

## Comfort for Sheep among Wolves (Part II)

Matthew 10:32-42

*Halifax: 1 May 2005*

### Introduction

Last week we began looking at some of the comforts Jesus gave to His disciples when He first sent them out to declare the gospel.

- They needed these comforts.
  - They needed them because Jesus had just told them that they would be like sheep in the midst of wolves...
    - They would be hated by all for His sake.
    - They would be scourged by Jewish courts as transgressors of God's law...
    - They would be brought before governors and kings for His sake to be tried as criminals...
    - Even the members of their own families would turn them over to be executed.
    - They would be called Baalzebub, or Satan, even as Jesus Himself had been labelled.
- Obviously, with this kind of treatment...
  - they would be tempted to draw back from ardently proclaiming Christ.
  - They desperately needed to receive the Lord's words of comfort if they were going to continue in faithful service to Him.
- And of course, I pointed out to you that these encouragements are recorded in Matthew by the Holy Spirit for **your** comfort also!
  - None of you are apostles as these men were,
    - but if you are a Christian, you are also called to faithfully represent Christ!
  - God has filled you with light and you are to let your light shine before men.
  - And as you live a life that is clearly Christian,
    - You will be despised even as these men were!
    - You need these comforts just as much as the Twelve disciples needed them lest you draw back.
- The three comforts we looked at last week were aimed at keeping you from the fear of man.
  1. First, we saw that you ought not to fear man because he will eventually be proven wrong.

- Men in rebellion against God have a way of making the truth look very foolish and even evil,
    - they distort God's word and they slander God's people...
    - But the Lord reminds you that everything will be revealed.
      - The foolishness and lies of unbelievers will all be exposed for what they are.
    - Therefore, you ought to speak and live the truth boldly and without shame.
2. Secondly, we saw that you ought not to fear man because in the end, he has no power to hurt you.
- Jesus does not deny that men can do many things to you in this world—
    - they can ridicule you and ostracise you...
    - they can scourge you and imprison you...
    - they can even kill your body...
  - But all that is nothing compared to destroying both body and soul in Hell forever and ever!
    - That is what God will do to those who reject Him!
  - Therefore, you ought to fear God instead of man.
3. Thirdly, we saw that you ought not to fear man because your life matters very much to God.
- When you displease man, you see the results immediately...
    - But because God does not reward and punish us instantly,
      - without the eyes of faith,
      - it is easy to think that He is indifferent about what we do in this world.
  - But Jesus tells us that this is not so!
    - Not even a sparrow falls to ground without your heavenly Father!
      - God has a purpose for each little sparrow...
        - It is there for His glory...
        - And nothing can happen to it apart from His will.
    - If that is true of sparrows, how much more true is it of human beings who were made in the image of God?
      - The Lord has custom designed every persecution that ever reaches you,
        - and He calls you to honour Him and glorify Him in every one of those persecutions.

- He is not detached and indifferent...
  - Not a hair of your head will perish without Him.
  - You ought not to fear man because your life matters very much to God.

Those are the three comforts we looked at last week.

- But the Lord Jesus did not stop with these!
  - He knows our weakness.
    - He knows how easy it is for us to grow weary and faint.
- So in His grace, He has given us three more comforts to encourage us in this hostile world where we are like sheep among wolves...
  - Christian brothers and sisters,
    - You have so much to give the world because you have life in Jesus Christ!
    - He doesn't want the opposition of the world to dim the light that is in you.
      - He wants His light and truth to flow out from you like river,
        - like a stream in the desert, giving life all around.
- The three encouragements the Holy Spirit gives you in verses 32-42 are promises to you if you find your identity in Jesus...
  - for you who establish yourself in Him as His disciple and representative.

## **I. First, find your identity in Jesus and He will claim you in heaven.**

A. Jesus uses the word “**confess**” to speak of identifying with Him:

- In verse 32, He says:
  - Matthew 10:32: Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.
- 1. This word **confess** as it is used here refers to a public declaration of allegiance to Jesus Christ.
  - a. We live in a time when people want everything to be casual.
    - 1) We want our relationships to be casual—
      - no marriages, no contracts, no membership vows, no vows of office...
      - We want sex to be casual—no big deal...whenever and wherever you want.
    - 2) The reason is that we don't want to be bound to anything...
      - We want to come and go as we please.

