

“The Rewarding Cost of Discipleship”

Matthew 10:32-42

December 2, 2018

This morning will be our final message in Matthew 10 before we transition into a Christmas series for December called, *“The Greatest Miracle: God Incarnate Here to Dwell.”*

Actually its quite ironic that I should preach on the end of Matthew 10 on the first week of December because it seems to collide with one of our favorite Christmas themes: “Peace on earth, good will toward men.”

Let me explain. Isaiah prophesied that Messiah would come as the **Prince of Peace** and that there would be no end to the increase of His **government of peace**. It was prophesied of Jesus that He would “guide our feet in the **way of peace**” (Luke 1:79) and on the night of His birth the heavenly hosts of angels sang, “*glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased*” (Luke 2:29).

And so its not surprising that we would emphasize the theme of peace at Christmas. But what do we do when we come to Matthew 10 where Jesus says, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; *I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*” (vs. 34).

Three things need to be said to resolve the seeming tension:

1. **Jesus came to create peace between God and man.** Hence the angels sang at Jesus’ birth, “glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased. We experience the blessing of peace when we are at peace with God, having been reconciled to Him through the cross of Jesus.
2. **When we confess Jesus as Lord, our union with Christ creates peace with God but hostility with the world.** This is what Jesus meant when He said He did not come to bring peace. The context of Matt 10 is one of persecution. The world who rejects the gospel-offer of peace, “wars” against God’s people. *The gospel of peace which welcomes God’s reign in our lives, aggravates the hostility of the world toward those who follow Christ.* We see this reality

immediately following the Christmas story in Matthew, when Herod had all the baby boys in Bethlehem slaughtered (Mt 2:16-18). What a horrific response to the coming of Christ, even as a baby.

James 4:4 says, “do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?” ***You cannot be at peace with God and the world simultaneously*** because the whole world lies under the power of the evil one who wars against God (1Jn 5:19; cf. Eph 2:2).

But what about the passages of Scripture like Isaiah 9 that seem to picture world-wide peace? That leads us to the 3rd statement:

3. **Eventually, when Jesus comes again, He will establish His universal reign of peace on earth.** But until then, believers who are at peace with God will not be granted peace by the world.

This is why Jesus said, “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives...These things I have spoken that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world*” (John 14:27; 16:33).

So here we are in this tension between God and the world. In Matthew 10, Jesus reveals just how intense the hostility of the world will be toward believers and the weightiness of our response to it. And yet He also wants to encourage us that there is reward for those who are faithful to Christ.

Here is it is in a nutshell: ***While devotion to Christ in this life may require great cost, it is not without eternal reward.***

Let’s break this down into 4 key points:

1. **Our identification with Christ has ultimate consequences** (32-33).

[32-33] The idea behind confessing Christ is that of publicly identifying with Him, living in such a way that your allegiance to Christ is steadfast in a culture where there is pressure to live otherwise. It’s obvious from this text that while our relationship with Christ is personal, it must not be private.

Remember the context from last week. In vs. 28 Jesus said, “do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The point is that faithfulness to Christ can have severe consequences in this world. Yet the consequences for being unfaithful to Christ are much greater. To acquiesce the world is to betray God.

If we confess Christ before men, even when we are pressured to recant, or when the risk of suffering is great, Jesus promises us that He will also confess us before the Father in Heaven. In other words, our allegiance to Christ is rewarded by Jesus’s allegiance to us before the Father. Our oneness with Christ that empowers us to withstand testing on earth is the same oneness with Christ that enables us to stand before God and be accepted by Him.

However, if we deny Christ under the pressure of the world, then we will be denied as true believers before God. We will be denied as true children of God because the testing of the world has revealed that we are imposters who are not truly united to Christ. If you deny Jesus as your Lord, He will say to the Father, “I never knew you.”

Do you feel the weight of eternity in these verses? Given our bent toward self-deceit, we need the pressure of the world to confirm the genuineness of our oneness with Christ.

