MATTHEW

WESLEY BIBLE STUDIES
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Three-and-a-half years is not a long time. It is barely enough time to embark on a world-changing venture, let alone complete one. Yet in just that short length of time, Jesus Christ defined a way of life through His words and actions that radically altered the course of human history.

There are many ways to approach the study of Christ. Some approaches would focus on His self-understanding, rightly emphasizing His identity as the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Others would examine the deeds of Jesus, emphasizing the divine power displayed through His miracles and justifiably celebrating His resurrection from the dead. Either approach would yield an accurate picture of Christ and lead students to truth.

Our approach will be slightly different, however. In this study, we will focus on the words of Jesus, examining some of His most powerful teachings as recorded by Matthew, the tax collector turned apostle. Here are some of the takeaways you will discover in these powerful lessons.

GOD’S BLESSING COMES IN UNLIKELY WAYS

Jesus’ masterwork of theology, the passage of Scripture we know as the Sermon on the Mount, provides the context for four studies in this book. In the Beatitudes, those beautiful yet disturbing pronouncements of blessing, Jesus teaches us that God’s best for us is not always what we would consider best for ourselves. The
more we try to impress others, the less we impress God. The more we seek for ourselves, the less we are likely to gain. God’s view of the world and our view are, well, different. Jesus teaches us that our best hope for a happy life, both now and later, is to trust God with childlike faith. That doesn’t come naturally to most of us. These readings will challenge you to make your life more like Christ in everyday ways.

**FOLLOWING JESUS CALLS FOR TOTAL COMMITMENT**

The cost of discipleship is a favorite subject for Jesus. Realizing that many of the eager crowds who followed Him during the early days of His ministry were more interested in show than in grow, Jesus intentionally upped the ante for His followers. To be a disciple of Christ calls for an open mind, total commitment, and complete obedience.

While we say that our world is ever changing, the human penchant for easy solutions and nominal commitment seems constant. In this study, you will be challenged to examine the strength of your faith and the depth of your commitment to Jesus Christ.

**AS CHANGED PEOPLE, WE CHANGE THE WORLD**

The gospel is powerful and effective. It will have an effect upon your life, and you, in turn, will have a revolutionary effect upon the world. Over and over, Jesus made these points in His teaching. Yes, you really can enjoy God’s blessing. Yes, it is possible to fully and freely forgive those who have wronged you. Better yet, this new society we have formed—this kingdom of heaven—will grow from just a few comrades in faith to become a great force in the world. When you forgive, when you love others, when you perform acts of kindness in the name of Jesus Christ, you are quite literally changing the world. You will be motivated to allow God’s grace to work in your life and to offer that grace to others.
In this study, we have the pleasure of studying both the first arrival of Jesus, as a child in Bethlehem, and His second advent, as the Judge of all the earth. Let these words from Christ move you the way they moved His first hearers—to experience God’s blessing in surprising ways.
Life is incredibly busy, and most people are forced to juggle many responsibilities. In the age in which we live, there are no clear lines between homemaker and accountant, dad and soccer coach, or church member and CEO. We all must manage many priorities each week, and all of them are important. Is it possible to have ten number-one priorities?

According to Jesus, the answer is no. Only one thing will have an ultimate claim on our attention, energy, and passion. We may choose family, career, success, health, or Christ as our first priority, but we cannot choose to honor them all equally.

This study will challenge you to examine your priorities and put Jesus Christ first in your life.

**COMMENTARY**

The context of this passage is Jesus calling and sending His disciples. Before looking at this context, we need to review. First, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presented a theology of Christian faith and living. Rather than living as a sinful or selfish person, a Christian should live according to God’s value system.

Second, Jesus performed a series of miracles. Many people received a “touch of the Master’s hand” (Matt. 8:1—9:34). As a result of this ministry, three things became apparent: (1) There were many needy people; (2) Jesus had an important ministry to these people; and (3) more workers were needed.
The urgency of preaching the gospel of the kingdom and the magnitude of the needy people are the pressures under which Jesus selected and prepared His disciples for their work (9:35—10:42). He requested the disciples to pray for laborers. He then appointed the Twelve. He taught them how their needs would be supplied and how to minister, and warned them about the conflicts they would encounter.

In this passage, He talked to them about the depth of discipleship they would need. Not just the Twelve, but all who want to be His disciples need to check their attitudes, value systems, and priorities to see if we are effective servants of Jesus.

Jesus is calling His disciples to a commitment of devotion, a reevaluation of priorities, and a reconsideration of the cost of discipleship. It is true that a disciple cannot earn merit toward salvation. We are saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8–9). It is also true that it is not always popular or easy to be a witness. Sometimes a disciple is the only one in his or her group who professes faith in Jesus. At times not only individuals but whole groups of Christians have been persecuted. God’s people have paid huge prices for their faith.