- We do not want to be tied down to anything or committed to anything.
  - Casual is comfortable.
- 3) Now of course I do not mean to suggest that everything should be formal...
- But we need to learn the difference—
  - Some things are to be a very big deal, other things are casual.
  - We need to learn to live rich variety that God has appointed for us instead of the boring sameness we so easily gravitate to.
- b. Jesus does not want our relationship with Him to be casual.
- 1) He calls us to **confess** Him before men.
- This word speaks of formally establishing our identity with Him.
  - It speaks of covenants with vows made in the presence of witnesses.
- 2) From the beginning, the Lord has ordained covenant signs to clearly separate those who confess Him from those who don't...
- a) In the Old Testament, the covenant sign was circumcision followed by a life of public worship involving sacrifices and feasts.
- Circumcision was a sign that the person belonged to God.
  - It was not a sign that they were sincere or not,
    - but a sign of identification with Him in the world as one of His people.
- b) In the New Testament, the covenant sign is baptism followed by a life of public worship involving the Lord's Supper and the oversight of elders.
- There was no such thing in the early church as a Christian who was not baptised.
  - The first thing a person did when he trusted Christ was to be baptised...
    - The hearers at Pentecost were immediately baptised...
    - The Ethiopian Eunuch stopped his chariot and was baptised in the desert.
    - The Philippian Jailer was baptised the same night he heard the gospel.
- c) Always, baptism and circumcision required a confession of trust in and allegiance to the Lord...

- either by the convert himself or, in the case of children, by their believing parents.
- And until such confession was made, a person was not considered to belong to the Lord!
  - The Lord is not like an irresponsible man who wants to take a woman without owning her publicly before witnesses as His wife!
  - He insists on a wedding before we can claim that we belong to Him.

TRANS> Of course, formality does not change the heart... covenant vows and confessions can be hypocritical.

- A woman can marry a man for his money who has no intention of remaining faithful to that man...
    - Or the man can take his vows even while carrying on an affair with another woman.
    - If you would be saved, you must not only confess with your mouth, but also, as Romans 10 says, believe with your heart...
      - In other words, you must be sincere.
2. And so you must understand that confession of Jesus is more than just a formal thing that you do at church.
- a. Confessing Jesus before men involves finding your identity in Him wherever you go.
- 1) Let me ask you, what do you think of the airline pilot who takes off his wedding ring as soon as he leaves town?
- Or the woman who goes out to the night-club and doesn't let anyone know she is married?
  - Not that it always makes much difference today when marriage is considered to be so casual...
  - But that woman or that man cannot be said to confess their husband or wife when they do that.
- 2) So it is with the Christian who is only known to be a Christian at church.
- He makes his vows of allegiance before the brethren...
    - but nobody at work knows he belongs to Christ...
    - nobody at the family reunion can tell by his filthy talk and the jokes he laughs at and the quantity of beer he consumes that he belongs to Christ.

- b. You see, confession is formal, but it must not end with formality.
- 1) If it ends with formality, it is not a genuine confession...
    - Jesus is talking about a confession that starts with baptism and is renewed at the Lord's Table...
    - and that is taken with you wherever you go...
    - Everyone is to know that you belong to Him.
    - You are to find your identity in Him.
  - 2) So let me ask you,
    - Do the people at work know that you are a Christian?
    - Does your family know?
- c. And let me add,
- You must confess the true Christ and not a false Christ.
  - There are many antichrists—those that claim to be Christs but are not.
    - Your allegiance must be to Him and not to a christ you have made up in your own imagination—
      - a Christ who suits your worldly friends or your religious friends...
      - a Christ who winks at immorality...
      - or a Christ who accepts everyone, even if they don't repent...
  - Confessing Christ means you identify with **Him** in all that **He** is, not with what you wish Him to be or what others want Him to be.
    - There are many false prophets that preach false christs and many false churches that confess false christs...
    - But Jesus' promise in verse 32 is for those who confess **Him**.

TRANS> And so what is His promise to you if you confess Him?

B. His promise is that if you confess Him, He will confess you before His Father in heaven!

1. What a marvellous thing this is!

- a. You confess Him before lowly human beings who are but dust and ashes—
  - and He confesses you before His glorious Father who reigns in heaven!

b. What a contrast this is!

- 1) It is a terrible to even think that you might be ashamed to confess Him before men are corrupt and so unworthy of Him...

- When He is willing to confess you before the courts of heaven when you are so unworthy of Him.
- 2) Think of it!
- You have no reason to be ashamed of Him and He has much reason to be ashamed of you!
    - Yet, you are the one who is hesitant to confess Him!
- c. Does it cost you something in this world to claim Him?
- 1) Does it mean that you may be laughed at, mocked, alienated, even persecuted?
- Does the shame and reproach of Christ seem to great a price to pay?
- 2) Well consider what it costs Him to claim you!
- Before He could claim you, He had to bear God's wrath and curse for your sins!
  - He had to pay the full penalty for your rebellion before the throne of the Father He loved from all eternity...
    - He had to bear shame before the one who is everlastingly worthy of all glory and honour and praise...
    - And you have to bear a little shame before those who are not worthy.

