

September 20, 2026
 Pursuing the Kingdom: Cost and Reward
 Matthew 10:32-42
 Vernon Advent Christian Church

There are some decisions we make in our every day lives that we make easily because the consequences don't seem to matter all that much. We decide what we're going to have for dinner. Or what we're going to wear. We decide where we're going to go shopping and if we're going to buy something. Everyday, we make these kind of decisions, and some may question those decisions (i.e. what we wear), but at the end of the day, we make those seemingly inconsequential decisions and life goes on.

But, then, there are other decisions we make in life that are more consequential and those decisions we make change everything because they are the type of decisions that determine the direction of our lives. They affect our relationships, our priorities, our future and sometimes even who we are.

And the decision to follow Jesus and be obedient to Him is one of those decisions. And, as we're beginning to see in our look into the book of Matthew, when Jesus calls us to follow Him, He is not asking us to make a small adjustment to our lives. He is calling us to make a decision about who is going to have first place in our lives.

Matthew 10 has been a challenging chapter because Jesus has been preparing His disciples for what it means to pursue the kingdom of God. He has called them, equipped them and is now sending them out to proclaim the gospel. And, as part of that preparation, He has warned them that the mission will not always be easy. There will be opposition, rejection and persecution. But now, as Jesus brings this section of His teaching to a close, He brings everything back to one central issue, "What does it mean to belong completely to Him?"

So this morning, we're going to continue in our journey through Matthew and the passage we're going to look at today is going to give us another glimpse into what it means to pursue the kingdom of God. In this passage, we're going to see that following Jesus means confessing Him publicly, putting Him first, taking up our cross and trusting that nothing done for His kingdom is ever wasted. So, if you are able, please stand with me as I read from the Word of God found in Matthew's Gospel 10:32-42. [Read Passage]

We begin, again, where we left off last week with Jesus continuing to speak to His disciples as He is sending them out to do the work of ministry in vs. 32, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven." The word "confess," here, carries the idea of acknowledging, affirming or openly identifying with someone. Jesus isn't simply talking about privately acknowledging Him in your heart. He is talking about being willing to identify with Him before other people. In other words, Jesus says, "Don't hide your relationship with Me."

And think about the context here. Jesus has just warned His disciples that opposition and persecution was coming simply for carrying the message that He had given them. They would be arrested and flogged and dragged before governors and courts. The

temptation would be there to remain quiet, to blend in and avoid trouble by keeping their faith quiet.

But Jesus says, "...whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven." This isn't teaching that our salvation is earned by making public statements about Jesus. Scripture consistently teaches that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. But Jesus is addressing the evidence of genuine discipleship. A person who truly belongs to Jesus will identify with Him publicly.

Everyone Jesus called, He called publicly. There is really no such thing as a "secret" Christian. That's actually a contradiction in terms. For the word "Christian" means "little Christ," and not in a "we're all little gods" kind of way, but in the fact that when we call ourselves Christian, we are identifying ourselves with Him and with His teachings.

And each individual Christian life should supply enough evidence, that can be seen, that they are indeed followers of Jesus. As David Guzik says in his commentary, "It is to be feared that many modern Christians, if arrested for the crime of following Jesus and tried in a court, would have the charges dismissed for a lack of evidence."

Now, I can imagine that the words of Jesus, here in this passage, were on Peter's mind when he denied Jesus three times on the night Jesus was arrested. He was grieved in his heart that he had denied Jesus before a group of strangers, before men, even though he swore that he wouldn't. And that guilt went with him all the way until the resurrected Jesus singled out Peter and restored him beside the Sea of Galilee, on the same shores where Jesus originally called him and told him He would make him a fisher of men.

Brothers and sisters, there is something powerful about being willing to say, "I belong to Jesus." It doesn't mean that we always get it right. The disciples certainly didn't. It doesn't mean we have to be obnoxious or turn every conversation into a theological debate. But it does mean that when the opportunity comes, we aren't ashamed to say we belong to Jesus.

The Apostle Paul makes this clear in Romans 1:16 when he says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation..." And that's the posture Jesus is calling all of us toward. We live in a culture where people are incredibly open about almost everything except their faith. People will tell you their political opinions, their hobbies, their dietary preferences and what they think about the latest movie or TV show. But when it comes to Jesus, suddenly people become uncomfortable. Sadly, this is true for us as Christians.

But Jesus says, "Don't be ashamed of Me." For pursuing the kingdom means that Jesus isn't simply someone we believe in privately, He is the King we acknowledge publicly.

Jesus, then, continues by making the point that He is to be above everything else in our lives, starting in vs. 34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Wow! I bet you won't find that verse on a wall hanging at Hobby Lobby! That verse is shocking to us because it sounds like a contradiction.

Doesn't Isaiah prophesy that the Messiah would be called the Prince of Peace? Didn't the angels who spoke to the shepherds keeping their flocks by night, announce peace on the earth because Jesus had been born? Didn't Jesus Himself teach His followers to be peacemakers? The answer to all of these questions is yes.

So what is Jesus saying here? Well, first of all, the peace that Isaiah and the angels are talking about is the peace between God and man that Jesus came to bring to us. Here, He is describing the division between people that His message will sometimes create.

