

TAKE YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW JESUS

Matthew 10:34-42

Key Verse: 10:38

“...and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

This is the last part of chapter 10, in which Jesus sends his disciples out into the world to preach the gospel and to heal the sick. In this part Jesus teaches what kind of commitment his people must make and what the reward of following him is. May the Lord renew our relationship with him as disciples through this passage.

First, Jesus came to bring a sword (34-36).

Look at verse 34. “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” The Jewish people had a common understanding of the Messiah based on many Old Testament prophecies that he would bring peace when he came. Isaiah called him, “Prince of Peace.” Their concept of peace was freedom from oppression of their enemies. It was like the peace that comes after war. Jesus says that he did not come to bring that kind of peace. Therefore, the disciples should not live in a false supposition about the kind of peace Jesus brings. Even today many think that if they become a Christian they will have a smooth and comfortable life, free from strife. This too is a false supposition. We should not expect that Jesus will make our lives free from hardship or conflict. Rather the opposite is often true. Why is it so?

Jesus says that he came to bring a sword. Of course, Jesus did not carry a sword with him. Jesus is not talking about a literal sword. Jesus uses the word “sword” in a metaphorical sense. Jesus is referring to the word of truth that he preaches which divides men between God and the devil. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” When the word of God penetrates into someone’s heart it brings God’s judgment. It exposes sinful thoughts and feelings as what they are. It requires us to make a decision to accept it or to reject it. For those who accept it, it becomes the absolute standard of their lives, including thoughts and conduct and how to make relationships. The word of God becomes the measure of all things. But for those who reject it, it becomes a relentless enemy whom they try to avoid at all costs. The most important decision each person makes is whether to accept the word of God or not. On the basis of this decision all other relationships must be formulated. When two people of close human ties differ in their view of the word of God, there is a limit to the depth of their relationship. More than that, there is a deep and unavoidable conflict in their relationship. This is true for even the closest of human ties. On the other hand, even though two people may have very different backgrounds and personalities and social standings, if they have a common view that the Bible is the word of God, they can relate on the most fundamental level, the level of spiritual truth.

Jesus said that he came to bring a sword. Jesus’ coming forces the issue between God and men and between men and men. How we see Jesus determines how we see everything else. Jesus’ sword is dividing America today. Many have said that we are fighting a cultural war in our country, reminiscent of the Civil War. The Civil War divided America between North and South. The main issue was slavery. The cultural war is fundamentally between godly people and ungodly people. Those who have accepted Jesus as God have a basic value system that honors life and seeks moral and spiritual development that is consistent with the Bible. They tend to be in favor the pro-life position, Biblical marriage, prayer in public schools. Those who have rejected Jesus as God tend to favor pro-choice position, gay marriage, and anything that removes references to God or Jesus from our political, social and economic life. There is a sharp divide on the issue of evolutionary theory. Although there is room for godly scientists to form some sort of evolutionary beliefs in line with the Bible, the general consensus is that ungodly people support evolution because it is an alternative explanation to creation apart from God’s work. Those who believe the Bible advocate what the Bible says, that God created the heavens and the earth. Jesus’ sword is dividing our nation America. On which side do you stand? When we stand on Jesus’ side we must also carry the sword of truth with us. In Ephesians 6:17 Paul charges Christians, “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The only offensive weapon we have is the word of God. But it is a sharp sword indeed. We must be like Jesus who came with a sword as we carry the word of truth into this dark world.

Look at verses 35-36. “For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” Even the closest of

family members will find themselves on opposing sides. Jesus is not saying that family relationships apart from him are impossible. But there is always a danger that they can be broken. We have seen many difficult and painful examples of this. Dr. Joseph Chung gave his heart and life to serve the work of God for the last 40 years. His son, Joe Jr., followed in his footsteps for a while. But through several events, Joe Jr. faced a limitation in his commitment to follow Jesus. When he did not stand on the side of Jesus, his relationship with his father was broken and he became an enemy of UBF ministry. The hostility he has vented toward UBF is as passionate as one can expect. When Jesus comes into a person's heart, he changes our value system and basis for human relationships from the core. Jesus brings a sword that draws a very clear line between those who are on Jesus' side and those who are not. There is no middle ground.

Therefore, we must discard any notion that the Christian life will be peaceful and comfortable in this world. When we accept Jesus as King, we must re-examine all of our human relationships and put them into the proper perspective. We must realize that the Christian life involves conflict and struggle on the deepest level of our being. Anyone who thinks the Christian life is fun and enjoyable and always "good" has failed to work through the transformation that Jesus requires from us.

However, Jesus does bring peace. Jesus brings us peace with God. This is, in fact, real peace. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...." The real cause of restlessness and distress is sin. Because of sin we are enemies of God. No one can have peace when his enemy is God. But God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus took up all of our infirmities and sorrows and sins. Jesus brought forgiveness of sins. Jesus restored our relationship with God. We are now the children of God who have all the privileges and rights to live in God's love and presence. We have eternal life in his kingdom. Jesus gives us real peace. Let's accept Jesus' real peace and the reality of life in a hostile world. Jesus told his disciples in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." May Jesus give you real peace.

