith. The two different peoples were to be at enmity with one another. Enmity is defined as: a strong, settled feeling of hatred whether concealed, displayed, or latent. Thus it was not just that both parties were to be at odds with each other, but that the seed of Satan was to be at enmity with the seed of faith. It is a one sided enmity. For in Genesis it is told to Satan that his seed would be at enmity with the seed of the woman. Like Nathan Hale and the hatred he received from the British soldiers we, too, as the seed of faith, face hatred from our enemy, Satan and his seed. The war which rages on, though spiritual, very often spills over into the physical world. Thus, Paul speaks when he says: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:7)* And again: *“none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy.” (Acts 20:24)* These words of Paul sound very much like the words which Nathan Hale uttered. Paul is saying that the faith he holds in his heart is worth more to him than his own life. He knows that the fight which rages on is waged by those that hate him, that are at enmity with him. Satan hates him deeply and does everything possible to harm him in body and soul. Martin Luther often described Satan and his servant, the Antichrist, as raging and fuming against him and his doctrine. Therefore, we see that Satan and his seed are at enmity with the seed of faith, it can be no other way. Their hatred continually fans the flame so that there will never be rest, there will never be peace between the seed of Satan and the seed of faith. Recently I saw a Lutheran minister, a woman which is sinful itself, who described Jesus’ dealings with a woman in the New Testament as a mistake by Jesus. Satan even infiltrates the church on earth to attack and make prey sincere Christians. All of this brings to our mind that we are among the seed of faith. And it causes us to wonder within ourselves, what are we to expect in this life based on all we have just heard. Thus we will see according to our text, our expectation in this life. Our text is found in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at verse twenty four.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O Lord God, Thou righteous and just Judge of all mankind, we humbly beseech Thee to attend Thine ear unto the voice of our supplication. We cry unto Thee in distress and anguish, for the messengers of Satan have been sent to buffet us continually. Rescue us, dear Lord, from the hand of those that hate us, and wish to cause us harm in body and soul. Yet if Thou art pleased to allow us to suffer, but for a moment, give us grace to remain steadfast in Thy Word and doctrine and in the faith of Jesus Christ Thy Son. Give us courage to take up our cross and follow even when we know what the end of all these things is in this life. Remind us evermore that though we may lose our earthly life, our heavenly life can never be taken away. Keep us in the faith unto our end so that we not perish everlastingly, but join Thee in eternal bliss. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us see first that our expectation in this life is:

1. **To take up the cross.** We read verses twenty five and twenty six of our text: **Read verses here.** There is often a mistaken notion among Christians that we somehow will have a great and blessed life because we are disciples of Jesus. We often think that we are entitled to many and various blessings from the hand of God because we believe in Him. We expect to have more than we need in regard to our bodies; we expect that we will be spared from grief and pain; that our loved ones will not be injured or sick; that they will all have long lives. Thus it often happens that when some great tragedy, illness, suffering, or pain comes into our lives that we look to God and say: why would you allow this to happen to me? I have served you faithfully and this is what happens? Christians are often persecuted severely, in mind, body and soul, they are tortured and killed, and yet it is all too often the opposite of what they expect. This is the reason why Jesus states the things that he does in our text. Our expectation for this life should be found by observing the life of our Master Jesus Christ. He was called a devil, in fact, Satan himself. He endured hunger and thirst; He was poor with no place to call His home; He watched friends and family die. Many men sought to take His life from Him, and finally succeeded in doing so; they blasphemed Him, tortured Him, raged and fumed against Him night and day. Should we expect to be treated better than He? Jesus tells us that we should not. If they called the Son of God Beelzebub, or the prince of devils, they will call us far worse things. If they tortured and killed the Prince of Life they will do far worse to those who follow Him. We cannot expect to share in the glory and salvation of His name, but avoid sharing in His suffering. This is the reason that Paul tells the Romans: *“If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17)* You see, it is not as though we earn salvation by sharing in His suffering, but if we are not willing to suffer with Him, then we show that we are not truly His disciples. Someone who holds a deep conviction concerning Jesus Christ and salvation through His name is willing to suffer all to receive eternal life with Jesus in heaven. If he is not willing to suffer all than he is not a follower of Jesus. This is in line with what Jesus often said unto His disciples: *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:24-25)* We are not above Christ Jesus our Lord, He is our Master, thus we should expect nothing less than to take up a cross, just as Jesus took up His cross. It may not be an actual wooden cross which we will be crucified upon, but it will be a cross of suffering and contempt; a cross of enmity from the world.