TRANS> What an unequal sort of arrangement is this?

- Who would not claim Him here when the promise is that He will claim you there!
2. Especially when you see that to deny Him here means that He will deny you there!
- a. It is a terrible warning, but it is very plain...
- "Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."
  - Nothing could be better than to stand before God on the day of judgement and have the Lord Jesus say,
    - "That one is mine..."
      - When He owns you before the Father, it assures your everlasting acceptance in heaven with the Father—
        - It means that you will dwell in the glory of Heaven, delighting in God's majesty and goodness forever and ever!
        - Nothing could be better than to have him confess you there!

- But nothing could be worse than to stand before God and have Jesus say—
  - “Depart from me, for I never knew you!”
  - to have the eternal fire of Almighty God fall upon you and to be cast into the outer darkness where the worm never dies and the fire is not quenched!
  
- b. It all turns on the great question:
  - “Do you own Him now?”
  
  - 1) If you own Him now, He will own you then.
    - If you deny Him now, He will deny you then.
    - And then it will be too late to repent.
  
  - 1) But I say, it is not too late for you to repent now!
    - Jesus is not severe with us...
      - He gladly received Peter after Peter had denied Him three times.
        - As soon as Peter repented he was restored...
      - He knows your weakness and your fears...
        - He knows that you will have lapses...
          - He is not a hard driver looking for perfection in the children He has redeemed...
            - only sincerity—and even that is imperfect.
      - But God forbid that you should live a life that is characterised by denial of Him!
      - A life that is settled into denial and does not repent for it!
        - If that is the case, it is a sign that you do not know Him!
        - Repent before it is too late!

TRANS> What a great comfort it is for believers in a hostile world to know that if you confess Jesus now, He will confess you before His heavenly Father!

- Find your identity in Him and He will own you in heaven!
- That is the first comfort I present to you today.

## **II. Second, find your identity in Jesus above all others and you will find life.**

- This comfort is found in verses 34-39.



- A. In many ways, your whole life is a series of choices...
1. When you bought a house, you rejected a whole bunch of other houses—and other purchases...
    - When you married, you settled upon one person instead of many others...
    - When you chose a career, you set your course in one way instead of another, and while you might change, you could never go back and start out again at the same cross roads.
    - You were deciding what your life would be identified with.
  2. You also made choices of a moral nature...
    - There have been temptations that you resisted that would have changed the whole course of your life if you had given in to them...
      - And there are others that you gave in to, the consequences of which are with you to this day.
- B. But here in verses 34-39, Jesus tells you what you must choose if you would find life.
1. First, He shows that you must choose Him before your closest earthly ties.
    - a. It is **so** easy to think that your life is found in your parents or in your children...or in some other relationship...
      - And indeed, in many ways it is and ought to be found there!
    - 1) Jesus does not at all look down on family relationships—
      - He is the one that instituted them and that calls us to live in them for God's glory!
      - He is the One who scolded the Pharisees for not honouring their parents on religious pretexts!
      - He is the One that insisted that a man must not divorce his wife for any cause but adultery.
    - 2) But, as soon as fidelity to any earthly relation, no matter how near and how dear, means infidelity to Him...
      - He demands you to be unfaithful to the earthly relation.
        - If it means they will utterly turn on you, let it be so!
    - 3) For Jesus says in verse 37,
      - Matt 10:37: 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.
      - These words, “not worthy of me” are expounded for us by Luke who says “cannot be my disciple.”

- b. You see, if you love your mother more than Jesus, it is a sure indication that you don't realise who Jesus is!
- 1) You don't realise what He has done for you!
    - Your mother may have given you birth, but He gives new birth!
      - She brought you forth to corruption and sin, but He to holiness and eternal life!
    - She may have sacrificed for you to train you up,
      - but Jesus gave Himself to die on the cross for your sin!
    - Saying no to Him instead of saying no to your mother shows that you just haven't come to grips with what He has done for you...
      - and not only that...
  - 2) Denying Him instead of her also shows that you have not sufficiently grasped who He is!
    - a) He is your Creator, the one by whom and for whom all things were made!
      - No created thing has its purpose in itself!
      - Your whole purpose is found in Him alone!
    - b) And, though your mom has authority over you, Jesus is the Lord of Lord's and the King of kings!
      - He is to be obeyed without question and without reserve!
      - To choose to please your mother or your father or your child rather than Him is to show that you do not grasp who He is!
- c. Now it is easy to talk about this in theory, but it is much harder in practice!
- 1) Many of you have been tempted to break the Sabbath to please your parents...
    - They wanted you to do something that offended your conscience and to keep the peace, you did it.
    - But that, you see, is not keeping the peace where peace is most important!
      - It is not peace with your parents but peace with Christ that really matters.
  - 2) I know people that go to compromising churches because they want to please their parents...

