

Living the Christian life to win the prize

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[0:00] If you would please take your Bibles and turn them to Matthew chapter 5. What's known as the first missionary discourse in the Gospel of Matthew.

And Pastor James has walked through this chapter with you so far. And we are this evening at the end of this chapter. And we look forward to what God has to say to us this evening through his word.

Let me read these verses before we pray and ask for God's help. This is God's word. Matthew chapter 10 verses 32 onwards.

Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father.

[1:26] A daughter against a mother. A daughter-in-law against a mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. 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. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it.

Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

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.

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.

[2:32] The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God lasts forever. Let us pray. Amen. Dear God, we ask for your help this evening.

We ask that the same Holy Spirit who inspired these words centuries ago would speak to us from his word. We pray, O God, that he would teach us what it means to be a disciple.

That he would teach us to put our faith into action. Amen. We ask, O God, that he would take these truths and plant them deep in our hearts.

Even the hard truths that we are sometimes reluctant to hear, would you soften our hearts to receive them. We pray and ask all of these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. In these few verses, in these 12 verses, Jesus has a few things in mind.

[3:40] He wants us to profess him before the world. He wants us to prize him before every earthly bond.

He wants us to live a life of paradox. And he wants us to live it to win the prize. So if I could summarize what we just read, I would say what I said just now again.

Jesus calls his disciples to profess him before the world. Prize him before every earthly bond. Live a life of paradox.

And live that life to win the prize. Those will be our four points this evening. Profess Christ. Prize Christ. Live a life of paradox.

And fourthly, live that life to win the prize. Profess him. Prize him. Live a life of paradox. Live that life to win the prize.

[4:45] In verses 32 and 33, Jesus reminds us that we need to profess him. You remember that Jesus is calling his disciples, his 12 disciples.

In the beginning of the chapter, we read that Jesus called his 12 disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and illness.

Have you ever asked yourself the question? Have you ever asked yourself the question, why 12? Why 12 disciples? I think Jesus is calling 12 disciples particularly because he is remaking Israel. Israel had 12 tribes. So, here Jesus is reconstituting, remaking Israel in his image. And he is calling 12 apostles, 12 disciples to carry that message forward from Jerusalem, from within the Jews first and then to the rest of the earth.

So, you may read these verses, these 12 verses and say, maybe that message, that call to profess Christ, to prize him, to live a life of paradox and to live it to win the prize is for those 12 people.

[5:58] But I think, by extension, those principles apply to us, even this very evening. And so, he reminds us in verses 32 and 33 that we ought to profess Christ.

So, Jesus says this in verse 32, whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge me, acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

In the ESV, right before this verse starts, there is a so, there is a therefore. And that is actually hinting at what has come before this text.

And you remember that in the verses prior, in verses 29 and 31, for example, Jesus is reminding the disciples of his providential care of every single detail in the universe.

So, in verse 29, we read this. Verse 30, And even the very hairs of your heads are all numbered.

[7:06] So, do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. Jesus is reminding his disciples, his 12 disciples, of the providential overruling of his universe.

God rules the universe. There is no maverick molecule in the universe. Everything happens according to God's plan. There is nothing out of order in God's economy.

And God, in the person of Jesus Christ, is reminding us this evening to actually think of that providential care of God's people.

And out of that security, profess him. What is provident, you may ask? And in our Westminster Confession of Faith, in chapter 5, paragraph 1, we are told this.

This is how it reads. God, the creator of all things, does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his will, to the praise of the glory of his own wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

[8:28] And in paragraph 7, we are told that this providence of God takes care of all creation, but especially God has a care for his church.

So we read there that God's providence takes care of all creation, but he cares for his church in a very special way, and works everything for her good.

So the soul there that is missing in your NIVs, which is present in the Greek and in the ESV, is actually pointing to God's providential care.

And as you are reminded of God's providential care, now you are motivated to profess Christ. You have a security from which to confess Christ, to acknowledge him before all men.

Do you know Christ? You have to know Christ in order to proclaim Christ. Just in the Gospel of Matthew, we are told many things about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9:31] You remember the very first verse, chapter 1 of Matthew, says Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. He is truly man.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born of a virgin. He will save his people from their sins. He will be called Emmanuel, God with us. Or you go to chapter 5 and you hear about Jesus Christ as the new Moses who goes up on a mountain to give a clearer, clearer exposition of God's law.

