

Matthew 10:32-42

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[0 : 0 0] Do turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 10. Matthew chapter 10. We're going through Matthew's Gospel.

! If you've got a church Bible, it's on page 815. Matthew 10, verse 32 to 42.

How have they done it? How have Christians been tamed? How has it come about that Christian people are just respectable members of society, who do good, who support the status quo, who vote conservatively, and never offend anyone? It's been quite an achievement, hasn't it?

It's so successful that most people, and most Christian people, maybe you, regard the question as silly. We expect Christian people, don't we, to be respectable, not disreputable. We expect them to do good rather than harm, don't we? We expect them to be conservative rather than radical ratbags. We expect Christians to be peacemakers, not troublemakers. Which just goes to show that the taming process has been very, very thorough indeed. And not only Christians have been tamed, but everyone expects them to be tamed. So why do I ask such a dumb question? Well, because we have these words, don't we, in Matthew 10, 32 to 42. And they are words, I don't know whether you picked it up in the reading, where it is perfectly clear that Jesus did not expect his followers to be tamed. And this chapter is in Matthew's account of Jesus' life. And he's given us, doesn't he, in chapter 8 and 9, the most dramatic report, the kind of things Jesus did in the early days when he was in public life in the area of Galilee. There was the healings and the exorcisms, there was the raising of the dead.

And it's hardly surprising that in that context, word spreads about Jesus like wildfire, the kind of things this man was doing. And what we've seen is there have been reactions of really various kinds to what Jesus did. Things that people perceived that he was doing. They realised Jesus was doing more than miracles. They're not less than miracles, but they are powerful things that Jesus did in chapter 8 and 9. They were, in fact, demonstrations. They were anticipations of something that was to come. Of an even more powerful thing that he claimed to have done. Those miracles are showing you and I that Jesus has come to establish God's rule, God's kingdom. The kingdom of heaven here on earth. And so it says at the end of chapter 9, I don't know whether you remember that, that Jesus having done these things, and having demonstrated who he was and what he's come to do, he looks out on the crowds of people and he has deep compassion on them. And as he looks out on them, he says, they're like sheep without a shepherd. And so you'll remember at the end of chapter 10, he sends out his 12 to these sheep without a shepherd. Disciples with the message of God's kingdom. The king has come. And what we've seen in chapter 10 is really the instructions that Jesus gives as he sends his disciples out. And it's really important that as we come to the end of chapter 10, which is really a break in Matthew's gospel, that we appreciate the connection of what we've seen. The connection between chapter 8 and 9, the stories of the miracles, and chapter 10, the instructions given to his disciples going out. And as we understand chapter 8 and 9, we see what Jesus did. And if we understand it at all, we understand that he came to bring God's rule on earth. And we get little glimpses of what God's rule is like. Of what heaven one day will be like. And we understand that chapter 10, that now the rule of God is going to be established in the world, and it will go out through the world, and it will make progress. As the news about Jesus goes out. God's rule. As the message of Jesus, the king of all is proclaimed. And Jesus is saying that message must be told no matter what, that the king is kept. But what reactions can be expected to this message? Well, as we listen to the words of Jesus in chapter 10, the one reaction that he did not anticipate, in this chapter at least, is the message we see mainly on your street and on mine. And in the UK. And that is apathy. I don't care. The message is about God's rule, and Jesus says as that is announced, people will be hostile to God. And so he says, as you go about and you say the king has come, what you'll expect is hostility to this message from some at least.

[5 : 31] Because the message is about God's rule. There will be others, they won't be hostile, they will welcome it with joy. Because God's rule is so good. But not apathy. Not apathy.

There's no apathy in Matthew chapter 10. And I think that's worth thinking about, isn't it? that is the apathy of the modern UK to the message of Jesus Christ clear proof that the followers of Jesus in this land have been thoroughly domesticated? And tame, is it?

Well, we come to the last part of chapter 10. And I'm beginning in chapter 32. I think that is where the kind of sections divide up. And the theme of the passage is really simple.

