

## THE UNDIVIDED DISCIPLE [MATTHEW 10:32-42]

### Introductory Remarks – the Church and Her King

It's appropriate that we began with the Apostle's creed this morning - that ancient creed spoken by Christ's church - because coming to this passage I feel like a spiritual infant. My courage is pathetic, my boldness is lacking and yet I've faced nothing of the persecution that our big brothers and sisters have faced all around the world and down through the ages. Accordingly this morning, I'm going to season this sermon with stories<sup>1</sup> from our big brothers and sisters as they have lived out these words and so provide us with inspiration and encouragement as we consider these words of Jesus.

Yet the other thing I want to mention at the outset of this sermon is who Jesus is revealed to be in Matthew 10-13 – he is both tough and tender, both strong and kind. One of Steph's favourite parts in Narnia is when Susan is speaking to Mr and Mrs Beaver in Narnia and enquires after Aslan, upon discovering he is a Lion, she asks, "is he safe?" To which Mr Beaver replies, "**Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.**"

CS Lewis brilliantly captures our King. He is not safe, and following him is not safe, but he is good. Don't treat Jesus like he's a lion at the zoo - powerful, but in a cage of our making and comes at our beck and call when we lure him out with a choice morsel of meat. Don't come to this passage and try make Jesus say what you want him to say. Come to this passage wanting to hear and obey the roar of our Lion. He is not safe, but good. He is tough and tender, strong and kind.

### The Unashamed Disciple (10:32-33)

So let's turn to the passage. You'll recall that Jesus has been preparing his Apostles for their mission trip, but the teaching soon broadens out from mere instructions about their particular mission trip, to teaching more broadly on who Jesus wants his disciples to be and preparation for the reception we will face as we take the message of the Kingdom to the world around us. And as we saw last week, the reception to this message will not always be warm. We read now from verse 32 –

**Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.<sup>33</sup>  
But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.**

On Christmas Eve last year, extremists from the Islamic State West Africa Province attacked the town of Garkida in Nigeria. In the attack two people were killed including a five year old, and five Christian men were kidnapped. Six days later a disturbing video was posted online of their brutal execution. Yet even in such horrifying circumstances, even in the face of death, these men clung to Jesus and refused to disown him. What a reception they would have received in heaven after their moment of horror - Jesus acknowledging them by name before our Heavenly Father. An awesome thought.

What an incentive to not be ashamed of Jesus even when costly! In the words of verse 27, let us speak the gospel from the rooftops. And what a warning Jesus gives us against adopting a pattern of life marked by being ashamed of him and so drifting from the faith in Christ which saves us.

Yet sadly, so often we fail at much smaller threats than our Nigerian brothers faced. We keep silent or even speak lies to conceal what we know to be true. We claim we do so as part of an exercise of discernment in a tense situation, but sadly all too often our response is not really driven by discernment, but by fear of rejection and being ashamed of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm indebted to Open Doors for these stories. Open Doors serves persecuted Christians the world over.

### **The Undivided Disciple (10:34-39)**

Yet not only is the disciple of Christ to be unashamed, but they are also to be undivided. From v34 –

**“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.<sup>35</sup> For I have come to turn**

**“a man against his father,  
a daughter against her mother,  
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—  
<sup>36</sup> a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’**

**<sup>37</sup> “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.**

I’ve had friends who refuse to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but nonetheless acknowledge him as a nice person and a wise teacher whose words we’d do well to follow. Evidently they never read this passage. Jesus calls us to love him more than family and calls us to follow him even to the point of death. In Jesus’ day, to see someone carrying their cross was to see someone on a one way journey, their life over and their remaining moments subject to public humiliation and scorn. In effect, Jesus thus says to us in this passage, “Give me priority over your family and be prepared to face humiliation and death for me.” This is not ‘nice’ teaching. This is either the King of all rightly claiming our complete and total allegiance, or else it’s the teaching of a madman.

Yet how is it that the prince of peace can come to bring such division? Notice that division is not an accident of Jesus’ coming but a purpose behind it, it’s why he came, and it’s predicted in Hosea 7, which Jesus quotes in verse 35. How can this be? Did not the angels herald at the birth of Jesus, ‘peace on earth’? The lasting peace of Jesus’ Kingdom will only come as the forces of sin and evil are overcome, and they have been so by Jesus death and resurrection. Yet Jesus’ claim to kingship confronts humanity in our sinful rebellion, it confronts Satan in his schemes and elicits resistance. We do not want Jesus as Lord. So we should expect that those who share the good news of reconciliation with God through the lordship of Christ will be resisted. Yet Jesus says that being on the receiving end of such persecution is actually living the ‘good life’ in God’s eyes. He says in Matthew 5:11-12,

**“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Last year I briefly shared the story of Khan, a brother from Central Asia from a Muslim background. After his first marriage failed, Khan married a Christian woman who prayed for his conversion. Eventually Khan came to Christ and naturally wanted to share the good news of Jesus with family members. He went to visit his 13 year old son from his first marriage, his son was not happy and responded, **“You betrayed our faith, you accepted a foreign God, you are not my father anymore.”** Khan’s son then informed his uncles who came to his house the next day to punish him for his betrayal. They attacked him with a chainsaw nearly cutting off his hand and injuring his head and body. They then slaughtered all his livestock and burnt down his barn. Turned in by his son and attacked by his own brothers, Khan experienced the full force of Jesus’ prediction in Matthew 10. Yet he returned to his home saying, “the more they brutally beat me, the more I saw their need for Jesus the Messiah.”

