

#New Series: The Hard Sayings of Jesus
“Christ Centered and Cross Ready”
Matthew 10:34-39

Someone once said, "**If you thought that living the Christian life is easy, then you haven't lived it!**" (Quotes & Things, by D. Collins) If we say the Christian life is easy we also haven't read the New Testament and particularly these words of Jesus from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

Reading of scripture

I'll grant you much of the ways of Jesus are simple; but not necessarily easy. I read where one minister boiled these words of Jesus down to four principles. He said the truth from this passage is about division, decision, determination and discovery. (Pastor Guy Calley, sermoncentral.com, 2011) I would have to agree.

Division

In verse 34 when Jesus says, “don't think that I have come to bring peace but a sword,” he was describing that to be in step with God's will there will be the dividing and sorting of our true loyalties. The hard sayings of Jesus will reveal whether we are genuine followers or pretenders. He was teaching that God sees those who are truly seeking to follow him from those who are merely trying to look the part, going through the motions or trying to have life solely on their terms.

I heard about a guy who was working out at a fitness center where you can look out the window as you exercise. He said he was using a treadmill when he saw a small car pull up. Out of the car emerged a man who was good size fellow for such a small car. The man gets out of the car, then reaches back into the car and grabs a gym bag. The gym bag indicated he was planning on

coming into the fitness center to work out. He puts the bag over his shoulder, then reaches back into the car one more time and pulls out a tall drink cup, but in the cup was a red spoon. When the guy working out saw the red spoon he realized what the man had in his hand. The man had a blizzard dessert from Dairy Queen. The guy stood there in front of the fitness center and ate his last few spoonfuls of his blizzard ice cream before he enters the fitness center to work out. He said it struck him how the guy eating the ice cream on one hand wanted to get it shape but yet he didn't want to make the personal sacrifices to really make it happen. (I'm Not a Fan, Idleman, p.143)

Jesus by his very nature will be a source of division because in him there is no sin, no contradiction, no self-serving ill will like we can have. Our tendency is to try mask and cover the ways about us that do not please God. The Bible teaches us in Hebrews 4:12 that God's living truth is **"...sharper than any two edge sword able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."** These words of Jesus would remind us that from God's point of view, we don't live in a "whatever you think is best" universe. It sounds comforting to ourselves when we think that way and say that to one another, "just do whatever you think is best, whatever feels right to you. You won't have any enemies when your motto is live by whatever you think is best. It sounds nice.

Pastor Charles Swindoll interprets this image of sword to mean the following when he writes, "Encountering evil requires sword-like confrontation, not peacekeeping compromise. Stay alert. God's truth has a way of cutting to the heart of a matter. When a clear moral issue is at stake, people-pleasing compromise will tempt us to lay aside the sword of truth. However, we must remember to keep our sword pointed at the issue.

When Jesus says he brings a sword, he intends to divide truth

from falsehood.

Decision/choices v.35-37

What makes Jesus words hard, really tough and challenging is that he demands we make decisions to be loyal and committed to him above all others. Our decision is to keep our lives centered and focused Jesus Christ

Jesus raised the challenge to a whole another level when he talks of setting **father against son daughter against mother...** This is the scripture if misused could paint being a Christian as some cult that turns you against your family. But we know in other teachings Jesus encourages the love and honor of family members, so what it is his point?

N.T. scholar William Barclay states in this passage of scripture there is a principle of spiritual/relational warfare and often that warfare starts in the home. The question is simply this, will we decide to not let even the closest most intimate relationships keep us from following Jesus and his teachings.

This isn't scripture that should be limited to telling parents don't let your kids dictate whether they go to church or not. This isn't scripture to brow beat people about bringing their spouses to church. It's too easy to show up for worship once a week, be on your best behavior, but have the rest of your life, your values, your relationships to be inconsistent with Jesus. This is about an on going decision to put Christ above all others.

This is a hard saying from Jesus about committing to a decision that no relationship whether relative, friend or any other capacity will have a greater influences and direction over us than Christ himself. In the days of Jesus there was no relationship that had more power over you than your immediate family.

