

Matthew 10 • Standing firm in your faith

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We're in Matthew chapter 10 so open your Bible there if you would, please. And we're going to get through this chapter this morning. And there's a lot of good stuff so let's pray.

Father, thank You so much for the opportunity to come together with my brothers and sisters in Jesus. And I just thank You Lord for Your Holy Spirit, who attends these gatherings in such a wonderful way. And we just pray Lord for Your presence to minister to hearts. Speak to people and to encourage them.

Lord, I pray specifically today for those of Your children who are here or who are tuning in online and who are desperately seeking answers right now in their life.

And I pray my Father that You'd speak to them and that You would bring clarity and insight to the things about which they are praying. And I ask my Father that you would use Your Word to, to open our hearts, to speak to us today. So we desire to listen. Tune our hearts to hear Your voice in Jesus name, amen. Amen.

Matthew chapter 10 verse 1 begins by saying, “*And he called to him his twelve disciples...*” (ESV) Now Matthew refers to them as disciples here in verse 1. There were obviously more than 12. There was a huge crowd that was following Jesus around, but these were the guys that He had chosen to be His closest followers.

And it goes on here in verse 1 to say that, ...*and (He) gave them authority over unclean spirits, (that means demons) to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.*” Right? In other words, they were unlimited in their ability to go out and do these things.

But I want you to take note of what the passage says here. Specifically, this phrase that He “*gave them authority.*” Right? He “*gave them authority*” to go out and do these things. I've said many times that you can't give what you don't have, right? This tells you something about Jesus. Jesus is saying something to His disciples.

Matthew is telling us something and that is, very simply, that Jesus has the authority. Well, who possesses that kind of authority to be able to heal any kind of disease, or affliction, and to cast demons out of people? Who has that authority? Well, that's the authority God has to do that stuff.

And so what Jesus, or what we're hearing here from Matthew, is that Jesus is divine. I mean, it's what is being said over and over. We've already gone through several instances of this sort of a thing happening in the Book of Matthew. Where Jesus calms the waters, and casts out demons out of a man that nobody could even get close to, and on, and on, and on. And the things that He has done.

It's interesting. I was watching a video this past week where somebody was challenging some kind of a Christian speaker and I didn't know who it was. But it was one of those deals where, they had a microphone sitting out in the audience, and people could come up and do their best to stump the speaker, I suppose.

And this guy gets up, and he says, show me one verse in the Bible where Jesus claimed to be God, where He said, I am God. And I thought that was a pretty interesting question. And as I listened on with the video, the speaker responded in a very different way than I would have. I would have responded by saying, who cares? Really, seriously. And I wouldn't even be joking.

I'd say, who cares? Who cares if He said, if He ever came out and said, I am God and you're not, or something like that. Because people can say all kinds of things. People can make all kinds of claims. I don't know about you, but I'm more interested in Him showing me than just saying it. You know what I mean?

I mean, if I was walking with a guy and we looked at a 300 pound barbell on the ground and this guy said to me, I can pick that up and put it over my head in 3 seconds. I'd be a whole lot more impressed if I saw him do it. You know what I mean?

And what we're doing here as we read through the Gospel of Matthew, is we are watching as Jesus systematically proves that He is God in human flesh, because He does what only God can do. And we're, we've seen it and we will continue to see it over and over.

Verse 2 goes on and says, “ *The names of the twelve apostles...* ” Now notice that now all of a sudden Matthew switches. He called them disciples a moment ago, now he calls them apostles. And by the way, this is the first and only use of

the word, apostle in Matthew's Gospel. It's the Greek word, Apostolos. It very simply and literally means, messenger, but it carries with it the connotation of someone who has been sent; sent forth.

And he begins to give us these names of these individuals, but there's something very unique in these individuals who are called apostles. You'll notice that it goes on and says, “...*first, Simon, who is called Peter,...*” Simon, of course, was his Hebrew name. It would have been pronounced, Sha-mon. And Peter, you'll remember, was the name given him by Jesus, which means, rock.

He goes on to say, “*and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*”

These are the 12 apostles. One of these is going to, of course, betray him. There will be 11 remaining. Then Paul's going to take over and become a real pillar. But it's interesting here, that we don't, have you ever noticed we don't call anybody apostle around here?

