

The Joy Division

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Date: 04 November 2018

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. It's really nice to see you two weeks in a row. Can you even believe this is happening? This is amazing.

We are in Matthew 10. And in this section of Matthew, Jesus has been presenting his grand mission to the disciples to take the message of the kingdom of God to the people.

It's a beautiful task. But then there's this thing that Jesus says. There are these words that Jesus says. I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

And it seems like such a shocking thing for him to say. It's shocking for us because it just doesn't fit the Jesus of popular imagination. I mean, we're coming up to Christmas. This is the baby in the manger.

And the angel said we bring peace to the earth. And he grew up and said kind and lovely things to people and wise and wonderful things. And he helped people.

[1 : 08] So what do we make of this? I have come not to bring peace but a sword. Jesus is telling his disciples, don't be naive about the mission.

And the sword is, of course, I'm sure you know this, as a metaphor. Jesus is speaking about division. And because the disciples were going to head out and be very publicly Christian and call people to Christ.

And Jesus is saying, look, some people are going to be into it and their lives will be changed forever. But many people will be passionately opposed to it. They won't like the message and they won't like you.

Perhaps the disciples were giving Jesus the impression they were feeling pretty good about this mission, this job that Jesus had given them, thinking that they had all the authority and all the power and they were going to do these miraculous things.

And perhaps they were thinking they were going to go into these towns and they were just going to own these places. They're going to be killing it there. It's going to be wall-to-wall healings, wall-to-wall exorcisms.

[2 : 11] People are just going to be bringing them casseroles and patting them on the back. And it's just going to be fantastic. Everyone's just going to flock to them, say how great they are. And Jesus is very real with them.

He says, you will see people saved and reconciled and brought together, but you will experience significant opposition. And, of course, this makes sense, doesn't it?

Because at this point, this was just an obscure Jewish sect. It was a minority movement.

And when a minority movement hits a majority culture, there is going to be friction. That's our experience today. As I've been thinking about these words this week, really difficult words, I have become very grateful for them.

And I find this a very freeing truth, that Jesus has come to bring a sword. I remember going to a party a few years ago, and there was this couple there that discovered that I was a Christian and, in fact, in paid Christian work.

[3 : 25] And they were sort of, I guess you'd call them, sort of part of the new atheist community. And they were quite, well, they're Canadian, so quite passively, aggressively, you know, attacking what I had to say.

And I didn't really have much to say in response that I thought was very helpful. And it could have been very discouraging to me. But Jesus is reminding us here that opposition isn't a mark of failure. It's actually just how Jesus expects things to happen sometimes. When the mission is battle, don't think the gospel has failed, Jesus is telling us.

He's just reminding us that opposition is sometimes a given. So Jesus says to his disciples, he's saying, look, it's just not going to be a walk in the park for you, this job I've given you, this mission. I've come to bring a sword. And then Jesus gives his disciples an example in verse 35. And if you're wondering what the structure of this sermon is, verse by verse. I'm just going to go through each verse one at a time.

[4 : 34] So Jesus gives his disciples an example of what this will look like, what the sword will look like. Verse 35. For I've come to set a man against a father, and a daughter against a mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Now, I'm saying something you'll know. Hostility within the family is not a value of the gospel. But Jesus is saying, you might experience opposition in the one place you have only ever known unconditional love, in your family.

And it is brutal when it happens. Maybe your children aren't Christians. Maybe your parents aren't Christians, and your faith is a problem for them. It's weird for them.

They raised you to be normal. And look at you now. What are you doing? What are you doing with your life? People might regard your life as a wasted life, of lost opportunities.

There are a lot of people that this is true for them. I'm one of these people. It's reassuring to know that Jesus knew this pain.

[5 : 53] In Mark's gospel in chapter 3, it tells the story of Jesus' own family trying to stage an intervention. Let me read to you just a couple of verses from Mark chapter 3.

And then he went home. It's Jesus. He went home and a crowd gathered there so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard about it, they went to seize him, for they were saying he's out of his mind. So Jesus was out.

He was doing stuff with his disciples, and they went back to this house. And the people wouldn't leave him alone. They couldn't organize a dinner for themselves. And you can imagine Jesus' family hearing about this instead of, you know, his mom was banging her hands on the table.

