



January 18: Acknowledging Christ

WEEKLY READINGS - MATTHEW 8-12 TODAY'S PASSAGE - MATTHEW 10:32-42 •

MAIN POINT

Our relationship with the Lord is demonstrated by publicly acknowledging His lordship in our lives through word and deed, no matter the cost.

BACKGROUND

Matthew 10:34–11:1 wraps up Jesus' discourse on mission. This segment clarifies what Jesus' kingdom brings. Contrary to expectations, the Messiah does not immediately inaugurate an era of peace, prosperity, and faithfulness (Isaiah 11; 60–66; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). A blessed age does await, but first Jesus brings a sword, not peace. Here the sword represents choice, not judgment. Decision leads to division, even in families, as one chooses Christ while another chooses darkness (Matt. 6:22–24). This text establishes that to choose Christ is to offer him a love supreme. The passage also returns to the beginning of the teaching. At the start, Jesus told his disciples to go first to Israel and seek a welcome city by city (10:5–6, 11–13). Now Jesus names a reward for all who welcome them (10:40–42).

Like most of Jesus' teaching in Matthew, 10:34–42 is highly structured. The interpreter will recognize progressions and poetic parallelism. The passage has three paragraphs: the first announces the divisive mission of Jesus (10:34–36); the second describes the absolute loyalty of Jesus' disciples (10:37–39); the third names the reward for Jesus' supporters (10:40–42).

In more detail, the passage begins with three statements about Jesus' goals. He says (1) he did not come to bring peace, (2) he did come to bring a sword, and (3) he came to divide families. He illustrates this division in three ways: son against father, daughter against mother, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. So a disciple will have enemies in "his own household" (10:34–37).

Grammatically, a series of substantival participles (and one relative pronoun) governs a string of parallel statements with three themes. The first covers loyalty to Christ over family. The second describes loyalty to Christ over personal comfort. The third describes Jesus' loyalty to his servants, shown in the rewards he grants.

Jesus brings division: Loyalty to Jesus over family

- The one who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.
- The one who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Jesus claims supreme love: Loyalty to Jesus over personal comfort

- The one who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

- The one who finds his life will lose it.
- The one who loses his life for my sake will find it.

Jesus honors his servant: Loyalty of Jesus, shown in his rewards

- The one who receives you receives me.
- The one who receives me receives the one who sent me.
- The one who receives a prophet . . . will receive a prophet's reward.
- The one who receives a righteous person . . . will receive a righteous person's reward.
- Whoever gives a cup of cold water to a little one will receive a reward.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The teaching of Jesus was often harsh. He was not a preacher of convenience, but hardship; not a preacher of comfort, but suffering.

In 9:35-11:1 it is hard to miss this theme of suffering or, more precisely, the theme of persecution, "suffering that derives from the world's not Jesus."² In 10:14 Jesus speaks of the possibility of an unfavorable reception and in verse 23 of the reality of persecution: "[w]hen they persecute you in one town." In verse 16 Jesus speaks of being sent out "as sheep in the midst of wolves" and in verses 17-19 of being brought before the wolves—before the Jewish synagogue court—to be flogged and then dragged before the Gentile rulers to be sentenced to jail or death. In this section our Lord speaks of even one's family becoming one's enemy, to the point where a brother is turned against his brother, a father his child, a child his parents, delivering the Christian over to the authorities (vv. 21, 22, 35, 36). Jesus also speaks of being maligned (v. 25), of being "hated by all" (v. 22), and of martyrdom (vv. 21, 28, 38, 39).

Our mission is dangerous and divisive, but it's worth giving our very lives. Jesus teaches that we must expect persecution, endure persecution, and not fear persecution. But why? Why not fear? There are four reasons: (1) this was the way Jesus went—he suffered; we will suffer. Through suffering for the gospel, we identify with Christ. (2) Such persecutions will not impede the advance of the gospel but actually promote it. (3) God knows how many hairs are on your head and knows when a sparrow falls to the ground dead, and with fatherly love God is with you even through your sufferings. (4) Following Jesus, according to Jesus, is worth it: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (v. 39). There is an abundance of joy to be found in our public relationship with Jesus!

