

*No One Like Jesus: The Storm Before The Calm*  
*By Jason Huff*  
*May 15, 2016*  
*Micah 7:5-9; Romans 6:16-23; Matthew 10:34-42*

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Matthew 10:34-42. May God add His blessing on the reading of His holy Word. “[Jesus continued,] “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. 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.’ Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who 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 sake will find it. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.””

“Comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.” That phrase was coined in 1902 by Finley Peter Dunne, a journalist poking fun at how important the newspapers thought they were in bringing down corruption and lifting up the little man – when in reality turn-of-the-century newspapers dragged people through the mud to sell more papers.

But in 1987, author Martin Marty brought new life to the phrase “comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable” when he applied it not to newspapers but to the ministry of Jesus. Jesus goes to the poor, the helpless, the hurting, and the lost, and He brings them relief. He gives them healing and hope. But when Jesus deals with the comfortable people – the religious leaders so certain of themselves and their authority, the rich, the self-righteous – things get ugly.

Jesus is complex. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and yet He is also the gentle lamb slain to cover our sins. Jesus’ teaching is just as complex. As He finishes His instructions to the apostles before sending them out to minister on their own for a while, He challenges conventional ways of thinking. He promises comfort to those who give all for Him while He warns against sentimentalism and play-acting instead of genuine faith.

He starts out very pointedly: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Then He quotes Micah 7, promising He will divide households. This should perk up our ears. This sounds contradictory to what we’ve been taught about the Messiah. In the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6, Jesus is foretold to be the “prince of peace.” Isaiah 53:5 describes how Christ’s punishment brought us peace. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “in me you may have peace.” Acts 10 describes Jesus’ work on the cross as “the good news of peace.” Through faith, Romans 5:1 teaches, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So what is Jesus getting at?

Jesus does bring peace. His perfect life and atoning death on the cross brought an end to hostilities between us and God. We can live at peace knowing He loves us and controls our eternity. When we are found by Jesus, we are unified and given peace with people very different from us because we are brought together into the family of God. Jesus is the only path to true peace. Believing in Him and following Him is the only way to reconciliation with the Father.

But the peace that Jesus brings to believers terrifies the world. The world is threatened by a faith where God cannot be manipulated and whose followers cannot be bought. When a family member becomes a Christian, they no longer fit the world's mold. Pastors have had parents in their congregations come to them scared when their child becomes a sold-out believer. They don't know what to make of a son or daughter who loves Jesus enough to take risks and step out in their faith. Families are torn apart by the gospel because it threatens the powers and authorities of this world. Most of Jesus' own family didn't accept Him!

Families are divided even now over the gospel. I had a friend I met in Russia named Fachradin, a refugee from Kazakhstan. He heard the gospel and believed in Jesus as his Savior and Lord. He told his Muslim father and his father replied, "Leave. Tomorrow when we wake up, we will look for you, and if we find you, we will kill you." He traveled several hundred miles from home and found refuge with us for a few weeks as he started a new life as a believer.

Jesus hits on a theme we've seen for several weeks: persecution and conflict does not mean disobedience or God's displeasure. We will face trouble for Jesus. Kyle Idleman, author of the book *Not A Fan*, describes the commitment Jesus asks for. He says, "Following Jesus isn't something you can do at night where no one notices. It's a twenty-four-hour-a-day commitment that will interfere with your life. That's not the small print – that's a guarantee."

Don't be surprised when families have conflicts over faith. Some of us are blessed that our families are believers. Some of us aren't. But don't get discouraged. In 1 Corinthians 7:16, Paul encourages those who are married to unbelievers not to leave. He says, "How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?" God often uses the simple faith and witness of a child or a spouse to save a family. But Jesus says not to be surprised by serious tension in a home due to faith.

He then turns up the heat: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Let's be frank: this is offensive. Jesus meant it to be provocative. He catches us off-guard. And just like the quote about peace, there's more under the surface. Jesus called out the Pharisees for breaking laws about honoring your mother and father. In an era when children were not very valued, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and don't stop them." Is He contradicting Himself?

