

Reward for the Righteous
Matthew 10:32-42
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Matthew 10 contains the summoning of the twelve disciples for their commission to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom to the Jewish people. This second discourse in Matthew's Gospel contains the teaching of Jesus to the twelve, who are listed in 10:2-4, for the purpose of preparing them for their mission that they would embark upon. The twelve had observed the works of Jesus and they would now be sent to do these works themselves. They will also be sent to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom.

It is a lengthy section covering Matthew 10:5-42 which divides into three units:

- (1) Directions to the disciples (10:5-15)
- (2) Perseverance in persecution (10:16-31)
- (3) Reward of the righteous (10:32-42)

Matthew 10:5-15 focuses on what Jesus taught about their mission, their provisions and their method.. Their ministry was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel because God's plan was for the Jews to be the means by which the world would know God. The disciples were to travel light and move along when their message was not received.

Matthew 10:16-31 focuses on the persecution that the disciples would encounter. Jesus taught His disciples about the people who would bring persecution and He taught them how to respond when persecution would be encountered. Matthew 10:32-42 focuses on the reward of those who follow Christ.

The righteous confession of Christ (10:32-33)

The righteous will confess Christ before men and will be confessed by Christ before the Father. These are two simple and straightforward statements by Jesus that set forth confession as a basic requirement for saving faith. True faith itself identifies with Jesus Christ. This truth is reflected in Paul's words from Romans 10:9-10, *"if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."*

There is no middle ground between confession of Christ and denial of Christ given in this text. Jesus emphasizes this in Matthew 12:30, *"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."* If we are not with Christ, we are against Christ. We cannot simply be neutral.

This should not be confused with salvation via the act of confession. Confession does not in itself bring salvation, but rather it is the necessary result of our inward faith. This was implied earlier in this Gospel in the Sermon on the Mount, *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket but on the lampstand"* (Matthew 5:14-15). Yet there are those who confess Jesus but whose words do not reflect sincerity, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter"* (Matthew 7:21).

The New Testament elsewhere refers to those who give verbal assent to Christ but do not possess true faith. *"The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (1 John 2:4). *"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?"* (James 2:14).

The parable of the wheat and the tares teaches that there will be those who profess allegiance to Christ among the church but who are not true believers (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). Jude 4 speaks of unbelievers who are unnoticed by the church, *"For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation."* Some of those among us will be false teachers, *"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you"* (2 Peter 2:1). Likewise, there will be those who were a part of the church but were not sincere and leave. *"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us"* (1 John 2:19).

The reality of an insincere profession of faith by those attending church is even more likely in societies such as ours, where there can be significant social benefit from participation. Friendships are made, marriages are formed, and there is a little disdain among the community for those attending church. This stands in contrast to places where association with Christ brings active opposition by the community at large. In such hostile areas, professions of faith are more likely to be sincerely held beliefs.

Matthew 10:33 should not be construed to teach that one can lose their salvation by denying Christ. Our confession is the product of our inward faith and denying Christ is the product of unbelief. There is a distinction between denying Christ and being faithless. Peter is an example of one whose momentary lack of faith in his denials of Christ were not the faithlessness of an unbeliever (cf. Matthew 26:69-75).

2 Timothy 2:11-13 addresses this distinction between denying Christ and being faithless. *"It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself."* There is a difference between a time of fear in lack of faith and a complete denial of Christ.

The context of Matthew 10:32-33 is persecution. Siding with the persecutors in denial of Christ is the essence of unbelief. Conversely, confessing Christ in the context of persecution is the essence of faith. People make false professions of faith because it serves themselves in some respect. When our profession of faith brings persecution, it is evidence of our sincerity and that we are not deluding ourselves.

The reward of a sincere confession of faith in Christ is His confession of us before His Heavenly Father. Our public allegiance to Him will be rewarded by His perfect allegiance to us in eternity. There can be no greater reward than this.

The righteous conflict for Christ (10:34-36)

Matthew 10:34 builds upon the topic of persecution by introducing the reality that the Messiah will not bring the expected peace but rather conflict. This is a surprising statement for those familiar with the Old Testament and who are sent out to preach, *"The kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 10:7).

The expectation of peace was due to the kingdom in the Old Testament promising to be a time of peace. The Messiah was prophesied to bring peace, *"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness"* (Isaiah 9:6-7). This peace will extend to all of God's creatures, *"And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat"* (Isaiah 11:6).

Also, peace among nations is the destiny for the world in the kingdom of God. *“And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war”* (Micah 4:3). So there is reason to expect that the kingdom of God will come with peace.

This promise of the Old Testament is seen in the announcement of the incarnation. When the multitude of heavenly host praised God for the birth of the Savior in the city of David, they said *“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased”* (Luke 2:14). However, this pronouncement of a coming peace on earth was for men *“with whom He is pleased.”*

Therefore, Jesus introduced the concept of a delay in the kingdom of God because of the persecution that will occur. Because of His coming rejection by the nation, the promised peace in the kingdom would become a conflict. There will be continued elements of this rejection of the Messiah by Israel throughout the rest of Matthew’s Gospel.

Just as the people of Israel viewed the Messiah as coming to bring political peace and material prosperity, so the church today can make the same mistake. Faith in Christ will not bring peace on earth but conflict. There is conflict because of the rebellion of man. Until man submits to God, peace on earth will wait. We know this submission awaits the return of Christ and the separation of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25). At this time all will recognize Him for who He is and *“at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:10-11).

