

Rejected: One Way or Another

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: 29 October 2023

Preacher: Robbie Laidlaw

[0 : 0 0] them still. The common attitude today is you want to be on the winning side. You want to come out on top. So until it's made clear who's going to win, you support both sides. You got a both-colored scarf. But sometimes we don't get to play both sides. Sometimes we need to make a choice and back one team over the other. Tonight in Matthew, Jesus is telling us that we don't get to wear a scarf that has the colors of the kingdom of God and the world on it. We don't get to pretend to be on both teams. Instead, Jesus is saying we need to choose. We need to back somebody, either Jesus and his message and his kingdom or the world we live in just now. We saw last week in the first half of this chapter, we're in the middle of a teaching block that Jesus is giving to his disciples as he sends them out on his mission. Jesus has given his disciples his authority to go and preach the kingdom of God, that preach the same message Jesus is preaching. And he's given them the power to do signs to prove that they are of Jesus. But he's also let them and us know that it's not going to go smoothly. Jesus warns them that they will be hated and rejected. They will be beaten and killed.

But the disciples are not to be afraid because Jesus promises them they go out with the help of the Spirit and under the care of their heavenly Father. So tonight, as Jesus continues this set of teaching, he actually builds on that comfort by explaining why people might do what they do, why people will stand up for him, what is the reward of taking on such pain and suffering. But he also deepens where that suffering is going to come from. So tonight, we're going to see those two things, the cost and reward of standing for Christ. Now, I wonder how you felt as this passage was read out. It is really intense. Let me read verse 34. If you look with me in your Bibles, I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. That is really difficult to hear and read. This has been such a hard sermon to get through as this week. I've just found it so difficult to figure this out and figure a way to preach it. It doesn't sound like our normal picture of Jesus. What's happened to the Prince of Peace? Why is he bringing a sword? What does that mean? Well, it is important to say at no point does Jesus stop being the Prince of Peace. Instead, what's happening is Jesus is, he's not telling his primary objective here, right? Jesus has not come deliberately to separate families. Jesus doesn't say to his followers, go and get rid of your parents. No. In Matthew 9, 13, Jesus says that he's come to call sinners.

[2 : 5 2] That's his primary objective. He's come to bring peace between his father and sinful humanity. Division is not the primary goal, but Jesus knows that as he brings about reconciliation between sinners and the father, the world will reject those people who've come to him.

Jesus knows that as people come to him and accept his message, they will be so transformed that they will clash against the society they've come from. These people will be like, they'll be new people. Their desires and actions will be like those of a new person. What they now see as good because they follow Jesus will contrast with what the world sees as good. And the world we live in does not like being told that it is wrong. Moral statements can be so vociferously rejected because everybody else thinks they know best, and to tell them they're wrong is one of the worst things you could do. Dark things do not like the light. In fact, I'm sure we all know that the appearance of light intensifies darkness. We're made more aware of the dark when the light comes on.

That is exactly what Jesus experienced. The light of the world came in and yet was completely rejected. The darkness tried to smother the light, and we are to expect the same thing. So that's what Jesus means when he says he's not come to bring peace with a sword. He knows his message and his goal will bring his people in conflict with the world around them. The specific example Jesus uses is that of family. He introduced this theme back in verse 21. Even our families

who reject Jesus reject him so much they will reject us too. This is a really known fact for a lot of people. I'm sure many people tonight have experienced this. You've come to know Jesus, and all of a sudden your family have distanced themselves from you. Some of us will have dads who won't talk to us on Sundays. We'll have brothers and sisters who no longer want to hang out with us because we've become those pesky Christians.

We'll not be invited to our auntie and uncle's house for the big parties. None of us should be surprised if we're cut out from the family inheritance because we chose Jesus over our family. This rejection can come from the most unexpected places. We think our family are going to be on our sides until we tell them, no, we've chosen Jesus and to live for him.

And then suddenly doors are swung shut. The world we are in is not neutral. Too often we think as we live in our workplaces that everyone around us is in a neutral position, they're just waiting to hear about Jesus and then they'll come on his side. But actually we are in enemy territory. That is what Jesus says. We love to think the world is neutral. And actually when they hear Christ's message that the kingdom has come, they'll cast off their half and half scarves and they'll bring on the colors of Jesus. But the reality is that they're hostile. We don't get to remain neutral either.