In fact, the churches in America don't usually use that title, but I've come to learn that there are a lot of churches overseas, in other countries that still often use the title, apostle in their church. And every so often even I'll get asked by someone, is that a legitimate usage of the title? Should we be calling people apostles today? I don't think so.

I mean, if you read through Paul's letters to Timothy, and then his letter to Titus. By the way, we call those, the Pastoral Epistles or, the Pastoral Letters. And the reason we call them that is because in those letters, Paul wrote to those 2 men about raising up leaders within the church.

And if you read through those letters, you will find out that Paul talked to those men about raising up pastors, and elders, and overseers, and deacons, but not once does he give any information or qualifications for raising up apostles. He just doesn't. And that is rather telling in and of itself. And so I really believe that there is a unique role that these particular men had to do what they did and so forth. And mostly, writing the Scriptures for you and me.

Anyway, it goes on in verse 5 to say, “*These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them,...*” Now, if those of you that have in your Bible, the words of Jesus in red, you're going to notice that starts here and it pretty much goes to the end of the chapter. This is pretty much all taken up with Jesus talking and giving

instructions to these men before He sends them out with this authority and so forth.

But He begins His instructions by saying this. Look at verse 5 again. He says, *“Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* And so Jesus begins, His first instruction is, don't go to the Gentiles or even the half Jews, Samaritans. Go just to the lost sheep of Israel.

And there are some Christians that read this in the Bible, and they're taken aback by it, and they're wondering, well, why did Jesus do that? I mean, isn't the Gospel for everybody? Yes, the Gospel is for everybody but the Jews had to have the first crack at it. Why? Because it was to that nation that God had sent the prophets foretelling the coming of Messiah and all that He would do.

And I believe that it was God's intention that the Jews would hopefully receive the message of the gospel and be His instrument of bringing the Gospel to the world. I believe that was God's original intention for the Jews to be that instrument to bring the Gospel. However, they largely rejected the message of Jesus, rejected Jesus Himself. And then the message went on to the Gentiles and the Gentiles became the light that the Jews refused to carry. But it was necessary for the Jews to have that first chance and we see this throughout the Scriptures several times. Let me show you an example from Acts chapter 13 up on the screen. It says,

Acts 13:45-46 (ESV)

...when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

...when the Jews saw the crowds, (that's the crowds that Paul and Barnabas were attracting) they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. (that's speaking abusively) And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. (did you catch that? Let me read that again: It was necessary Paul said, that the word of God be spoken first to you. But) Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. But it had to go first to the Jews.

Now, as we go on with these instructions that Jesus gave them. Verse 7, it says

that He tells them to “...*proclaim as you go, saying, (and this is the simplicity of the message He gave them) ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’*” Wow. I would think to myself, that's great. That's all I got to say. I don't even need notes. I'm just going to go out and tell people, hey, “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”

And if they wondered about whether or not I had the authority to make such a statement, God has given me the ability to heal all kinds of diseases and cast out demons. And that would be a validating element to it. But this message, the kingdom of God is at hand. This is, or, “*The kingdom of heaven,*” by the way, means the same thing. Kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, synonymous statements. Think about that.

This is a message that Jesus brought. It's a message He told His disciples to go out and preach, or declare, proclaim. But have you ever noticed it's not one that Paul taught, teaches? Or frankly, any of the other New Testament biblical authors. The focal point of their message was not, “*the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*” That's not what they said because this was a message that was uniquely tuned to the Jews once again.

You see, the Jews had been raised with their Hebrew scriptures. And in those Hebrew scriptures, the prophets foretold a time when Israel would become the focal point on the world stage. That Israel would literally be exalted above all the nations of the earth. Now we know that's going to happen during the Millennial Kingdom. Right? That's coming. It's still in the future, but the Jews knew this, and they were waiting for it. They were hoping for it.

In fact, you remember the story that Luke tells about Simeon who was an old man that was hanging out in the temple precincts. And he actually was there when Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus in. You'll remember that? And he began to speak prophetically over this child. Well, it says something interesting in Luke's Gospel about Simeon. Let me put it on the screen so we can see it together. Luke chapter 2, it says,

Luke 2:25 (ESV)

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, (and I want you to take note of this next phrase) waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

That phrase right there, “*waiting for the consolation of Israel*,” is just what we're talking about. And it's just what Jesus was telling His disciples to declare. “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand*.” Simeon was waiting for it. The message Jesus gave His disciples was, it's here, it's at hand, it's beginning, buckle up.