No! He's once again challenging us to think deeply. Jesus isn't telling us to break the commandments to honor and love our families. Instead, He contrasts our commitment to our families to our commitment to Him. Jesus says it even more strongly in Luke's gospel, that one must hate his family and his own life to become His disciple. The contrast shows just how great our love for Jesus is supposed to be.

When Jesus says that anyone who does not take up his cross and follow is not worthy of Him, He uses exaggeration and contrast to make His point. We aren't as offended by this as the call to love Jesus more than our families, but every Jew who heard this would have been shocked. A cross was a torture device, the worst known form of execution. They were used by Romans, whom the Jews loathed. We don't just die to ourselves; it's a hard, offensive death.

Being a disciple of Jesus is eternally rewarding and changes us from the inside out, but it means sacrificing what we hold dear. When someone desires us to go against Jesus' teachings, we go with Jesus. When family wants to do something unethical or harmful, we go with Jesus. When children go astray into sin, we go with Jesus. That's hard because we love our families. We want their respect and love. But Jesus gives us a new family far deeper than flesh and blood.

Jesus exaggerates to make His point, just as many rabbis did. He is serious, yet He knows we will fail. He does not say this to condemn us but to call us on to greater things. He wants us to expect nothing less of God than total transformation, where we are not only willing but excited to sacrifice for Him. Where we are unwilling to commit, we turn to God like the man asking Jesus for help who said, "I believe; cure my unbelief!"

There's a satirical website called the Babylon Bee. They make up news stories about the Christian life that are meant to make Christians think. An article the other day captured a problem we have. It's called "Everything Local Man Feels Led To Do He Coincidentally Really Likes." The fake news article goes like this: "Don Farmer, 43, reported Tuesday that he was recently "led by God" toward several things he really likes—and in fact, as a general rule, everything he feels spiritually moved to do he coincidentally enjoys very much.

"Last week Farmer was considering whether he should go to the Men's Golf Outing or volunteer at the city food pantry, when he says, miraculously, he knew just what to do. "You could say I really just felt led to lend my support to the church event," Farmer confirmed to reporters. "It would have been great to be a volunteer over at the food pantry, but I had to say, 'Here I am, send me, Lord, even to the ends of the fairway.' Plus I recently purchased a new driver, which I took as a definite sign."

"Additionally, he felt led to attend the church's Super Bowl Party last year, which it just so happens he thoroughly enjoyed. The next Sunday, Farmer was unable to sign up for the church outreach visit to the senior home or the juvenile detention center due to the lack of a "nudge" from the Holy Spirit, but did feel moved to participate in the Men's Group's Annual Chili Cook-Off. He was also able to fend off several invitations by the church's leadership to attend the new discipleship class, sorrowfully noting that not only would the time interfere with his Tuesday TV viewing lineup, but that he just didn't feel as if he was being led to a diligent study of the Word "in that season.'" It's satire, but we get the point.

Jesus asks us to do hard things. Not difficult things; it's not difficult to load groceries at Military Avenue or recycle cans. But it's hard. We'd rather do something else. It's not difficult to have church at 2pm, but it's hard when a million things are going on. It's hard to say to your son, "We're can't make your Little League game today because church is at the same time." But we die to ourselves daily, choosing what's right over what's most enjoyable or comfortable.

Should we feel badly that we don't do this very well? No. No one is worthy of Jesus. We need His grace every day just to begin to walk in His ways. On the cross, Jesus poured out His grace on us, not so we could do what we want, but so we might begin to be truly righteous. Instead of going home and thinking, "I feel bad about myself; thanks, Pastor Jason!", think about how God might be calling you to greater things. Greater discipleship. Greater relationship. Less self-centeredness and greater other-centeredness.

As my friend from Asbury Seminary J.D. Walt said this week, "Jesus says in his way of living you don't have priorities. You have one priority, period...seek God's Kingdom in everything...in the deepest place within me, in my marriage, with my children, in my friendships, acquaintances, finances, networks, neighborhood, in my children's schools, in my extended family, at work, on vacation, on the golf course, and onward to the very furthest reaches of my influence in the world."