THE FLOW

- 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building
- 5 minutes - Create interest (icebreaker, activity, or quote)
- 10 minutes - Year of Prayer guided prayer time
- 40 minutes - Study and apply the Bible
- 5 minutes - Prayer requests

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use at least one of these questions to introduce the topic of discussion.

Have you ever been in a relationship you didn't want anyone to know about?

What about a person's relationship with the Lord? Do you think of faith as a personal, private matter or something that should be public? Explain.

Share information from BACKGROUND and CHRIST CONNECTION to help group members understand the context

Transition/Say - We tend to focus on passages that make us feel safe and comfortable in regards to our relationships and our sense of peace. But there are some tough teachings of Jesus that we must wrestle with if we are to grow in our faith. One such passage is in Matthew 10 which teaches us we must choose Jesus even when it is difficult and divisive to do so.

YEAR OF PRAYER - GROUP PRAYER

PRAY THE FOLLOWING PRAYERS TOGETHER AS A GROUP. HAVE A TIME FOR PEOPLE TO OFFER THEIR PRAYERS OUT LOUD WITH THE ENTIRE GROUP OR PUT PEOPLE INTO GROUPS OF 3-4 TO PRAY TOGETHER.

Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

Father God, Isaiah 45:5, leads us to praise You because You are the Lord, and there is no other; apart from You there is no God. Isaiah 9:6 and Daniel 7:9 reminds us that we are to praise You as the Ancient of Days, the Eternal Father who lives forever and ever.

If you have words of praise to the Father, would you offer those up now. (Pause)

As we are still before the Father, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal to you any unconfessed sin. Be quick to confess and repent, knowing that the Lord is faithful to forgive your sin and restore you to a right relationship with Him. Confess silently before the Lord now

Lord we desire to align our lives according to Your Holiness.

Father God, we want to express words of thanksgiving for Your ongoing goodness to us. We can all pray in agreement that Your faithfulness to us is never ending. Thank You for Your mercies that are new every morning.

Do you have words of thanksgiving to share? If so, do so now. (Pause)

Father, guide us in using our time wisely. You tell us to number our days. Help us make every day matter, may it count for Your kingdom as we live out Ephesians 5:15-16, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." Colossians 4:5 tells us to "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity."

We pray for those who've never acknowledged You as their Lord and Savior. May they accept the teaching of John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Would you speak aloud the names of those for whom you are praying for salvation? Speak those names now. (pause)

May those whose names that were spoken be open to the Holy Spirit, as You work to draw them unto Yourself.

Holy Spirit, we ask You to continue to guide our thoughts, revealing to us how You desire for us to express our petitions and intercessions. We ask that we always allow You to guide our steps.

Group leader close time of prayer by reading Proverbs 3:5-6 - “trust in the Lord with all our hearts, and do not lean on our own understanding, in all our ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths.” May this be true in our lives.

Father we desire to know You more deeply and experience more of Your presence in our lives. May we exercise the discipline needed to carve out more time to be with You. Help us, Lord to submit to You in all things, acknowledging that our steps are established by You, as we delight in Your ways. Increase our hunger for Your Word, so we might delight in Your ways with each breath we take.

With hearts full of joy and anticipation, we pray in agreement in Jesus Holy name. Amen

STUDY AND DISCUSS

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says and means.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 10:32-33.

What did Jesus indicate here about relationship with Him—public or private?

How does the fact that Judas acknowledged Jesus on certain occasions and Peter denied Jesus three times help you better understand the meaning of these verses?

What does it look like to acknowledge Jesus as Lord of our lives?

These words of Jesus were set in the context of persecution and trial (16-25) and speak to a person's whole life rather than just one instance. There are people who acknowledge Jesus as Lord and even get baptized but then live apart from Him, while there are others, like Peter, who in a moment of weakness, fail to acknowledge Him but are truly saved and go on to live boldly for the Lord.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 10:34-39.

In this passage (and others such as Luke 12:49-53), Jesus seemed almost to thumb His nose at any peaceful picture of Himself. Not only that, He seemed to be explicitly saying that He did not come to bring people together, but possibly to break even the closest of human relationships.

In what ways are you comfortable (or uncomfortable) with this part of Christ's identity and mission?

How does this fit with the command, “Honor your father and mother”?

What does faith cost us today in terms of human relationships?