[6 : 13] If we are choosing to follow Christ, we need to be fully on his sides. We can't love our friends or family more than Jesus. That's what verse 37 says. Presents us with a very real choice. Whose side are we on?

If we try and wear our jewel-colored scarves, then actually we're not neutral, we're not in the middle, we're not playing both sides, but we're rejecting Jesus. To put anything above him is to not live with Jesus as our king. This is really shocking. Please don't think that I'm here trying to write off the shock of being told that father will turn against son and mother against daughter. We live in a culture where family means so much. Blood is thicker than water. Some of us come from other cultures where family is the important thing. Where to turn from your family is to be excommunicated from your whole community. Jesus isn't saying we have got to stop loving our family if they don't love Jesus.

Jesus isn't presenting an option that it's family or Jesus, but he is saying when push comes to shove, if it's back Jesus or back your family, we need to choose Christ. He should have our primary attention above all else. When your parents tell you that if you give up that really well-paid job that they funded your training for to go become a missionary in a foreign country or even here in the UK, that then you're not welcome at Christmas anymore. If your parents tell you that, you need to back Jesus and the thing he's called you to do.

When your brother or sister or cousins constantly belittle you and your dumb Jesus, when they keep calling you hateful because of your views on ethical issues, are you going to just accept it and actually maybe ease off on the Jesus stuff?

Or are you going to say, no, if this Jesus is true, if he is my king, I will live for him no matter what. Jesus is calling us to represent him in the hardest places when rejection feels most guaranteed. But this isn't seen as an easy choice. Jesus isn't giving us something simple to do. He acknowledges how hard it is. Look at verse 38 with me now.

[8 : 40] Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. We throw the phrase, I had to bear my cross around a lot today, but really it means something more than just bearing with a mildly annoying flatmate in a nice manner.

To take up your cross is to come to the end of all hope of life. To take up your cross is to face the certainty of a coming death.

In the Roman world, to carry a cross was not a mildly inconvenient thing. It was guaranteed death. And the death Jesus is calling us to here is a death to self.

It is death to our worldly desires, our relationships, the values and goals we've set for ourself according to what the world tells us. To bear our cross is to submit totally to the way of Jesus.

The way of the cross is to waive all rights to a life of ease and comfort. But the way of the cross is the only way to true life.

[9 : 52] Look at that in verse 39. Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. But whoever finds their life will lose it. Siding with Christ over our friends and families when they come into conflict is no simple thing.

In fact, it probably will be one of the hardest things you ever do. Jesus doesn't call us to this death arbitrarily. We take this way of the cross because Jesus took it first.

When we remember that Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life. Jesus was light itself, yet the world in all its darkness did not accept him. He bore his cross.

He carried it to the most painful death. He died so that we might be rescued from the darkness. He died in our place to rescue sinners from their sin.

So to take up the cross and live a life that is the way of the cross is to put on Christ's colors. It is to identify yourself fully with his kingdom that is coming.

[11 : 05] And to be in his kingdom is to receive life. Because that is the outcome of loving Christ above all else. Whoever loses their life for my sake will find life.

Jesus says the same thing in a similar way. So I want to read verse 32 to 33 with me as we look at what this reward looks like. Verse 32. Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. If we stand up now and face rejection for Christ, then Christ will stand up before his Father and acknowledge us. Now to be acknowledged before the Father is to receive full acceptance and even adoption into the Father's family. The Bible tells us that every single person will stand before the Father's throne and face a judgment.

And when we do stand before him, we have two options. We're either going to be accepted by him or rejected. That's it. There's no in between. And how we are received by the Father depends entirely on how he sees us.

[12 : 28] And Jesus is telling us how the Father sees us relies entirely on what Jesus says. Again, there are two options. Either he will acknowledge us or he will disown us.

So what Jesus says in that heavenly courtroom will depend entirely on what we do here in this world. Now, it's worth saying that acknowledging Jesus isn't a work that is worth our salvation.

We don't earn it by standing up for him. But rather, when we stand up before others in this world and acknowledge Jesus, we are giving a sure sign that we are siding with the King.

To acknowledge who Jesus is and what he's done for us is to throw off that half-and-half scarf. It's to get rid of the colors of the world and be completely identified with who Jesus is. To acknowledge Christ before others is faith.

As we've seen, this will have great cost, but the reward is greater. If you stand for Jesus now when the pressure is high, he will stand before the Father and acknowledge you.

[13 : 37] Jesus will say, Father, he is mine. He will say, Father, she spoke up for me when no one else would. So I stand before you for them.

