

Matthew 10:24-42: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Matthew chapter 10 verses 24 to 42. And what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

And 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. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?

And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my father who is in heaven.

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, and a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

[1 : 3 0] 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.

The second half of Matthew chapter 10 continues the themes of the first. Faithful followers of Christ should expect to suffer persecution on account of their association with him.

[2 : 3 3] If Christ was accused of being Beelzebul, casting out demons by the power of the devil, his disciples should expect even worse accusations to be hurled at them. So have no fear of them.

It's a surprising teaching to come next. But persecution is part of the harvest process by which wheat and chaff are revealed for what they are, by which people are separated. It's an essential aspect of their mission.

Persecution reveals things and hearts for what they really are. The charge not to fear also introduces the command to declare openly what Christ has declared in private.

Open proclamation will be the first thing to fall by the wayside in the case of fear. And the point here isn't merely that of not being afraid. It's a calling to be positively bold.

The twelve need to proclaim their message without fear and without trepidation. We should not fear because persecution associates us with our master. And our master is greater than any persecutor.

[3 : 34] They cannot kill the soul, only the body. And if God notices even the falling sparrow, how much more will he notice his children who lay down their lives in his service?

Every single hair on our heads is numbered. And not one of them will be lost without God knowing. If we confess Christ before men, he will confess us before his Father in heaven.

Throughout Jesus' teaching here, he's focusing first of all upon our association with him, upon God's notice of us and the attention that he pays to us, upon the way that he will bear witness to us before his Father as we bear witness before men of him.

And with all of this, upon the fact that persecution is not an accident. Persecution is something that in God's providence is part of the process of bringing things to light, of achieving the harvest.

Christ brings division into families themselves. Our closest relatives may turn upon us. Persecution isn't just from the wider culture, but can be those closest to us that can be our greatest enemies.

[4 : 39] Jesus' disciples will experience the pain of ostracization and betrayal. And in a society where your family was at the heart of all your networks of relations and support, your business, your social recognition, your children's chances of getting married, all these sorts of things are on the line.

If you follow Christ, you might be rejected from the fundamental structure of your society. And this could be absolutely devastating in that particular day and age. But Jesus brings the sword in order to bring peace.

Division must occur in order that something new might be created. Christ declares that those who do not take up their crosses and follow him are not worthy of him. And we should feel the force of this statement.

The symbol of the cross has been dulled for us. When we see it, we see something that can be found on someone's necklace or used in an expression such as my cross to bear. It can easily be forgotten that this is an instrument of torture and execution, not dissimilar to something like a guillotine or an electric chair.

And it has a visceral force to it. People would have seen bodies hanging on crosses, rebels who were being crucified for their rebellion, and bandits and other people who had been put on these crosses, left to die in the most extreme agony, and there to be mocked and humiliated, stripped of their clothing, and presented as outcasts of society, there to be gazed upon and ridiculed.

[6 : 09] It was a symbol of the most utter expulsion from society. Society extricating a person from itself in the most excruciating of spectacles.

And this is what disciples were supposed to move towards, to take up their crosses and to walk on the path towards execution. And this would be a following of Christ.

This is the first time within the Gospels we have an intimation of the way in which Christ will later die. For all those who follow him, however, they will find their lives, much as he is risen from the dead, they too will be raised to life eternal.

And as people follow Jesus, Jesus identifies with them. Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. There's an extension of the principle to the person who receives prophets and righteous persons.

They will receive the reward of the person that they have received. That promise of those who give a cup of cold water to a person on account of their being a disciple, that they will by no means lose their reward.

