

The cost of being Harvesters (2)

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Date: 28 November 2021

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[0 : 00] All right, we're going to read from Matthew 10, verse 32 to 42. And then David will come up and speak to us. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

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. Well, if you look at the trail of Christianity through history, there's lots of ways you can describe it.

[1 : 35] But one way that would be quite appropriate is that it's a very bloody trail. And it's bloody because Jesus has never been comfortable or acceptable in our world.

When faithfully proclaimed as God's king and savior, he challenges that which is actually hardwired into every single person.

That is what we call personal sovereignty. We just naturally believe that we're competent to run our own life apart from God.

And so when we speak of Jesus, then we're automatically on a collision course with individuals around us and our society at large.

It can't be any other way. We're a threat as we speak about Jesus. We become a threat. Jesus is a threat to how people think, to how people live.

[2 : 50] And as a result of that, then, generally speaking, Christians have not been welcomed or accepted as the message of Jesus has not been welcomed or accepted.

And generally speaking, when you look back through history, generally speaking, you would have to say that the lives of Christians who are seriously committed to Jesus and serving Jesus and speaking about Jesus, you'd have to say their lives have not been comfortable or peaceful.

Now, I suspect that's not how most of us think about our week to come, is it? Because, you see, I think generally in our day and age, generally we think that having sorted out a relationship with God, being a Christian is about getting on with life, enjoying the things that life has to offer us.

The comforts, the leisure, the pleasure, the possessions. Now, we might actually qualify that a little bit when talking to somebody. They might say, well, we expect from time to time that people will attack our faith in Jesus.

But it's that sort of magnitude. The prevailing view, I think, is that we expect, being Christians, is an enjoyable life, perhaps even a comfortable life, albeit with that relationship with God sorted out.

[4 : 28] Now, friends, I think what that means as we move into this passage, I think what it means is that we're really ill-prepared to hear these words this morning.

Perhaps even worse, perhaps we're even reluctant to hear these words this morning. Because they detail out, as James already opened up, whereas they detail out hostility, division, suffering, that serving Jesus will bring, right into even those most personal and intimate relationships. So, what I'm going to do now is I'm going to stop, and I'm going to ask you to join me in prayer that the Lord might help us impact on these verses and these verses to impact on us, given that they're talking about selflessness when we're so hardwired to be selfish.

So join with me now in prayer just as we move into these verses. Lord, we are ill-prepared to hear the challenge of these verses, perhaps even reluctant.

We are naturally inclined to self-interest, and yet these verses call us to your interest and our selflessness.

[5 : 52] So, Lord, we need you to go before us. We need you to open these words to our minds and open our minds to these words and change us from the inside out.

Amen. Okay, as usual, before we get into the detail of the text, I want to do some revision, just to keep these chapters together, from chapter 9, verse 35, through to chapter 10, verse 33.

We're working on this section that stands together. Jesus, back in chapter 9, verse 35, likened his mission to the work of harvesting. So preaching the gospel is harvesting.

He's the Lord of the harvest, and he invites his disciples to share in this exciting mission, in his exciting mission, and indeed share in the bumper harvest that he said would be there.

Then in chapter 10, Jesus sends out his disciples as harvest workers, or mission partners. And chapter 10 then is essentially talking his disciples through the practical challenges and difficulties they might expect to encounter.

[7 : 04] There's a cost in being harvesters. And as we work through chapter 10, we see that cost steadily ramping up. Initially, verses 5 through to 15, any opposition seemed sort of general, impersonal, remote.

So Jesus sends them out, and he talks about them going into a village. If you're going into a village or into a house, it's out there. It's just out there. And he says that you can expect there would be random people in random villages, showing disinterest.

That's where we start, in those verses 10 through to 15. And then last week, we saw verses 16 to 33. It ramps up. Jesus prepares them for much more challenging scenarios.

And Jesus says, as they proclaim the gospel of Jesus, they should expect initial opposition and disinterest to become persecution. violent persecution.

Violent persecution. You should expect loss of freedom, loss of reputation, ridicule, false accusations, and in the most extreme cases, death.

[8 : 18] And last week, as I tried to open up this idea of Jesus' perspective on the cost of being harvesters, harvesters, I used the idea of a cost-benefit analysis.

As Jesus prepared, his disciples for what lay ahead. And so, the costs are real, says Jesus, but the eternal benefits of identifying with Jesus, of keeping our eyes on him, seeing through our circumstances to our Savior and the Lord of the harvest behind our circumstances, though the benefits of that move us from fear to freedom, move us from reluctance to see opportunity to minister and stand with Jesus, from fear to excitement in the mission with Jesus.

Now, with that background, let's step into these confronting verses in verse 32, but mainly kicking into verse 34 for a start. And the cost ramps up even further.