This study calls for a confession of Christ, a supreme love for Christ that is worthy of Him, and a proper understanding of God’s rewards.

Confessing Christ (Matt. 10:32–33)

In verses 32–33, Jesus offers His disciples two opposite conditional relationships. In simple terms, He is saying, “If you confess Me, then I will confess you. But if you deny Me, then I will deny you.” The structure of the two opposite conditions does not permit one to choose one condition and expect the opposite response. If a person wants Jesus to confess him or her to God the Father, then he or she must fulfill the prerequisite condition to receive that reward. In today’s churches many people
have excused their failure of confessing Christ by saying that Jesus understands. He does. He understands denying Him reveals a broken relationship.

The Greek word for confess means to say the same thing. If a man named John is asked, “Is your name John?” the correct answer is “Yes, my name is John.” Confession doesn’t find ways to circumvent or evade the truth. When it comes to confession, Christ gives us two categories: confess or deny. The answer is either a confession or a denial of Him.

Sometimes it is difficult to confess Christ. In the verses preceding this passage, Jesus warned of opposition and persecution. Ever since the first generation of Christians, when Saul was leading the persecution, some have confessed Christ as martyrs. The word martyr is a transliteration of the phrase to witness. Christians have often witnessed for their faith in Christ in difficult situations, even as martyrs.

WORDS FROM WESLEY
Matthew 10:32–33
Thy confessor in deed and word,
Before the sons of men,
In all the tempers of my Lord
I would Thy cause maintain:
And if my Lord I thus confess,
Thou wilt Thy servant own,
Present before Thy Father’s face,
And place me on Thy throne.
Ah, wretched souls, who urged by shame
Desert your Master’s cause,
Before the world deny His name,
And stumble at His cross!
Disown’d before the heavenly host,
Ye shall receive your hire,
Out from His glorious presence thrust
Into eternal fire. (PW, vol. 10, 329)
If people fail to confess Christ, they have not only denied Him, but they have also denied their faith relationship with Him. Whether or not Jesus confesses us to His Father is intrinsically linked to our confession or lack thereof. This may seem hard, but a government expects its citizens to confess their homeland. A wife expects her husband to confess that he is married and intends to remain true to her. Christ expects Christians to do as much.

While Jesus stood trial before the high priest, Peter was accused of being one of His followers. Rather than confessing his allegiance, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Later, Peter repented and Jesus restored him. Even though it can be difficult, Jesus calls His followers to confess Him.

**Commitment Worthy of Christ (Matt. 10:34–39)**

Since Christians have experienced God’s love, they desire to share it with others. Since God’s love has infused a genuine love in the Christian’s own heart, he or she desires to give and receive *agape* love. The desire for peace is strong in Christians.

In the Jewish mind, the word *peace* often meant more than an end of fighting. If a person said “Peace” to another person, it also included a desire for all of God’s blessing to be given to that person.

Jesus said He did not come to bring peace (v. 34). If the Prince of Peace did not come to bring peace, why did He come? He came to die, to atone for our sins. Jesus did not come so we could feel good with everyone, but to be our Savior.

Jesus came to bring the sword (v. 34). This sword was not a military weapon symbolizing power and splendor, but a long knife used for killing small animals and slicing meat, as a knife used in butchering. Even though Christians desire peace and love, this vivid picture predicts rejection, hostility, and persecution.

The strongest emotional bonds are those between parents and children. Yet Jesus said He came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother (v. 35). He was saying
that these strong ties may be painfully tested in regard to the kingdom of God when some family members accept Christ and others reject Him. In spite of our love, we may still feel the pain of the sword of conflict in our hearts.

Are we willing to place our love for Christ above human relationships?

**Words from Wesley**

*Matthew 10:34*

For *Think not that I am come*—That is, think not that universal peace will be the immediate consequence of my coming. Just the contrary. Both public and private divisions will follow, wheresoever my Gospel comes with power. Yet this is not the design, though it be the event of his coming, through the opposition of devils and men. (ENNT)

Jesus is calling on His disciples to love Him **more than** (v. 37) they love their parents and children. He wants a love that surpasses the strongest love we possess. Anything less than first place puts Christ beneath the level of acceptable love. An inferior love for Jesus is not worthy of Him.

If we love anyone more than we love Jesus, then that person should be the object of our worship. Worship springs from the idea of “worthship,” of being worthy of adoration. Worship is an act we render to the one we admire most. To love someone more than we love Jesus and then attempt to worship Jesus is incongruent and a conflict of ideas.

Are we willing to love Christ more than we love our own relationships and interests?

