

Sunday, November 8, 2020
Matthew 10:34-42 (Loving Jesus supremely)
Pastor Eric Dubois

Intro

Maybe this morning our thoughts are on the election. Or masks. This morning we need to be reminded of our hope in Christ, and our gospel mission. We need a unified, partnering outward focus.

Recently we've encountered missional living. Jesus went about the people teaching, preaching, healing, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. He called Matthew the tax collector and dined with sinners at Matthew's home. As Jesus encountered sinners he felt compassion. So Jesus chose 12 apostles and sent them on a mission to reach the lost sheep of Israel with the gospel. The apostles were instructed to search out receptive ears and move on from those who rejected the message. Because it was a dangerous mission, they needed to be wise and innocent. Move on from danger. Don't do anything to provoke danger. The presence of opposition required courage. God would be present with them in intimidating situations, God would vindicate them on the last day, their soul was safe in God's hands, and nothing could happen to them unless God willed to permit it, so fear not. Now Jesus calls his followers to suffer rejection from family.

This reminds me of a book I read as a new believer. *God Has a Wonderful Plan for Your Life: The Myth of the Modern Message* by Ray Comfort. The cover has a picture of Stephen being stoned. The premise is that preaching a gospel of "come to Jesus because he has a wonderful plan for your life and he'll give you happiness you can't find anywhere else" isn't the gospel Jesus proclaimed. The wonderful plan sales pitch says come to Jesus so that you'll be happy, insinuating that all your desires will be met and you'll have a life of ease and bliss. This isn't the gospel. The gospel is the promise of sins forgiven, the promise of a freedom from sin's tyranny, and the promise of eternal life. Through faith and repentance. Jesus paints a different picture than the wonderful plan gospel.

Let's look at what Jesus said to his early followers as he prepared them for gospel mission:

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Point 1: Love Jesus supremely (10:34-39)

Explanation

Jesus makes provocative statements to shake us up. Why did God the Son come to earth in human flesh? To bring division, not peace. What about Isaiah 9:6-7?

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace.** ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Jesus will bring peace, but not during his 1st coming. When Jesus comes a 2nd time, sin and strife will end. Peace will be established. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. Swords will be turned into plowshares. War will be no more (see Isa 2:1-4; 11:1-11). But during the inter-advent age, the time between Christ's comings, the gospel creates division.

Specifically, the gospel will divide families:

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. - 10:35-36

When a person hears the gospel, embraces it, and converts, not everyone is happy. Especially family. Like cases where conversion requires rejecting the **long-held family religion**. Or when newfound Christian ethics clash with **cherished family values**. Following Jesus can require opposing family.

Illustration

On the **desiringGod** website Texas Pastor Afshin Ziafat tells his story:
[<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/disowned-for-jesus>]

I was born in Houston and grew up in a devout Muslim home [Iranian background]...Growing up, I was taught the five pillars of Islam and that if I did them to the best of my ability, then maybe I'd get to heaven.

I spoke Farsi, not English, and so God, in his incredible plan, provided a Christian lady who tutored me, teaching me the English language every day by reading books to me. In the second grade, she said to me, "Afshin, I want to give you the most important book that you'll ever read in life." Because the Bible came from her, I believed it was important, and held onto that New Testament. She had planted a seed in my life in the second grade that wouldn't come to fruition until ten years later.

[After being confronted for using God's name in vain on the basketball court, and watching a historical documentary on the life of Jesus, Afshin rediscovered that NT and read it daily in secret. Daily gospel conversations with a student at lunch, Romans 3:22, and an invite to an evangelistic crusade led Afshin to faith.] → God used numerous encounters to save Afshin: tutor, a Bible, basketball player, television, conversations, a specific verse, a crusade

“What am I going to tell my family? What am I going to tell my father?” My father had always been the most important person in my life, the guy I’d always looked up to. I’m ashamed to say that I decided to hide my newfound faith from him and the rest of my family. I would sneak out to go to church, intercept mail from the church I was attending, and hide my Bible.