Now, He isn't saying that His mission is to make His followers violent or that Christians should seek conflict. Far from it. For, Jesus did teach His followers to be peacemakers, as far as it was up to them, for we can't control the actions of others. Yet, the gospel calls us to a radical commitment to Jesus Himself, who brings us peace with God, and it's that message of peace that creates the dividing line between those who choose it and those who reject it.

You see, when people encounter Jesus, a decision has to be made. Some will believe. Others will reject Him. And sometimes that decision creates conflict even within families.

For Jesus says in vs. 35, "For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Again, I don't think any of us have this verse down as our life verse. And, again, the English reads kinda clunky here, but the point is the same as in these verses as a whole. And that is that the gospel is a message of reconciliation and peace with God, but it also a dividing line that exposes the human heart. The reality is, not everyone will celebrate your decision to follow Christ. The sword Jesus spoke of would sometimes cut even through families.

And Jesus makes the statement, in vs. 37, that brings us directly to the heart of what following Jesus really means, "He who loves father or mother...or son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Now, again as I said last week when this issue came up in vs. 21-22, Jesus isn't telling us not to love our families. No, scripture commands us to love others, especially our families. No, Jesus isn't minimizing family relationships. He's establishing priorities. The greatest love in our lives, above everything else, must be our love for Christ.

And that's a difficult statement to make because family is one of the strongest attachments that we have. Parents love their children. Children love their parents. Husbands and wives love one another. Grandparents love their grandchildren. And these relationships are precious gifts from God. But Jesus says that even good things cannot take the place of God.

And this is one of the greatest dangers to our pursuit of the kingdom. Sometimes we don't replace Jesus with something obviously evil. Sometimes we replace Him with something good. But the fact is, that anything we put in the place of God, even good things, is an idol. Anything that we give more time and thought to than our relationship with Jesus is an idol.

You see, our families can become more important to us than Jesus. Our careers, financial security, our reputation and comfort can all become more important to us than Jesus. The question is not whether these things are important. The question is whether they are more important. When Jesus occupies His rightful place, everything else finds its proper place in our lives.

When Jesus is first, we can love our families better because we no longer demand that our families give us what only God can give us. We can serve our spouses without making them our ultimate source of our identity. We can love our children without making

their approval the foundation of our worth. And we can enjoy possessions without making them our security.

The point is not that Jesus doesn't want us to have good things. The point is that He wants us to put them in the correct order. For pursuing the kingdom means loving Jesus above everything else so that we can love everything else correctly.

Well, Jesus doesn't stop there, but continues in vs. 38, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." I can imagine the disciples at this point thinking, "C'mon Jesus, we can't take anymore." For these words would have sounded very different to them than they sometimes sound to us. For us, a cross can become a piece of jewelry, something hanging on a wall in our homes or a symbol on the front of a church.

But when Jesus said, "Take up your cross," His disciples knew exactly what He meant. The interesting thing is that this is the first mention of the cross in Matthew. But the cross was already widely known as an instrument of execution. You see, Jesus was not the first person to be crucified. The Persians came up with the idea in the 6th century B.C., but the Romans had perfected by the time Jesus was falsely accused and condemned. And they used to crucify criminals outside the city gates so that as people entered that city they would see what happened to anyone would defy Rome.

What Jesus was telling His disciples was that following Him would involve a death. Now, while this was literally the fate of all but two of the 12 disciples (Judas and John), the death Jesus is speaking of here is a symbolic dying to self. For, the cross represents surrender. It means saying, "Jesus, You are Lord. My life belongs to You." It means surrendering your own selfish desires and plans to follow after Jesus with no turning back.

And then Jesus says in vs. 39, "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it." To our modern ears, that sounds backwards. Because the world says, "Go out and find yourself." But Jesus says, "Surrender yourself to Me." The world says, "Protect your life at all costs." But Jesus says, "Lay your life down for my sake." The world says, "Make yourself the center of everything." And Jesus says, "Put Me at the center of your life." What Jesus is saying is that when we give up everything in this life for His sake, the world views that as a loss. But in God's economy, the truth is when we live in full surrender to Jesus, that's when we actually find true life and freedom.

Think about a seed. A seed has to be buried before it can become a plant, right? From the seed's perspective, being buried might look like the end. But what appears to be the end is actually the beginning of something greater. Jesus would use this same analogy when speaking of His own death and resurrection in John 12:24.

And that's the pattern of the kingdom. Like Jesus, we surrender our lives to the Father and He gives us life. We die to ourselves and Christ forms something new in us. We stop living for our own glory and we discover the joy of living for His glory. You see, following Jesus is not about adding Jesus to the life we already wanted. It's about surrendering the life we had planned and allowing Jesus to lead us into the life He has called us to live.

The truth is, every Christian is called to surrender. Sometimes that looks like obedience even when it's difficult. Sometimes it means forgiving someone when we don't feel like forgiving. Sometimes it means standing for truth when compromise would be easier. Sometimes it means giving generously when we would rather keep the money. It's the cross which reminds us that Jesus is worthy of our complete allegiance.