2. **Our identification with Christ will create conflict with the world and divide our deepest relationships (34-37).**

[34-37] If we are going to grasp the gravity of the situation, we must realize that for many the testing will not just be from the world in general, but from the people closest to them who they love deeply. What if you had to choose between being faithful to Christ or being rejected by your family?

This is what Jesus means when He says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. What does a sword do? It divides. Jesus is not talking about literal war here, but deep division. And of course we know that many believers have died as martyrs, even at the hands of family members who have rejected Christ at all cost.

D.A. Carson put it this way, “Prince of Peace, though He is, the world will so violently reject Him and His reign that men and women will divide over Him.”¹ Indeed, families will divide over him—“a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (36).

In what sense did Jesus come to set a man against his father or a daughter against her mother? He came to establish the reign of God in the hearts of men. But man in his rebellion against God, would not only reject God’s righteous reign, but also war against those who exchange loyalty to the world (and the values of the world) for loyalty to God. Jesus’s goal is not to tear families apart. But He knows that the cost of following Him for many will be the rejection of their own families.

And this is a cost that Jesus upholds. In vs. 37 He says, “*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and He who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*” Jesus is saying that to be His disciple, you must value Him above even the deepest family relationships on earth. How can He say that? If anyone else said that it would be scandalous. If a teacher or a coach said you have to be more loyal to me than to your parents, that would be wrong. If your boss demanded your allegiance even over that to your spouse or children, that would be absurd and wrong.

Only God demands greater loyalty than our family. And Jesus, the Son of God, is speaking with the very authority of God. Perhaps it would be helpful to state vs. 37 in the positive: “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind**” (Mt 22:37). Let me remind you that of the 21 occurrences of the phrase “with all your heart” in the Bible, it is used always and only in reference to the Lord. No one or nothing else should be the recipient of our whole heart but God.

¹ D.A. Carson, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, pg. 257.

So should I love my wife with all my heart? Should I love my kids with all my heart? To ask that question is to ask, “should I put my family on equal plane with God? Some of us do and some of us put our family on a higher plane than God. What I am saying is that loving your family with all your heart may be at the expense of loving God with all your heart. We have to be very careful about the idolatry of family.

Here’s why. ***Whatever has all of your heart is your god. Whatever you love with all your heart, whatever has the final claim to your affections is your god. And if it is not Jesus, you are not worthy of Him because He is God and God is the only one worthy of all our heart. He can’t be your God if you love something else with all your heart, because that something else is your god.*** And He won’t co-reign with any other god (Isa 42:8).

Now I realize that I am stepping on some personal ground and lest you think that that’s not very family-friendly, let me remind you that ***whole-hearted love for God always results in loving people better.*** The best way for you to love your spouse, the best way for you to love your children is with a whole-hearted love for God. If I simply love them with all my heart, they get a heart that is perverted by sin and selfishness. But if I love them with a whole-hearted love for God, then they get a heart that is saturated with the perfect love of God. And so I will serve my family better. I will discipline my children in a way that is better for them. I will communicate better. I will be more patient. I will be more joyful in my sacrificial living for my family. I will *love* my family better when God has the exclusive claim to my heart.

In Matt 10, Jesus is acknowledging that some, because they don’t know Christ, will not tolerate a family member’s higher allegiance to Christ.

The paradox is that loving Jesus with all your heart may cost you your family while loving Jesus with all your heart is the best thing you can do for your family. Whole-hearted love for God always results in loving people better. (We never have a license to be unnecessarily offensive to people)

Now as if that is not weighty enough, Jesus now presses us to the utmost cost of discipleship in vss. 38-39. Here we see that...

3. **Our identification with Christ is more weighty than the preservation of our own earthly lives (38-39).**

[38-39] There’s that word “worthy” again: “He who does not take up his cross and follow after Me is not *worthy* of Me.” In vs. 37, it was the one who loves family more than Jesus who is not worthy of Him. So let’s go back to what I just said about vs. 37 and see if it helps us understand vss. 38-39.

Whatever has all your heart is your god. Whatever has the final claim on your affections is your god. And if it is anything other than Jesus, you are not worthy of Him because He is God and He can’t be your God is something else is your God.

