

Carrying the Cross

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 10, verses 34 to 42. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sean.

! I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church. And it's my great joy and privilege to preach God's word to you this morning. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand.

We'd love to give you a copy you can have and use. Looks like everybody has one. We're in Matthew chapter 10, verse 34 to 42. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, thank you for calling us as your children.

And for giving us the privilege of following Jesus Christ, your son. And we ask that as we open up your word together, that you would speak to us and impress deeply upon our minds and hearts the worthiness of Jesus Christ, the King.

[1 : 20] That we might submit to him, pledge allegiance to him, and follow him at all costs.

Fill our hearts with thanksgiving and praise as we remember how you have used us to proclaim your gospel and to build up this local church, your body of Christ, the body of Christ.

Thank you, Father, for that privilege. Be glorified in our midst. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Please stand if you are able to honor God as we read from his word. Amen. Matthew chapter 10, verses 34 to 42.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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.

[2 : 36] And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 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.

And whoever does not take 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.

Whoever receives you receives me. And whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

And the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple.

Truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

Please be seated. There are several places in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus expressly states his purpose.

[3 : 53] The purpose for which he came to earth. We've seen two of those so far already in this series in Matthew. In Matthew 5.17 Jesus said, I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill them.

We saw it again in chapter 9 verse 13. I came not to call the righteous but sinners. And probably the most famous purpose statement that Jesus gives is in Matthew 20 verse 28.

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So to recap why Jesus came to earth.

He came to fulfill the law. To call sinners to himself and to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. To redeem a people for himself. For God. But there is one more.

I have come to fill in the blank statement in the Gospel of Matthew. And that's the one we see here in our passage. And this is probably the most surprising and shocking one. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.

[4 : 54] I have not come to bring peace but a sword. Jesus came to earth to bring a sword. Not a literal sword of violence.

But a figurative sword that slices apart even the most basic building blocks of society and family. But wait isn't Jesus pro-family?

And aren't Christians supposed to be pro-family? Yes we are. But not at the expense of following Jesus. The main point of this passage is that to follow Christ we must carry our cross.

Even the cross of losing our loved ones. First let's talk about the cross of following Jesus. And then lastly I'll talk about the reward of following Jesus.

Jesus' statement in verse 34 is shocking because it appears to contradict what we already know. Scripture says elsewhere about Jesus' coming and his purpose.

[5 : 55] For example later in Matthew 21 verse 5 Matthew cites an excerpt from a prophecy in Zechariah 9.9-10 to show that Jesus riding on a donkey into the city of Jerusalem is a fulfillment of the messianic prophecy.

And that passage in Zechariah says that the Messiah would speak peace to the nations. Isaiah 9.6-7 another famous messianic prophecy foretold that Jesus the Messiah would be the prince of peace.

And that of the increase of his government, his rule, there will be no end. This is why when Jesus is born the angels proclaim him in Luke chapter 2 verse 14 saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

So how can Jesus say that he did not come to bring peace? That he came to bring a sword? The answer lies in this that Jesus did bring peace but that that peace is not for everyone.

The angels' announcement in Luke 2 verse 14 was on earth peace among those with whom God is pleased. Remember earlier in Matthew chapter 10 verse 13 as he was commissioning, Jesus was commissioning his 12 apostles to go and proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God.

[7 : 17] He told them to as they go from house to house, neighborhood to neighborhood, to proclaim his peace. And that their peace would come upon them. But if those people would, if should they refuse them, refuse to receive them, show them hospitality and refuse and reject their message of the gospel, then Jesus said that their peace would return to them and not rest on those people.

In other words, the peace that Jesus offers is for those who receive him as the messianic king and submit to him as subjects of his kingdom. Those who reject Christ as their king do not get to enter into the kingdom of God.

That's the realm over which Christ reigns as king. And if you're not in the kingdom of God, then you don't benefit from his reign. You miss out on true peace for there can only be peace where the rightful king reigns from his throne.

Peace in biblical terms goes far beyond the mere absence of conflict. It has in its background the Old Testament idea of shalom, which is the Hebrew word for peace.

It represents being in right relationship with God. God says in Isaiah 54 verse 10, When we are the objects of God's steadfast love and a recipient of his covenant of peace, that's when we are whole.

[8 : 48] That's when our lives are rightly ordered. That's when we have true peace. And that's why it is impossible to have peace apart from Christ. As long as rebels exist who defy Christ the king, Jesus does not bring peace to the earth, but a sword.