I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come to fulfill them, Jesus says. And he says, if you harbor hate against your brother, you have committed murder in your heart.

Do you know that Jesus who proclaimed that and gave that exposition of God's law? Or you could go to chapters 8 through 10 and you can read the nine miracle stories.

The story of the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. And he says, take care, daughter. And Jesus demonstrates his power to show that the miracles he is performing are a picture of the kingdom to come.

[10:49] Where in that kingdom the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the mute will speak, the lame will leap for joy. You could go to chapter 11, the next chapter, and you could read Jesus' own invitation.

Where he says, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Or you could go to chapter 13 and read the parables, the stories about the coming kingdom. Where we are told that Jesus is the sower who sows the seeds. And he is the king who has brought his kingdom. You could go on and on. That's just half of the book of Matthew.

You can know Christ by going to his word. Do you know Christ? You must know him as these things and more in order to confess him.

Do you know about his two natures? He is truly God, truly man. Do you know Jesus Christ as Savior? Do you know him as King?

[11:53] Do you know that he came to seek and save the lost? Do you know him as the King of kings and the Lord of lords? Do you know Jesus Christ in his suffering?

He was a man of sorrows. He was acquainted with grief. Do you know Jesus Christ in his glory? As risen from the grave. Do you know him as seated in the heavenly places advocating for you?

Do you know him as your high priest? Do you know him as your living and reigning and returning king? Do you know him as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all history and all creation?

Do you see him in the scriptures? Do you see him in the Old Testament? Do you see him as the center of all the scriptures? When you know Jesus Christ in these ways, you begin to know the outskirts of who he is.

And as you know him in these ways, you learn that as you know him, you are indeed known by him.

[13:05] As you are known by him, you realize that he is closer to you than you are to yourself.

And in that knowledge, though adversity comes, though there is oppression and there is persecution, you learn to confess him.

You learn to confess him. You claim him as your savior. And you share the gospel with those who are lost. You remember the story of Polycarp from the second century, the bishop of Smyrna.

He was a disciple of the apostle John. He had served the church for a long, long time.

And at the end of his ministry, he was dragged into a Roman festival before the Roman proconsul. And they urged him to swear by Caesar and curse Christ.

He is 86 years old. Do you remember how he replied? Do you? This is what he said. He says, 86 years have I served Christ.

[14:17] And he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my king and my savior? You may not be dragged in front of the Roman high courts today.

Maybe you'd be dragged to the parliaments, to the police stations here in Scotland for proclaiming the message of the gospel of repentance.

But do you profess Christ? Do you confess him by words? Nobody becomes a believer by you bringing them a bowl of soup.

Although that is wonderful. Although we should adorn the gospel with good deeds. But you have to speak up. You have to use words.

Jesus who created the gospel of Jesus. Jesus who created the world. Who is in charge of every molecule in all creation. Who is in charge of your life. The parts of your body.

[15:15] He is working all things for good. So that not one of your hair can fall on the ground without his permission. He cares for you. He knows every detail about you.

And he asks you to be bold. He asks you to be bold. But if you deny him before men, Jesus says, who at worst can only kill the body, he will deny you before his father in heaven.

A bold call. A hard word. But here is the call to profess Christ. The call to profess Christ.

Do you profess Christ in all the spheres that you are involved in? The next call is to prize Christ. If you think this is a hard word, the next call is a harder word.

So profess Christ in verses 32 and 33. That's our first point. Our second point is prize Christ. 34 through 37. Verses 34 through 36.

[16:24] This is what he says. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father.

A daughter against a mother. A daughter-in-law against a mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Does it seem contradictory to you?

Does it sound contradictory to you? That Jesus would say that he has not come to bring peace? If you just do a survey of what the Old Testament has said, you remember the prophecy of Isaiah who says, he shall be named the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9.6. You remember the angels foretelling Jesus' birth, and they say glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill to men.

Jesus himself in John 14 would say, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives. Or after the resurrection, in John 20, he says, peace be with you.

[17 : 42] As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you. And he calls us to be peacemakers, doesn't he? He says, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Or in Romans 12.18, live peaceably among all men, as far as it depends on you. And the apostles called Jesus peace.