Jesus says, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." The world has so much to offer, but it has so little meaning and purpose. It is hard to pull ourselves away from it. Our brains are rewiring themselves to expect the input we get from screens, constant interaction, and it's not good. We see the Kardashians on our newsstands and I think, "What do they have to offer the world?" I am drawn to movies and video games, but many of them have little redemptive purpose. We can lose our lives to our hobbies and interests. We can lose ourselves in our families, making them the center of our lives.

But Jesus says we will find our lives when we lose them for His sake, when we stop pursuing our pleasures and desire Him. When we give our lives to God, we find a passion for Him that doesn't stop. CrossWay is on a "Just Jesus" model – we don't have a ton of programs or a cool band or the most captivating preacher, but we've got Jesus. If we take that seriously, it shouldn't just be our church that's just about Jesus; our whole lives should be just about Jesus.

Somebody out there is better, brighter, and smarter than us. Somebody's more flashy and important in the eyes of the world. But if we are united with Christ, then we truly live. If we give up our self-interest and do what we do for Christ, we have no regrets. It doesn't mean we won't have any interests; God gave us our loves, our passions for sports or photography or the arts, for a reason. Yet we will use them – or abandon them – as our passion for knowing God, desiring Him and Him alone, takes over.

We find ways to use our gifts and talents and interests for the Kingdom of God. We learn how to talk about sports as metaphors for the Christian life. We engage media with a heart for explaining Christ to others. We give up our self-interest so that Christ shines through, not us. And we set aside things that distract us from following Christ and doing hard things in His name.

As Jesus closes His instruction to His disciples, He encourages us in our weakness and our unimportance. He says, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Here's the beauty: *we may not be anybody important in the Kingdom of God, but when we serve those who minister for God because of their work, we will be rewarded for serving the One who sent them.* Jesus tells the apostles that if someone welcomed them into their home, provided for them, took care of them, and watched out for their welfare, it was as if they'd given that welcome to Jesus and His heavenly Father. They would receive a prophet's reward, a righteous man's reward, a disciple's reward, eternal rewards that will be their glory forever.

We can't do everything and be everything. Even amazing figures in the Bible – they aren't everything! Moses was a great prophet, but his brother Aaron was the priest. David was the king – but he was never a priest. (The former king Saul was rejected by God because he attempted to take on both roles without God's permission.) Peter led the church in Jerusalem, but he couldn't be a missionary at the same time. Paul was a missionary church planter, but he couldn't pastor every church. Many Christians in the early church were simply faithful people who loved God and loved others and shared Jesus with their family and friends as they could.

But God made you with a specific purpose in mind. He made you to be you – the very best you – the you that would know His love, find your meaning in Him, and share Him with those that come into your corner of our world. I'm a pastor, not a missionary or a seminary professor. In your sphere of influence, whether that's in a job or in retirement, with the various people you see, God's made you to shine for Him.

The very best thing you can do is to fulfill that role and to support those who are called into front-line ministry. We pray for other churches; we pray for missionaries; we pray for pastors and Bible teachers and evangelists. We welcome them. When it's possible, when God gives us the resources, we support them financially so that they can do what God has called them to do without having to worry about finances all the time. We no longer live in an era when we receive ministry from traveling evangelists that we can provide with room and board. But we can still receive those who minister in Christ's name by supporting them where they are.

And we receive the same reward as they do. When we support someone in their ministry, we support Jesus. When we do something for someone because of their faith, or to show our faith, it does not go unnoticed by God. We do these things not for the rewards themselves – we welcome someone because of their righteousness, not because of the reward we might get for doing so. But acts of love towards the people of God will have eternal consequences for our benefit. Let's not turn down the help of others in the church or say we don't want to be a bother. Charity and kindness start within the family of God. When outsiders see us care for one another, and then they receive our help, they know it's genuine.

Jesus comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. We've seen both today, and probably as we leave, we'll feel both. But go today knowing that with God, all things are possible. Be reassured that God is with us, guiding us to care for one another, to leave behind everything that might hinder us from following Him – and when we do, the rewards will be great, both now and in the life to come.