Jesus hears warning that the greatest cost is likely to be experienced in our most personal and valued relationships.

The greatest cost is likely to be felt closest to home, in other words. Verse 34. Here's where it starts to open up the gap between where we are and between what Jesus says.

[9 : 49] As Christians, we're determined to believe that Jesus' gospel or message will bring peace and happiness and well-being to our lives. I mean, we're just starting to move into that silly season of Christmas and that's what we're starting to hear.

You know, peace and goodwill to all men. Quietly, I think, as Christians, we're committed to and demand from the Lord hassle-free lives.

And we see that as so fundamental to being Christians. Well, Jesus says the opposite. Allegiance to him, allegiance to his gospel of salvation, says Jesus, inevitably results in conflict.

Now, we need to read this very, very carefully in today's modern society. Jesus is not inciting people to violence.

That's not his point here at all. His point is that people, when they're confronted with him as Savior and Lord and confronted with his gospel, they will not easily give up their own personal sovereignty.

[11 : 06] There will need to be a struggle for that to happen. People will push back at anybody who threatens their personal self-sovereignty. Jesus himself, back from the Sermon on the Mount, is the ultimate peacemaker.

But when you think of Jesus like a surgeon who comes, as patient comes and his body is ravaged by cancer, how is the surgeon going to bring peace into that body, if I can use that sort of metaphor?

Well, he has to take that patient into a place of more pain, more suffering through surgery. There can be no shortcutting of that. The pathway to peace and health is suffering.

That is the way Jesus, the peacemaker, brings his peace into our lives and in the lives of people around us. verses 35, 30, 37 then.

For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother. Even as we start to read these verses, we start to think, this is obscene. And yet, these are the words of Jesus. [12 : 25] A daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law and a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 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. The gospel of Jesus polarizes people.

The most painful divisions, the greatest hostility, the most heartbreaking suffering, will surface closest to home in our closest, most personal relationships when we share that Jesus is God's king to be obeyed.

God's savior without whom nobody gets to heaven. If we share that, even our closest relationships will be under severe pressure. And even then, Jesus calls us to absolute loyalty, choosing relationship with him over any other relationship, any other relationship.

And accepting, in practical terms, that sometimes when we want to speak the gospel to those we love most, they are closest to, them, they actually will become enemies.

[13 : 55] We will become enemies to them. So much will they hate what we're saying to them, even though what we say to them is driven by our love for them. Verse 38, as harvesters working for Jesus, we must be totally selfless, that idea that Jen's already opened up helpfully, carrying the cross.

Most days when you hear Christians, it's just used as a turn of phrase when you speak and do lots of Christians. Oh yes, I have a cross to carry. That is, there's a particular unpleasant circumstance in my week this week or something like that.

That's what carrying a cross is. But not so in Jesus' day. When you carried your cross, you had already been sentenced to death. So to carry your cross is to act as one whose life has already been forfeited to somebody else.

totally selfless. Disciples are to demonstrate, we disciples are to demonstrate our total commitment to Jesus and his cause even if necessary walking away from the most treasured relationships in our lives.

man, that's a big call, isn't it? That's huge. And it's huge simply because treasured relationships are exactly as they say, treasured relationships.

[15 : 35] And yet, that's what Jesus calls us to. Verse 39 cuts even deeper. whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Another sort of proverbial type phrase but I think it's this. I think Jesus is saying, look, there's two choices and only two choices. Either we will be committed to building our own kingdom, that's the self-sovereignty thing again, building our own kingdom, our own secure and comfortable life in this world which will mean that we need to make peace with this world and in a sense approximate something of the values and philosophies of those around us in order to be peaceful and acceptable among them.

So we can go that way. So we can sort of find a life that says Jesus but ultimately will lose it or the alternative is we will be committed to building his kingdom by speaking the gospel of Jesus as God's savior and king and accept the cost involved in that.

Now, there's no way to sugarcoat those verses. They're confronting and they force a confronting question for each one of us.

So go back to the idea of the cost-benefit analysis that we talked about last week. What will these details mean for your cost-benefit analysis of serving Jesus?

[17 : 21] It's quite possible for some here this morning these verses would be a deal-breaker. giving up those relationships most valuable to me closest to me is just too much to ask.

Or is it still a good decision to serve Jesus getting involved in this mission with ever increasing costs?

And so maybe in your mind you're saying could any person in their right mind be prepared for the intense personal cost of giving up the closest and most precious of relationships and family relationships or close friends for the sake of spreading the gospel of Jesus could anybody in their right mind say yep I'm up for that.

Continuing from last Sunday the theme that I used what sort of gospel perspective could enable us to go down this pathway? And I tell you it needs to be a gospel perspective nothing else will take us down that pathway but what gospel perspective could possibly take us down that pathway?