This side of eternity, the prince of peace will bring division. The experience of Khan, or even what is described in Hosea 7 won't be the universal experience in every family and of every believer, but whatever division we experience Jesus calls us to total allegiance. Our compromise might not come at the teeth of a chainsaw but it may come at the pressure to 'spend more time with family.' We may not have property burned down, but we will face the pressure to keep the peace and keep our mouths shut from loved ones, colleagues, friends etc.

Yet Jesus calls us to live like Khan, to live a life worthy of him through undivided loyalty. Do you live such a life? Does your love for Jesus outstrip your love of family or comfort? These loves aren't bad in and of themselves, and we are indeed called to love our families and honour our parents, but if they are our supreme love then our faith is not really in Jesus as our King, there is a greater authority we submit to in our hearts, and our faith is not worthy/in keeping with Jesus' claim to be king.

If you're like me you'll feel quite small at the moment - repentant and ashamed; aware of your propensity to preserve your life rather than lose it for Christ; aware of the array of loves in your heart that so often eclipse your love for Christ. If that is you, don't forget that our Lord is both tough and tender. Don't forget the tender words of Jesus in verse 31 who reminds us of our worth to God.

Don't forget the words of Isaiah quoted shortly in Matthew 12:20 which remind us of Jesus, **A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out...** So often our witness to Christ is not burning bright, but is more like a smouldering candle emitting only a small orange glow whilst at the same time pouring out smoke which would set off a smoke alarm. We are often more smoke than light, yet Jesus promises he will not snuff us out.

Don't forget our tough yet tender Lord who graciously restores Peter after Peter had disowned him three times. The same Lord who received and restored the fickle Peter is the same Lord who receives and restores us when we come to him with the words of the prodigal, "I am not worthy to be your son." We are indeed not worthy, but he makes us worthy and as we turn to him in repentance and faith will grow us to become more like Jesus, more like Khan, more like those brothers in Nigeria. He will not give up on you, and as you come to him will grow you to live out this passage.

### **The Unrestricted Gospel (10:40-42)**

We will only very briefly consider the remaining verses in this chapter before turning to our application. From verse 40 **"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."**<sup>41</sup> **Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward."**<sup>42</sup> **And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."**

There is more we could say here, but despite all the opposition that we will face, there *will* be those who receive us. Whether great evangelist, or stumbling sharer, whether impressively Godly, or smouldering wick, when people respond to the gospel we show and share, they respond to Christ.

That is the awesome authority we carry. We are God's emissaries. We are to be unashamed and undivided because the gospel is unrestricted - *whoever* receives Christ in the humblest of ways from the humblest of God's people will receive God's reward. And what is this reward? It is no less than eternal life in Christ. As Jesus speaks of the reward in Matthew 25:34, **"take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."** This is the reward and inheritance we ourselves received when we first received Christ as we encountered him in his people.

## Application

So what might this mean for us we hear and submit to Jesus' words this morning?

### 1. *Change Your Metric for Success*

We live in a world where failure is understood in terms of disapproval and success in approval. We don't want to be *that* person. We are quick to assume that if someone is upset with us then we have failed. Parents want to be friends with their kids, politicians vie for approval ratings, bosses want to be liked by their employees. Approval and being 'liked' have become our metric for success.

But we know that if we follow Jesus this can't be a reliable metric. There will be times when living Christ's way endears us to people, but there will be other times when it leads us right into trouble. Parent, you have not failed your kids if they don't like you and oppose you because of your faith. You have failed when you have grown ashamed of Christ. Success is when we have remained faithful to Christ despite the difficulties and disapproval. Let us change our metric for success.

### 2. *Challenge Your Aversion to Sacrifice*

We live in an increasingly pain-averse culture. No longer is it '*no pain, no gain*' it is perhaps '*gain is no pain.*' It is perhaps one of the reasons why the secular west is pushing into the euthanasia debate much more rapidly than the east where suffering and death are a much more accepted part of the cultural and religious worldview.

To seek to live our best life now, will inevitably put us at odds with Christ who calls us to take up our cross. Ironically sacrificing and surrendering to Christ will give us the blessed life now and the best life *then*. We need to challenge our aversion to sacrifice so that we don't neglect to faithfully follow Christ.

### 3. *Choose the Right Battles*

Given what Jesus has spoken of division, given what believers like Khan are experiencing the world over, we need to get a little bit of perspective about the things we become frustrated about and the people we become frustrated with. That annoying person in your Bible study group is not the enemy, that pastor who irritates you is not the enemy - sin, the world and the devil are the enemy. Even when real hurt is done to you, do not two Christians have the ultimate resource for forgiveness, reconciliation and moving forward? Lay off the friendly fire and direct it at the enemy. Cease the assault on that mound and get after the enemy fortifications. How much more ground we would take here on the North Shore if we were all lovingly outward looking like that.

### 4. *Check Your Self Awareness*

Do you regularly remind yourself of who you are in Christ. Do you remind yourself of Jesus words? "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me." What authority and what a privilege. Stop feeling like you're a nothing or a no one. Stop feeling like you're alone or outnumbered at work, at home, at school, with your friends. You are an ambassador for Christ, he's with you, he'll protect you, he'll deliver you, he'll use you, he'll never leave you nor forsake you.

Change your metric for success. Challenge your aversion to sacrifice. Choose the right battles and check your self-awareness. We can heed and obey the words of our King this morning, because though these are not safe words, they are good words and He is a good king. As we seek to do so, let us pray.