A disciple’s love for Christ is to surpass everything, even life itself. **Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me** (v. 38) calls the disciples to the superlative
degree of love. Not only is our love to be the highest, but since Jesus spoke in the present tense, it is to be continually practiced. Daily, all of our Christian life, we are to take up our cross.

“Taking up our cross” is asking us, “For what are we willing to die?” Are we willing to lose our lives for Christ? Ironically, whoever loses his life for Christ will find it (v. 39). Those who seek to find their life apart from a faith commitment to Jesus Christ miss important elements of life.

Christ’s Commissions (Matt. 10:40–42)

In the preceding verses, Jesus addressed His disciples. But in this section, He addresses those who will meet the disciples. Jesus is offering a series of rewards to those who accept His disciples and work to support them. These promises could be understood as blessings for those who help send missionaries and support their pastors by helping them in their ministry.

A reward is offered to those who receive His disciples. Not only that, but he who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me (v. 40). Those who receive the gospel receive a relationship with God the Father. The first reward is saving faith. The second reward Jesus expresses is the prophet’s and righteous man’s reward (v. 41). Jesus said anyone who received a prophet or a righteous person would receive the same type of reward. So, what are those rewards?

Let’s first look at the righteous person’s reward. Do righteous people get paid for keeping the Ten Commandments, attending worship services, and doing noble things at home and in society? Of course not. The righteous person’s reward is his or her personal relationship with God and the personal assurance that they have been true to their Lord and to themselves.

What is the reward of the prophet? The Bible answers this question in several different ways.
The prophet’s remuneration is seldom mentioned in the Bible. Elijah was fed by the ravens, indicating that he was not paid during that terrible time of famine. Jeremiah, instead of being paid for his work, watched his book destroyed and then was placed in prison. From a financial and personal perspective, he would have been in better condition if he had not ministered. Some prophets, like Ezekiel, suffered the calamity of being taken prisoner of war along with others. They felt that their ministry was to a congregation of “dry bones.” Their hearts were so broken that instead of singing praise to God, they hung up their harps and wept (Ps. 137).

The prophet’s reward was greater than his pay. How much money is the book of Jeremiah worth? How much is the book of Isaiah worth? How valuable was the ministry of Elijah and Elisha? The value of a prophet is more than his or her pay. God’s payday is not just on Friday. The greatest reward a prophet receives is the knowledge that he or she has fulfilled the calling of God, which money cannot buy.

In His third reward, Jesus is promising a blessing, even a payment, for giving aid to His servants. He is offering to bless one of the most common courtesies, giving a cup of cold water. Since Jesus takes note of such small act, shouldn’t every Christian take the cup of cold water test (Matt. 10:42)? Just ask yourself, “Am I aiding or hindering the ministry of my church?”

God blesses those who pass the test. Among the common factors in healthy growing churches are a love for their pastor and the church ministries, and members’ joyful help in ministry. Likewise, declining churches exhibit members’ disharmony with their pastor and an unwillingness of members to participate in church ministry.

Jesus knew that not everyone would love Him supremely. Many would deny any relationship with Him. But Jesus called His disciples to help Him with His ministry. He challenged them to be committed to Him. He asked them to love Him more than
they loved anyone else. Jesus was not only going to bless them, but also those who helped His disciples. And He asks the same of us today.

**WORDS FROM WESLEY**

*Matthew 10:42*

How small the gift it matters not  
Given for the sake of Christ the Lord,  
It cannot be by Christ forgot,  
Or lose its infinite reward.  
A cup of water shall procure  
(Bestow’d for Jesus’ sake alone)  
Rivers of life, and raptures pure,  
Which flow perennial from His throne. (PW, vol. 10, 244)

For those who receive the gospel, there is saving faith. Those who receive the ministry and support it will receive the same type of reward as the one doing it. Yes, even a cup of cold water in His name will be remembered.
DISCUSSION

When serving Christ is our priority, our faithfulness to Him will impact every decision we make.

1. What single word do you think best describes this teaching by Jesus?
2. What do you think the word *despise* means in this context?
3. In what ways did Jesus’ life bring peace to earth? What divisions has it caused?
4. Why would Christ come between father and son or mother and daughter?
5. In practical terms, what do you think it means to forget self and become lost in God?
6. Jesus’ message here lets followers know they are in for challenging times. In what ways do we present that message to new believers today?
7. React to this statement: “There is no such thing as cozy Christianity.”
8. Based on this passage, what is the relationship between faith and action? How does this compare with other Bible passages you may know?
9. Jesus mentions a reward for those who receive Him. What do you think that reward is?
10. In what ways can we support one another in following Christ?

PRAYER

Father, we acknowledge our allegiance to Jesus Christ, Your Son. Help us take up our crosses and follow Him every day. Amen.
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