Well I want to suggest two the first one there if you see your outline in front of you being clear about family relationships ultimate family and temporary family Now as I said last week Jesus is sending his disciples out to do something so new so different so dangerous to anything they've ever experienced and so in a sense throughout these two chapters Jesus said look the key thing is keep your eyes on me keep looking at me see through the circumstances that are going to come to you and see me the Lord of the harvest behind those circumstances that's a gospel perspective it's the great faith that Jesus commended back in chapters 8 and 9 when we looked at some of the miracles which was the ability of people who came to Jesus asking for healing and asking for Jesus blessing it was the ability to see through this man that stood in front of them to see the Lord of the universe who had power to heal to renew so my friends this is the gospel perspective we will need when it comes to rejection and opposition and enmity from those that once we treasured and valued as closest to us being able to look through that rejection and hatred from those closest to us is so hard of course it's hard because to be human is to crave love to crave acceptance to have somebody reciprocate our love and actions towards them to belong to be in a lasting relationship to be in a secure relationship without fear of rejection all those things are just so fundamental to us as humans so what could possibly enable us to give those things up or walk away from them well we need to remember that our ultimate lasting family relationship is in

[20 : 59] God I said last week that being a disciple is identifying with God and that's true but far more important is that God identifies with me his disciple because that's my security that is the relationship I crave for in my innermost being that is the unbreakable relationship which can be enjoyed without fear that's the relationship that keeps on getting better and will keep on getting better until I go to heaven to be with him forever and enjoy the fullness of that relationship in a way that I can't even begin to imagine now that is in my heart of hearts the relationship sorry that is the relationship I crave in my heart of hearts and it's mine in Christ this relationship is essentially with God in Trinity and underpins everything

Jesus saying in chapter 10 if you look at chapter 29 sorry verse 29 through to 32 we looked at this passage these verses last week God is my father and he cares for me deeply as his child for every aspect of me as I serve him Jesus has dealt with my sin he's made me acceptable to my father who has adopted me into his family making Jesus like a brother to me so God the father Jesus my brother and Jesus gladly identifies with me before the father he's happy to acknowledge when we stand with him he will stand with us that's what brothers do in the ideal world verse 25 you go back to one of the verses we looked at last week it talks about how they will be treated just like the master because in the same household this is what the family treatment will be says Jesus it's an affirmation of family likeness and belonging and he reassures the disciples even in the midst of what seems like negative he reassures them that yes when they experience rejection and opposition and hatred then yay that's confirmation that they're in the family of

Jesus in a sense verses 21 and 22 go back further we looked at those again last week as well when you're under pressure when you're holed up before the courts don't worry about what to speak because your father will give you what to speak through the holy spirit and there we have it the trinity working for us with us as family the holy spirit has taken up residence with me the holy spirit we're told in other parts of the scripture daily renovates me from the inside out in a sense you can talk of the holy spirit like new dna when we become christians and that new dna is slowly working through all my body and renewing me spiritually helping me express the mind of christ in the most difficult of circumstances my friends this is the family we belong to in christ this is a family like no other family and all of this helped me to remember that my identity and security is not tied to my human relationships no matter how personal and how treasured they might be to me now sadly many many christians get it wrong at this point many christians act as though family human family relationships or other close personal friendships are permanent are absolute are ultimate in other words they are so important to life that they are to be protected against everything else so these are