In Ephesians 2.14 and 17, we are told that he is our peace. He came and preached peace to those who are far off. In 1 Thessalonians, he says, now may the Lord of peace sanctify you completely.

2 Thessalonians 3, now may the Lord of peace give you peace at all times. Is Jesus contradicting himself? I don't think so. I think the answer to that question is in verse 37.

In verse 37, he gives us that answer. He says, anyone who loves their father or mother, is father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me.

[18 : 46] Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. In other words, Jesus did not come to bring disruption to your family.

Jesus did come to rightly order your loves. He wants you to prize him above all earthly bonds.

Do you prize Jesus Christ? It means that as you profess Christ, there will be a position in your families. And more than not, it actually comes from people who are closest to you, people who know you.

It means to prize Christ, there will be a position. As you love him, and as you love his law, you will have to make decisions between choosing him or choosing to compromise.

It may look different in different families, but the crux is this. Your loves have to be rightly ordered.

[19 : 56] You have to love the Lord your God, the Lord Jesus Christ, with your heart, soul, strength, and mind. And there's also another truth.

There is a dividing line that runs through human history from the very beginning, from the beginning of the Bible. We are told that there are two lines of humanity that are characterized by two loves.

One line is characterized by love for God, and the other line is characterized by love for self. You see this division from the very beginning. You remember the division between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman in Genesis 3.

Or you remember the distinction between the seed of Cain and the seed of Abel and then Seth in Genesis 4 and Genesis 5. That line runs through every period of history, every empire, and sadly in every family.

Jesus here wants our utmost loyalty. He wants us to prize him above all earthly bonds.

[21 : 15] Do not make idols of your family relationships at the expense of worshipping the true God, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a jealous God, you see.

He is a jealous God. In the words of the Scottish Puritan, Samuel Rutherford, set not your hearts on the flowers of this world.

They shall fade and die. Prize the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, for he changes not. Prize Christ.

Prize the rose of Sharon. Prize Christ the maker, the redeemer, the friend, the high priest. He changes not.

Or in the words of the psalmist in Psalm 45, Jesus is the most handsome of all the sons of men. O beloved church of God, he is your betrothed.

[22 : 22] You are bound to marry him. You are his bride. He loved you before the stars were made. He emptied himself by becoming like you.

He gave himself to pursue you. He ransomed your soul on the day that he died. He demands your love. Of 10,000 strong, he is the fairest in heaven and on earth.

Cherish him, treasure him, and prize him. Psalm 45, verse 10. Listen, O daughter, and pay careful attention.

Forget your people and your father's house. Let the king be enthralled by your beauty. Honor him. For he is your Lord.

Profess him, prize him. And thirdly, live by paradox. How do you prize Christ? One of the ways you can do is to live by paradox.

[23:26] That is our third point this evening. Live by paradox. Verses 38 and 39. In verse 38 and 39, Jesus says this, whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds their life will lose it. And whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. You see the parallels in verses where he says, anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he repeats the same in verse 38. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. What does that mean?

It means that we are called to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. One theologian said, imitation of Christ is the heart of the spiritual life.

imitation of Christ is the heart of the spiritual life. For some from some for some disciples who are called in this very passage, imitating Christ actually meant dying as Jesus did.

[24:44] They professed Christ, they prized Christ, and they were crucified for it. You remember the story of Peter gathered from tradition, early Christian tradition that he was crucified upside down in Rome.

And he requested to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus died, the right side up. Oh, Andrew, Peter's brother, who was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Greece.

He was bound to the cross and the legend goes that he preached for two days before dying. Crucifixion was a slow death, you remember.

Oh, Philip. They say that they crucified his head first in modern day Turkey. So, Nathaniel was flayed alive and then crucified in Armenia.

For those disciples, that's what it meant, but what does it mean for us now? Does it mean that we carry physical wooden crosses and start mimicking the historical actions of Jesus?

[26:02] Does it mean that we put on a shroud? If you look at church history, you'll find that certain monastic traditions and mystical traditions, they actually attempted to replicate and reenact the crucifixion.

And they found it to be meritorious. They found it to bring the merit before God. But carrying the cross, taking on the cross and following Jesus is not really a costume to wear, is it?