Second, Jesus must be first in our hearts and lives (37-39).

Jesus tells us we must set our priority very clearly to love him first before any other affection we have. Look at verse 37. "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...." In human relationships there is not a deeper love and loyalty than the one between parents and children. But this relationship too must be subject to the Kingship of Jesus. Jesus is King. Jesus is God. He is our Creator, Savior and Ruler. He must be first in our affections and loyalty. There is no room for another, no room at all. Even the most intimate of human relationships must defer to Jesus' reign in our lives. Jesus insists on it. Jesus is Lord.

We can find a good example of this in the life of Abraham. Abraham lived by faith in God's promises for 25 years, going through many ups and downs and experiencing many trials as well as triumph. Then, according to God's promise, God gave him a son Isaac. God knew that Abraham loved Isaac dearly. Abraham's hopes and dreams were wrapped up in Isaac and his future as God's chosen covenant bearer. But one day God asked him to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt offering. It was God's way of keeping the first place in Abraham's heart. Abraham obeyed God and was ready to slay Isaac. In this way, Abraham passed God's test and proved his love for God. It is our Christian duty to love our children and to love our parents. But at the bottom of our hearts we must love God more. Jesus must be first in our relationships. Only then can we be worthy disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus wants to be first, not only in our outer relationships but in our hearts as well. Jesus wants us to love him and be loyal to him overcoming our own ideas, plans and desires. Look at verse 38. "...anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Here to take one's cross has reference to Jesus himself. Jesus took up the cross of suffering and death to save us from our sins. When Jesus hung on the cross, he was alone, all alone. Jesus' disciples had abandoned him. One had betrayed him and the top disciple had denied him. The religious leaders were hurling insults at him. Behind them, the devil was hissing and taunting Jesus to come down from the cross and save himself. Even God turned his back on Jesus, leaving him utterly alone to hang on the cross in our places for our sins. Jesus was utterly forsaken and abandoned in our places for our sins. In this way Jesus reconciled us to God. Thank you, Jesus. When we follow him as his disciples, we will also experience rejection and abandonment. Those who

seemed to love us will reject us. We may stand all alone with Jesus. We may stand all alone to testify to the gospel of Jesus in a sinsick world. At those times, we must remember Jesus who took the cross for us.

The great man of God John Hus was hated by the Catholic Church for teaching the Bible to Hungarian people in a language that they could understand. He was hated for opening the Bible to common people in a time when only the pope, cardinals, bishops and priests were allowed to open the Bible. He was systematically isolated from many in the society. At last, he was brought out to be humiliated. His priestly garments were stripped from him one by one in front of all the members of his town. He was tied to a stake which was surrounded by firewood which was then set on fire. He told his executioner, "You can cook this goose, but the word of God that has been preached through me will continue to spread." The bishop in charge of his execution said, "Over my dead body." After he was killed, and his body burned to ashes, his persecutors, in their rage against him, gathered up all of his ashes and threw them into a nearby lake scattering them completely. In the course of time, the bishop died and was buried in an honorable place in the church. About 100 years later, a man by the name of Martin Luther was ordained on the very spot where the bishop's body laid. The word of God spread through Martin Luther over his dead body.

There will be times in our lives of faith when we stand all alone with Jesus. There will be times of pain and shame. We may even have to offer our lives to God to be faithful witnesses to Jesus. When we do so, we may lose everything in the world. But we gain something much more precious.

Look at verse 39. "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." John Hus lost his life for Jesus and the gospel. But he found eternal life and eternal glory in the kingdom of God. The bishop gained everything in the world in terms of his human honor and power and wealth. But he lost everything in the end and became an everlasting loser. When we lose our lives for Jesus, Jesus gives us eternal life in the kingdom of God. Jesus gives us final victory and everlasting life in glory.

Third, Jesus rewards (40-42).

Look at verses 40-42. "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." The disciples would often be despised and rejected in the world. But they had a very great reward in the sight of God. They were chosen as the ambassadors of God in a lost and dying world. They were the very representatives of Jesus Christ before me. Those who accepted their message accepted Christ himself. And through Christ they came into the presence of the Holy God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. What greater reward or blessing could there be?

When we examine God's redemptive history, we find that God called and used very ordinary people in his work. When God touched their lives with his power and grace, they were transformed into spiritual giants who could shake the world and turn it upside down. William Tyndale was the first to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into English. He did this at the cost of his life. As he was being executed, he prayed, "Lord, I pray that the king of England may open his spiritual eyes and see you." Three years after Tyndale was martyred King Henry VIII proclaimed that every Englishman should obtain and read the word of God in English. Tyndale's prayer changed a nation and the world. It was because he stood on the side of God as God's man in the world. What a privilege Jesus has given to us. Jesus makes us his own representative on the earth. Jesus uses us to give the eternal word of God to others. Through our Bible teaching and witnessing, people can come out of the power of death and have eternal life. Through us, people can come to God.