



Receiving Jesus

Matthew 10:40-42

In Russia and many of the Eastern bloc nations, church services are different than ours. Different cultures commonly have different ways of doing things, and so you would expect that church services would be different also. One of the most drastic ways in which services in Russia are different is that they often have three sermons in one worship service! This morning, we are not going to have three sermons, but we are going to have two sermons. I've never done this before, but it is something that I want to give a try.

The reason I want to do things differently this morning is because of the text that we have come to in our exposition of Matthew. Have you ever been to a restaurant and could not finish your meal? It's not that the meal is bad. It's simply that you are full. So, you box up what you could not finish and take it home in a doggy bag. The next day, it makes a great mid-morning snack. That is a little bit what it was like with Matthew 10 last time that we were here; I just could not finish the chapter. I tried, but I could not. There was so much to enjoy in verses 34-39 that we could not get to verses 40-42. As I studied Matthew this week, I came to the conclusion that verses 40-42 did not appear to be enough for a full meal. On top of that, we have come to a close of a major section in Matthew. And the difference in theme between the end of chapter 10 and the beginning of chapter 11 seemed too great to stomach at the same time. When Yvonne and I go out to eat, we often like to taste what each other is having for dinner. It is often the case that what she ordered and what I ordered are so totally different, that the taste of my meal does not go well together with the taste of her meal. If I would stick with my meal, all is good. Or, if I would have ordered what she had, all would be good. But, when you mix them, something just does not taste right. There is still some lingering taste on your palette that clashes with what you are taste testing. This is the reason that taste-testers "cleanses their palette" before moving on to taste something else. This is our situation today. So, I thought that it was best for us to have two sermons. After we look at the end of chapter 10, we will break with some more worship and prayer and come back again to begin chapter 11. You might consider it a "cleansing of your palette" before our second exposition.

In Matthew 10, we have arrived at the final section of Jesus' instructions to His apostles before they would venture off to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom of God to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. You can see this in Matthew 11:1,

And it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. (Matt. 11:1)

If you recall from our previous studies, Jesus has given them some very hard words to swallow. He had told them that they would be as sheep in the midst of wolves (10:16). He told them they would be delivered up to the courts (10:18) and brought before governors and kings (10:19). Jesus had said that brother will deliver brother to death (10:21), and father will deliver up his child (10:21). He said children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death (10:21). Jesus warned his disciples that they would be hated by all on account of Jesus' name (10:22), and that the disciples would be treated even worse than the people treated Jesus (10:24-25). In this final section of verses 40-42, Jesus is seeking to encourage His men before sending them out. Let's look at these verses:

Matthew 10:40-42

"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in [the] name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward."

Here Jesus takes the same thought and repeats it four times with only slight variation. The thought Jesus repeats it this: "As you go out and minister to others, realize that there is a correlation between My messenger and Myself. The way in which someone receives a messenger of Mine is the same way that they receive Me." Let me list each of the four times this thought is repeated:

- In verse 40, Jesus says it this way, "He who receives you [i.e. apostles] receives Me."
- In verse 41, Jesus says, "He who receives a prophet in [the] name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." A prophet's reward is what the prophet will receive from the Lord Jesus in the final day.
- In verse 41, Jesus says, "He who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." - The reward of a righteous man is what God will give to Him.
- In verse 42, Jesus says, "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." He will be rewarded as if he gave the cup of cold water to drink to Jesus, Himself.

Strictly speaking, these words do not center their attention upon the apostles themselves. Rather, they center their attention upon those who would hear the apostles preach. They focus upon how Jesus will respond to those who receive them well. These apostles would be received well by some. These apostles would not be received well by others. Some houses will be worthy. Jesus said, "if the house is worthy, let your [greeting of] peace come upon it;" (Matt. 10:13). Some houses will be unworthy. Jesus said, "if it is not worthy, let your [greeting of] peace return to you" (Matt. 10:13). These words must have found comfort in the hearts of the apostles. It would be comforting not so much because

these words were focused upon the apostles, but because of how Jesus communicated His union with them.

In an indirect way, then, these apostles would have been comforted. As they went out, there was a sense in which it was really Jesus who would go out. As they were received, it is as if Jesus were received. As they were rejected, it is as if Jesus were rejected. In the early church, we often see Jesus taking the treatment of the church personally. One instance is found in Acts 9. This is the account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He was on the road to Damascus to persecute the church and "bring them bound to Jerusalem ... both men and women" (verse 2). Beginning in verse 3 we read,

And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. (Acts 9:3-5)

Saul of Tarsus didn't think that he was persecuting Jesus. He was persecuting the church (Phil. 3:6), not Jesus. He was standing there in approval of the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1), not Jesus. The text says He was going to bind the Christians -- the followers of Jesus, but not Jesus personally. Yet, what does Jesus say? "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting **Me**?" You see, there is this connection between Jesus and His followers. This connection is the same whether it is a great and mighty apostle (such as we see in Matthew 10) or whether it is member of a church (a man or a woman) (Acts 9:2). Jesus sees it the same. Persecution to us is persecution to Him. Reception of us is reception of Him.