This has gone far enough. He can't even eat. His own family thought he'd drunk the Kool-Aid. His own family thought he was crazy.

I find this very comforting, that Jesus knows this pain. We're going to hear next week about John the Baptist, who was family, was doubting Jesus.

[6 : 56] It's comforting to know that Jesus felt this pain. Look, I don't have to tell you this stuff, but you do hear these stories of folks who become Christians, and some of them decide to go and pay Christian work, and the parents say to them they're wasting their life.

These things are just not uncommon. Some religions, I know, some faiths have funeral services for their children when they become Christians. I was speaking to a guy this morning who became a Christian, a friend of his became a Christian at Harvard.

Went back, told his family, his father sat him down, tried to convince him out of it. Guy called him the bishop, obviously a very liberal bishop.

The bishop tried to talk him out of his evangelical convictions, and when the guy wouldn't budge, the father says, okay, we're not on the same page anymore.

We have nothing to do with each other anymore, and wrote him out of the will. This story, I just heard this this morning. That's brutal. Okay, so where are we? Let me give you a quick summary here.

[8 : 06] Jesus says, you'll be out there, you're being on mission, you'll be public about your faith. Some people will respond well. Many though, what you have to say to them is going to cause a great problem.

There's going to be drama. There's even going to be drama in your family, and that's going to be really difficult. Now, what does Jesus say next? It's very dense here. He says, now let me tell you why, let me tell you why people will react with such hostility sometimes, and it's in verse 37.

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. Now, the point is not stop loving your parents.

The point is not stop loving your children. Remember Jesus on the cross in John chapter 19. He's dying, and one of the last things he does is he looks out, and he calls out to John, and he says, John, Mary is now your mother.

Look after her. Jesus is about family. The key word in the passage is more. Whoever loves mother or father more is not worthy of me. His big point is this.

[9 : 12] Jesus is claiming, and it's an astounding point, a culturally shocking point, Jesus is claiming a higher place in your life than anything else, even family.

Shocking. Jesus comes crashing into the world and demands to be the most important person in our lives, more important than our mom, our dad, our children.

Jesus demands the highest place of affection in your life, and this is what causes people to become hostile, because when you make Jesus the primary concern of your life, again, not the only concern, but the primary concern, when you do that, some people are going to see that as a defection, a defection from normal life going over to some extreme, extreme, crazy religious place, and people don't like that because you're implicitly challenging their worldview and their priorities. You're saying to them, Jesus is king, and their gut reaction, their heart reaction is, no, I am the king of my life. Now, you may be here sitting here thinking to yourself, and Aaron, this is why we should never be too religious.

This causes too many problems. I don't want the hassle. Aaron, I'm okay for you to be religious because you get paid for it. Dan, you can be religious too because you get paid for it.

[10 : 38] You guys be the awesome, super hardcore people. The rest of us, we just need to be balanced. We need to have our faith. We have a family. We have our job. We have our activities. No, this is, Jesus doesn't give us this option here.

Let me read verse 37 again. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Do you hear the repeated word there? Whoever.

Jesus is not just talking about the super keepers. He's not just talking about the religious elite. He's not just talking about people who are paid to do this kind of thing.

He is talking to all of us. He's talking to all of us. And the only way to interpret what he's saying is this. It's a very stark call to total allegiance.

All followers. Total allegiance. There is no room for some sort of, you know, go this halfway business. There is no sensible middle ground sort of Christian.

[11 : 38] He leaves no room for that attitude. It's one of the reasons people respond with such hostility. And then what does Jesus say next? Well, it's just one shocking statement after another.

So remember, so far, what have we got? Jesus makes his big sword statement. He tells them they're going to experience hostility. He tells them they're going to experience in the last place they thought possible. It's going to be, you're going to have it in family as well.

And he says, and it's going to happen because you've made me your primary source of allegiance. And this creates problems. And then he says, and let me tell you what that's going to feel like.

Let me tell you what it's going to look like. And Jesus says, whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

He's stating a positive and the negative here. The cross is, it's quite a, you know, remote metaphor for us.

[12 : 42] Obviously, we're a few thousand years out. You know, we see it mostly in jewelry. It's, but we know this passage. I think it's the kind of thing we, we sometimes bandy around this phrase to talk about difficult things in our life.