The points really are exactly the same. What we're going to see here today is the decisive, shocking, divisive words of Jesus. Decisive, shocking, divisive words. And the news about God's rule, which is what the message of Jesus is, will meet with two responses wherever it goes. It will meet with one response or the other. It will either be joyfully accepted or there will be conflict. And then there will be the division of people's loyalties. So let's firstly see the decisive words. Two responses, the decisive words and a division of loyalties Jesus later on. Look at verses 32 and 33. Verse 32. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Do you see the two responses there? It's really obvious this morning.

Two responses anticipated by Jesus before men. And what's really helped me this week, as I've thought about this, is that he's not talking about private, personal, secret faith that's just between me and God, is he? And that is the pressure, and that is what people often talk about. They often want to say religion is a private matter. Have you heard that? I don't want to talk about my religion. My religion is about me and God. Well, that may be so for your religion, but if that is your religion, that is not the religion of Jesus Christ. Because I want you to see, which is so shocking, isn't it, that Jesus is not interested in that private religion.

[8 : 13] It is people's response to him in front of other people that is the issue here. And so there will be those who, according to verse 32, acknowledge Jesus Christ in the presence of other people.

You acknowledge Jesus to be your Lord yourself, and you're prepared to say so, publicly. And really, what it is, is that you've come to understand, chapters 8 and 9, that Jesus Christ is so important that you cannot treat your allegiance to him just as a private matter.

He's not just your Lord, and my Lord. He is the Lord. And so he is the rightful ruler over the whole world. And somebody who's understood Matthew chapter 8 and 9 is prepared to say so, publicly. And being prepared to say so publicly is evidence that you do actually acknowledge Jesus at all. But there will be those in verse 33, can you see them, who disown Jesus in the presence of other people. They don't accept his claim over you, and the evidence for that is that they're not prepared to acknowledge him publicly. That's really interesting, isn't it? Jesus did not take the middle path which our culture wants us to take, that of the private Christian.

Or even the person that owns Jesus in their heart, but never gets around to acknowledging the fact publicly. He really does seem to be saying, doesn't he, that we tend to think, don't we, that what we are in public is not the real me. The real me is what I'm privately like inside. But Jesus looks at it the other way around. He says, what you are, is what you are in public. That if you acknowledge Jesus in public, then you'll acknowledge Jesus.

And if you will not acknowledge Jesus in public, well then you're going to acknowledge him at all that is false. And of course, Jesus speaks in this way because he knows your heart and he knows my heart. And he knows that acknowledging Jesus in public is something that you and I shrink from doing naturally. And we mustn't deceive ourselves into thinking, well this is just a problem with the modern world. It's got nothing to do with that. It's always been like that.

[10 : 38] Always, always. And Jesus at the very beginning is speaking like this. And the reason it is difficult, the reason that you and I shrink back from Jesus in public, well that's been very much a part of the whole chapter, isn't it? Look back over it and you'll see it. It's perfectly clear, doesn't it?

That it takes boldness and it takes great courage to acknowledge Jesus Christ in the family. And to acknowledge Jesus Christ in the workplace. And to acknowledge Jesus Christ amongst your friends and your neighbours. And where can I find such courage? We'll look again at the words of Jesus. Jesus. They are magnificent words when you fully understand them. He says, whoever acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. Do you hear that?

But as I acknowledge Jesus, as I stand up for Jesus here on earth before people, he will acknowledge me and stand up for me before God the Father in heaven. As I own Christ now before people, he will own me before God then. And so you see, if this morning you find yourself thinking, Jesus is really requiring too much. This is too much for me. I'm not willing to do this. Well, think again of the promises. Because the promise is far, far, far greater than the requirement. Don't you think? For Jesus to own you. Let alone you. To acknowledge you before God in heaven. [12:24] To speak your name. To speak your name and say, he belongs to me. She belongs to me. You see how according to the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no follower of him. There is no Christian who is not required to be his witness. No doubt. Don't misunderstand me. Don't mishear me this morning. We're all going to have different opportunities.