You see, the Jews knew that the Messiah was going to usher in the kingdom. That's what their Hebrew scriptures told them. The Messiah would come, He would usher in the kingdom, and Israel would become the focal point of the world as Messiah rules and reigns from Jerusalem, over the entire world. Here's the deal, the Jews missed..., they confused the comings of Jesus. They thought that was going to happen right away when Messiah came. Right?

That's why the disciples were constantly talking about which of them was going to be the greatest. Because they believed, like all other Jews, Messiah comes, He exalts Israel. He puts down the enemies of Israel. He exalts Israel on the world stage, and Messiah rules and reigns for a thousand years. They knew that. And so they're all talking about, I wonder which one of us is going to rule and reign right next to Him. I wonder which one of us is going to be on His right.

In fact, James and John got mom to ask Jesus for those places. You remember that? They actually got their mother to ask Jesus to have her sons seated on His right and left. Yeah. So you can see that's what the Jews were expecting to happen. The problem is they missed what the Word of God had to say about the first coming of Messiah when He would give his life on the cross for the sins of the world. They missed that. They completely skipped over that and they got right to glory, which is very common human sort of a thing to do.

This message that Jesus is telling His disciples to give is so specifically tuned to a Jewish audience so as to say, it's coming, it's here, it's now, it's beginning, it's beginning.

Jesus goes on in verse 8 and He says, “*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons*. (right? And then He goes on to make this statement) *You received without paying; give without pay*.” In other words, what He's saying here is, I'm giving you the ability to do these things without cost, so don't you go charging anybody.

See that was a common sort of a thing in those days for the Jews to charge for services like casting out a demon or something like that. Jesus says to His men essentially, you received all these things without cost, make sure you give them away at no cost.

Now, that doesn't mean the disciples wouldn't or couldn't receive offerings free will from people because He goes on to say, “⁹ *Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts.*” And that means don't bring along any money.

Don't bring along a “¹⁰ ...*bag* (He said) *for your journey*, (to put things in) *or* (don't even bring) *two tunics or* (another pair of) *sandals or a staff*, (and then He says this,) *for the laborer deserves his food*. In other words, He's telling them, people are going to take care of you along the way so don't worry about it. There will be people who will receive the message that you bring, and they're going to want to support you.

Do you know that's how Jesus was supported? The Bible tells us that there were women who were of some financial means who supported Jesus and that means they purchased food, and lodging at time for time, or whatever the thing might be. And Jesus is telling His disciples that's going to be the continuation of how their ministry plays out here and so forth.

Verse 11, He says, “*And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart.*” In other words, don't bounce around from house to house. And He says, I want you to remember that statement, “*find out who is worthy in it.*” “¹² *As you enter the house*, (verse 12, He says) *greet it.* ¹³ *And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.* ¹⁴ *And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.* ¹⁵ *Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*”

Boy, that's a powerful statement. But I want you to notice here that Jesus talks about a house being worthy and what does that exactly mean? Well, He's not... He's talking about the people in the house. Okay. Houses can't be worthy. He's saying essentially, if someone receives you, and receives the message, then the people in that house have proven themselves worthy.

When you come into their home, because they will obviously invite you into their home, pray a blessing. Give a blessing of peace over that house and if that house is worthy, they've received you accordingly, then your blessing will be upon them, and so forth. However, He's saying, if there are those who refuse to receive you, and they won't invite you in their home, and they won't receive the message that you come to bring. I want you to dramatize for them God's displeasure by shaking the dust off your feet. And that was a way of illustrating that essentially, your blood be on your own head. I've come with a life preserver

and you chose to reject it. And so that was the way they illustrated that to the people there in those towns and villages.

Now, as we come to verse 16 here in this chapter, and this is pretty much now through the end of the chapter, Jesus is going to begin to speak to them about what they can expect as it relates to rejection and persecution for going out and doing this ministry. But what He's going to do, and you're going to see this as He speaks to them, He's going to speak prophetically. And what that means is He's going to talk about things that are going to happen beyond the current event, right?

He's sending them out to go and speak the Word and to do these miracles but a lot of the things that Jesus is going to say here and warn them about are not going to happen now. They're going to happen in the years to come. They're going to happen in the decades to come, and even further down the road. Keep that in mind. Jesus is speaking prophetically. Okay. It's important you know that, or you're going to get messed up reading these verses.