Like I, you know, I have a disease. It's, you know, it's the cross I bear. But this is not what Jesus is talking about here. We, taking up your cross doesn't mean putting up with some awkward or tragic situation in your life.

Jesus is talking about painfully dying to self. Rome didn't invent crucifixion, but they used it a lot. It was the most humiliating and painful method they could come up with of dispatching of someone. They reserved it for special occasions, special people like runaway slaves, folks who opposed to the state. Before someone was crucified, they'd make them carry the cross to the place of execution.

Rome liked doing this. They liked the spectacle of it, because it was a warning to others, and they'd make them walk the longest possible route to the point of execution to maximize the amount of people who would see it.

[13 : 56] It was a warning to those who attempted to run or revolt or oppose. Rome loved this. Showed that they were in total control.

What a horrible thing. And this is the thing that Jesus said, it's going to be like to follow me. It's just astounding. So when Christ said these words to the initial hearers, what would have happened in

their brains?

What would they have felt? What would they have thought of? What was Jesus implying by this? Well, I think at least four things. By saying, take up your cross, he's saying at least four things.

One, when someone was crucified, it meant official opposition. It was a Roman punishment for those opposed to Rome. You're going to be treated like a criminal, an outsider.

So one, official opposition. Two, it meant shame. Because it wasn't just execution. They wanted to maximize the shame. Three, it meant suffering. Four, obviously it meant death.

[15:03] So opposition, shame, suffering, death. Jesus is calling his disciples. He's calling us to the grand mission. And he says, it's going to look like those things.

It's going to look like a crucifixion. It's going to feel like a crucifixion. And he's saying to us, are you willing? Are you willing? And then in verse 39, he tells us why we should say yes to this.

Because it sounds like madness, doesn't it? It's just madness. But why would we say yes to this? Why would we pick up that cross and walk with it? Verse 39.

Whoever finds his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. So it's a paradox. You find to lose. You lose to find. So on the bad side, on the negative side, what does Jesus mean by finding life and then losing it?

What does that mean by finding life and losing it? It means you avoid opposition. You avoid the potential of being shamed. You pursue comfort and ease and safety.

[16:09] You avoid risk. That's finding life. And the result is you lose it forever. Jesus says, don't find it. Lose it.

He says, lose your life for my sake. Lose your life for my sake. Lose it with purpose. And that's hard, isn't it? Because our self, our self, we don't want shame.

We want respect. We don't want unease in our relationships. We want comfort. We want to be the boss.

But a Christian on mission for Jesus says, I want Jesus more than I want to avoid shame. I want Jesus more than I want to avoid awkward family situations.

I want Jesus more than I want to avoid awkward conversations. I want Jesus more than the prospect of being disrespected.

[17:12] I want Jesus more than I want to avoid suffering. I want Jesus more. I want others to know him. Because he is my great treasure. Let me finish off here.

The way of Jesus is the cross. These are his words. If it sounds harsh and you don't like what I'm saying, I'm literally just telling you his words. It's the cross.

The way of Jesus is the cross. And we find our life by losing it. And they're such sharp words, aren't they? But they have to be sharp because our desire for comfort and ease and respect is so great. So the challenge from Jesus is so great. But it is more than matched by the promise of Jesus to those who accept the challenge.

We didn't really get into it. But verses 40 to 42 are rich. And just in 30 seconds here, it sort of says two things. The first thing it says here, let me read a couple of verses here.

[18:12] Whoever receives me and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. And then it goes on right at the end. 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. There's two things that are going on there. Christ attributes the highest possible value to us. He's saying to us that when people receive you, they're receiving me.

When they're receiving me, they're receiving God. When they receive you, they're receiving God. He attributes the highest possible value to us. It's an astounding thing to say. And then three times it talks about reward, reward, reward.

Now you are saved and you are secure in your salvation. But those of us who engage in mission, Jesus talks about reward. And what's the reward?

It's Jesus. It's life. It's joy. It's meaning. Even when we do it badly. Even when we can only pull off the smallest possible thing.

[19:12] A cup of water. For the least important disciple was the final verse there. Even when we do it badly, there is reward. What a saviour, eh?

What a saviour. He is with us. He calls us. He sees us. He rewards us.

Take up your cross and follow him. Amen. Amen. Amen.