Now, after talking about the cost of following Him, Jesus shifts His focus in the final few verses of His instructions in this chapter in vs. 40 when He says, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” This is a remarkable statement. Jesus identifies Himself so closely with His followers that receiving one whom He has sent out is treated as receiving Him. The good done to the disciples is as if it were good done to Jesus Himself, because they are His representatives, carrying on His ministry.

And Jesus uses the same type of wording when He speaks about prophets and righteous people. And finally, in vs. 42, Jesus says, “And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

The point here is that even seemingly insignificant works of kindness performed for God’s people are meaningful in God’s eyes. And what could seem more insignificant than giving a person a cup of cold water? For, after a while, they will be thirsty again. Yet even such a small gesture will always be remembered and rewarded by God. That’s what Jesus means when He says, “They shall by no means lose their reward.”

Notice how Jesus ends this powerful section. He has been talking about persecution, sacrifice, family division, carrying the cross and losing your life for His sake. And then He says, “Even a cup of cold water matters.”

Why? Because nothing done for Jesus is insignificant. We tend to measure importance by visibility. If thousands of people see it, we think it matters. But the kingdom of God operates differently. The world celebrates platforms and counts followers. But God sees the faithfulness of His servants.

There are probably things you have done for Christ that nobody else has seen or remembers. Maybe you served in a ministry and nobody thanked you. Maybe you prayed for someone and never saw the answer. Maybe you gave financially and nobody knew. Maybe you encouraged someone who never told you how much it meant. Don't assume that because people didn't notice that God didn't. The King sees faithful service that the world overlooks. And Jesus promises that it will not be forgotten in the kingdom of God.

So what does this passage mean for us as we pursue the kingdom of God? First, don't be ashamed to identify with Jesus. You don't have to be confrontational. You don't have to have an answer for every question. You don't have to win every argument. But are you willing to say, “I follow Jesus.” And, just as important, does your life show that you belong to Christ?

Second, put Jesus above everything else in our life. Ask yourself honestly, “Is there anything I would refuse to surrender to Jesus? Is there a relationship that has become more important to me than Christ? Is there a dream that has become more important than Christ? Is there anything in your life that has taken first place other than Him?” Jesus isn't asking us to love those things less because He doesn't care about them. He's asking us to put them in their proper place.

Third, Jesus says, “Take up your cross daily.” Following Jesus will cost you something. In reality it costs us everything for it means dying to our self daily. If your relationship with Jesus never requires sacrifice, surrender, obedience, or discomfort, you may want to ask whether you are actually following Jesus or simply adding Him to your

existing life. The cross reminds us that following Jesus is not about our convenience. Its about allegiance to the true King.

And finally, don't underestimate small acts of faithfulness. You may think what you're doing doesn't matter. But Jesus says it does. That conversation matters. That prayer matters. That act of generosity matters. That cup of cold water matters. That decision to remain faithful matters. And our Heavenly Father sees it all.

And so, as we come to the end of this chapter, Jesus never promised His disciples that pursuing the kingdom would be easy. In fact, He told them it could be costly. But He promised them something better than an easy life. He promised them that their lives would have purpose in the kingdom of God.

And, so the question this passage places before us is not simply, "Do you believe in Jesus?" The deeper question is, "Is Jesus worthy of first place in your life?" Is He worth confessing when it isn't popular? Is He worth following when it's difficult? Is He worth obeying when obedience costs you? Is He worth putting above your relationships, your reputation, your comfort, your possessions, and your plans? And, as followers of Jesus, our answer to all these questions should be yes.

And the gospel tells us why. For the One who asks us to take up our cross, first took up His cross for us. The One who asks us to give our lives, first gave His life for us. The One who asks us to confess Him before others, first confessed His love for us by going to Calvary. Jesus didn't simply tell us what sacrifice looks like. He demonstrated it, as Paul makes clear in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrated his own love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

And because He died for us and rose again, we don't carry our cross hopelessly for we follow a risen King. So keep on pursuing the kingdom. Confess Christ. Put Him first. Take up your cross daily. And serve Him faithfully.

And one day, the King who saw every act of faithfulness will say, "Well done." And we will discover, on that day, that whatever we surrendered for Christ in this life was nothing compared with what we will gain in Him when we're face to face with Him for all eternity. For, as the hymn writer once famously wrote, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus." Let us pray.

Closing prayer:

Heavenly Father, give us courage to confess Christ before others. Give us grace to put Him above every relationship, every possession, every ambition and every desire. Teach us to take up our cross and follow Jesus faithfully, even when the cost is great.

Lord, help us not to measure our faithfulness by what other people see. Remind us that You see every prayer, every sacrifice and every act of service given in Jesus' name. Help us to remain faithful even when nobody notices.

And above all, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. May He be first in our lives, first in our homes and first in our hearts. Give us the courage to pursue Your kingdom until the day we stand before You. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Benediction:

May the Lord give you courage to confess Christ, faith to put Him above all else and strength to take up your cross and follow Him faithfully. May you remember that every act of service done in His name is seen and treasured by the King. Go forth unashamed, surrendered, and faithful, pursuing the kingdom of God for the glory of Christ. Amen.