Verse 16 and following. He begins by saying, *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves,* (and that’s a simple way of saying, I'm sending you out into dangerous territory. Here's His exhortation) *so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”*

Now, if anybody here has a New King James on your lap, your Bible says *“harmless as doves.”* I got to tell you, I like that a little bit better than innocent because what Jesus is telling them here is that in the coming years, you will go out into all corners of the earth. And you will bring the message of hope and salvation through My death on the cross.

But some people are going to reject you. And some of them are even going to reject you violently. And you're going to need great wisdom to know how to respond. But you're also going to need to be harmless even when some want nothing more than to harm you. In other words, harm will come to you, but make sure you don't return that harm to them. That's the message. What a great message, huh? I got a ministry for you. It's dangerous. People are going to hate you. Some of them are even going to try to kill you. Don't you dare do anything back to them except love them and pray for them. How would you feel about that ministry? That's the ministry Jesus gave them.

He goes on to say in verse 17, *“Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues,* (again, prophetically. This didn't happen in this first outing. He says) ¹⁸ *and you will be dragged before*

governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. (and) ¹⁹ When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰ For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

We even have some examples of this in the Book of Acts when the disciples were hauled before the authorities, and the Bible says, the Holy Spirit would come upon one of them, or more, or two of them, or whatever. And they would begin to speak. And they would speak in such a way that the authority said, wow, these guys are amazing. I mean, they're uneducated nobodies. Yeah, and yet here they are speaking with wisdom and articulation in such a way that's impressive and so forth.

Now Jesus begins to speak in verse 21 and following, how the Gospel will create a dividing line within humanity. And there will be those on one side who love the truth, and those on the other side who resist, and reject the truth. He says in verse 21, here's how it's going to play out. *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."*

What does it take for family members to be willing to sacrifice some of the people in their family simply because one or more have come to faith in Jesus Christ. We don't experience this stuff to a great degree. I mean, to a lesser degree, I have talked with people who have experienced rejection from their family because they've come to faith in Christ. But it's nothing like in like Islamic countries where you come to faith in Jesus and they put out a kill order on you. I mean, literally. They want you dead. You've professed faith in Jesus Christ, you've betrayed the whole family. And this is happening today.

And Jesus talks about it here, but He makes an important statement at the very end of verse 22, and I want you to see this. He says, *"But the one who endures to the end will be saved."* And you could take that statement, I suppose, to mean that they have to endure all these trials, all these challenges, and all these difficulties. And that's true. But He's talking also about a different kind of endurance. He's talking about the endurance of faith. Because you see, when people are threatened with murder, being killed for their faith in Jesus, it's a huge temptation to recant, and some have.

I've never had anybody threatened to kill me unless I recanted my faith in Jesus as my Savior. And I can't even really imagine what that would be like, but I can

imagine it would be tempting, at least tempting, to just, all I got to do is say what he wants to hear, and I can go be with my family. And if I say what I know I need to say, I'm dead. I can't imagine.

And I can't imagine what that's like, but Jesus is talking here about that very thing. And he says, “...*the one who endures to the end will be saved.*” And again, He's talking about the endurance of faith because you see the endurance of faith is critical.

How are we saved guys? We're saved by grace through what? Isn't that what the Bible says? You are saved by grace through faith. That's how you're saved, is your faith. Faith in what? Faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. He died for you. He bore your sin. You believe it and receive it and you're saved. That's what the Bible says.

Now, how important is it for you to hang on to that faith? Oh, it's pretty critical, wouldn't you say? And He's telling, He's warning His men, there are going to be situations that you will face where you will be tempted to not hang onto your faith. That's the reason the Book of Hebrews was written in your Bible, in the New Testament. The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were enduring persecution because of their faith. And so you know what they were doing? They were being tempted to go back under the law as a means of salvation.