Jesus is not speaking here of his judgment and of waging war against his enemies. Jesus will not do that.

He will not bring his final judgment until his second coming, when he will subdue all the rebels and bring universal peace. But until then, it's the time for his followers, his disciples, to bear witness to Jesus, their king, and to take a stand for Jesus.

To tell people about Jesus and to give them an opportunity to repent. To repent of their sins and follow Jesus themselves. This necessarily means planting a flag on the ground.

It necessarily means drawing a line on the sand. Saying, I belong to the kingdom of God. I am with Christ, my king. I have drawn the line on the sand.

[10 : 01] And no matter what you do and no matter what people say, I will not cross over to the other side. You may join me here, but I am not going over again.

This is the reality that Jesus speaks of when he says, I have come to bring a sword. I've mentioned to some of you before that I was part of the largest naturalization ceremony in U.S. history, which took place at Fenway Park here in Boston.

On September 14, 2010. And when I took the oath of U.S. citizenship, this is what I had to say with my right hand raised. I hereby declare on oath that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, patented state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen.

That I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic. That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same.

It seems kind of extreme at first, very categorical language, but if you think about it, it's not extreme at all. How can I be a citizen of the United States while pledging allegiance to a foreign state or power?

[11 : 23] That would make me a spy or an imposter. The same principle applies in the spiritual realm. How can we be citizens of the kingdom of God and claim to serve Christ the King if our loyalties are divided, if we have multiple allegiances?

Jesus explains in verses 35 to 37, 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 and a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

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. This is an allusion to Micah 7, 6, which prophesied of family divisions, not only during the time of Micah, but also especially in the Messianic age.

It's important to note here that Jesus is not commanding us to reject or neglect our family members. In fact, one of the Ten Commandments is to honor your father and mother.

And 1 Timothy 5, 8 teaches us that if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. As Christians, we ought to love our families and take care of our families.

[12 : 43] But nevertheless, Jesus says, you must not love them more than you love Jesus. If we are more loyal to our families than we are to Jesus, then we are not worthy of Jesus.

If our loyalty to our families subverts our allegiance to Christ and damages our witness for Christ, then we are not worthy to follow him.

This is what, this is the choice that my parents had to make when they refused to participate in ancestor worship in Korea and were consequently shunned by their family members and branded as those who bring dishonor to the family.

This is what Pastor Emmanuel, that we had as a guest preacher some months ago in this year, experienced himself when he converted to follow Christ in Nigeria and then was subsequently disowned by his own father and put in jail because his father was an imam of a Muslim mosque.

The sword divided their families because of people's refusal to acknowledge Christ as king. It's fine to want to please your parents, but you want to please them even more than you want to please God.

[14 : 04] When they oppose your decision to follow Christ and serve him, do you take a stand for Christ? Are you open to marrying a non-Christian even though that goes against the counsel of scripture in 1 Corinthians 7.39?

Even though you're aware that drawing nearer to that person will necessarily mean drawing further away from God and vice versa because they do not share your fundamental allegiance to the Lord. What about children? Do you love your children more than you love Jesus? Are you more concerned about their health and wealth and success in the world than for their faith and obedience in Christ?

Is participation in a sports league more important than their faithful attendance and Sunday worship? Are you willing to let your children risk being mocked or bullied in school for boldly sharing the gospel of Jesus with others?

Or would you rather them be silent? Are you so preoccupied and consumed with their well-being that you give hardly any time to your own relationship with God?

[15 : 21] Do your life choices and priorities revolve ultimately around Jesus, the King, or around your kids? When our church planting team was initially sent out by King of Grace Church 10 years ago, we only had five adults in our church.

Steve and Lauren Miller, right there. John Buckley. Where's John? Yeah. And Hannah, Hannah, my wife. I think we did have one kid at the time, right?

Ine, the oldest. Why did John and the Millers leave their home church and their houses to join an unproven recent seminary grad still in his 20s?

It's probably not the smartest decision they've made. Not because I was special, but because they were following Christ. Because they wanted to establish a gospel outpost in East Cambridge where there wasn't one.

They have Christian parents, so no sword had to divide their families, but it was nonetheless a real sacrifice to move down here to an expensive neighborhood where they've never lived, away from homes that they grew up and taking on jobs that they've never done to support the work of building Trinity Cambridge Church.

[16:53] Are you willing to make the same sacrifice? Jesus himself endured this sword. In Mark 3:21, it says that even some of his own family members said of him, he is out of his mind.