It is a way of life. It means sharing in the suffering of Christ. It means a life of self-denial and a life of self-forgetfulness. It means active obedience to God, doing God's will within specific circumstances, the modern callings that He has called us to.

It means that if you're working in government, you follow Jesus Christ and His law to the very end. If you work in industry, business, wherever you work, you live with a willingness to forfeit everything, wealth, worldly pleasures, family ties, even your own life for the sake of Christ.

But it also involves a tearing down. You have to say no to yourself. There's self-denial, isn't it? You have to say no to your sinful self and you have to be willing to endure hardship.

[27:33] And more often than not, it means being okay. with being called a bigot or an unloving person for your views on Christian teachings, on sexuality and marriage.

It means professing Christ and prizing Christ and not giving in to self-protecting fear. It means learning to live by paradox.

Verse 39, whoever finds their life will lose it. And whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. If you try to grasp onto life, you try to hold on to life and your possessions, you will lose it.

It's paradoxical. But if you lose your life for my sake, for Jesus' sake, and the gospel, you will find it. it means looking at your world through the lens of the cross, looking at the world the right side up, which is the upside down way of how people usually look at the world.

It means to see everything through the lens of the cross. as the first prayer in the book called The Valley of Vision.

[29:00] It is to realize that the way down is the way up. It is to realize that the way to be low is to be high. It is to know that the broken heart is the healed heart.

It is to know that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit. That the repenting spirit is the victorious soul. It is to know that to have nothing is to possess everything.

It is to know that to bear the cross is to wear the crown. It is to realize that when the night is the darkest, that's when stars shine the brightest.

Do you live by the way of the cross? Does your life take the way of the cross? Do you see your life through the lens of the cross?

Maybe when you were young, when you were first converted, you heard the scandalous message of the gospel and you were moved. But over time, you've kind of lost that.

[30 : 15] But have you lost the edge of your Christian life? Christian life is a life that is marked by paradox.

Profess Christ, price Christ, and live by paradox. And fourthly, and lastly, live it to win the prize.

Live it to win the prize in verses 40 and 42. Anyone who welcomes you, Jesus says, welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And whoever welcomes a person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

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.

[31 : 25] You remember the stories of people receiving prophets. You remember the story of Elijah who was received by the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17.

And the story of Elisha, Elijah's disciple, who was received by the Shunammite woman both women had lost their sons.

And they were hospitable to Elijah and Elisha and they received their reward. They received their sons back. But who else also received their reward?

It's not just the prophet, but it's also the ones who received them, the women. They received their rewards, Jesus says. Jesus is making a distinction between the prophets and the ones who received those prophets.

In modern parlance, he is making a distinction between what we call goers and senders. Goers are the ones who say that I'm going to go to the mission field and I'm going to preach the gospel to unreached people groups.

[32 : 41] And senders are the ones who host people, give them hospitality, support the work abroad with resources. So goers and senders, and Jesus says, regardless of what you're called to, it'll be one of those two things.

You are either a goer, someone who goes to proclaim the gospel, or you're a sender, you will receive the same reward.

What a scandalous message is that? It means that missionaries are really not upper class citizens in God's economy. Pastors are not upper class citizens in God's economy.

The one who goes and plants, he receives the reward, and the one who shows hospitality and supports that work, they receive the same reward.

Do you actively partake in God's mission? Do you give to the church? Ralph Winter, an American missiologist, he talked about wartime living, wartime living, and you're probably familiar with that.

[33 : 57] During the World War II, you probably know better than I do. You come from Sri Lanka, you made sacrifices to fight that war. You know the Clydeside shipbuilders.

You remember the factories that pivoted from manufacturing civilian luxury items to building trains and tanks and ships. You remember wartime rationing, people voluntarily giving up sugar and meat and petrol and other resources, all kinds of resources so that they could be forwarded to the front lines.

Maybe you remember stories about the dig for victory or maybe you heard it from your parents or your grandparents. Campaigns to grow vegetables in your backyard, in your front garden, so that resources can be allocated to the front.

wartime living really means shifting priorities. Do you live a life that is luxurious, that is self-centered, that is self-loving?

Do you live for this world or do you make your priorities centered on the coming kingdom? Do you view your money, your time, your careers as a means for personal comfort or peacetime pursuits?