And that's the whole reason the Book of Hebrews was written. The author wrote to them to say to them, no, that doesn't work. You can't go back under the law because the law can't save anybody. Jesus saves people. So why would you..., that's the whole argument of the Book of Hebrews. Do you think people don't succumb to that temptation from time to time? And are willing to give up on faith? Yeah, that happens. That's why Jesus is telling them, “...*the one who endures... will be saved,*” because that's how we're saved, by faith. Right? Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 15, up on the screen. He says,

1 Corinthians 15:1-2 (ESV)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, (right?) in which you stand, (stand by faith) and by which you are being saved, (but then he includes this word, if. The word, if introduces a

conditional clause) *if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

What is Paul saying? Here's how you're saved. You guys know the Gospel. I preached it to you. You received it and you're standing on it. Now, hold fast to your faith. Hold fast to what was preached to you. Hold fast. Hold on. Don't let go. Don't let anything cause you to let go because it's by faith we're saved. Right? People don't like this passage. Because we've believed this nonsense that people love to spout. This whole idea of, once saved, always saved. It doesn't say that in the Bible anywhere, by the way. And yet people, they want to believe it. You come to passages like this, where there's conditional clause to salvation, and that is faith, and people get all upset.

Now, be careful about what you hear me saying, because I do not believe you can lose your salvation. But I also don't believe in, once saved, always saved. There's a difference, because the whole idea behind the once saved, always saved idea, is that you could sin and lose your salvation, potentially. That's what that's responding to.

Well, I don't believe you can sin and lose your salvation. I don't believe that. Because the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from sin. That's what the Bible says. I don't think you can sin your way out of the kingdom. I just don't. So what's the issue? What's the big issue if it's not sin? Guys, we're saved by faith. We're saved by grace through faith, right? It's faith that saves you. You put your faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, and you're saved.

Well, what happens if a person says, I no longer believe that? Well, you got a problem. That's what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. He says, here's the Gospel. You received it, you're standing on it, and that's the way you're being saved if you hold fast. If you hold fast. See? We, we got... Yeah, I hate getting involved in arguments. I really do. When people say something or whatever, and this is what I believe and stuff like that. It's like, you know what, let's just believe what the Bible says, even if it ruffles your feathers a little bit, let's believe what the Bible says.

We're saved by grace through faith. I believe Jesus died for me on the cross. Do you believe that? You're saved. You're saved through faith. Hold fast, regardless of what happens in your life. Regardless if someone threatens to kill you because of what you believe, hold fast. Regardless of what happens in your life. Regardless of the tragedies, the difficulties, the problems, the concerns, hold fast. Hold fast. Don't let go of your faith. It's so important.

He goes on in verse 23. Look with me in your Bible. He says, *“When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”* And by the way, this is a troublesome verse for some people because it sounds like Jesus is saying, you guys aren't going to get through all the towns of Israel before I return physically.

Well, first of all, remember Jesus is speaking prophetically of days and years to come. Secondly, He didn't even send them this time to all the cities of Israel. He just sent them to a small area so this is not pertaining to their immediate circumstances.

In fact, I believe that Jesus is speaking prophetically of that period of time that we call the, Great Tribulation, when the Gospel will go out in Israel through a very special group of people that the Book of Revelation refers to as the 144,000. And they're going to go out and they're going to preach the Gospel. And I believe that what Jesus is saying is they won't get through the entire nation of Israel before He ultimately returns at the end of the tribulation period. And it's essentially a statement to say, once it begins, it's going to go very rapidly.

And so He goes on in verse 24 and He says, *“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (He says) ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, (which was another name for satan, He says) how much more will they malign those of his household.”* Another way of saying, if they hated Me, they'll hate you too.

How are we to respond if we know, now knowing what we know, that we're going to go out into the world with the Gospel of Jesus, and some people aren't going to receive it. And they're going to in fact reject it, and want to hurt us. How should we respond?

Verse 26. *“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered (that word means, concealed) that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.”*

In other words, don't hold back anything with this Gospel message that I've given to you. Even when you're being threatened, don't hold back, preach it from the housetops to anyone who will listen, and don't be afraid of them.

In fact, he says in verse 28, “... *do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*” And that, of course, is God. See, when people kill you, that's all they can do is kill your body. They can't kill the immortal part of you.

He begins to say in verse 29, “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?*” And I'm thinking, do we even give that much today for sparrows? I wouldn't give you even a penny for two sparrows. Thank you. I got plenty in my yard and I'd appreciate it if you'd help me get rid of them. But anyway. Apparently that was going on back then.