And he will stand with you for eternity. These verses would have given the disciples confidence to stand before the councils and kings of the Gentiles and Jewish people and to tell of Christ's kingdom, even though they knew what was coming their way.

They knew that death awaited them. Floggings and beatings and all the horrible things that the world could throw at them. They would be able to stand saying, if I do this now, Jesus will claim me as his own and the Father will welcome me into his heavenly family.

It can encourage us the exact same way to go and stand with Christ and to nail our colors to the mast. So often we will be given the choice by the people we speak to, to either stand up and defend Christ or to just kind of slip away into the backgrounds.

Just let the conversation pass us by. And sometimes it will even lead to absolutely rejecting Jesus and saying, I don't know him. I don't follow him. No, no, no. I don't believe that thing that he says.

[14 : 59] No, no, no. That's not what I think of. Jesus' words are sure. Those who stand by his sides here will have Jesus on their side forevermore.

Now, as I said, it may seem the obvious way to avoid this rejection is to just keep your head down. Maybe you're thinking tonight, oh yeah, I know that it says that, but actually maybe I can get away with doing both.

Maybe if I just avoid the conversations completely. I don't reject him. I just don't speak up. If I keep church to Sunday, you know, I'll be a Christian on Sunday and the rest of the week I'll try my best, but you know, if it doesn't come up, that's okay.

Essentially, you might be thinking you want to keep your half and half scarf. Jesus makes it clear that that isn't going to work. There is no such thing as a private faith. We can't keep it only to Sundays.

There is no option in this passage to avoid rejection at all. The option is either we are rejected now by the world or in heaven by the Father forever.

[16:03] Rejection is certain for every single one of us. We just get to choose when it happens. If we keep our faith on the Sundays and avoid rejection of the world, then in the heavenly courtroom we will be disowned.

Jesus will look at us and say, he is not mine. She's not one of our people. In one level, it seems like this is quite one for one.

Reject in this world. Be rejected in this world. Be accepted in the next. Be accepted in this world. Be rejected in the next. If you acknowledge Christ here, you'll be acknowledged then.

Maybe you're not a Christian. Actually, this sounds really foreign to you. It sounds really intense. Perhaps you're not quite sure while you're sitting here today. Well, please don't feel alone. Just because you're not a Christian doesn't mean you're the only one in this room who finds this hard. In fact, it goes against every one of our natures. At our core, we are all bent inwards.

Self-preservation is always the top priority in this life. So why on earth would you align with Jesus if it's going to cost you so much here and now?

[17:19] Eternal life doesn't actually seem so great. If you think it's only going to be like life now but forever. If we want to see why eternity is going to be so good.

If we want to see why facing rejection now is going to be worth it. Well, we need to understand who Jesus really is. Because he's the one we'll be with forevermore. And so far in Matthew, we've seen that Jesus cares for every person he meets.

Jesus has been healing and casting out demons. Later on in Matthew, we're going to see that he has power over nature, over evil, over sickness, even over death. And this Jesus who has power over those things is using that power to dispel him from the world.

To show what his kingdom is really like. These stories in his life are a taster of what we're promised for all eternity. Eternity with Jesus isn't like now but longer.

It's not like now but, you know, slightly better. To live with Christ forever is to live in the recreated world. With none of the things that makes this world so hard.

[18:26] There will be no sickness or sadness. No death or disease. To live with Christ and be acknowledged is to live as we were made to live. If you don't know really who Jesus is, then can I invite you to something that Andrew mentioned earlier, the life course.

It starts in November and it's a great place for you to come and talk to people about who Jesus is. Ask the big questions you have. Or if that's absolutely terrifying, that's okay. We actually have a few copies of stories of Jesus' life up the back corner of our bookstall.

Why not take one and read it? If you want to know who Jesus is and what life will be like with him, you need to get to know him. Find out who he is and why he is worth giving up everything for. Because he really is. Life with him isn't just something to be like, okay, cool, it's going to happen. It is the greatest joy we will ever experience. The promise of life with Christ forever is worth facing rejection now.

But actually, there's another reason that it's worth facing rejection. We're to acknowledge Christ before others. We're to lose our life for Jesus' sake.

[19:38] It's quite easy to read this passage and actually think about this in like a one-for-one reward system. That if we do the thing, then we get the good future and that's it. But actually, we don't only speak for Christ now to secure our eternal future.