We should seek to understand how peace and conflict coexist in the person of Jesus by recognizing there is a difference between His mission and the effect of His mission. As comforting as His mission of salvation and reconciliation is and continues to be, there are uncomfortable effects associated with following Him fully. Making peace with God can still bring about a kind of war in our lives. We should not be surprised by this effect.

People whose lives have been changed by God can find themselves at odds with those they are most close to in earthly terms. Because this change is deeply spiritual, followers of Christ often find themselves at war with their culture in general. New life in Jesus includes inherently new choices and an altered world view.

How can we have close relationships but still find our ultimate validation from God?

Jesus' words to His followers focused on placing different value on their earthly attachments, even within their families. Perhaps within His message to that audience—an even more family-driven culture than our own—there is a specific message for us. Jesus has called us to a higher purpose than simply drifting through life validating ourselves by any one set of relationships.

Can you take up your cross and follow Jesus daily without publicly acknowledging His lordship in your life? Explain.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 10:40-42.

What do these verses indicate about the result acknowledging Jesus?

What reward is there for those who publicly acknowledge Jesus in kindness toward others? Are they for heaven only or this life as well?

Jesus' overall message in this passage shows that acknowledging Him is far more than lip service. It involves sacrifice. It involves service. And most of all, it involves love. This love supersedes all other loves and seeks to affirm the gospel publicly at any cost. Those who acknowledge Jesus in lovingkindness toward others, particularly others who also seek to acknowledge the Lord, are promised heavenly rewards and promised a joy flowing from a deep relationship with Christ (1 Thes. 1:6).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is there any context in your life where your faith is not public knowledge? If so, why is this the case?

How do you reconcile the promise of a life abundant in joy with the reality of the sacrifices your faith requires?

What are the difficulties of letting go of the people from whom we are used to seeking approval?

Where do you struggle to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus in your daily life? How is God speaking to you about that?

What is the response/adjustment you need to make this week in order to receive the joy of acknowledging Jesus before others?

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY

15-Second Testimony

A 15-second testimony is a clear, personal statement of how Jesus has impacted your life. It's not your whole story—just the essence, and ALWAYS ends with the follow up question "Do you have a story like that?"

This format answers three simple questions:

- Who were you before (or what struggle did you have)?
- What did Jesus do (or how did you encounter Him)?
- How is your life different now?

Why it matters: It helps us acknowledge Jesus publicly, share faith naturally, and stay focused on Christ.

Example framework:

- "I used to find my identity in _____. When I encountered Jesus I found _____. Now I'm learning to live with _____. Do you have a story like that?"
- "There was a time in my life when I felt _____. Jesus changed my life by _____. Now I've found _____. Do you have a story like that?"

Spend 1-2 minutes having each person develop their 15 second testimony

Then, spend 3-5 minutes encouraging the group to move around the room and share their 15 second testimonies with one another

- **Leader tip:** Share your testimony at the beginning in front of everyone to give an example. Use the rest of the time to listen in as the group shares with one another

Say: I encourage each of you to find an opportunity to ask someone if you can share how Jesus has impacted your life using your 15 second testimony and be ready to share how it went next week.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 10:32-42

10:32-33. Because there is no reason to fear persecution from men (10:24-31), believers should have no hesitation in confessing Jesus before others. The person who can adopt the fearless perspective Jesus teaches and who confesses Jesus before men will find a willing advocate in heaven before the Father. But the person who gives into faithless fear and denies Jesus before men will find a just denial (of reward and reign; 2 Tim. 2:11-13) before the Father in heaven.

As the people turned away from him, Jesus focused on whether we are willing to associate with him under the public scrutiny of other people. We might say that Jesus was asking, "Will you really be my friends and loyal followers, no matter what other people think, say, or do to you?" If we will, we will find in him an even more faithful friend—in fact, a brother. And a rewarder. Every act of our lives will come under the scrutiny of the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). If we should refuse to speak up for Christ because of fear or intimidation, we will suffer the loss of reward from him (2 Tim. 2:12).

10:34-36. The king wanted his followers fully prepared for the difficulty they would face because of their loyalty to him, so he addressed a possible misconception. In 5:9, Jesus pronounced the "peacemakers" blessed. But here he announced that his mission on earth would cause not peace, but hostility (a sword)—even between the closest of family members (10:21). He was not saying that he would intentionally divide families. But he was saying that loyalty to him would cause some of his

followers to be hated by their families, because of the disbelief of other family members. Jesus experienced those kinds of feelings at the deepest level when he was betrayed by Judas.

