

ON BEING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

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Scripture: Matthew 10:24-39

Before we get into the word from Matthew 10:24-39, I want to preface it with an understanding of the whole chapter.

Last week, we talked about general verses and then specific verses, and how there are some general verses that are just meant generally for everybody. And then specific verses that the Holy Spirit sometimes brings that will touch us and say that this mandate or this verse or this direction is for this moment. But in this chapter, the specificity of these verses (some of them) are actually for the disciples who are walking with Jesus at that time. Then there are general verses that would be for us. So I want to make sure that we understand this 10th chapter.

The background is this: Jesus is sending out His disciples and He is sending them out with instructions for service in verses 1-15. Then from verses 16-23, He's telling them about the hard road that they will face; how they are going to face difficulty that will be ahead of them as they go into various places. Then in verses 24-39, He takes a step back and talks very generally of what it means to be a disciple of His, and giving certain principles that must be a part of their mental makeup as they seek to be His followers. He then ends that chapter with verses 40-42 with a reward for their service.

Specifically, He is talking to them in verses 40-42, and then from verses 1-23, but generally He is talking to all disciples of His, not only at that period of time, but including us as well – ones who are followers of His, ones who bear His name. In these 15 or 16 verses are key points that will help you and me understand what it means to be a disciple and what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus.

Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus says, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!"

"Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 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. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."

"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD."

"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. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

These are hard-hitting words, isn't it? This is a passage of scripture that brings discipleship to the front and says, "Okay. If you are going to be a disciple, here are things that you must keep in mind. Here are things that you must follow, here are things that you must expect in being a disciple. And then it challenges us to be true disciples.

I think there about 5 points that we can bring out of this passage. Let's look at them one by one.

1. Prepare to be maligned against. (verses 24-25)

The point that Jesus is making here is that as a disciple, we will be maligned. He is saying that we are not greater than He is. We are not greater than the teacher if we are students, and that we must aspire to be like Jesus just as students aspire to be like their teachers. Further, He says, that He is maligned against. Therefore, we too will be maligned against and must be prepared to be maligned against.

What does it mean to be maligned against? To be slandered, to be criticized, to be defamed, to be smeared, to be liable, to be denigrate. All of these things are part and parcel of what we need to expect as a disciple or a follower of Jesus. And so Jesus says, "We must be prepared for this because this is par for the course of being a disciple.

If you and I are serious about being followers or disciples of Jesus, we need to be prepared to be maligned against.

2. (verses 26-32)

- **Don't be fearful.**

We may be put in threatening situations, but we are not to fear, for everything will be revealed someday. What does He mean by that? Perhaps you are in a situation where you're privy to knowledge that your position, either as a pastor, or counsellor, or an employee, where you cannot talk about something, and yet the other person knows that you cannot talk about it. And this person is also in a position of some authority to make your life miserable, to wield power over you or threaten your future, your job or even cause bodily harm. Jesus is saying this: don't fear this situation. Speak out what you hear him tell you to do, because ultimately, everything will be revealed, and you will be vindicated.

So even though now you cannot talk about some of the things that you may know that will vindicate you, Jesus is saying: "Speak what you need to speak, what I'm telling you to speak without maybe, having to bring in that particular situation because you cannot, and undergo what is happening to you in terms of maybe, some of the harm that is coming to you or the discomfort. But don't fear it, because ultimately one day, everything will be revealed and then you will stand vindicated.

- **Don't be worried.**

Within the context of those verses, Jesus is saying: Don't be worried. God cares for even the sparrows which are so cheap, and yet not one of them falls to the ground without His knowledge. So how much more will God take care of you than many, many sparrows?

God cares so much for you and me. He is saying: If you are going to be My disciple, there will be many situations that will threaten you, where you can't talk about things maybe, and so fear looms. But He says: Don't fear because one day everything will be opened

and you will be vindicated. Also remember this, that you are worth much more than the sparrows that He cares about, that He will not allow even one of them to fall to the ground without His knowledge. You and I are more valuable. So He says, “As followers of mine, don’t fear and don’t worry.”