In support of not coming to bring peace but a sword, Jesus quoted Micah 7:6. Micah was writing of a rebellion during the reign of King Ahaz, specifically the injustices that occurred in Israel that would lead to their judgment. The unrighteousness was so great that people could not trust friends, neighbors or even family members. The parallel to the time of Jesus was the unrighteous opposition to Christ on the part of the nation. Their rejection of the Messiah will cause division within families. We see this with Jesus Himself, as the unbelieving residents of His hometown in Nazareth took offense at Him (Matthew 13:53-58) and His brothers were not believing in Him either (John 7:3-5).

The righteous commitment to Christ (10:37-39)

In light of this persecution from family members, Jesus speaks to the importance of supreme allegiance to God's Son even over our family. If hostility comes to us from our family due to our faith, we must remain loyal in our faith. Thus, to love our family more than our love for Jesus means that we are not worthy of Him, since this testifies to our unbelief.

This commitment to Christ above our love for our family extends to our love for our own life. Our love for our family is less than our natural love for ourselves and Jesus addresses this most fundamental allegiance with the reference to our death. The purpose of a cross was to kill someone so the words "*he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me*" is tantamount to telling the disciples that they must die to themselves. This much more significant than merely tolerating some difficult situation, it is following Jesus at the cost of our own life.

It is likely that the phrase "*take up his cross*" refers to the Roman practice of forcing a condemned person to carry his own cross to his crucifixion (cf. Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26). As such, our present life is the living out of this process of losing our life; walking in Christ in the application of forsaking ourselves. In the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "*I die daily.*"

If the imagery of the cross pointing to our own death to ourselves in following Christ is not clear enough, Jesus spoke directly to the matter of our life when He said, "*He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.*" If our goal is to make our present life better, we will only lose our life in eternity. If our goal is to live for eternity, then following Christ will require us to lose our present life. Losing our life means leaving behind all our personal goals and aspirations for ourselves and adopting the priorities and values of Christ.

This concept of losing our life in following Jesus is fundamental to faith itself. If we have true faith, we will live for Christ, not for ourselves. This principles was restated in various ways throughout the epistles of Paul:

"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:4-5)

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

"Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:2-4).

These all contrast our present life with our eternal life. The righteous will commit their life fully to Christ and will receive eternal life. Confessing Christ before men will be normal when we are living for Him and not for ourselves. This will enable Christ's followers to endure persecution for His name's sake, even from their own family.

The righteous commendation for Christ (10:40-42)

Denying ourselves to live for Christ will be rewarded into eternity. Jesus ends this discourse with the blessing of this eternal reward. Those who lose their life for the sake of Christ will find it by God's reward into eternity.

There is a progression in Matthew 10:40-42 from the twelve disciples to us today. As Jesus sends them out, He has made clear that if the twelve are received, it is because He is received, just as when they are hated, it is because Christ was hated (cf. Matthew 10:22, 25). Similarly, if Christ is received, then the Father who sent the Son is received. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (John 13:20).*

Matthew 10:41 moves from the twelve disciples to the broader group, the prophets of God. The disciples, like Christ Himself, would speak for God as New Testament prophets. Whoever receives any of God's appointed messengers will receive their reward. The righteous man includes an even broader group than the prophets of God. This is essentially all disciples, who represent the One Righteous Man. God will reward those who receive His followers as righteous people. This is the reward of a righteous person.

The specific nature of this reward is left undefined but Matthew 10:42 notes that the reward is eternal, for *"he shall not lose his reward."* Matthew 10 concludes with this reference to *"these little ones."* This is likely Christ's disciples when they face persecution, which has been the subject of the context. Those who assist Christ's followers when they are persecuted *"in the name of a disciple,"* that is, because they are Christ's disciple, will not lose his reward.

When we are an encouragement in any way to our fellow believers who suffer affliction because of their faith, we will be rewarded by the Lord in eternity and this reward will be secure. This is true even by helping in a small way with a cup of cold water. Just like it is not just the large acts of kindness that will be rewarded, it is not just kindness toward significant people that will be rewarded either. Small help to the humble will enjoy permanent reward.

Matthew 10:40-42 highlights the role we have with one another. Serving each other is the essence of obedience. *"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). The righteous will commend those who God commends and will support those who suffer as a disciple of Christ. Loyalty to Christ is necessarily manifested by loyalty to Christ's followers who are unjustly treated. The reward for such service to one another is certain.

Conclusion

In Matthew 10, Jesus sent the disciples to preach the kingdom of God among the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He told them of the coming opposition from people in their mission. They would be scourged (10:17), hated (10:22), and persecuted (10:23) for the sake of His name. Yet Jesus called them to not fear (10:26-33).

The reason they should not be fearful is because of their reward. As they confessed Christ before men, He would confess them before His Father in heaven. Because they have given up their life for His sake, they will find life eternal. When they receive fellow disciples, they are receiving Christ Himself. When they serve their fellow disciples in time of need, they will not lose their reward.

If we are living for ourselves, for manipulating others to serve us and for earthly reward, our life will be meaningless and lost. However, if we are living for Christ's sake above all else, serving others according to His will, our life will be significant and saved. And our reward as we serve others will be secure forever.