

Jesus' Mission Brings Division

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 August 2024

Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] Well, I don't know if you've watched much of the Olympics over the last couple of weeks. It is a festival of sports, isn't it?

And if there's one thing that sport guarantees, it's that at the end, there are going to be some people very excited and some people very disappointed.

But the Olympics, at least for me, has thrown up a few surprises on that front. When you see who is discontent and who is delighted at the end of a race.

Last week, we were watching some of the swimming events going on in the evenings. And in one particular race, as is often the case, there were contrasting emotions at the finish line.

But on this occasion, while the Australian who finished second looked pretty devastated to be landed with a silver medal, there was a young woman from Hong Kong who finished third behind the Australian and her smile could not have been bigger.

[1 : 10] I get it lit up the whole place. Measuring by the results, objectively, that race had gone better for the Australian than from the woman from Hong Kong.

But you would never have known that from their respective reactions. Why? Well, the commentators explained the difference was in their expectations.

One of those women expected to win gold. The other did not expect to win anything at all.

Their expectations were different. And so their response to their results were completely different. One was more than content.

The other extremely disappointed. Not because one had done better than the other. But because of what they expected. Our response to anything will always be shaped, won't it?

[2 : 16] By what we expect. How many times have you found yourself disappointed by something really quite good? Because you set your expectations far too high.

Maybe you found Jesus teaching on mission in this chapter, chapter 10 of Matthew, a little downbeat so far.

It's not been full of wonderful promises of great results, has it? No guarantees of fame and popularity. No prosperity and comfort for disciple makers.

That's not what Jesus has been promising at all, has it? No doubt. And it's just as well. Because while that might have motivated a few to go marching out the door to spread the gospel, every one of those people would very quickly be discouraged, disappointed, discontented by the results that would not have met their expectations.

Jesus is not trying to bribe us into mission in Matthew, chapter 10, or guilt trip us. I think that's been quite clear. Rather, he is making sure our expectations are set where they should be, so that we don't get discouraged and tempted to give up when we're faced with reality.

[3 : 45] If we know what to expect, we won't think we're failing when what happens is exactly what Jesus said would happen. Expectations matter.

And so Jesus continues to set realistic expectations for disciple makers in the final verses of this chapter. Not to dishearten us before we go on mission, but so that we won't become disheartened when we do go.

Let me just give you a little teaser of what to expect from these verses. Expect another hard message. But expect also a hopeful message.

Because there is a light shining brightly at the end of this chapter. But before we get there, we must hear, first of all, what Jesus says in verses 34 to 36.

If last week we were taught to expect persecution, this week we are taught that we should expect to bring about division. Our first point this evening, expect division.

[5 : 02] Just look at verse 34 with me. Jesus is speaking here and he says, Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth.

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. On first reading, maybe on second and third reading too, Jesus' words here sound quite shocking, don't they?

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. What is going on? Jesus is supposed to be the prince of peace, isn't he? So what is he saying here?

Well, let me explain, in part at least, with an illustration. Mary, my wife, she loves to clean. It's a strange hobby, but one I'm okay with, to be honest.

So what quite often happens is that she'll tell me that she's off to clean, say, the living room or something. And then 15 minutes later, I'll walk into the living room, which she said she was cleaning.

[6 : 17] Some of you know where this is going. And upon a single glance, I immediately assume that she's lost something. And we've been robbed. And a bomb has gone off all at the same time.

The room is carnage. A few cushions might have been out of place before. Now there is stuff everywhere. And she will, without fail, look at me and say, it's part of the process.

It's part of the process. Sometimes things have to appear to get worse before they get better. But there is purpose in the mess being made.

It appears to get worse, but there is purpose, and it is working towards something better. Well, it is, I think, similar with Jesus' mission, even if not identical.

Peace might be what we are looking forward to at the end of Jesus' mission. But part of that process involves first bringing about division.