We will find ourselves, won't we, in different circumstances. I am not asking you to go into the workplace tomorrow and come over the town alley and say, I believe in Jesus. I'm not asking you that. I'm not asking you to do an open air this week. Some of you want to, go for it. But I do think you and I need to see that there is no Christian who is not required to be his witness. We'll have different abilities, won't we? And so we're not all going to acknowledge Jesus in exactly the same way. But we must be clear that if we make the claim to belong to Jesus, we must make sure we do our duty as followers of Jesus. It's as simple as that to acknowledge Jesus Christ before others. And to do that, we must ask for great wisdom, mustn't we? I'm encouraged to do so. But we must do so. Why must we do so? Well, verse 33 tells you because of the alternative. Whoever disowns me before man, I will disown him before my father in heaven. Doesn't that make you tremble? It makes a mockery, doesn't it, of somebody who's called a secret disciple. And it shows me how stupid it is when I fear people more than I fear God. And I know that none of us like the idea of fear in God. We don't like the idea of fear in God. But that is stupid too, because if you look back at verse 28, you'll be reminded of Jesus' word on that subject. And so the message about God's rule and the message about Jesus Christ is going to meet with two opposite responses. And of course, it's very important to see which response has this message met in me and in you. And so what is true of you? Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ before people? Or do you disown him before people?

One of the other is true. And before God the Father in heaven, Jesus will either acknowledge you or disown you or disown you. And which will it be? Because one or the other is true of every person who's ever heard this message. And this message creates conflict. And so secondly, let's see the shocking words of Jesus. And if you weren't shocked before, verse 34 really is shocking. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. And the people that first heard that, these disciples, they would have been shocked when they heard it. And they are still a shock today. I have not come to bring peace on earth. That is an extraordinary thing to say, because what have we seen through chapters 8 and 9 and 10, we've seen Jesus claiming to be the Messiah, the one that God's people were looking for. The Old Testament really made it very, very clear that when God's rule was established in this world, the great outcome would be peace. It would be that Jewish word shalom.

[16:26] I think of that. One of the frequent problems that the Jewish people have today with the message of Jesus as the Messiah, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, is they would say the world is not of peace. So how can Jesus be the Messiah? How can the Messiah have come when the world is like what it is? How can Jesus have been the Messiah when he did not bring peace? How anyone can see that? And here Jesus says, well don't think that I'd come to bring peace on the earth. Of course lots of us have been around long enough that we know that we'll never see peace on earth. We're so cynical, aren't we, about the world that we think it'll never happen. Certainly it hasn't happened in the last century and it doesn't look like it's going to happen this century. Then there are those people that internalise the whole thing and say if Christianity is about anything, Christianity is about inner peace.

We all long for peace. We long for peace in the world. We're so grateful, aren't we, to live in a land which is at the moment peaceful? We long for inner peace. And in the New Testament we do find Jesus Christ is called our peace. And in another place Jesus says to his followers, he says, peace I give to you. So verse 34 is a shock, isn't it? A real shock to hear Jesus say, don't think that I've come to bring peace on earth. And the shock is intensified by the words that follow, I did not come to bring peace but a sword. And so if we hear him, it is perfectly clear that Jesus did not anticipate his followers would enjoy a tranquil life and free from conflict life. In fact he goes on to say in verse

35, for I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

And a person's enemy will be those of his own household. So that quote is adapted from the prophet Micah, Micah chapter 7 and verse 6. It's a really dark passage in Israel's history. It's a miserable time for the people of God when Micah was preaching and when things were so bad that you couldn't trust anyone. You couldn't trust even the members of your own household. Micah the prophet, if you go back to his book and you look at it, he was looking forward to a day when God will bring salvation from that kind of misery.

In Micah chapter 5, you find he talks about the Messiah and he says he will be their peace. And now we hear Jesus, who's claiming to be the Messiah, say, well I did not come to bring peace but to bring times that are like the terrible times in Micah. So what is Jesus talking about? I think you can say three things about these words.

Of Jesus. The first is Jesus is not saying this is going to be the final outcome of what I've come to do. It's perfectly clear that Jesus Christ has come ultimately, wonderfully, powerfully and clearly that Jesus Christ will bring ultimate peace. Praise God.