- And I know others that go to compromising churches because they want to please their children!

TRANS> Jesus says, “If you would find your life, you must choose me before all your nearest and dearest earthly relations.”

2. Second, He shows that you must choose Him before your own safety in this world.

- Indeed, choosing Christ can be very dangerous!

a. It can be dangerous to your career.

1) Many disciples, as they continue to grow in grace and follow Christ,

- come to the place where they no longer continue in certain kinds of work because their work conflicts with their discipleship.
- Sometimes it is because of ethical issues, sometimes it is because of philosophical issues.
  - Sometimes it is just a matter of God’s calling on your life.
  - There is a fine article in the new Canadian associates about Ranya Bailey who finished medical school and then gave up her career in medicine to pursue her calling as a wife and mother...
    - She did not loose her life, but found it in serving Christ.

2) Our tendency is to think we find our life in our work...

- But Jesus is showing you here that you actually find your life when you chose to follow Him instead of a career if that career contradicts with following Him!
- You aren’t loosing anything by giving it up—
  - You are rather finding your life in Christ which is the only place to truly find it.

b. But of course following Christ can be dangerous to more than just a career!

1) When Jesus speaks of taking up your cross and following Him...

- He is talking about following Him even to the point of death!
- The cross was the place where people were crucified!
  - And the disciples to whom Jesus spoke knew that well!
  - Only a few years before Jesus spoke these words, a zealot named Judas had gathered a band of rebels to fight the Romans. The insurrection was easily quelled, and to teach the Jews a lesson, the Roman general Varus ordered the crucifixion of over 2000 Jews. Crosses lined the roads from one end of Galilee to the next!

- 2) When Jesus speaking of taking up one's cross, He is speaking about those that would be crucified because they were doing His will.
  - It might look like they were losing their lives at first (and in a way they were)
  - But Jesus says they were actually gaining their lives in a far more important way!
    - They were finding their life in Him instead of in this world.
- 3) This bears out in your daily living as well!
  - You don't find your life by hanging on to it but by giving it up for Christ in service to others.
  - As you give, you actually find your life because you are drawn into His glorious service and out of service to everything else.

TRANS> What a great encouragement this is to find your identity in Him instead of in your family or anything else when a choice has to be made!

- That is the second great encouragement I present to you today from our text...
- Now let's consider the third.

**III. Third, find your identity in Jesus and you will be a source of great blessing to others.**

A. When Jesus says, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent me"...

- He is saying it to encourage those He is sending out to minister in His name.
1. Jesus is telling His disciples that by entrusting them with the glorious gospel,
    - a. He has made them conduits of blessing for Him.
      - They were going out to tell the covenant people that Jesus the Messiah had come.
      - People would either receive them or reject them.
    - b. Those that received them will be richly blessed!
      - If they receive the apostles as those who represent Christ, it is all one and the same as receiving Christ...
      - And receiving Christ is all one and the same as receiving the Father because it is the Father who sent Christ to save the world!
  2. What a huge encouragement this must have been the Twelve disciples!
    - a. Yes, many people—even most people—would reject them...

- but those who received them would receive Christ and in receiving Christ would receive the Father!
- b. Of course, even the disciples did not yet understand all the benefits of receiving Christ...
- But they knew that He had come to bless the world and to establish God's kingdom among them...
  - And they knew that anyone that was received into that kingdom would be blessed beyond imagination...
    - They knew that God's divine power would be turned upon that person to do him God and give him everlasting happiness in His grace.
- c. And Jesus is encouraging them that they are now those who are the bearers of this grace!
- They could say what Paul said when he wrote to the Romans:
    - Romans 1:16-17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."
  - You see, the gospel is transmitted from one person who has faith to the next person who receives it by faith...
    - It moves along from faith to faith.
    - Paul was delighted to go into city with the gospel and then see people in that city begin to believe that gospel and so receive the grace of God.

B. And Christian, so it is for you!

1. Jesus is made known to others through you who know Him—His church!
  - You carry the light of the Christ with you wherever you go because you are in Christ.
  - You represent Him and testify of Him.
  - The river of God's grace flows from your inmost being to bring life to others...
2. Jesus makes it clear that it is not just the twelve apostles who are able to bring Him to others.
  - He speaks also of prophets, righteous men, and little ones.
  - a. The word **prophet** is used here in a general sense of those who are set apart to minister the word.