Finally, one day my dad found out. He’d seen my Bible, and he’d also seen other evidences in my life. He sat me down and said, “Son, what’s going on? There’s something different about you.” I said, “Dad, I’m a Christian.” He said, “No, you’re not, young man. you’re a Muslim and you’ll always be a Muslim.” I said, “Dad, the Bible says that if I trust in Christ alone for my salvation, then I’m a Christian — and I do.” My dad said, “Afshin, if you’re going to be a Christian, then you can no longer be my son.”

Everything in my flesh wanted to say, “Forget it. I’ll be a Muslim.” I didn’t want to lose the relationship with my dad. So even I was surprised when I opened my mouth and said, “Dad, if I have to choose between you and Jesus, then I choose Jesus. And if I have to choose between my earthly father and my heavenly Father, then I choose my heavenly Father.” My father disowned me on the spot.

→ God led Afshin to Matthew 10:32-35 that night. Afshin chose Jesus over his father.

Jesus says that whoever chooses father or mother or son or daughter over Jesus isn’t worthy of him. Jesus expands the principle:

And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” – 10:38

In order to be worthy of Jesus, we need to take up our cross (endure suffering) and follow him (obey his will regardless of the consequences, like proclaiming the gospel). Jesus continues...

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. -10:39

Finding your life results in loss. Losing your life results in finding life. Jesus is pointing back to 10:32-33:

Matthew 10:32-33 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

The worthy person publicly acknowledges Jesus before men. Despite the cost. Like Afshin. The worthy person takes up their cross and follows Jesus. Even if they're beaten. Even if they're disowned by family. Even if they're threatened with death. The one who wants to keep their life keeps silent and avoids family disapproval. But they lose their life = rejected by Christ on the final day. The one who loses their life, disowned by family or even killed, is accepted by Christ on the final day. And as we go out with the gospel, we'll find some who are worthy, some who embrace Jesus and his gospel.

Jesus came to divide humanity into two groups: his followers and everyone else.

Application

Have you ever asked yourselves, why such intense opposition to Jesus? He died for sinners, he's merciful to sinners, he rescues sinners from slavery to sin. Why the intense opposition? Why would family turn on family?

John 3:19 ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

- the end of autonomy = I can't live however I want & I can't live for myself
- the final judgment = my actions have eternal consequences
- Jesus stands opposed to the things we place our identity in: Buddhism, Islam, fraternity, etc.

Jesus confronts our autonomy. Jesus confronts our ease. Jesus confronts our identity. Following Jesus means publicly acknowledging him. And loving him supremely. More than father or mother. More than brother or sister. More than son or daughter. This isn't saying don't love your family. We still honor our father and mother. It's saying love Jesus more than family. If loving Jesus requires family rejection, keep Jesus and let your family go.

Family rejection

If embracing the gospel disturbs family relationships, how do we handle it?

If we've rejected the tightly-held family religion, we should expect difficulty. When the family places their identity in a religion, and you reject that identity, family thinks you are rejecting them.

Expect family to be angry and sad and disapprove. When they express grief, verbally remind them you still care for them. Counter their disapproval by being a good family member. Be a good grandparent or parent or sibling or child. Go out of your way to express your care through actions. Show them the gospel isn't all bad by being salt and light in the family. When they express frustration or ask questions, make use of the opportunity to have gospel conversations. They may have a warped stereotypical view of Christianity. Help them to see the beauty of Christ.

Initial opposition to Christianity may change over time. In my family it was Roman Catholicism. When my dad's cousin Norman converted to Christianity and left the Catholic Church he was the first as far as I know. He was seen as too radical and his presence was unwanted. A former drunk was now proclaiming Jesus to good religious people. No one wanted to hear about what following Jesus truly entailed, and how Roman Catholicism fell short. But my dad gave him a hearing. Then my dad was persuaded.