And later in that passage, while his family members are calling for him, Jesus asks, who are my mother and my brothers? And looking about at the disciples who sat around him, Jesus said, here are my mother and my brothers.

For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. Jesus is here speaking of the reality of the spiritual family.

bought by the blood of Christ and bonded together by the spirit of God which will outlast any earthly family. When we partake in the life of the local church, when we work to build up a local church, we do so as members of the very family of God.

Note how starkly Jesus puts this in verse 37. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. When whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

[18:09] There are no in-between halfway options here. There is no option C for loving your biological family and Jesus equally. You must make a choice.

Unless we submit to Christ as our king, as the supreme ruler of our lives, we are not worthy of him. Why? Why does Jesus have to be so demanding? Why? Because Jesus is worthy of that kind of worship and obedience.

Because Jesus is the king of kings and lord of lords. Because Jesus is the son of God and son of man. And because Jesus is the savior and redeemer of the world who laid down his own life to save us from sin and death.

Only those who therefore acknowledge Jesus' true worth and follow him are worthy to be called one of his own. In medieval dubbing ceremonies when a king confers knighthood on a loyal subject, he lightly taps the flat part of his sword upon the subject's head or shoulder to indicate that that person is now a knight that carries out the king's purposes and priorities.

That is what Christ has done for every single Christian. And that allegiance necessarily brings division in this sinful world that is in rebellion against God.

[19:40] And the sword that King Jesus confers on his loyal knights is a cross. Jesus says in verses 38 to 39, whoever does not take 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. In the western world we're so familiar with crosses and crucifixes that this verse loses its shock factor.

But we have to remember that for the Greeks and Romans crucifixion was a form of cruel and unusual punishment. It was a form of torture and execution wrapped up in one.

The Romans had several other far more efficient means of killing people but crucifixion is what they reserved for special cases for the low life criminals and enemies of the state.

In fact, Cicero, the famous Roman politician and philosopher himself denounced the practice of crucifixion. He called it a most cruel and disgusting punishment. He says, quote, the very mention of the cross should be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body but from his mind, his eyes, his ears.

[20:54] The cross was a stigmatized shameful symbol of humiliating defeat. But this public disgrace did not begin at the crucifixion.

It began long before that when the condemned criminal was forced to carry that heavy cross beam that he will be nailed to himself to the place, the location of the execution while bearing the jeers and the insults of the crowd.

This is exactly what Jesus endures in Matthew 27 and this is the glorious prospect that Jesus lays out in front of all of his potential followers.

Do you want to be found worthy of Jesus? Then you must take up your cross and follow Jesus in his footsteps, meaning into betrayal, rejection, suffering, persecution, possibly even death, martyrdom.

This is what Jesus confers on us, not a mighty sword with which to slay all of the wicked, but a cross by which we are to be slain by the wicked as sheep in the midst of wolves.

[22 : 21] When following Christ means being shunned by the world, will you follow Christ still? When following Christ means losing your job, when following Christ means loss of security, when following Christ means disrepute and disrespect among your peers and colleagues, will you still follow Christ?

if out of the desire to preserve our own lives, our wealth, our reputation, our career, we refuse to acknowledge Christ before men and bear witness to him, as we saw in the previous passage, you might succeed in preserving your life for a time, but you will lose something much bigger, your eternal life.

This is what Jesus means when he says in verse 38, whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. If you try to gain your life in the kingdom of this world, you will lose it in the kingdom of God.

Jesus adds in Matthew 16, 26, for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

It is folly to forsake your eternal soul to gain this temporary world that is just passing away. following Christ is not merely a matter of life and death.

[23 : 46] It is much more important than that. But this cross of following Jesus also comes with a great reward.

Jesus says in verses 40 to 41, whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

When we go out in Jesus' name to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, those who receive us and receive our message receive Christ himself. Why is that?

Because we are representatives of Christ, ambassadors of Christ. Envoys are extensions of the king's will and authority, and for that reason, the envoys are to be received with honor the way you'd receive a king.

For this reason, in 2 Samuel chapter 10, when the Ammonites shame King David's envoys by shading off half their beards and cutting off half their garments and make them walk back in shame, it leads to an all-out war between King David and the Ammonites because to insult and mistreat the envoys of the king is to insult and mistreat the king himself.

[25 : 20] 1 Corinthians 12, 27 teaches us that all Christians are individually members of the body of Christ. We are united to Christ our Lord by faith, and therefore, to receive or reject us is to receive or reject Christ himself.