To further explain his prediction of hostility, Jesus quoted Micah 7:6 in 10:35-36. In Micah, this verse comes at the end of a lament about Israel's misery (Mic. 7:1-6), because of the Lord's judgment on them at the time of King Ahaz (Mic. 6). But the verse immediately following (Mic. 7:7) is a contrasting note of hope: "But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."

The remainder of Micah (7:8-20) is prophecy and prayer about Israel's restoration. Those familiar with Jesus' quote in its original context would see the **family hostility as a reference to God's judgment on unbelieving Israel and see the hopeful future beyond the devastating difficulties.**

10:37-39. Jesus now moved from his warning about the divisions and hostility which his followers would encounter to clarify the standard for the follower worthy of him. First, the worthy follower will love Jesus more than anyone else—even one's own parent or child (10:37). Immediately following the quote of Micah 7:6, he issued this challenge: "If you find yourself faced with a choice between loyalty to an unbelieving and hostile family member and loyalty to me, I have to take priority." He was not assuming that everyone would have to leave his or her family. Jesus' demands here amount to one more declaration of his deity. One of the highest duties in all Judaism was to love family members, especially parents. Every faithful Jew knew and understood that only God himself could demand a higher love (Deut. 6:4-5; 13:6-11).

Second, the worthy follower will endure the mockery and suffering involved in following Jesus (10:38). Matthew referred here to the cross. The criminal had to carry the crossbeam—usually through an angry, chiding mob—to the site of the execution. Jesus stated that his faithful followers would experience some degree of suffering and shame. Jesus used this powerful imagery again in 16:24-27, after his first prediction of his death.

In addition, the worthy follower will give up all of his individual "rights" to the king, together with any possessions, passions, pastimes, or people that might distract from following him. In "losing" these lesser aspects of earthly life, the follower "finds" true worth—God's purpose, joy, and reward.

10:40-42. Here Jesus returned to thoughts about the hosts of the disciples as they went from city to city (10:11-14) and continued his thoughts about reward.

An apostle was one who, if he conducted himself in a worthy manner, was to be treated exactly as the one he represented. He had the same authority and conveyed the same message as the person he represented. Jesus was an "apostle" from the Father, and the Twelve were apostles from Jesus. Through this chain of representation, the authority of God the Father was conveyed through the Twelve. And the response of those to whom they went was not a response to human beings, but a response to the Father whom they represented (10:40). Jesus focused on the positive response of "receiving" rather than on the negative response of rejection.

In the Old Testament, a person who accepted a prophet and his message had accepted God's will. Those who provided for the prophets were rewarded like the prophets. Similarly, to receive a righteous person or a disciple for Christ's sake would mean sharing in their reward for faithfulness. Matthew 10:41-42 has some characteristics of Hebrew poetry. In keeping with the rules of Hebrew parallelism, Jesus varied his wording for aesthetic value in the parallel statements about reward.

Little ones (10:42) was a term of affection that Jesus used toward his disciples, particularly when they followed him with the innocence and faith of a child (18:1-6; 19:13-15). He would use the same terminology in 25:31-46, asserting that those he sent represented him, and any kind of response to them was equivalent to a response to him in person. A cup of cold water was a gift that even the poorest person could give.

He will certainly not lose his reward (10:42) is not so much a statement allowing for the loss of reward as it is a different way to say that the person would be rewarded. Throughout this lengthy discussion (10:32-42), Jesus seemed to assume that the matter of rewards in his kingdom was understood by his disciples. But the vast majority of Christians today know little about rewards. We have lost this reality of kingdom service. Whether through simple ignorance or some kind of false piety, we have shied away from this biblical doctrine. Jesus will evaluate the service of every one of us, his servants. And our eternal reward is dependent upon our service in this life. How you serve him in this life determines how you will serve him in eternity (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

PRAYER REQUESTS

Prayer Requests of Group Members (be sure to share these with the group and check in on relevant requests)

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- .
- .
- .
- .
- .

Those we are Asking God to Save

Friends -

Family -

Co-workers -

Others -