

WD August 1, 2022

## “Following Jesus Takes a Thick Skin”

We’ve all hear the term ‘thick-skinned.’ If one were to look at the animals with the thickest skin one quickly sees the benefits. A Hippo for instance has a 2-inch-thick skin that also secretes its own natural sunscreen—so it doesn’t burn while poolside. Another creature is the whale shark which is not only the largest fish in the oceans but also holds the record for the thickest skin at 4 inches in thickness. It’s an insulator and a tough layer of protection from a shark eat dogfish world.

The word for thick-skin comes from the word Pachyderm, a word not accidentally used for animals like a rhinoceros, hippopotamus, or elephant. We got the word in 1838 from French *pachyderme*, where it was used as a biological term to classify the animals. This in turn was taken from Greek *pakhydermos*, which translates to "thick-skinned". Anyway, thick skin is necessary to thrive in harsh environments.

What about humanity? What about Christians in particular? We live in a harsh environment too. The world is fallen to sin. The Devil is routinely trying to destroy us or pressure us into surrendering our faith in Jesus and severing any connection to Him. Jesus says the world hates us as it hated Him. I’d think that it’s pretty important to have a thick skin when it comes to overcoming the world in Jesus.

Jesus Himself had to have some really thick skin. Just look at the way Jesus’ enemies mistreated Him, how His family originally rejected him, and the disciples blew it. In Mark 3 Jesus’ own family thought He was crazy and was prepared to seize Him by force to put Him somewhere for His own good. John 7:5 makes it clear that even Jesus’ brothers didn’t believe Jesus. Jesus was also rejected at Nazareth in John 4 and these former neighbors and family members tried to throw Jesus off a cliff. Jesus was called a glutton just for hanging out with sinners and eating with them in Matt 11. And how many times did His disciples seem to be sleeping in class when Jesus would teach them. In Mark 7 Jesus says in frustration, “Are you still so dull...can’t you see that a man is made unclean by what comes out of him...” The disciples ran away, one betrayed Him, one denied Him, and everyone let Him down. In Matthew 12:22-37 Jesus is accused of being possessed by a demon calling Him Beelzebub just for casting out demons. Jesus was routinely challenged and mocked. He was mocked especially when He was on His cross. Matthew 27:39-41 says, “...<sup>39</sup>And those who passed by heaped abuse on Him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup>and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!’ <sup>41</sup>In the same way, the chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked Him...” Today most still do not respect Jesus and most certainly do not honor Him as Lord in their life. Yet Jesus continues to love and offer His cross and resurrection.

And Jesus says get ready. If you are going to follow me you should expect the same treatment (John 15). People are going to be disrespectful, careless or mean, or insensitive, or just plain cruel. Fellow Christians are going to say stupid things especially at a funeral when they are trying to say something helpful. Sometimes you may be the one rejected from the choir you want to be part of as I mentioned a few weeks ago. Sometimes you are not going to win the company over with your interview or ideas. Sometimes you may be called fat, unchristian, stupid, or phobic because you don’t buy into the ignorant statements of others. Sometimes you are just going to be a target because you seem to have it better than someone else. Sometimes you are just going to have trouble as Jesus says, because of the bitter nature of other people. Buckle up because these are the people Jesus says to love and pray for. You better have a thick skin.

You have a choice to make. You get to choose how you will respond. You choose to be sad, bitter, shaken, or hurt. This is where it is good to pay attention to the scriptures—“Quick to listen...” An ambush of hurt may be something much more. A person may be bitter, a liar, evil or a number of other things. Listen first to discover what. Be slow to speak...the words that we are called to respond with are to be gentle and respectful. Our “counter attack” should be a tactical response. Maybe a clarification question. Maybe a teachable moment. Maybe just walk away. Most of all be slow to become angry. Become angry or hurt, you are compromised. Maybe none of the things we should do have any effect on one attacking us. Jesus didn’t win everyone over even though He was always a good listener, slow to become angry and was always careful with His Words. Making the argument is not my point today.

Expect hardship. Expect to be hurt by others in this broken world we live in. Put into practice that thick skin of faith because you will need it from time to time. Be especially aware of those who are closest to you—

relatives especially. I have relatives who say stupid things to me about the Bible as though they are great theologians. They think that what they say is written in the Bible and they think they have won some kind of argument by quoting something that isn't even of the Bible.

Thick skin is tough and durable stuff. But this doesn't mean that its impenetrable. Know when to retreat. When Jesus saw He was getting nowhere in Nazareth He walked away and moved on to other places and people. When He was being called Beelzebub Jesus didn't start jousting with a name calling challenge and He didn't belittle anyone. He said His piece and carried on His ministry. And when people mocked Him and challenged Him to come down off the cross Jesus never got off *His* game. Even when the Disciples were threatened and thrown into jail in Acts 5, they endured it without spewing hateful things. And when Paul was thrown into Jail in Acts 16 Paul sang and eventually witnessed to the Jailor and Baptized His whole family.

See, that is the point. A thick skin keeps us on Jesus' game plan. Name-calling, taunting, threatening, or causing harm are tactics to shake our faith and purpose. And it may mean a couple of things are happening. You may be very effective as a witness and our opponents don't have a real argument. And it may mean that you are being truly faithful enough to be counted worthy of the attack. The closer we are to Jesus the more likely we may find this to be true.

We live in a time that is less tolerant, more confused, and more evil than it has ever been in this country. So, to end today let me encourage you with the last words of 1 Corinthians 15. Paul ends the chapter about the resurrection with the words of 15:58. "Therefore my brothers, stand firm, let nothing move, but always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because You know that Your labor in the Lord is not in vain." Thick skin is not in vain. You are standing on the promises of Christ our Lord. Hang in there. In Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30