

The Cost and Reward of Being a Disciple (Matthew 10:34-42)

To give us some context to today's reading of Matthew 10:34-42, we start at the beginning of Matthew 10, where we find Jesus' instructions to his disciples as he sends them out as emissaries. For their mission, they are armed with supernatural powers over unclean spirits and over sickness. They are to take vows of poverty, taking with them no money and receiving no reimbursement for the ministrations. Further, the disciples are to travel light, and for their sustenance, they are to depend on the good will of those who will receive them. In the midst of this commissioning of the disciples, Jesus signals that they will encounter difficulties—that they will be like sheep among wolves. In the midst of this ominous warning, the good news is that some will courageously support the disciples. And for these people, there will be the reward of the righteous.

Now, we come to today's reading, where we read, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." At first glance this saying may sound like a contradiction to Isa 9:6 ("Prince of Peace"), Lk2:14 ("on earth peace to men"), and Jn 14:27 ("Peace I leave with you"). It is true that Christ came to bring peace—peace between the believer and God, and peace among men. Yet the inevitable result of Christ's coming is conflict between Christ and the antichrist, between light and darkness, between Christ's children and the devil's children. This conflict can occur even between members of the same family.

In the verses of our passage of Matthew today, Jesus is exact and uncompromising. He lays some heavy demands upon his disciples. He states clearly what it will **cost** a person to be his disciple, and he describes the cost by using four illustrations. The **four** illustrations are a **person's family**, the **cross**, a **person's life**, and a **person's ministry**.

So. Let's start with Jesus' **first** illustration, a **person's family**. The believer is to note **three** things about his family. **First**, Jesus sets the believer against his family. It is important to see that it is Jesus who caused the division. Jesus calls a person out of the world and separates him from the world so that he can go about correcting the evil of the world. If a family member continues to live in sin and to walk ever onward toward the grave without turning to God, two things usually happen. The believer struggles to save his loved one, no matter what opposition he may face. The family member rebels against the righteousness and effects of the believer.

The **second** thing is that Jesus demands supreme love. Jesus uses the words, "more than me." Believers are to love their families, but they are to love God more. He is to be first and foremost. Their first loyalty is to be to God. **Two** terrible things happen when a family is put before God. **First**, the

families cannot be what they should be without God.
No family can reach

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its full potential without God. Without God, a family will lack spiritual growth and strength, conviction and commitment, confidence and assurance, purpose and meaning for all eternity. There will be no prospect and no hope of eternal life, no assurance of anything beyond this life.

The **second** terrible thing that can happen when family is put before God is that families cannot be looked after and overseen by God, unless God is given his rightful place in the family. If the family takes control over its life, ignoring God and his control, then what happens to the family is in its own hands. God is put off to the side, excluded, and shut out. He is given no voice in the life of the family.

The family is left all to itself. There is a lack of spiritual strength to face the trials and crises that confront the family during its life together.

The **third** thing Jesus warns the believer about is that he shall either be counted worthy or unworthy of Him.

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There is a great reward for loving Christ supremely. If we count Christ worthy of our first love, He will count us worthy of Him, We are assured: we shall receive the great salvation in Him. There is a terrible loss for not loving Christ supremely. If we love our family more than Christ, He will count us unworthy of Him. We are assured that we shall not receive the great salvation in Him.

The second illustration Jesus used is that of **the cross**. This is the first mention of the cross in Matthew's Gospel. The cross was in instrument of death and here symbolizes the necessity of total commitment—even unto death—on the part of Jesus' disciples. Christ again made a strong demand. The words he used were "Anyone who does not take his cross." Every man has "his cross." The cross is the symbol of death and execution.

Every man must count himself dead to sin and follow after Christ.

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The reward is again being counted either worthy or unworthy of Christ. If we do not put ourselves to death, we are not worthy of Christ. He shall deny us.

What Christ says is strong. A man must die to self, sacrificing his will, ambitions, and desires. Whatever it is that a person wants—comfort, ease, wealth, fame, power, family—all must be placed behind Christ and His will.

The third illustration Jesus used is that of a **person's life**. Jesus demands a person's life (the **cost** of a disciple). Note the unique way he words this.

“Whoever finds his life will lose it,” and “Whoever loses his life will find it.” The **reward** is losing life vs. finding life. Life, the very thing which a person seeks, is found only in Christ.

And now for Jesus' fourth illustration, a **person's ministry**. This fourth illustration that Jesus used is that of welcoming and ministering. Christ demands

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(another word for the cost of a disciple) that we welcome and minister to all his servants. Imagine this! The person who ministers to God's messenger is said to minister to the following: to Christ himself, to God the Father, to a prophet, to a righteous man, to a little one.

The reward is astounding. The person who welcomes and receives God's servant shall receive a reciprocal or an equal reward. The person who welcomes and ministers shall receive the presence of Christ and of God himself. He reflects honor upon the Lord and even upon God himself. In fact, Jesus says that welcoming and ministering to others is the same as entertaining Him and His Father.

The person who welcomes and ministers shall receive a reciprocal or an equal reward with God's servant. Perhaps a person cannot be a prophet or a shining example of a righteous man, but he can receive the reward of both. How? By simply welcoming and

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supporting and caring for God's servant. This is an astounding truth: the person actually shares in the work of God's messenger when he receives and helps him. Christ puts an enormous value on how his messenger is received and treated. If the messenger is received, Christ will give an equal reward for the kindness and care shown to his messenger.

Christ declares that the smallest ministry will not lose its reward. A person will be rewarded for the smallest ministry done for God's messenger. Just giving a cup of water to a messenger is extremely significant to God. It causes God to say emphatically that a person will be reward for such an

act. The person needs to know that he is ministering to someone who is very, very dear to God. Christ calls his messengers “little ones,” which is a term of endearment.

There is great confidence and assurance here for the messenger of God. It is implied that some will receive and welcome the messenger of the Lord. There will be

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some who will open their hearts and homes to him, and they will receive his message.

What lessons can we learn from this Scripture reading of Matthew?

God equips those he calls, so we are never alone in our assignment. We will serve with generosity and bless others because God has freely blessed us. We will have courage because God sees, protects, and values us deeply. We should stand boldly for Jesus and let our faith be known through our actions and words. We must trust God’s provision, because where he sends us, he sustains us.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the many things we can learn from the commission Christ gave to his disciples, when he sent them to preach the good news of the kingdom to Israel and empowered them with strength from on high. Thank you that in Christ, we have all we need for life and godliness, through the power of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**