Later in Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of what the final judgment will look like in the end of days. And King Jesus will be sitting on his glorious throne, and he will say to the righteous, come you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me.

I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink?

And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you? And the king will answer them, truly I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

[26 : 41] This world will be judged according to the way they treated the disciples of Christ.

Whether they receive them and their message or not, because to reject the envoys of the king, to reject their gospel message is to reject Christ himself.

But that's not all. Jesus also says, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The chain of representation goes up even further.

Those who receive the disciples of Christ receive Christ himself. And those who receive Christ receive God the Father himself. Brothers and sisters, that's the kind of backing we have when we go out as witnesses of Jesus Christ and share the gospel.

That's the kind of authorization we have. Jesus continues in verse 42, and whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Jesus calls all of his disciples little ones. It's very affectionate, isn't it? I love how our children's ministry volunteers refer to the kids sometimes as little ones.

[27 : 57] Jesus is speaking of the spiritual reality that all of his followers are adopted children of God. God. This is why Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6, 9, to cry out to our Father in heaven.

We are God's little ones. And God the Father, like any good father, takes very seriously how his children are treated.

I've mentioned this to some of you before that when my family, we travel to Seattle to visit my parents, we get treated like royalty out there. These people from the church that my dad pastors, you know, take us out to restaurants to eat, they buy and slaughter an entire black goat, which is like a delicacy, and they prepare it for us to eat.

They buy expensive Dungeness crabs, which is unique to the Pacific Coast, straight off the boat and steam them and feed us, even though I don't really like crabs. They even give allowances to my kids.

I'm like, who are these people, you know? Like, why are you doing this? Why do they do this? Not because they think we're so great. They barely know us. They see us, we see them once a year.

[29 : 22] They do it because they love my parents. they feel indebted to them. This is their way of loving them and serving them. It's the same with God, our Father.

He says, if you give one of my little ones, even a cup of cold water, a cup of cold water is the very least thing, the smallest thing you can do for someone in this, as an expression of hospitality.

Even if all you can do in receiving one of my little ones, my disciples, my emissaries of Christ, is to give them a cup of cold water, God says, you know, that's not much, but it's enough.

You receive them, you receive the message of the gospel, and I will reward you. God promises heavenly rewards to all those who receive the followers of Christ because to receive them is to receive Christ's Christ himself.

And to receive Christ, God's son, is to receive God the Father himself. I want to remind all those who are part of our original team, Hannah, as well as all those who left their homes and were sent out by their local churches early on in our ears to build this church.

[30 : 48] If you're listening, you might not be here, but you're listening to the message. This is what Jesus says in Matthew 19, 29. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

And I also want to thank all of you who are here now as members, but also all those who have been church members over their years because without your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, this local church would not be the local church that it is today.

All those times you've greeted our guests, all those times you've shared the gospel with unbelievers, all those times you've played music, watched the children and taught them in children's ministry, all those times you've hosted community groups in your homes or invited believers, other believers in the church out for coffee or lunch, all those times you pray for one another, all those times you have worked quietly in the background to set up the sound and to move the slides and set up the chairs and the projection, all those times you've updated the church website or sent out announcements on posts on Slack or social media, everything you have ever done for Christ matters forever.

Because Jesus promised us whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Jesus is such a kind Lord and King. He says in Hebrews 6, 10, for God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

[32 : 44] What do you expect to hear when God says, when this Bible says, for God is not unjust so as to overlook, overlook your sins. Maybe in our guilty consciences we think of our sins.

God is not unjust so he will not overlook your sins. That's not what it says. God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

You know what God does overlook? Our sins. Romans 4, 7 to 8, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. How can it be that our Lord will not overlook a single smallest thing we do in his service and he will overlook every sin and every offense and every failing and shortcoming?

That's the kind of Lord we serve because Jesus gave his own life and died on the cross for our sins so that he can not count our sins against us and yet count everything we do in faith for his namesake.

[34 : 26] He will count them all and reward us all richly. It's the greatest honor to serve him.

Let's pray together. Lord God, there is no one like you.

No one saves like you do. And no God is merciful, gracious like you. Oh Lord Jesus, there is no king like you.

Lord Jesus, there is no king like you. And we want to follow you. And we want to follow you to the ends of the earth. We want to follow you to our dying breath. We want to pick up our crosses and walk and run after you.

So Lord, fill us with your spirit. Empower us to do it. Because you are worthy. You are worthy.

[35 : 51] Be glorified. Continue to be glorified in our midst. In and through our church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.