It's not only about me. It's not a selfish thing. Actually, Jesus tells us that if we stand up for Christ now in the face of the world's rejection, we have the opportunity that others might see him and welcome him.

As we take up our cross, the world sees afresh in us the Christian way of living. I think that's partly what's going on in the last little section.

Let me read verses 40 to 42 for us. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me. And anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's rewards.

And whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's rewards. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their rewards.

[20 : 49] Now, in one way, this is a passage that we can apply to ourselves as the welcomers. It's another example of how we can stand with Christ in this world. Jesus says that if you welcome one of the apostles, it is to welcome him.

Jesus is so identifying himself with his message and his messengers that to welcome them is to welcome Jesus.

In many ways, this is the positive side of the negative thing we've seen so far. If you side with Christ's messengers, you are siding with him.

And you will receive the great rewards. To welcome his people is to surely not lose the gift that he's given you. That is worth thinking about.

How can we today be welcoming Christ's messengers in this world? How can we look after our missionaries and supporting them because of what they're doing for Christ wherever they are? How can we love them and care for them and so identify with the work they're doing that we can be said that we are doing it with them?

[22 : 00] This is not just because of social cues, but because they are doing work for the Lord. The more we identify ourselves with them, offering even just a glass of water because they belong to Christ, the more we identify with Jesus.

And that is a fruitful line of thinking. And I encourage you all to go home and think about that. How can we so identify with his messengers? But I think the other reason I was talking about that we get from this passage is that we are not only the welcomers, but we are the ones bringing the message. Not only are we to care for those who speak, we are to speak for Christ in front of others. Earlier in the chapter, in verses 12 to 14, Jesus has been talking about how the disciples should treat people who welcome them or reject them.

If the disciples don't find anyone worthy, they're to wipe the dust off their feet and find somebody new. But what does it mean to be worthy of the apostles? Well, verses 14 and 42 tell us, If we take this seriously and go out standing for Christ, acknowledging him in the face of persecution and pain and rejection, we might have 10 people rejecting us.

But if one person hears and sees what we are doing for the sake of Jesus and accepts you because of the thing you've said or shown about Christ, then they're going to receive a righteous reward.

[23 : 34] That's what this is saying. Anyone who welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. If anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these who's my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose the rewards.

Jesus doesn't send us out to a hostile world because he's a bit of a masochist and enjoys watching us suffer. He calls us to stand up for him in a world so that other people can hear the good news of Christ and come to him.

In sending out people with his message, we see Jesus' compassion for the lost. This is how he plans to rescue sinners, which is the primary reason Jesus came.

If we stand up for Christ now, not only do we find life in him, but we also take our place in Christ's great plan to bring light to those in darkness.

The thing about half and half scarves is that actually we're never showing which one we think is right. We can't be of the world and of the kingdom. And actually, it brings the kingdom into a bit of disrepute.

[24 : 47] If people think, well, Jesus isn't so worth loving that they'll get rid of anything else. Why would I go for it? But actually, when we take off those scarves, when we put on the colors of Christ and stand before the world, presenting the Jesus-given gospel, as we bear our crosses, as we tell people about how great Jesus is, someone might just welcome him into their lives.

They might just join the kingdom and put on the colors for themselves. This is so often how the church has grown in persecuted countries, both historically and still today.

People see the suffering and want to know, why on earth are people giving up their lives for this man who died 2,000 years ago? And they're doing it because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took up his cross to rescue them from their sin, to rescue me from my sin, to rescue you from your sin.

And if he's willing to give that up for me, all that he has, then I can give up whatever there is in this world. It won't be easy.

We will need his strength and the spirit and the care of the Father, as we've seen already in Matthew 10. We may face the worst harm and hardship that we can imagine. We may be rejected by our parents, our brothers and sisters, our friends, anyone in our families.

[26 : 18] But if we stand up and acknowledge Christ before all others, we can be assured that he will say, he is mine. She is mine. All we need is to stand up with the strength of Christ behind us and say, no, Christ is mine.

Now and forever. Let me pray. Father God, we thank you that you sent your Son for us. Lord, help us to see that in him is life and he offers us more than the world ever can.

Lord, we know that we will face rejection for you. We ask that you would help us to continue to stand for Christ, to nail our colors to the masts.

Lord, we cannot do this without you. And so we ask for your help through the Spirit to strengthen us this week to acknowledge you wherever we are. We pray these things in your Son's precious name. Amen. Amen.