3. We ought to publicly acknowledge Him. (verses 32-34)

He talks about everyone who confesses Me before men, I will confess before My Father, and if you deny Me before men, I will deny you before My Father. This tells us that we ought to publicly acknowledge Him as disciples, as followers of Jesus, we need to let our friends, our relatives, our colleagues, everybody know that we are disciples of Jesus and that He leads me and He leads you.

Many years ago, we had the privilege of talking to a person who was a wonderful seeker after truth. I had a long conversation with him that lasted into the wee hours of the morning. At that point, it didn’t lead to him getting to know Jesus or accept Jesus. But at a later point, we heard that he did. But here’s the amazing thing! He took a year’s leave from his office and both he and his wife bought a round trip ticket around the world, stopping at all the places where they had relatives, and spent time with each of those relatives letting them know that he was a believer, a disciple, a follower of Jesus. He wasn’t afraid to publicly acknowledge who he was and who Jesus was to him.

Yet sometimes, as I heard some time back, about two people in an office, who after six months or a year of working together, suddenly realized that both of them were followers of Jesus. While they were so happy to acknowledge, it made one ask the question: How was it that it took so long before he could identify the traits of being a follower or a disciple of Jesus. So there must be a public manifestation not only from our words but our behavior as well, things we do that proclaim that you and I are disciples of Jesus.

The old adage says, “If you were to be tried for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” Jesus says, “If you publicly acknowledge Me before men, I will publicly acknowledge you before My Father. But if you deny Me before Men, then I will deny you before My Father.” That’s a very, very fearful place to be in – to stand before the throne, before the Judge and to hear Jesus saying, “Depart from Me. I never knew you.” So we need to be very careful. This is a very sobering aspect of being a disciple of Jesus, that we acknowledge Him publicly wherever we are.

4. Be prepared for conflict. (verses 34-36)

He says some strange words about not coming to bring peace on the earth but a sword, and to set up people against one another. You wonder – what is Jesus saying here? He is saying, “Be prepared for conflict because of who you are – as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus who has certain principles by which we live, we can and must accept people who don’t share those principles and values to be in conflict with us.

Therefore, there can be no peace that exists between two world views – that’s what Jesus is saying. As My disciple, as My follower, you owe allegiance to the things that I speak about and the principles I stand firmly on. There can be no compromise on that and because there can be no compromise, somebody who doesn’t have those principles will always find your position a conflicting one.

Let me give you an example. Some years ago, I heard from one of our church members that his office had asked him to put on his resumé, a qualification that he didn't have. They wanted to send him abroad for a job. He refused to do it, and in refusing, lost his job. But that's the kind of conflict that a disciple of Jesus will have – there's a cost that is attached to it, that you may have to pay for it. There will be a conflict between you and the office maybe, because of the principle of honesty and integrity that we stand for, as disciples of Jesus.

Then you may ask: what about the peace that we talk about in terms of Jesus? He came as the Prince of Peace. Or what about 'blessed are the peace makers'? that's the kind of peace that comes from being in complete alignment with God. God's peace flows through us because of the alignment that we have with Him. It's not a peace that works horizontally. When we talk about the peace of the world, it's a peace that often involves compromise. We compromise on things so that we can have a peaceful situation. But the peace that Jesus came to give is a peace that rests upon us even though we are in a conflicting situation. He invites us also to bring this kind of peace into different situations as we bring alignment with His principles and foundational thoughts.

Therefore Paul would say to us, "As far as possible, live peaceably with one another." That it's not going to be easy for everybody to be peaceful because of the different worldviews. And Jesus is saying, "Accept that." don't look for a peace that involves compromise or as the world understands peace. Jesus said, "The peace that I will bring is the peace that the world doesn't understand". So, be prepared for conflict.

