

Find Life in Christ Matthew 10:34-42

³⁴ *“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. ³⁷ “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ⁴⁰ “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. ⁴² Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward.”*

Our Lord’s words at the beginning of this Scripture seem to contradict the message the angels brought to shepherds when Jesus was born. God does bring peace to the world through his Son. This peace comes to all who believe in his saving name. But many people resist this message of peace and they will even persecute those who possess it. What our Lord does in this Scripture is to present us with a realistic view of what it means to follow him. We’ll follow v. 39: *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it...* to bring out the theme, Find Life in Christ. We’ll renounce worldly peace while we receive eternal reward.

Our text contains instruction that Jesus gave about witnessing for his kingdom. Jesus had displayed compassion for the lost. He urges his followers to have such compassion. This compassion leads us to ask God to send out workers into the world. Those who have a heart for mission work may become God’s means for doing that work. Jesus had gathered his Twelve and authorized them to go out in his name and proclaim the kingdom of God. As they had freely received grace, so they went out to dispense that grace.

Jesus also wanted to prepare his disciples for discouragement and danger. Some to whom he sent them would not welcome their message about the kingdom of heaven. Disciples should be prepared for such rejection. Those who reject their words might arrest them or in some other way cause them to suffer. But the Holy Spirit will be with them to give them the words to speak. So they must be determined to be bold and continue to proclaim God’s Word. Even if it costs them their family, let Christ’s followers boldly preach their master’s message.

Jesus tells his faithful followers, *“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.* Many people believed that when the Messiah came, he would put an end to earthly wars. At this time they had hoped that Jesus would overthrow their Roman enemies. But Jesus tells his disciples not to fall into that false belief. Our Lord says that they should expect to see division instead of harmony, hatred instead of friendship. The reason for this is that Jesus brought a sword to this earth. In Ephesians 6:17 Paul calls God’s word *the Sword of the Spirit*. Wherever the word of God is preached, there believers will be found. That

sword which works faith in a person's heart also divides family members when some believe it and others do not.

Those who refuse to believe the word of God will hate those who do. There will always be hostility between Satan's kingdom and God's people. There will never be a total conversion of all people. People will continue to be divided on earth. The sword of the Spirit still divides believers from unbelievers. Simeon told Mary, *"Listen carefully, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

Jesus tells his disciples what it will take to follow him. *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* This section offers a stern rebuke. It reflects the First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before me. God's Word tells us, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. God's Son demands that he receive first place in our lives. He will not share that position with anyone or anything else.

These strong words convict us. We must confess, "I am unworthy." In one way or another we have failed to put God first. Jesus shows us the great loss we suffer if we prefer family members to him. To follow Jesus may mean that family members reject me. It may mean that I lose some opportunities to climb the ladder of success. And a cross will come from following the Savior. But my Lord is teaching me to rejoice in the greater gift of eternal life.

Everyone wants a peaceful life, right? Obey the rules and keep your mouth shut and life will roll peacefully along. But open your mouth and share God's word and you'll soon find out some people will hate you for it. They'll even persecute you for what you believe. Why even take a chance? Our Lord did say earlier in this chapter, *"Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven"* (10:32,33). Every one of us wants our Savior confessing we are God's children before our heavenly Father. None of us wants him to deny us before God. So we confess him before others. But what if others don't want to hear it. Should we take the path of least resistance? But Jesus didn't do that. He loved us all the way to die on a cross where he suffered God's punishment for all your sin. And where you and I have failed to keep God first in our lives, he did that perfectly while loving his parents and all other people perfectly. He did that for us so we can be forgiven and have eternal life. He did that for everyone so they can be forgiven and have eternal life.

As we find life in Christ and not strive for worldly peace. We'll instead live our life knowing an eternal reward awaits us.

It's easy to become popular. All one must do is soft-pedal sin and accept any belief as long as people are sincere. But God's spokesmen represent our Savior and not popular opinion. And Jesus does mention results of faithful preaching, *"Whoever receives you receives me, and*

whoever receives me receives him who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward." The disciples need not imagine that their future will be filled with rejection. They may have enemies, but they also have friends. Many will receive them for the message they bring. They may rest assured that their preaching is not in vain. And the friendship of true Christians will repay them for what they must bear from enemies.

A prophet's reward is a special reward of grace. A prophet receives many rewards already in this life. He will benefit from an intense study of Scripture. He is privileged to bringing the knowledge he has gained to his listeners. And his hearers will respect him for his faithful study. Anyone who receives a prophet will receive a similar reward. They are brought under the influence of the instruction of a prophet. They gain a better understanding of spiritual things. They are respected by fellow Christians. They will share in the blessings of eternal life and all the rewards of grace God has prepared for those who love him.

The apostles are the little ones. They were far greater than any prophet or righteous man. At this time, when they were being sent out, they appeared little before the world, much smaller than the prophets of old and the righteous men of the day. Christ might even be calling them little ones because of what the apostles thought of themselves. Anyone giving them no more than a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple would not go unrewarded. God does not look at the size of the gift, but the giver. The small drink of cold water is made because the recipient is a disciple. Just as the widow's mite was highly prized by Jesus, so also a drink of water given to one of his little ones is worthy of praise.

When God's spokesmen speak God's message, people who welcome them welcome Jesus. When Jesus speaks of people welcoming his disciples, they are willing to listen to the word of God that his disciples bring them. They will receive them into their homes so they can learn even more from them.

There's been much discussion in our church body about offering more care for our called workers. Is it because we're anticipating more stress from more work because of the shortage of workers? I think called workers need to remember the reward is in the work itself. That we get paid to be in God's word daily is pure grace. That we get to share the way to heaven through Jesus with people in church and even some outside these church walls. And we shouldn't be surprised if we face rejection from some. Jesus said it would happen to his first disciples. Why should we be any different? But we should rejoice that God's Spirit does his work through the gospel in word and sacrament that God has privileged us to use to carry out his ministry. May we all make use of every opportunity that God gives us to grow in faith and look ahead to our reward by grace. What a privilege it will be when our Savior returns in glory and we by grace stand before him with saving faith in our hearts only to hear him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant. God grant that to us all by faith in Jesus.