These things are not told to us to make us fear the life of faith, but that we have a true expectation. When sin entered the world, enmity between us and Satan’s seed also entered the world. They hate us, and because they hate us we will suffer. It can be no other way, for a definite line has been drawn between the children of Satan and the children of God. Thus not only should we expect these things to come upon us, but when they do we should rejoice in them, for in them we know that we are children of God. The seed of Satan does not hate its own, but those who are the seed of the woman in faith. Therefore, Paul says: *“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Cor. 12:9)* The power of Christ rests upon us when we suffer with Him. He gives us the strength and the faith to endure these things that will most surely come upon us. It is a testimony to Jesus Christ when we suffer for His name and remain in the faith, because it is not our strength that comes forth, but God’s strength in us. Therefore we glory that we are counted worthy to suffer for His name’s sake. When we have a true expectation that we must take up the cross to follow Him, we do so:

1. **By preaching the name of Christ.** We read verses twenty six through thirty one of our text: **Read verses here.** Jesus began our text by proclaiming what we are to expect as followers of His, but if we are followers we must of necessity preach in His name. A person who holds a deeply held conviction about something will not remain silent in regard to it, but through his actions and words shows forth that he holds something dear to him. We saw previously of the conviction Nathan Hale had in regard to his country and freedom in his country, and because he held this conviction he went and took action in the name of his belief. In the same way Christians who hold the conviction that forgiveness and everlasting life come only through the name of Christ will proclaim that truth, whether by speaking or in their walk and conversation as Christians, or both. A good tree brings forth good fruit, thus a Christian brings forth Christian fruit. This is the very cause of the things we suffer. For the name of Jesus Christ is the very point of ire in Satan. He cannot abide preaching, teaching, or godly living in the name of Christ because he hates Him. This then is what causes the cross which we must take up: bearing the name of Christ upon our lips and in our hearts. It was not the conviction which Nathan Hale held in his heart that caused the hatred of the British, but the actions which resulted from that deeply held conviction. If he had not acted on it, he would not have been killed, but in refraining from acting he would have shown that his was no conviction at all. We are persecuted, tortured, mocked, and killed, not because we simply believe in Christ, but because the things we hear we proclaim upon the housetops. This is nothing more than the fruits of faith manifesting themselves in our words and actions. One is never divorced from the other, nay, if one truly believes in Christ his words and actions will show that forth. It can be no other way. Thus we are hated, because Christ was hated, and we bear His name upon our lips, hearts, and actions.

However, lest we become discouraged at the thought of proceeding in taking up our cross we are told not to fear them which kill the body, but cannot harm the soul. Rather we are to fear Him who can destroy both in hell. This is speaking of not fearing men, though they rage and fume against our bodies, but to fear God who will destroy soul and body in hell. Truly we can avoid every ounce of hatred, rage, and fuming of those at enmity with Christ by simply denying His name, as Ronald Reagan once said: “you can have peace, and you can have this minute: by surrender.” We will thereby save our bodies much pain and agony, but we will lose our eternal life. In order to have true faith, forgiveness, and salvation we must deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Jesus. This is not works righteousness, but our fruits will demonstrate that we are children of God. If we have no fruit, if we deny taking up the cross, we truly do not have faith, for we love ourselves and our earthly lives more than Christ, forgiveness and salvation in His name. Later in this same chapter Jesus said: *“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 10:32-33)* Nathan Hale went to the gallows and proclaimed that he would gladly give up his life many more times to gain freedom for his country. Paul proclaimed that he would die for the name of Jesus Christ, for it is the most important thing. Nothing supersedes it, not even our earthly lives.

Even in all of this we are not left comfortless, but Jesus says that not even a sparrow, which has little worth, does not die without God knowing and consenting to it. Thus He is ever on our side doing what is best for us and our salvation. He does not leave us alone, but has all things in His hand. We may be killed for having Christ upon our lips, but we are of more value than many sparrows, and God will keep us in His hand. In the end all the hatred, rage, and fuming of the world cannot harm us in the least, for our salvation cannot be taken away from us. Satan’s goal in his hatred is not to kill us in the body, no that truly holds no power, but Satan’s goal is to separate us from God our Savior. He uses earthly suffering, like financial difficulty, betrayal from friends, or any number of things, to make us think that God has turned against us. Yet we know different because we have been told by Jesus ahead of time that these things are to be expected. Thus when they happen we can smile and say with Luther: *“And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the kingdom ours remaineth.” (TLH 262:4)* In the end we are children of God and all the hatred in the world cannot change that. Let us remain strong in the Lord God almighty, for He is by our side in all these things. Let us not fear them which threaten our bodies and life, but let us believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. And finally let us proclaim the name of Him who took up His cross and went to death so that we might have life everlasting. Amen.