5. Be fully surrendered to Him. (verses 37-39)

Jesus 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. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

Be fully surrendered to Him. A family member, father, mother, son or daughter who doesn't see eye to eye with you being a disciple, will be the cause for conflict. Jesus uses this situation to pivot to his last point which is: Love is at stake. You have to love Jesus more than you love your family because God wants us to be His followers and His children, not out of coercion, but because of love. To adhere to these principles of discipleship, the motivation to do so must be unparalleled love for God. Nothing else! We've got to be able to love God more than family members. Only then can we follow completely after Him.

Francis Xavier wrote a beautiful poem. I'm going to read it to you. It's in old English, but I think you can get the gist of it.

O God, I love Thee for Thyself
And not that I may heaven gain,
Nor yet that they who love Thee not
Must suffer hell's eternal pain.

Thou, o My Jesus! Thou didst me'
Upon the cross embrace.
For me didst bear the nails and spear
And manifold disgrace.

And griefs and torments numberless
And sweat of agony;
E'en death itself – and all for one
Who was Thine enemy.

Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ,
Should I not love Thee well?
Not for the sake of winning heaven,
Or of escaping hell.

Not with the hope of gaining aught,
Not seeking a reward,
But as Thyself as you have love me,
O ever-loving Lord.

E'en so I love Thee, and will love
And in Thy praise will sing
Solely because Thou art my God
And my eternal King.

I will love You above anything and everything else. As The Passion Translation puts it: Whoever comes to Me must follow in My steps and be willing to share My cross and experience it as his own. Or he cannot be considered to be My disciple. All who seek to live apart from Me will lose it all, but those who let go of their life for My sake and surrender it all to me will discover new life.

Beloved, we have two choices:

- To live apart from Him is to face the consequence that we will lose everything in the final reckoning.
- To surrender all to Him and discover what true living is all about.

Jesus never lowered the bar or compromised on the principles of discipleship when He was on the earth.

Matthew 8:19-20 Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

It was almost as if Jesus is saying, "Don't come and follow me because I don't have what you think I have in terms of worldly things that will give you comforts. Count the costs and then come. Jesus never compromised or lowered the bar on following Him.

Matthew 19: Someone came to Jesus with this question – "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" "Why ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. But to answer your question – if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" the man asked.

And Jesus replied, "You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself." "I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?"

*Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*

And beloved, notice that Jesus didn't stop him. So let me ask this question of you: Where are you today in your walk as a disciple, as a follower of Jesus Christ? Are you a Christian by name, but haven't given much thought to discipleship? If so, what is the Spirit of God saying to you about being authentic?

Or maybe, as you watch this service, you are saying, "I've tried to be a disciple but it's just too hard." I wonder what the Spirit of God is saying to you about giving up or embracing conflict, about being fearful or worried about loving family more than God. What is He saying? Is He saying: Don't give up? Those are things that you have to face in being My follower.

Or maybe today, it's all about total surrender. You've never been able to completely hand over the reins to God to get on the pilot's seat, and you be the co-pilot. What is the Holy Spirit whispering to you, beloved? Asking you to trust God implicitly? Asking you to yield full control or asking you to totally surrender to Him?

Our closing song will be our song of response. We are going to sing it twice; the first time, I'd like you to listen to the words and see if the Holy Spirit is leading you to respond to it in any particular way. Then when we repeat it, will you sing it with fervor, with conviction, and with the knowledge that, with God's help, you will be a disciple, a true follower of the Lord, Jesus Christ?

Let us stand as we sing this song together.

Shepherd of my soul, I give you full control,
Wherever You may lead I will go.
I have made a choice to listen for Your voice,
Wherever You may lead I will go.

Be it in a quiet pasture, or by a gentle stream,
The Shepherd of my soul will be my guide.
Should I face a mighty mountain or a valley dark and deep,
The Shepherd of my soul will be my guide.