[35 : 28] If you have the attitude of a wartime living, then you would have simpler budgets, frugal living, live more sacrificially, live more driven by the mission of the church.

Your lifestyle would be reallocated, your resources, your time. You would focus on the work of the church. Has your life been retooled for God's purposes?

Or are you still manufacturing luxuries for yourself? The frontiers of global mission are no longer far, far away in the east or in the global south.

Some of them are already here. The frontiers are here, whether you like it or not. Globalization has meant that nations have come to our doorsteps. In Edinburgh, there are about 24% of Edinburgh's

population have come from 170 different countries.

170 different countries. 24% of Edinburgh. But how about the remaining British people? 76% of British people live in Edinburgh and only about 2% of them are church going believers, evangelicals.

[36 : 56] So the frontiers are here. How do you support the work of your church? How do you support the work of Buklu? How do you support the pastor, the elders, the deacons, the musicians, the volunteers?

Do you take away from their work or do you add to it? Do you give to your church so God's work can be supported here in Edinburgh or do you hold resources for yourself?

Jesus says that there is a reward. There is a reward. And in one sense, the reward is described to us in verse 14. Jesus says anyone who welcomes you welcomes me.

and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. So in one sense, the reward as you labor for the sake of the church is that you get the Lord Jesus Christ.

And once you get the Lord Jesus Christ, you get God the Father. That is a reward. That is the highest reward anyone can get.

[38 : 04] It's to receive God as their ultimate price. But there is also reward in another sense that we don't like hearing about.

And that is that implicit in these texts is the idea that there is a thing that's called the prophet's reward. And that's different from other rewards.

rewards. And in fact, the Bible talks much about rewards. In 1 Corinthians 3.8, every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Or in Luke 19, the story, and Jesus says, you shall have power over ten cities, and you shall have power over five cities. Faithful servants are given authority over different numbers of cities.

What does that mean? It means that yes, we do get our reward in God. We get the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our treasure. We get the Father.

[39 : 11] We get the Spirit. But our capacity to rejoice in God would differ in heaven, depending on our labor, depending on what we do with the gift that we have been given.

God has given his church gifts. He has given you unique gifts. Do you put them to good use, or do you bury them?

Do you bury your talents? In one sense, I think the whole rewards argument is given to us so that we may actually work, because the scandal of the gospel is that you can never earn a place with God.

And because that is such a scandal, automatically human beings think that everything is equal. And we treat God as if he is the equal employment opportunity officer.

We flatten the teachings of the scriptures. So yes, the scandal of the gospel is that if you put your trust in Jesus Christ, you will get God.

[40 : 21] God, but you are given gifts in order that you may work them for the glory and the growth of God's kingdom. I shouldn't flatten that.

Do you live your life to win the prize? Do you put your talents to good work?

God's It's a question we have to ask ourselves. Do you give these little ones a cup of cold water?

Because they are the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you dig for victory? Polycarp certainly received his reward.

The Shunammite woman who took Elisha in surely received her reward. Jesus calls his disciples to profess him before the world and prize him above every earthly bond.

[41 : 30] He calls us to live a life of paradox. The way down is the way up. And he calls us to live that life, that paradoxical life, that foolish life to win the prize.

May he find us faithful as God does his work among us here in Bucklew and Edinburgh. May we hear from the Lord Jesus Christ, well done, good and faithful servant.

May we run our race to win that prize. God's word and his preaching of it. May God add his blessings to it.

Let us pray. God, we thank you for your words. We thank you for these simple truths we've always known. But we know, God, that we need fresh reminders.

others. So awaken us to these realities, show us the state we're in, and give us a sense of what you're doing in the world, cause us to have that joy of our salvation that we had 20 years ago, 50 years ago, when we first beheld Christ in his glory.

[42:53] Help us to live our lives faithfully, help us to live not for ourselves, but for the sake of Jesus Christ. We commit our weeks into your hand.

We ask that you would bless us as we go. Would you give us safety as we travel? Would you be with our children? We pray for pregnant mothers in this room, and those who long to be pregnant. We pray for our various needs. We pray for the needs of this church. Would you be glorified in raising young men and young women in this church who can serve you in the hard places and in the hardest place that is our front doors.

We pray and ask all of these things in the name of Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.