He says, look at this. “*And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.*”³⁰ *But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.*³¹ *Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*” I love this. Very wonderful, comforting passage. And He's telling us that since God is intimately acquainted, even with the death of each and every sparrow, how much more does He care for you?

Verse 32 says, “*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.*” What's the context of this statement? The persecution that's going to come upon believers when they go out and take the Gospel into the world.

The temptation to recant and to say, like Peter did, I don't know who you're talking about. This is what He's talking about. Are you going to continue to acknowledge Me before men, even if that acknowledgment might mean your death, your physical death. Will you continue then?

And I really appreciate the next statement by our Lord in verse 34. He says, “*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” Did I just ruin all of your Christmas cards? It's funny, most of them say, peace on earth, don't they? Have you ever just noticed that when the Christmas cards come into your home this year? Peace on earth, peace on earth, peace on earth. That's taken, from the statement that the angels gave to the shepherds when Jesus was born.

But if you ever really read that passage carefully, it doesn't just say peace on earth. It says, peace to those on whom God's favor rests. (Luke 2:14) So it's not a universal peace. Jesus did not come yet to bring universal peace. That comes the second time when the Prince of Peace takes the throne, during the Millennial

Kingdom. But what does Jesus say now? What's the first coming all about? Is it about peace? No! It's about a sword. It's about division. Right?

Look what He goes on to say. *“³⁵ 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.”*

And you might read this and say, well that seems uncharacteristic of Jesus to say something like this, that He came to bring division and strife. Why would He do that? No, no, no. You have to understand. It's not something that He does purposely. It's something that happens because of one simple element of who He is and that is truth.

Do you remember when Jesus said, I am the truth. I am the way, I am the truth. I am the life, right? (John 14:6) He says, I am, I am the truth. And Jesus comes to speak truth. Now, there are people in this world who are willing to hear that truth and to embrace it. But there are people in this world who are not willing to hear His truth and that means that they're not only going to reject truth, they're going to reject Him, okay?

Now here's the point. The people who cannot bear the truth, they're not only going to want to try to erase the truth, they're going to try to erase the people who are speaking the truth. And that's the point of what He's saying. Don't think I've come to bring peace. Don't think my coming is going to bring right away this universal peace that you're looking for. It's not because what I come to speak is truth. And there are many who don't want anything to do with that truth. And they're going to do anything within their power to rid the world of that truth. And that might include ridding the world of you.

And so that's why He says. A man will be against his own father and a daughter against her mother and on, and on, and on. Because you see truth is the dividing line. Truth is the dividing line. And really that's what separates all humanity. It's not the color of our skin, or the language we speak, or anything like that. It's whether we embrace truth and we're willing to listen to it, or whether we reject it. That's it. It all comes down to that.

Remember when Jesus was having that conversation with Pilate after He was arrested? What did Jesus say was His purpose in coming to earth? Let me show you this on the screen. John 18.

John 18:37 (ESV)

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. (look at this) For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. (and then He goes on to say) Everyone who is of the truth (and that means who's willing to listen,) listens to my voice."

Everyone who's willing listens to my voice. But the converse is also true. Those who are not willing will not listen to My voice. So what's the dividing line? It's truth. Truth. Simple as that. And He says that even families are going to separate, be separated by truth and falsehood.

Some of you have experienced that in your families today. And maybe it didn't come to death, but it did come to a place of separation. Emotionally, sometimes even physically. Because you, as parents, shared the Gospel with your children and your children couldn't receive it. So you continue to pray for them, but in the meantime, they just want nothing to do with you or the other way around. And it's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking, but it comes down to truth. And there are times when we are faced with choosing family or truth. And those are the most difficult things.

Let me show you, look at verse 37. This is so important. He says, *"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."* You could put truth in there instead of Me because Jesus is the truth. He could have just as easily said whoever loves father and mother more than the truth. He's not worthy of Me. Or son or daughter, Whoever chooses family over truth, He says is not worthy of Me. Wow. He's really meddling now, isn't He?

When we first started the church many years ago, I think it was like in our first year, maybe two, I got a call from a guy who had come, popped into one of our services. And he was very upset with me at something I said in my teaching because I was talking apparently that Sunday about the fact that the teachings of Mormonism are incompatible with biblical Christianity. I've said that for 34 years. And as we talked, he told me how upset he was by the fact that I made that statement. And it eventually came out in our conversation, the reason why he was so upset.