[7 : 32] And Jesus' mission will initially bring division because Jesus' message demands a response. There will be division because no one can sit on the fence with Jesus.

He brings his sword, not literally and not recklessly, but his teaching, his life, death, and resurrection. They come like a sword that will cleave humanity in two.

There will be those who hear him and follow him, and those who hear him and do not follow him. And so we go out on this mission to make the gospel known.

As we go out, we can expect division because everyone will respond to the gospel, but they will respond to it in one of two ways.

And different responses bring with them different and opposing priorities in life. Because of Jesus' mission, even families, he says, will find themselves divided against one another.

[8 : 52] Expect friction within your family if you give your life to Christ and others don't. Expect friction and division with friends and colleagues who will not understand why you believe what you do on any number of issues.

Jesus says to expect that because there are only two possible responses to his message and they stand diametrically opposed to one another.

We're just going to spend the rest of our time this evening considering each of these two responses that we can expect to be met with as we go out on mission. You'll see them beginning there in verse 37 and in verse 40.

Each with and anyone who... And we'll see group one is not worthy of Jesus. Group two will not lose their reward.

So let's just turn to each of these responses now and see, first of all, that we should, on the one hand, expect rejection because of what...

[10 : 08] because of Jesus' demand. See this in verses 37 to 39. When we go out with the gospel, we should expect some people to reject the message because of what Jesus demands of them.

In these verses, Jesus is not primarily explaining how to be a disciple, although we definitely learn something of that. But he's first and foremost explaining why some people won't become disciples, why they won't be worthy of him.

For these people, once they have had the gospel made known to them, they will choose to reject it because it asks too much of them. Just look there at verse 37 with me.

At what it costs to be worthy of Jesus. 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. To be a disciple, you must love Jesus.

[11 : 28] And you must love Jesus more than anyone else in your life. That is what Jesus demands.

For him to be the greatest love in your life, the one you live for above everyone and everything else. And to be clear, that doesn't mean we love others less.

It means we love Jesus more. That is a key difference. In a church I worked for previously, there was a single mom with two young children who came to faith through what was an amazing story in itself.

But as she grew in her love for Jesus, she rightly recognized where that meant her priorities were. In a context where family was everything, to her, Jesus was more important.

She would openly say she loved Jesus more than her own children. And that caused division. I'm sure you can see why.

[12 : 51] But it also led to one of the best stories I've heard about what happens when we put love for Christ first in our lives. Because one day, this woman's mom, the grandmother of her children, was questioning how she could possibly say, how can you say that you love Jesus more than your own children?

And before she had a chance to respond, it was her 10-year-old daughter who butted into the conversation and said, it's okay, granny.

The more mom loves Jesus, the better she loves me. Did you hear that?

The more mom loves Jesus, the better she loves me. It is a wonderful testimony, isn't it, from a young girl who had seen the difference Jesus made to her mom's life and so to her life, who saw that when Jesus became the priority, even over family, it worked out better for everyone.

I tell that story so that we won't mishear Jesus' words here in verse 37. He is not saying, in order to be a Christian, you need to love your parents or children less than you do now.

[14 : 33] He's not saying that at all. What he is saying is that you need to put me Jesus Christ at the very top of your priority lists.

What Jesus' words here do make clear is that if Jesus is not first in your life, he is nowhere in your life. This is the love we must have and this is the message Jesus sends us out with.

You must love Jesus more than your family. You must care about Jesus more than you care about your career. You must be willing to sacrifice a promotion at work in order to live for him.

You must be willing to live a less comfortable life in order to share him and share the gospel faithfully with friends and family. Jesus must be more important to you than your results at uni or school.

You must be willing to give up on time studying to spend time with him in his word and amongst his people. And we must be clear with those with whom we share the gospel that that is what Christ requires of them.

[16 : 10] If you think those demands are high, well, Jesus ups the stakes even further in verses 38 and 39. 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. Verse 37 teaches us something of the love for Christ's disciples, the love for Christ's disciples must have.