In vs. 37 Jesus was talking about the idolatry of family—making your family your god in stead of Jesus. Now in vs. 38 He’s talking about the idolatry of self—making your own life your god instead of Jesus. Taking up your cross can only mean one thing—death. *Jesus is saying that to love Him with all your heart means loving Him more than your own life.*

For some, vs. 38 will mean physical death when faithfulness to Christ comes at the cost of forfeiting one’s own life. To them Jesus says, “do not fear those who kill the body” but cannot harm the soul (vs. 28).

For all of us vs. 38 means dying to self every day. That is, valuing God’s will in place of our own. Living for Jesus’ interests more than our own. He is not your Lord if you do not follow Him when it means not going your own way. He is not your God if you do not obey Him what its not what you feel like doing.

This is weighty stuff so again Jesus reminds us that we are talking about matters that weigh into eternity. He who has found his life—that is, he who puts ultimate value in this earthly life—will lose it because he will die. But he who has lost his life for My sake—or we might say, he who *spends* his earthly life on Me because I am his ultimate treasure will have life eternally.

And the very reason He spends his earthly life on Christ is because he loves Jesus with all of His heart as his Lord.²

4. **Our identification with Christ will be rewarded by God (40-42).**

We have already seen the rewards or benefits of being faithful to Christ. Jesus will represent us before the Father in Heaven, as our advocate (32). Though we lose our life on this earth, we have the promise of eternal life (39).

Now Jesus concludes this chapter of hard sayings on the cost of discipleship with further encouragement on the reward for those who are faithful to Christ. **[40-42]**

Remember here that Jesus is addressing the disciples that He is sending out on mission. They go representing Him. And so those who receive them and their message, receive Jesus, and because Jesus is one with the Father, they receive the Father as well. In other words, the way people treat Jesus' disciples, reveals their heart attitude toward God Himself.

Furthermore, their response to the disciples impacts God's attitude toward them. Just as God rewards those who treat His prophets with honor, just as He rewards those who honor the righteous, so He will reward those who give even a cup of cold water to the disciples who come in His name. The "little ones" in vs. 42 does not refer to children, but to Jesus' disciples who will be regarded as small and insignificant by the world. The point of vs. 42 is that even the smallest, most basic kindness of a drink of water will not go unnoticed or rewarded by God.

It reminds me of **Hebrews 6:10**: ***"For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints."***

As we reflect on Matthew 10, it begs the question, *how do we get to the point of loving Christ supremely—more than family or life itself?*

The first step is the most critical. ***You must be born again.*** When you see the destructive nature of your rebellion against God which provokes His wrath, and when you see the grace and mercy of Christ who died for you, you will treasure Him with all your heart, forsaking your own life to no longer live for yourself but for Him (2 Cor 5:15).

Then, as we grow in our relationship with Christ there's a progression that develops if we feed it. Faithfulness is born out of loyalty and loyalty is born out of love. Love is fueled by communion (nurturing the relationship) and communion is enriched by the character of the One with whom we commune.

In other words, the more we develop an intimate relationship with Jesus, the more we love Him because we discover the depths of the riches of who He is in all His perfections—His truthfulness and reliability. His faithfulness and compassion. His mercy and His grace. His kindness and His justice. His love which is deeper than life itself. His love which gave Himself in death on a Roman cross for undeserving sinners like us. His promise of eternal life with no regrets, only increasing joy and the delight of God's favor which is lavished on us by our heavenly Father.

As we come to the Lord's table, we come to commune with the One who took up His cross and laid down His life for us. Will we lay down our lives for Him? Will we relinquish our will and selfish interests to follow Him? Will we do it in our marriages, in our parenting, in our work, and in our recreation? Will we regard Him as Lord in all things? Will we lay down our sin and every idol? Will we love Him with all our heart? Will we nurture that kind of love?

How do we do it? We drink in His sacrificial love for us and let it transform our hearts.

² Cf. Matthew 16:24

Communion:

Bread:

*Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is **in** heaven.
(Mt 10:32-33).*

Therefore, also, Jesus is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25)

Cup:

*Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful
(Hebrews 10:19-23).*