His daughter, who had been raised in a Christian home, had married a Mormon, and he desperately wanted to believe that his daughter made a good decision. And that what she was going to be walking in was the same truth that was given in the Bible. And I, I mean, what could I say? I'm sorry, you're wrong. That's not a fun thing to say to anybody. Fact of the matter is, I was really young at the time, and I didn't really know what it was happening. I mean, I didn't understand at that point when I was in my thirties, that this all came down to this issue of just truth, just the dividing line, that truth creates in humankind. I understand it now, but I didn't really then. But that's an example.

And so what am I saying? That your daughter marries a Mormon, then you reject her and kick her out of your home. No, I'm not saying that at all, but you don't stop believing in the truth. And even if it's a painful thing to realize, my daughter married a Mormon, and now they're going to the Mormon church, and they're believing and teaching her all kinds of things that are inconsistent with the way she was raised. What do I do as a father? I pray for her for the rest of my life, if necessary, that God would open her eyes and show her the real truth. Truth from falsehood. That's what you do. You still love them with all your heart, but you don't deny the truth. You with me? That's the point.

Verse 38, *“And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”* And now you see the context that this statement is also made in. It's about this whole idea of the requirement of discipleship to stand strong in your faith, to not waver on the truth, but to take up your cross and to follow the Lord.

This must have sounded really crazy for the disciples to hear this, for Jesus to use an example of the cross. Because the cross was a Roman form of execution, a very cruel form of execution. And to use it as an illustration must have been very unpalatable to these men. And yet, it got the point across. Because if there's one thing the cross always did, it always killed its victim. Anybody who got nailed up on a cross never got taken down alive. The cross always won.

Jesus is saying to them, take up your cross. In other words, live the life of dying to self and hold on to your faith and hold on to the truth. No matter what, no matter who's threatening you. No matter what happens in your life, hold on to your faith, hold on to the truth and don't let go. And if it means dying to self, so be it.

He says in verse 39, *“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* I talked about this a couple of weeks ago. This is one of those verses in the Bible, I'm convinced I could teach and preach on this verse for a year and not repeat myself. There's so much here.

It's so important to understand what Jesus is saying here, because, we're living in a world where the self-life is exalted and elevated. That's because, people in the world, that's all they've got. That's all they've got. There's nothing more than the self-life. But for you and me, self is a hindrance to the God life.

You see, self, Paul gets in the way all the time of what God wants to do in my life. And so rather than me getting in the way of God's will and purpose for my life, Jesus says to me, Paul, take up your cross and follow Me. Be willing to die to self that My will, and My Word, and my purpose in your life might be the exalted part of your life, rather than exalting the self-life.

Here the world is telling us, I don't know if people are saying it so much anymore. You remember when people were saying, I just need to find myself? It was a really popular phrase for a while, and I'm not sure people say it much anymore, but that was a very worldly thing. I need to find, I need to just go find myself. And the world still comes up with really dumb statements that are along those same lines, like you got to learn to love yourself before you can love other people. It's like, you just proved to me your brain is missing. But there's all kinds of these self-statements and so forth.

The self-life, what does Jesus say? You want to go looking for your life? He says, whoever finds it's going to lose it, but you lose your life for My sake, that's when you find it. And he's not talking about losing your life in the sense of dying physically. He's talking about dying daily to the self-life. Giving up my own personal desires so that the will of God might be made manifest. Right?

Finally, verse 40, *"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones..."*

And that doesn't mean children. The word little ones there does not speak of little in stature, it means little in popularity. It literally means of little standing. And that's talking about you, the way the world sees you, right? Of little importance so we'll read it that way.

⁴² *And whoever gives one of these (ones of) little (importance)... 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 a passage, this final passage of the chapter, speaks of rewards. And, we don't know a lot about rewards because they're all going to be

revealed in the last days. And I get a lot of questions about rewards and I'm not really, sure, there's not a whole lot.

Jesus just says we're going to be rewarded, He doesn't give a whole lot of details about how it's going to all work. But if nothing else, these verses reveal that God is pretty detailed in His record keeping as it relates to handing out the rewards for even the smallest act of kindness.