[19:51] But in the words before us, he's speaking of the immediate effects of his coming. Not the final result when all is said and done and when every wrong is righted. And so this isn't the final outcome of his coming. Secondly, he's not saying, and we'll see this clearly in a moment, he's not saying that this is the only effect of his coming. And the uniform effect of his coming. He's not saying that every person is going to be set against his father and every daughter will be set against their mother and so on. Not every family is going to be divided. Praise God. We've known that in this church, isn't it? You've said that today and many of you have got families that are not divided over Christ. And thirdly and obviously it would be an abuse of Jesus' teaching here to use it as an excuse for bad family relationships. And so it will not do, children, if you turn around to your parents this morning and then quote this verse at them and say, well, I'm just being Christian. Alright? It's not what it's about. So why did Jesus speak like this? Why is it so important for you and

I to get it? It's so important for you and I to understand because the depth of hostility there is in the human heart towards Jesus. Towards God. So deep is that hostility that when a person acknowledges Jesus Christ and so comes into God's kingdoms, even family ties of the closest kind will not be enough to subdue the opposition from other families who will not acknowledge Jesus. And the truth of Jesus' words have been shown again and again down through the ages in some people's lives here. I think of some of our Persian brothers and sisters and how their families have reacted to them coming to faith in Christ. And verse 35 is a reality for them. Authentic Christianity, wherever it is present and whenever Christians are not tamed, authentic Christianity always arouses opposition and anger. And families have been split by the message of Jesus. And the tone of Jesus' words here are this, they are not going to be surprised when they are not going to be caught off guard at all. And above all, whatever you do, don't hold back from acknowledging Jesus Christ from before people, including your own family. Because you can see it will cause conflict and of course it will cause conflict.

This is what happens when God's rule confronts God rejecters. Well that raises really serious questions for you and I, doesn't it? Why would you ever acknowledge Jesus Christ if it meant turning your son against you? What would you do if your daughter or your father or your mother or your husband to indicate that families are precious? That is a biblical value. Family relationships are, aren't they, one of the most valuable possessions we have. And so my third point is the decisive, the divisive words of Jesus in verse 37. Look at 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. 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 sin will find it. We are so twisted and distorted in our understanding that most of us, when we hear those words, we think those words are very harsh. And even over the top. And I mean live with those words for the last week. I don't think that they are harsh. It's not, it's not that Jesus was deprecating family. It's not that he's putting down family. He is elevating himself. If he was not who he claimed to be, it would be absolutely monstrous. Who is it that calls me to love him more than I love my own father and more than I love my own mother or my own wife? How is it that Jesus calls me to love him more than I love my own wife and my own children? Maybe you want to protest at this point. But just think for a moment.

Think for a moment. In your mind's eye, think about your dad or your mum. And whether they're still alive or not, think about them. I hope that as you think of them right now, I hope that you can think of them with deep, deep affection. It's not always possible, I know that. Some of you have had terrible experiences at the hands of your parents. But we all recognise, don't we, that it shouldn't be like that. Parents should love their children. And children should deeply love and honour their parents. And we owe so much, don't we, to our fathers and our mothers. And they mean so much to us. And now Jesus says to us, in effect, if you know me, you will love me even more than that. And you can say, if you like, well that is asking a lot, that is demanding. Or you might say, yes, I do owe him even more than I owe my parents. Now that I understand what Jesus Christ has done for me, I understand that he means more than my mother or my father. Think about a son, if you have a son, or a daughter, if you have a daughter. How do you feel about them this morning? Don't answer that, some of you. How do you really feel about them? You love them, don't you, very deeply. You actually love them more than you're able to show. Certainly more than you're able to tell them. Certainly and definitely more than they realise. Jesus says, in effect, if you know me, you will love me even more than that. And I want to say to you, does that not tell you about the worthiness of Jesus Christ? More than it tells us about anything else. This is not so much demanding, but showing us what a saviour we have. Do you see what is happening? Jesus is picking up those things that are most precious to us. And he's telling you this morning, and I, there is something even more precious than the most precious thing in your life. And he's saying, if you can't see that, you're missing the point. And if you can't see that, and if you won't see that, even love for your family, as good as though it is, can be twisted and turned into an idolatry. And so he presses in on you this morning, and he says, what is most precious in your life? And that's what he's talking about in verse 38. Let me just finish this up. Verse 38, where he says, anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. And then he says, whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For some people down the years, that verse literally meant martyrdom, didn't it? For some today. Do you see the extraordinary thing Jesus is saying? He's saying, if you lose your life for my sake, you'll be better off than if you saved your life for your own sake. And if we can come to see that that is actually true, that if we can come to see this morning, that it's actually better for me to lose my life in the sense of no longer living for myself. But to lose my life in that sense, in the sense of living it now for the sake of Jesus Christ, that is really better than just living it for myself. What holds people back from acknowledging Jesus Christ before others? What holds us back from acknowledging Jesus Christ before others? It's actually what we love more than him.