my fixed points in life i'll give up all that out there but no these family relationships i need them that's a wrong statement for christians we might desire them we might love them and enjoy them but we don't need them in christ the problem with that thinking is that we become flexible at the wrong points we become flexible in our service and testimony to jesus because well i don't want to risk these intensely personal friendships relationships so we become flexible about jesus and our relationship with him and inflexible about our relationships yeah that's how to kill her now i got to say here carefully i got to say here oh i don't know what i'm going to say this is not a license to be careless or heartless or irresponsible or disengaged in this world human family relationships that would be a terrible way to understand scripture so it's not a license to step away from human family relations it's a safeguard against making these relationships absolute and therefore being devastated or debilitated when gospel conflict surfaces in them so as disciples of the great peacemaker we too are peacemakers but just as jesus pathway to delivering peace meant rejection by his human family and remember that jesus human family first came to see what he was up to because they were a bit embarrassed by what he was saying and doing then down the track a little bit their embarrassment changed to outright anger they thought he had lost it so the pathway of jesus delivering peace meant rejection by his human family and ultimately suffering and death so too our sharing in his mission of true peace and renewal will reflect jesus pathway my friends this is hard for us to hear is it not so often we have secured peaceful relations in our families and workplace and with our friends simply because we've played down our loyalty to jesus and we've played down the message of jesus perhaps we've been silent about that which we say is at the heart of our being because we've not wanted to risk those friendships that are fun or intense or personal or immediate so often i think we protest that we don't have the opportunity to stand publicly with jesus and the gospel or that we don't have the ability to say anything worthwhile we often try and excuse ourselves for that when in fact perhaps the reason is slightly different perhaps the reason is that we're not prepared to risk those friendships that mean most to us perhaps we're not prepared to risk division and hostility creeping into those friendships that we value so much now friends don't misunderstand me we should never relish or look for hostility in a fight there's never a license to be that annoying christian member of the family at family gatherings who just won't shut up there's never an excuse for that and we all have them i might even be the one in my family i'm not sure but there's no excuse for that we're never looking for hostility in a fight with unbelievers but neither should we bag away from telling them those closest to us of their need for a fresh start in jesus i mean by definition if they're a close friend that means you love them and if you love them surely you want to tell the truth to them and if the truth means confronting their autonomy and sovereignty their own individual sovereignty and talk about bowing to jesus then it's a risk surely if you love them it's worth taking and so perhaps the real reason we're silent is because we put too much value on these relationships and we don't want to risk them second point is appreciating that we're never without family to enjoy and nurture we're never without family to enjoy and nurture now i have to say these last few verses are not easy to understand but here's what i think they might mean so you look at verse 40 whoever receives you receives me and whoever receives me receives him who sent me i think that's a principle perhaps that jesus sort of proverbial principle that then jesus expands in the next two verses and i think it goes something like this in jesus day it was assumed that a person's representative would be received welcomed and assisted as if the person themselves were there present so if you want to put it in the family context we're talking about here a person's representative in a sense was just an extension of the family and was to be treated like family and i think that principle of family connectedness might be at the heart of verses 40 to 42 as disciples busy in the work of harvesting or proclaiming the gospel in a myriad situations and circumstances we will constantly intersect with other disciples doing exactly the same work for exactly the same reasons and bearing exactly the same costs and we'll intersect with them and their joy and delight in jesus and we'll intersect with them in their desire that others might hear of jesus and know the salvation that we ourselves have experienced i think the picture there jesus is saying is that we are never without family and in fact as disciples we're engaged in core family business and so we will actually have a much bigger family to be part of than anything we could possibly imagine at the human level we are engaged in the core family business we all know and enjoy god as our father we all have a rich sense of privilege as siblings of jesus and joint heirs with him we all have the holy spirit working quietly behind the scenes to create family likeness in us and in these verses it's hard to know whether jesus has got different levels of formality or different harvest tasks in mind so he talks

about a righteous person he talks about a prophet and he talks about little ones i think possibly he's just spelling it out in some sort of concrete terms that regardless of the particular part of the harvest wherever you intersect disciples busy in the work of harvest they're all his little ones they're all to be welcomed encouraged supported enjoyed the reward that's mentioned in here well again it's really hard to be precise but the idea

[34 : 13] I think which fits best with the context is simply that embracing the family as they're busy in harvest will win the approval of christ because this is how god's family should work that's what family's all about that's what god's family's all about if your family gatherings are family gatherings you just come back to the same stories the same themes all the time I mean it's funny when you're there with a family but somebody else looking in would just think this is weird the family has a core definition a core shape common stories common memories our spiritual family is the place for us to rest and thrive and all the more so against the dysfunction and conflict and hostility that will most likely mark our human families and relationships as we are harvesters for Jesus my friends put it all down to something really simple we're never without family even when our human family and those closest to us reject us because those we have most in common with as family members are in fact

Christ's people we are never without family to nurture and enjoy family and what a gracious provision that is and many many Christians have lost all of their family and been totally rejected totally rejected by their family but even they are never without family in the Lord Jesus so which close relationships will claim your primary allegiance that's the question which family which set of close relationships are you shaped by defined by identified with which do you find security in which do you give allegiance to that's the question that boils down to will you continue to expect and demand a hassle free life and conflict free close personal relationships whether family or friends who are hostile to Jesus even if the cost is not speaking about

Jesus to them is that what you'll continue to hang out for and protect or will you sit loose to human family and other relationships knowing that your real family isn't Jesus if you can do that then I suspect you will be prepared to take the risk because you want your closest friends to know of the salvation that you've enjoyed and continue to enjoy in Jesus but it will only be that gospel perspective that will help you step into that place pray with me again please Lord I prayed at the start that you would help us hear words that we're not inclined to hear and perhaps even quite reluctant to hear

Lord we confess to you that we have put our allegiance in wrong places we have valued human relationships Lord good relationships important relationships to us Lord immediate relationships but we valued them too highly and unfortunately Lord the cost has been that we've been silent about you to those we would say we love most help us Lord to see through our dearest and most personal of relationships to see you the Lord of the harvest and help us Lord to take risks for those we love most by venturing most in speaking of Jesus to them and in his name I pray Amen Thank you very much