I find when I'm talking to Christians that there's still a lot of confusion about rewards among Christians. And one of the reasons we run into problems is because of a particular verse that is given in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, up on the screen. Goes like this,

2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Leave that verse up for a minute. When people read that, when Christians read this, they often get very unsettled in their hearts. And so people will ask, so what exactly does this mean? And does this mean that all of my sins are going to be, I'm going to have to stand before God for all of my sins?

Well, you do remember that Jesus died for your sins, right? Right? Yeah, okay, good. That's, oh, you scared me there for a minute. Goodness gracious. I was about to do a big altar call. You do know that He bore the punishment and all of the judgment that goes along with that for you, right? And you do know that after He finished bearing your judgment, He said, it is finished. Right? That means there's nothing else to pay. You with me?

You see, you got to be careful when you read verses like this. Paul..., there are three things that we often forget related to reading verses like this. Let me put them up on the screen. First thing, we forget that,

- The Apostle Paul is making a general statement about all judgement.

The apostle Paul here is making very general statements about judgment.

Okay. He's not specifically speaking of the judgment that believers will stand in versus the judgment that unbelievers will stand in. He's just making a general statement. We will all stand before the Lord. Now, we're going to stand differently, okay? And the next thing that we often forget, number 2 here, is that

- The Apostle Paul is making a general statement about all judgement.
- Paul is not speaking here about how people are saved.

Paul is not speaking here about how people are saved.

This statement in 2 Corinthians is not about salvation, right? He's not saying, well, you're saved by either whether you did good things or bad things. That's not what he's saying, because we know that's not true. We're saved by grace through faith. Not by what we do or don't do.

And then thirdly, we often forget that when we're reading a passage in the Bible, we must interpret that passage according to what the Bible or what the rest of Scripture has to say.

- The Apostle Paul is making a general statement about all judgement.
- Paul is not speaking here about how people are saved.
- All passages of the Bible must be interpreted in light of the rest of Scripture.

That's why I went through that exercise of reminding you of what Jesus did on the cross for you. And I'll give you one more that you need to keep in mind. Romans 8:1.

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

What does that tell you about the judgment that you're going to stand before the Lord in? It's not a judgment of condemnation, right? Your judgment is not going to be a judgment of condemnation. You know why? Jesus was condemned for you. He took it. He bore it. It is finished.

So what kind of a judgment are you going to stand in? It's going to be a judgment that tests your works. Paul explained it this way. He said, we all have

the same foundation and the foundation is Jesus. Right? We're saved by grace through faith, believing that Jesus died on the cross for us. And that's how we're saved. Now, salvation is settled. Our foundation is that's, we're settled. Now, what we build on that foundation is what you're going to be judged about. And Paul says that you have different options of materials with which to build. You can build with wood, hay, and stubble. And that speaks of those things that are of the flesh and of the self-life. Or you can build with gold, silver, and precious stones. And those are the things that will remain even through the fire.

And Paul tells us that the fire of God's presence, and it's not a fire of anger or judgment, it's just simply the fire of His holiness. When we stand before Him, the fire of His holiness is going to sweep through every home that's been built on the foundation of Christ, and what remains is what we did for Him. What is burned up, is what we did for self. And so you see, but the foundation remains. And Paul even tells us that there will be some whose home will be completely burned up but he goes on to say that the man himself will be saved, but even as one escaping through the flames. The man will be saved, but he'll have nothing to show for it. In other words, there'll be no reward because he never lived his life for the glory of God. He lived it for self. Yeah, but he hung on to faith. He was saved by grace through faith. But he never built on that foundation with anything that would last.

So my question to you is, are you building with the materials that will last? That's between you and the Lord. Let's stand together. We'll close in prayer. If you need prayer this morning, we'll have our prayer team up front here. So just come on up after we're done praying and we'll have these folks available to pray with you and for you.

Thank You, Father, for the blessing of being able to spend time together in worship and in the Word of God. We thank You Lord that Your Word is so delightful. It nourishes our souls. It brings clarity and understanding and it equips us for the days ahead. Father, I pray in Jesus name, that we would be wise about how we use our days so that when we stand before You one day, we need not be ashamed of the way we've lived.

I thank You for the strong foundation that is all of ours in Jesus, but I pray my Father, God, that each one of us would be busy for the Lord each and every day. Whether it's just raising our children or whatever is put in front of us, Lord, may we be faithful. May we be found faithful on that day. We thank You and praise You in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And all God's people said together, amen. Have a good rest of your day