As time went on the fruit of Norman's life became evident: a good husband and father, generous, humble, he served others = his life matched what he preached. My dad's parents initially thought he was crazy. Over time their opposition to Christianity waned, they attended evangelical services from time to time, and they enjoyed Norman's weekly visits to play cards.

At some point, Afshin's relationship with his father was restored. Endure the abuse. Pray. Engage in gospel conversations. Reaffirm your love for family. Live a transformed life that commends Christ. They will see the difference. Don't give up. Family may come around. The same goes with friends.

If family isn't the issue, apply to friends, neighbors, co-workers. If following Jesus affects your relationships, choose Jesus. **Love Jesus supremely!**

Point 2: Compassionately care for God's rejected people (10:40-42)

Explanation

Receiving God's true messengers is equivalent to receiving Jesus. Whether it's a prophet, or a righteous person, whoever receives the Father's children is rewarded by the Father. In fact, the one who receives the messenger receives the same reward as the messenger.

Considering that God's messengers are often opposed, and even violently, it's critical that God's people support those who labor for the gospel. Like our supported missionaries. Opposition breeds discouragement. It's the same with us. We might experience painful conversations with family because of our gospel convictions. In these times we need the local church's support.

Something as simple as giving one of Jesus' disciples (little ones) a cup of cold water is rewarded by the Father.

Illustration

Open Doors tells the story of Cheu, a new Christian from a Buddhist family among the Hmong people. [<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/family-disowned-christ/>]

The Hmong are a male-dominated ethnic group where fathers and men should be respected in the community, and going against them brings punishment. Cheu converted to Christianity and his brother and uncle were not pleased. They invited Cheu to their house and proceeded to tie him up and beat him.

“My brother...used the side of his palms to hit my neck and face over and over again. I was tied from seven in the morning until seven at night.”

‘If you won’t go back [to Buddhism], we will hit you until you die,’ they told me.”

Through trickery (he pretended to go back to Buddhism) Cheu escaped with his wife. The threat still lingers:

“Until now, my uncle and brother and my family still don’t know where I am, and I heard that they are looking for me. I also heard that the village chief, my brother and uncle said that if I come back to our home in our village, they would hit me over and over again until I die.”

Who gave Cheu a cup of cold water?

“He was welcomed by a community of Christian families in Ban Neuk*, a church in Vientiane Province 24 hours away by bus from his province. This church is always open to the needy. A family that provides and defends. A family given to Cheu and his wife by the Lord...They treat them as new members of their growing family and provide them shelter, food and other basic needs. Up until now, Ban Neuk has been giving Cheu and his family not just the warmth of a shelter but also the comfort a family could give and the love a family should provide.”

Application

The local church provides a family for those rejected by friends or family. The local church provides nourishment for those who are worn out by their gospel labors. We help each other to shake the dust off our feet. We help each other to keep seeking receptive ears. We scatter throughout the week and take our licks in the world. We gather and refresh one another when we assemble. Are you wounded by rejection in the world? Find family in the local church.

Conclusion

Of course Jesus does bring peace. When we believe we experience peace with God. Our relationship with our Creator is reconciled. Autonomy and rebellion are gone. And we’re flooded with joy. Our sins are forgiven, we have an unshakeable hope, and we have the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Losing your life = finding eternal life. But following Jesus also makes life complicated.

As we close this section in Matthew there’s several things I’d like you to come away with. There’s been an evangelistic bent. An outward focus we could say. Spend time with sinners. Have them in your homes. Be compassionate. Consider the plight of those enslaved to sin and affected by sin. Be courageous. God is with you as you share your faith. Be wise. Avoid danger if possible. Be innocent. Be a living testimony to the gospel’s power to transform lives. Be optimistic. Some will be receptive. Be realistic. Don’t be crushed when the gospel’s rejected. There’s a time to shake the dust off our feet and move on.

In everything, love Jesus supremely. Even if loved ones turn on you. Expect opposition. Care for your rejected brothers and sisters.