

LESSON FIVE

FOLLOWING CHRIST

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.

MATTHEW 10:38-39 NKJV



REFLECTION

The so-called health-and-wealth gospel says that because Christians are the “King’s kids,” we are entitled to a life of abundance and blessing. If we’ll just live by faith, we will be immune from disaster and distress. We will experience favor from both God and men. What do you think about such “prosperity” teaching? Is it biblical? Why or why not?

SITUATION

Conventional wisdom during the time of Christ said that people only suffered as a result of divine punishment. Got difficulty in your life? Hey, that’s conclusive proof that you must not be living in a way that pleases God. Jesus torpedoed this kind of thinking by telling his followers they should expect a life of persecution. Obedience to Christ will bring trouble from the world.

OBSERVATION

Read Matthew 10:24–42 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

²⁴ “The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like

their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

²⁶ “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

³² “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ 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—

³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”

³⁷ “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. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. ⁴² 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 reward.”

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

²⁴ "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! ²⁶ Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

²⁷ "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. ³⁰ But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

³⁴ "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; ³⁶ and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' ³⁷ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. ⁴¹ He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

EXPLORATION

1. What is the disturbing "promise" that Jesus gives in verses 24-25?

2. Why does Jesus suggest it is foolish to be afraid of people?

3. What examples does Jesus use to convey the idea that God really is looking out for us?

4. What rewards does Christ promise to those who faithfully follow him?

5. What does Jesus say is the cost for following him? What does it mean to "take up your cross" and follow him?

6. Looking back over this section, do you find it more disturbing or more comforting? Why?

INSPIRATION

The story is told of a man on an African safari deep in the jungle. The guide before him had a machete and was whacking away the tall weeds and thick underbrush. The traveler, wearied and hot, asked in frustration, "Where are we? Do you know where you are taking me? Where is the path?!" The seasoned guide stopped and looked back at the man and replied, "I am the path."

We ask the same questions, don't we? We ask God, "Where are you taking me? Where is the path?" And he, like the guide, doesn't tell us. Oh, he may give us a hint or two, but that's all. If he did, would we understand? Would we comprehend our location? No, like the traveler, we are unacquainted with this jungle. So rather than give us an answer, Jesus gives us a far greater gift. He gives us himself.

Does he remove the jungle? No, the vegetation is still thick.

Does he purge the predators? No, danger still lurks. Jesus doesn't give hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us himself. And he has promised to stay until the very end. "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20).

We need that reminder. We all need that reminder. For all of us need hope.

Some of you don't need it right now. Your jungle has become a meadow and your journey a delight. If such is the case, congratulations. But remember—we do not know what tomorrow holds. We do not know where this road will lead. You may be one turn from a cemetery, from a hospital bed, from an empty house. You may be a bend in the road from

a jungle. And though you don't need your hope restored today, you may tomorrow. And you need to know to whom to turn.

Or perhaps you do need hope today. You know you were not made for this place. You know you are not equipped. You want someone to lead you out. If so, call out for your Shepherd. He knows your voice. And he's just waiting for your request. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. Does following Christ ever feel like this to you—like hacking your way through a wild jungle with no clear sense of direction? Why?

8. Given Jesus' stark and sobering in Matthew 10:24–42, what kind of reception should you expect as you live out your faith in the world, at work, in the neighborhood, at school?

9. What are some specific ways a follower of Jesus can acknowledge him before other people?

10. What do you think Jesus means when he speaks of losing your life for his sake? It sounds radical and scary—but what does this look like in everyday terms?

11. What have been the highlights and lowlights in your time as a follower of Jesus?

12. What are your most consistent struggles in trying to walk with Christ on a daily basis?

LIFE LESSONS

We need to remember the first disciples were ordinary men called to an extraordinary mission. Before we turned them into stain-glassed saints in the windows of our cathedrals, Peter, John, and all the rest were just regular guys, trying to make a living and get along in life. They weren't seminary grads or spiritual giants. They didn't possess superhuman qualities. The most we can say about them is that their devotion to Jesus outweighed—by a hair—their fears and insecurities. As a result, God changed them and used them to accomplish some mind-boggling things. Why couldn't God—why *wouldn't* God—do the same thing in and through you and me?

DEVOTION

Lord, you haven't called me to a life of ease and comfort. You have called me to a life of trust and obedience. Help me to grow in you. Help me to daily know what it means to take up my cross and follow you. And help me resist the common but erroneous notion that following you will be anything but difficult.

JOURNALING

What are your biggest struggles just now? In light of what you've just studied, how might God be working in spite of your troubles?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Matthew during this twelve-part study, read Matthew 10:1-42. For more Bible passages on what it means to follow Christ, read Psalm 15; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:25-35; and 2 Timothy 2:1-7.