Pastor Kyle Idleman tells of preaching in Africa to a group of people and two men in their 20's came forward during the invitation and accepted Christ. The next day those same two men came into camp each carrying with a large bag. They came looking for a place to live because they were no longer welcome to live in their village because they accepted Jesus Christ. Idleman asked the local pastor if they were going to be able to handle the rejection. He said would because they knew this would happen when they made their decision. (I'm Not A Fan, p.145)

N.T scholar William Barclay writes, “...**The fact remains that it is possible for a man's loved ones to become in effect his enemies, if the thought of them keeps him from doing what he knows God wants him to do.**” (Commentary on Matthew p.395)

Determination/crosses v.38

The decisions we make about Christ are not to be deterred no matter what the cost. We are to live our lives Christ centered and cross ready. **Jesus said in verse 38 whoever doesn't take up their cross and follow him is not worthy of him.** We hear this scripture all the time and we think we get it and maybe you get it better than I do. But I read this week and was reminded how strong of a warning and challenge Jesus for what it means to be Christian.

One commentator tells how the people who were listening to Jesus for the first time were also people who probably saw a time when over 2000 crosses lined the road into Jerusalem. And the Romans hung people on those crosses to suffer and die. (Matthew Commentary, Barclay)

One preacher said, “Crosses were instruments of death and the words of Jesus communicate to us we must die to certain realities.”

There needs to be complete determination that no matter what the cost if God is calling us to follow then we follow.

If God's teaching indicates there needs to be a change who we are then we change.

Your cross may be your refusal to do something unethical at your job. Your cross may be to not chime in and be a part of bullying some kids at school and even standing up for that kid that's getting ridiculed.

You know what struck me this week is the word "**whoever.**" Sometimes we avoid living out something that God wants us to do because we believe we have our reasons why we can't carry our cross or we should postpone it. Our reasons often tell God we just don't have time. We just cannot change. We better not take that risk. We don't want to offend. We don't have any abilities God could ever use so we would not get involved. We tell God we couldn't bare the pain or we don't have the patience.

But Jesus simply said whoever is not willing to take up their cross is not worthy of him. He was teaching for us to be Christ centered and cross ready. And scripture like this is a reminder God is not impressed with my reasons to not face what he expects me to face. Jesus is not impressed with why you tell him you cannot _____ go deeper in your relationship with him, give him time, make some change? He said whoever! God will never lead or call us into anything that is wasteful. But if God calls **then determine** to follow no matter what the cost no matter how uncomfortable.

Francis Chan once pointed out that one of the biblical names for the Holy Spirit is the Comforter. He said, but if you are comfortable you don't need comforting. It is only when you are suffering that you need a comforter. It's when you are determined to carry your cross and obey God, even if it hurts or you pay some type of price for obedience that you need comforting. The only way to have the experience of God's comfort is when we are willing to be uncomfortable for his sake. I have to believe and have experience that the comfort God brings because we followed

where he calls is greater than any comfort we can pursue on our own.

Discover v.39

Christ made a promise to those who would stand with him, those who would decide to follow him, those who would be determined to follow him no matter what the cost. Jesus said we would find real life. He said in verse 39 anyone who would loose their life for his sake would find it.

This past week 12 of us drove to Covington to see Mary Helen Ladd in honor of her 92 birthday. I bet most of us thought we were doing something kind to serve her. After all, we we're taking our time to go visit, some brought cards and gifts. We went to serve her, and we we're. But I think we discovered the truth of these words from Jesus about finding real life in our visit with Mary Helen. Mary Helen greeted each person with hug. She asked about how people were, how were their husbands doing. For those she was meeting for the first time she hugged and said it was good to meet them. We were really touched when she took Byllie Thornton's hand and expressed sympathy to Byllie for their loss of Shana. It's like she was ministering us thinking of especially some of the hurts some had gone through. She even displayed her humor. I said to her, that I had to be leaving and get back to church, and she said, why its not going anywhere, it will be there when get home.

I attended along with 3 other folks from our church the funeral on Friday for Dr. Joe Bryant. Many things were mention about the nobleness of his life. He was a man willing to serve medically in Vietnam when he didn't have to. He was a physician who was known to call and check on his patients as times when he didn't need to. He was supportive of clergy even if they were not the pastor of his church. He was remembered as one who often asked

of others, are you okay is there anything you need.

Both Mary Helen and Dr. Bryant are examples of those who discovered true life by following Jesus Christ. Even at the age of 92 Mary Helen was demonstrating the character of Christ in her. Old age and a wheelchair could not prevent the power Christ love being shown through her.

Dr. Bryant leaves a legacy that lives on to challenge and teach any who knew him.

We live every day like that background faces in the crowd with the truth of the cross of Christ amongst us and God waits and watches for our reply to him.