



**Matthew 10:34-42** - <sup>34</sup>“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup>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— <sup>36</sup> a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’<sup>37</sup> “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; <sup>38</sup>and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>40</sup>“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup>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. <sup>42</sup>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.”

*Finders weepers, losers keepers*



“How could they?” That’s the question that jumps to mind when I re-read the story of Israel worshipping the golden calf. “How could they?” The Israelites had witnessed the Lord’s mighty hand at work for them in the ten plagues against Egypt. They had been led out of a land of slavery, saw the Red Sea parted in two, watched in terror and awe as Pharaoh and his army were swallowed up in judgment by the rushing waters. Israel marched through the wilderness with food in their bellies, clothes on their backs, shoes on their feet, led by the ultimate GPS – not global positioning, but God’s Presence - a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. There was no question – these were God’s chosen, special people. So the question leaps back into mind, “How could they?” After all God had done for them, in spite of all the promises he would surely fulfill...they chose to worship an idol in place of the true God who was always before them. “How could they?” In the account of the golden calf, Israel’s behavior doesn’t make sense, but then again sin never really does. In Exodus 32, we see a people of God who are unrecognizable, yet all too familiar.

In our gospel lesson today from Matthew 10, we see a Jesus who, at first glance, seems almost unrecognizable. Here, in Matthew 10, Jesus is sending out his twelve disciples on a preaching mission and giving them instructions on how to carry out their important work. He tells them where to go, how to do the work, what to do when people reject you, what to do when people accept you, who to look out for, and finally he warns them about the hardships of the work – persecution, prosecution, betrayal, rejection. And right at the end of this chapter of instruction, we read the words of our gospel lesson for today and, in so doing, we see a Jesus who seems almost unrecognizable. **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on 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 up 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.”**

Ouch. This notion would’ve seemed backwards to the disciples and all the people listening. You can almost hear their objections, *“But I thought the promised Savior was going to bring peace. He was supposed to restore Israel to its former glory, to suppress our enemies, to usher in an era of peace and prosperity unlike anything we’ve ever seen.”* That’s the kind of Savior many people were looking for. Jesus had to step in and correct that understanding, **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”** Would Jesus bring peace? Yes, Jesus would bring peace on his terms, not the world’s. Jesus came into the world to take away the sins of the world, creating peace between sinful humans and a holy God. That truth of the gospel is divisive. Some believe it by faith; others reject it – causing an immediate, fundamental division. And the temptation comes for Christians to avoid that division; sometimes by intentionally or unintentionally rearranging our priorities.



The Christian author and apologist C.S. Lewis once said, “*Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.*” Priorities in our lives change constantly. Most of the time we find ourselves pitting spouse, family, work, and hobbies against each other with different winners at different times depending on the day. But Jesus makes it clear that one relationship should be unchanging, unwavering, and undoubtedly our number one priority all the time – our relationship with him. How easily does our relationship with Jesus slip down our priority list? Pretty easily. You might remember about twelve weeks of Sunday morning Bible class when we addressed that question pretty pointedly in *Idols We Never Knew We Had*. In my mind, I think, “*Of course, I love my Savior more than anything else!*” But in reality it’s only when I’ve got the time in my crazy schedule, or when the kids don’t have A, B, or C to do, or when stuff finally settles down around here. Success, love, sports, technology, politics, family – the devil can and does use even these good things to try to crowd out Christ from our hearts. The tyranny of the urgent screams for our attention, the Joneses need to be kept up with, and squeaky wheels always need to get the grease. This is how idolatry happens, a remarkable trick of the devil – not necessarily bowing down to a golden calf or loving a bad, forbidden thing – this is the nature of idolatry, loving a good thing too much with a disordered love. This is what Jesus painfully points out in our gospel lesson. There are a lot of things God can put up with – being second isn’t one of them. You’re guilty of it, and so am I.

For every time we failed to put Jesus first, he never failed. The One who was in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something he had to hold onto selfishly. Instead, he made himself nothing. He took on our human flesh and became obedient to death on a cross. For every time we’ve failed to put Jesus first, notice that he never failed to put YOU first. Why would the Son of God take on frail and weak human flesh? For you. Why would the Son of God make the stunning move from “everything” to “nothing”? For you. Why would the *eternal* Son of God die? For you. And now that same Son of God calls on each of his followers, you and me, to take a look at our priorities. How is my love for God relative to my love for my family, my job, my stuff, my hobbies? More or less? Stronger or weaker? Committed or flimsy?

To steal an illustration: love we show to others is usually proportional to the love they’ve shown to us. If I’m checking out at the gas station and find myself a buck short of my total and you hand me a dollar, I’ll shake your hand. If I’m out of town for a while and you get my mail and water my plants, I’ll give you a restaurant gift card. If you pay my rent for a year, I’ll kiss your feet...don’t believe me? Try me! You see how the love we show is often conditioned by the love we’ve received. So how about this one – the Son of God leaves behind the eternal, unending praise of angels and swaps it for some moos, baahs, and bleats as he’s born in a stable; he leaves behind his almighty throne of power in heaven and trades it for a nothingness existence in a backwater province of a hostile world. And most of all he makes the most unfathomable exchange of all – he trades his perfect, spotless righteousness before God and takes in its place all of our sins – of loving creation more than the Creator, of cherishing gifts rather than the Giver, in making my human relationships



my 'be-all-and-end-all' instead of him – he takes every one of those sins on himself and pays for them by suffering the wrath of God, so that you and I would never have to. Talk about love! You give me a dollar, I'll shake your hand. You take care of my stuff, I'll buy you a gift card. But you lay down your life for me, you take away my sins, you suffer the hell I deserved? There is nothing I wouldn't do for you.

So what does that look like, to love my family dearly and to rejoice and be thankful that God has given me work to do and a way to provide, and hobbies as a way to relax but ultimately to love my Savior more than all of it – what does that look like? Listen to Jesus answer that question. **Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.** Or to put it more colloquially, "Finders weepers, losers keepers." Whoever "finds his life" in this world, that is, whoever stakes his happiness, his hope, his love on how big his house, how pretty his wife, how cool his kids, how much money he has – whoever "finds his life" in those things is setting himself up for failure and putting his soul in jeopardy of hell. But whoever "loses his life" and sets aside all those other things for the sake of Jesus and his gospel, he'll find the life that is truly life – a life with Jesus forever in heaven. And, as Jesus reminds us, "losing our life" to the things of this world means picking up the cross and following after him. The self-denial of Christianity and such a commitment to Christ will bring only conflict with the sinful world around me and, as Jesus mentioned earlier, sometimes with the world that lives under my own roof.

But Jesus calls on you to see more than hardship as you follow after him. He calls you to see the hope that you have because of him. He calls you to look at what truly matters in the eternal scheme of things – the life forever in heaven he's won for you. That helps us to answer the question, "What does it look like to love my family yet love my Savior more?" Losing your life to the thrills of this world, carrying your cross as you follow Jesus, focusing your attention on your eternal reward in heaven – how can those things help you to love your Savior and *then* your family? Love your Savior *by* loving your family – in a way that eternally matters. Demonstrate that worship and time in the Word of God are important to you. Be a light, not only to the world, but to those under your roof, as with the Holy Spirit's strength, you put your Savior and his glory ahead of your personal desires. Show your family, your neighbor, and anyone who cares to watch where your treasure is – not in the temporary things of this world, not even in the awesome family I have, but in the Savior who rescues me from a pointless existence of serving the gods of this world, and promises me a place with him in heaven. God grant that each of us find our life, our love, our peace and our eternal hope in Christ and Christ alone.

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)*