And we've got to see, isn't it? Jesus is showing us that these things can be so deceptive. Is it really loving my family to hold back speaking of Jesus? It's not. Indeed, it's not even loving my own life, if that is what keeps me from acknowledging Jesus. It's the surest way to lose my life in the end. And I wonder, what has actually tamed Christians in the UK is our other loves.

[29 : 13] In the last paragraph, really quickly, Jesus underlines the importance of his followers acknowledging him. Because it not only leads to division, but it leads to decision. Look at the way he talks in verse 40. He says, whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one 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. Do you see the principle there? In the first place, this refers, doesn't it, to the apostles who were in front of him. They were the first listeners. Who were sent out by Jesus to preach the gospel. But I don't think for a moment it's restricting to them.

Because don't these words still apply to those who acknowledge Jesus Christ before other people. These are very, very encouraging words from Jesus. That when you acknowledge him publicly, when you speak of him, there will be those who will really surprise you by receiving him. And receiving you. And Jesus says here that it's very, very important. That when you acknowledge him, that a person receives you because you acknowledge him in such circumstances. Here is the amazing truth.

That to receive you is to receive Jesus Christ. And to receive Jesus is to receive God, isn't it? It's explained in verse 41. It's the one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. A prophet is somebody who speaks God's word. And so receiving a prophet

because he is a prophet is more than just being friendly.

[30 : 59] Jesus says anyone who receives a righteous person. Because he is a righteous person. A righteous person is somebody who is in the right with God. So receiving a righteous person is more than just being nice.

Verse 42. And whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water because he is a disciple. Truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. The big point here is this.

People who respond to him, people respond to him by responding to his disciples. People respond to Jesus by responding to his followers, the Christians.

And so that can only happen if you and I are untamed. If we start acknowledging him. How can other people receive Jesus if we won't speak of him?

Because what is at stake is verse 41. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

[32 : 11] They'll receive God's word. And the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. They'll receive God's word.

Which means they'll receive God. So let's hear Jesus' word this morning as I finish. Let's hear Jesus' word and see Christian people in this congregation let loose and tamed.

Our families, our colleagues, our neighbours, our communities, our world, they don't want us to acknowledge Jesus Christ before them. But they need us to. And that is what followers of Jesus Christ do.

Decisive words. Shocking words. Divisive words. As I finished writing this sermon, I read, I'm reading this book by John Fenton who's the editor of Egon Gentiles Now.

And he said this. Today, many Christians are having to wake up to a reality they don't much care for. They may not have been in a long-term coma but they've been asleep spiritually.

[33 : 24] Insulated in the Christian bubble of church, conferences and Christian books. Somehow in denial about what's happened in secular society over the last few decades. And now they are at last becoming conscious of the fact that the world has changed dramatically.

Whereas Christians used to be thought of a bit nutty but basically good folk, dependable citizens, we are increasingly regarded as a bad influence in society.

Christian marriage, which was the foundation of Western society a generation ago, is now ignored and even despised. Freedom of religion and freedom of speech are under attack in the West. Our world has morphed almost out of all recognition.

Things which were once universally regarded as bad are now celebrated as good. It is a woeful situation. Many people, including those in positions of power in politics and the media, are now very antagonistic towards Christianity and the churches.

A cultural revolution has taken place and the old order is gone. The thesis of this chapter and of this sermon is that Christians and Christian leaders must wake up to the fact of this change and that they must realise also that they will need to be increasingly resilient in order to stand and be faithful in this increasingly hostile environment.

[34 : 39] Let's pray. Thank you.