If we look back at Acts 5, we see the account of Peter and the apostles facing persecution from the religious leaders. These religious leaders wanted to kill the apostles, but Gamaliel's stood and said, "If these apostles are from men, their plan will be overthrown, but if they are from God, you will not be able to overthrow them" (Acts 5:38-39). Acts 5:40 says, "And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them." Verse 41 is the key, "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." As the apostles were proclaiming the name of Jesus they were suffering. But, they were not suffering for their own sake. It was because of Jesus. As these religious leaders were persecuting the apostles, so also were they persecuting Jesus.

In Colossians 1:24, we find another instance of this connection between Christ and His disciples. Paul is writing to the Colossians concerning his ministry to the church at large. In particular, he is focusing upon his own sufferings for the church. Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). There is a sense where Christ is suffering today. It is not that He is suffering physically. Rather it is that as the Head of the body, He suffers as the church suffers. And Paul was saying that His suffering accumulates with Christ's suffering.

There is a connection between Christ and us today. I have demonstrated some negative examples of this. Let me show you some positive examples as well. Matthew 25 tells us how things will be at the final judgment. He will separate the mass of humanity into two different groups of people. One group will go to His right and to glory. The other will go to His left and to punishment. In verse 34, we pick up those who are on His right:

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 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 drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'" (Matt. 25:34-40)

This is almost exactly the parallel thought that we have in our text this morning. Matt. 10:42, "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." The same happens with those who neglect the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison as well.

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'" (Matt. 10:41-45)

There is this connection between Jesus and those among His church. Your treatment of a disciple of Jesus is really a treatment of Jesus Himself. If you think about it a little bit, you will realize that this flows from the metaphors that Jesus uses when describing the church. He is the head of the church, and we are His body (Eph. 5:23). You cannot help or harm a member of your body without your head knowing about it. If someone punches you in the stomach, the head knows about it. If someone give you a backrub, the head knows about it. He is the true vine, and we are the branches (John 15). There is a connection between the vine and the branches. He is the good shepherd, and we are the sheep (John 10:11-18). As the shepherd, He is acutely aware of everything going on with the flock. Jesus said, "I know My own, and My own know Me" (John 10:14). He knows when the wolf comes (John 10:12). He knows when a lamb is lost (Luke 15:4). So, what can we learn from this short little passage? At least two applications are clear:

Application #1 - Receive others well

There are four groups of people mentioned in these verses: Apostles (verse 40), Prophets (verse 41a), Righteous men (verse 41b), and little ones (verse 42). I believe that they go from those of great standing to those of small importance. There were 12 apostles, who were called by Jesus (their names appear at the beginning of the chapter). These men were specifically chosen by Jesus to spend three years of His life with them. The word "prophets" refers to prophets either from Old Testament or New Testament times. They were chosen and called of God to serve Him as proclaimers of the truth of God. It is difficult to determine the exact identity of the "righteous men." Fundamentally, it describes one who walks righteously before God and calls others to seek Him as well. There are many of these men. The little ones probably refer to be young, weak, or immature Christians. (see Matt. 18:3-6; 25:31-46), who are perhaps in distress. They are in need of help, rather than capable of giving help. This is why they are "given a cup of cold water to drink." In Israel at that time, such a gift would have been a life-saver.

I find that all these groups were to be received and helped on their way. As Christians come across your path, receive them and help them and encourage them. Trust that **you will receive** your reward from your heavenly Father. In some measure, it will be as if you are helping Jesus, Himself.

Application #2 - Trust God for your receptivity

This is Jesus' burden with these words. Behind any sort of reception that you receive is Jesus. Any mock or scorn or ridicule ultimately falls upon Him. But when others receive you positively and embrace the message that you proclaim, you may have confidence that it is not you whom they are receiving. It is Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are representatives of Christ. We are His ambassadors, entreating others to be reconciled to God, "as though God were entreating through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). We are His representatives on the earth. Our representation of Christ in some ways brings us to Jesus, Himself.

Recently I built a play-house for my children by enclosing the lower level of a previous existing play set. In order to get to the upper level, I built a trap door. The problem with this trap door is that it isn't so stable when opened. It has knocked several of our children on the head. Recently, I asked my son to show me how he could go through the trap door, but he refused to do so on his own, because it is somewhat dangereoud. Yet, when I was with him, there was no problem to his going through. This is what Jesus communicated in the very last verse in Matthew, Jesus says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Such a promise ought to give us great confidence and assurance. When we speak Jesus' words, it is as if Jesus were speaking. His message was intended to comfort His fearful apostles in their proclamation of the kingdom. May this be a comfort to you in your evangelism.

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