- Jesus says,
  - “He who receives a prophet in the name of prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.”
  
- 1) It is not just whoever happens to receive them along the way...
  - but whoever receives them **in the name of a prophet**.
  - That means, to receive them **because they are a prophet** who speaks for Christ.
  
- 2) The point is, they receive them because they recognise that they are speaking the word of God and they believe their message...
  - They receive them and welcome them and take care of them because they rejoice—not in the man, but in the gospel he brings.
  - This sort of receiver is the one who will be blessed with a prophet’s reward—
    - He becomes a partaker in the prophet’s work, a fellow labourer with him, and a promoter of the same message and so receives the same reward.
  
- 3) You see, Jesus is not talking about someone who receives them for other reasons...
  - They might receive him because he is a relative or a friend--
    - not because he brings the gospel, not because he is a prophet, but for personal reason.
  - Or, their might be a kindly couple who is hospitable to everyone who comes their way—whether a prophet of Baal or a prophet of Christ...
    - In such a case they do not receive him for love of Christ who is preached, but just because they are kind and helpful people.
  - Jesus is not promising this reward to them, even though they have done a good deed outwardly as far as it goes...
    - For you see, there is a great defect in their good deed that utterly spoils it!
    - Here they have had the gospel brought into their very house, yet to them it is nothing special—
      - no different than what any false prophet might have to say...
        - Though they have been kind, there is no reward promised to them!
  - But if at first they receive the prophet simply because they are kind...

- And then they hear the gospel and receive the prophet not only because they are kind,
- but much more because they have come to love Christ whom the prophet preaches...
- Now they will receive a prophet's reward!
- Now they are sharers in the prophet's work.

TRANS> But it is not just prophets about whom this is true.

b. Jesus goes on to say the same thing about a righteous man...

- "And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward."
- 1) This probably refer to a man who is blameless in the gospel—a mature man who is a shining light for Jesus Christ—who lives out the gospel in his daily work...
    - His whole life points to his Saviour
  - 2) Now here again, there may be those who receive this man for any number of reasons—perhaps they want to do business with him or whatever...
    - But Jesus is speaking of those who receive him because he is a righteous man—because he represents Jesus Christ...
    - The person who looks at that man and falls in love with his Saviour and so receives the man first of all because of love for Christ.
      - that person will receive a righteous man's reward...
      - The righteous man has brought the truth to that one and he has welcomed it.

TRANS> But Jesus does not stop here!

c. He goes on in verse 42 to speak of a little one...

- Matthew 10:42: "Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."
- 1) Even if you are what Jesus calls "a little one"
    - A young believer, a weak believer, even a child...
      - The light of Jesus shines through your life also if you trust in Him.
      - And whoever loves you for Jesus' sake will be blessed!
  - 2) Not the person who says,
    - "What a nice person that is"...

- But the person who wants to help you because you belong to Christ!
    - In other words, the cup of water is given for Jesus' sake!
- 3) And note here how generous and freely the reward is given!
- The Lord takes note of every little thing that is done out of love for Him.
    - Every little thing that is done for His people because they are His people.
    - I think we will be amazed in heaven at how generous He is with His rewards!
3. Do you see Christian!
- a. Everything has reference to Jesus Christ!
    - You represent Him if you belong to Him—whether you are a preacher, a mature Christian, or a babe in Christ—
      - You represent Him and have the privilege of bringing His light wherever you go.
  - b. And whoever sees that light and responds to that light will receive God's eternal blessing!
    - They see Christ in whom you are trusting and they begin to trust Him too!
    - Do not let your light grow dim because of persecution or you will limit your usefulness!
    - What a great incentive this is to keep on for Christ in this world despite all opposition!
  - c. And Parents,
    - Do not suppose that you will bring harm to your children by following Christ and leading them to follow Christ with you...
      - Indeed, it may well bring rejection from this world...
    - But the loss does not even compare with the reward!
      - Jesus is telling you here that if you follow Him, you will not bring harm to others, but untold blessing!

## **Conclusion**

So you see in this chapter how our Lord encourages us that even though we will face much opposition in this world as His disciples,



- we have no reason to draw back and every reason to carry on for Christ without wavering...
- Now let me encourage you as a specific application of Matthew 10 to make the most of the opportunity to invite people to our outreach on May 15.
  - Jesus wants us to make Him known in our city!
  - Establish your testimony among your neighbours and friends and co-workers and relatives as Jesus' disciple.
    - Do not be ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.
    - Thanks be to God for the gift of His Son!