These verses don't they teach us something of the life we must live and again the cost is high.

Here's how C.S. Lewis summarizes Christ's expectation of his followers. He says, give up yourself and you will find your real self.

Lose your life and you will save it. Submit. Submit to death the death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and the death of your whole body in the end.

Submit with every fiber of your being. the demand contained in these verses that I think Lewis summarizes so well there doesn't he?

[17 : 36] Submit. Submit with every fiber of your being. Submit to another king over your life. Over and above yourself.

Submit to a king who calls us to follow him on a path that will bring public shame and perhaps even death. That is what it is to bear your cross. Might be a religious symbol to us.

To Matthew's audience it was a symbol of shameful brutal public execution. That is what Jesus requires of his disciples.

That is the message he sends us out with. And we would do well not to soften it lest we make people unworthy of Christ thinking they can just squeeze him into the gaps of their life.

People need to know we need to know that to be worthy of Christ he must be everything to us and we must be ready to give everything for him.

[18 : 49] We don't have to live the perfect life but we do have to live for Jesus above all else. And that does mean we should expect some people to reject this gospel for humanity to be divided in two.

There will be times when we lovingly share the gospel with people over weeks and months maybe even years and at the end they will understand the message and so reject it.

they will choose another love over him. They will choose not to take up their cross not willing to sacrifice their life's ambitions to serve him and that will be painful.

It will be painful when people reject our message of life. it is not a joyful expectation but when we hear Jesus' words we will know that it is not our failing but Jesus demands that have caused them to reject his gospel.

If we expect everyone to accept the gospel we will burden ourselves with a burden we cannot bear. Jesus calls us to share the gospel he does not expect us to make every single person we share the gospel with a Christian.

[20 : 31] We need to know that otherwise we will cripple ourselves with an expectation that cannot be met. So expect some to reject Jesus because he demands so much of us.

But just as much as we should expect some to reject it so we should also expect some to accept this gospel.

Our third and final point this evening expect acceptance because of Jesus' promise. It's not been an easy task we've been sent out with so far is it?

But while this might not be an easy mission Jesus sends his disciples on it is certainly not a hopeless mission. In fact it is a hope-filled mission because Jesus sends his disciples to find the lost sheep.

Do you hear the promise in those words? there are lost sheep and they will be found through Jesus' disciples.

[21 : 53] That is the mission Jesus sends us on. Not to aim to bring about division, not to look forward to persecution. Those things will happen as we go but our purpose as we go is a glorious one.

It is to bring people to everlasting life. Bringing lost sheep to live under the rule of the great shepherd. And so Jesus says to his disciples go, go and find them knowing that he says in verse 40 anyone who welcomes you welcomes me and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

The word translated welcome in these verses verses 40 to 42 could just as well be translated receive or accept. The word welcome is not just talking about something you do when someone knocks on the door, it's how you respond to someone's message.

So some will, Jesus says, some will accept the gospel and they will by no means lose their reward when they do so. And the reward is a magnificent one.

I think in these verses Jesus lays out all the working for us and then just sort of leaves the answer box blank at the end for us to fill in.

[23 : 18] Let me just walk us through the working and see if you can put together the answer as we go on. Just look down there with me at verse 40 and see that first of all whoever welcomes a disciple welcomes Christ himself.

Whoever welcomes a disciple welcomes Christ himself and the one who sent him. Then secondly verse 41 the point isn't it is that you receive a reward based on the merits of the one you welcome. You receive a reward based on the merits of the one you welcome. Do you see what's starting to go on here? Based on the merit not of yourself but of the one you welcome or accept.

And then verse 42 whoever welcomes the littlest disciple with the littlest act of welcoming they will not lose their reward. There is a reward for welcoming disciples.

Piece it all together and we get something amazing. as you welcome Christ's disciples as you accept your message you receive Christ's reward.

[24 : 44] For a few minutes ago it was no surprise some people reject the gospel because of what Jesus demands. Here it is no wonder is it? It is no wonder some people will accept the gospel because of what Jesus promises.

He promises a reward based on his obedience his righteousness his faithfulness that is the promise held out with the message we are sent with.

Yes it will cost you much but only for a short time and look at what you will gain. that promises every spiritual blessing in Christ according to what he has done and he has won.

The removal of all of our guilt and shame the forgiveness of every sin God the promise of eternal life.

A resurrected body in a new creation where you will reign with Christ adoption into God's family.

You might well be divided from your old family when you accept Jesus.

[26 : 08] You will be given a new one in his church. church. Some people will hear the message of the gospel and they will welcome you.

What does it mean to welcome a disciple of Christ? I think it means to hear the gospel message, to believe the gospel message, and to carry the gospel message, to hear it, believe it, and carry it with you, the wonderful truth that Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that any and all who repent and believe in him will have everlasting life.

To hear, believe, and go on with that message. if you're sitting here this evening and you have not yet given your life to Jesus because you think the cost is too high, well, the cost is high.

He demands he become everything to us, but he also promises everything to us. There is a reward waiting for those who are willing to take up their cross.

And that reward can be yours this very evening if you choose to give your life to him, submitting to him as your king and your savior.

[27 : 53] And as we all go, those of us who do believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we go with that message, yes, some might reject it, but some will accept it.

God promises us his people are out there. Is that not a great encouragement as we go out on mission?

We don't go out with the gospel and hope for the best that maybe, maybe it'll stick with someone. one. We go knowing there are people who will respond with faith.

And we take the gospel to our family, our friends, our neighbors, our colleagues, our classmates, know that the person you are speaking to might very well welcome you with open arms.

And there is one more promise at the end of our reading that should bring us more comfort and confidence as Jesus sends us out.

[29 : 04] As Jesus sends disciples out in mission, he goes with them. After he had finished instructing his disciples, we read at the start of chapter 11, that he went to to teach and preach.

When Jesus sends us, he does not send us as a king who sits lazily on his throne, expecting his subjects to do his bidding for him.

He does not send us off to do his mission for him. He calls us to carry out his mission with him. He's not asking us to do a job he can't be bothered like a lazy boss.

He invites us along so we can share in the joy of this mission with him. For the disciples Jesus was speaking to, that meant knowing Jesus was somewhere doing what they were doing.

But we have an even greater comfort and assurance as we go out. At the end of this gospel, at the end of Matthew, as he ascends into heaven so that he can send his spirit, Jesus says these wonderful words.

[30 : 26] He says, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

I am with you always to the very end. Jesus does not send us off to do his work for him.

He sends us to do his work with him. when he calls us to take up our cross and follow him. He does so as the one who has taken up his cross.

One that we could not carry. When he calls us to go out with the gospel, he calls us to go out with him, knowing we are helped by the very same spirit that was with him in his ministry.

That's a pretty encouraging thought, is it not? If your faith is in Christ, the very same spirit which descended upon Jesus at his baptism, preparing him for ministry, now dwells in you, equipping you for that same work.

[31 : 55] He is with you always. we are never alone. And because we go with Jesus, we should expect to be treated like Jesus.

When Jesus preached the gospel as faithfully as you could possibly preach it, some rejected it, but some accepted it.

He brought about division. Many ended up opposing him, shaming him, even killing him. Do not lose hearts when division and rejection are what we face because Jesus faced exactly the same. But let us go because we know that some will accept the gospel joyfully, welcoming us, and so welcoming Christ with open arms and have their life changed for the better forever. all because of what Christ invites us and commands us to do, to go with him. Let us pray before we sing our final hymn together.

[33 : 36] Father, we thank you that you have made your gospel known to us. strengthen and equip us now to carry that message of wonderful hope, knowing that while there are some who will reject you, there are many lost sheep waiting to hear their master's voice.

So be with us always. We thank you that you promise to do so, that we might make known and grow your church for your glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen.