

Prayer

Heavenly Father, strengthen all of us who seek to follow You. Give us the courage to express our faith appropriately, especially to our families and to those with whom we live and work. May Your Kingdom come on earth as in heaven, as we engage in our mission of proclaiming it and living it, through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Crime

Much crime across the world is fuelled by drugs trafficking, and governments have not been able to do anything about it. Pray against the evils of drug use and associated crime.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for all those bereaved by the plane crash in Madrid*
- *Give thanks for food and friendship*
- *Pray for aid workers throughout the world who need our support*

Meditation

(a meditation arising from Psalm 68:5,6)

The Father of orphans and a protector of widows;
This is our God in His holiness.

The liberator of prisoners and a home to the desolate;
This is our God in His justice.

The head of His army and a conqueror of His enemies;
This is our God in His might.

The healer of sicknesses and a guide to the blind;
This is our God in His mercy.

The leader of His people and an everlasting presence;
This is our God in His majesty.

The Saviour of the world and a lover of His people;
This is our God in His glory.

Bible Study - Matthew 10:32-39

³² 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my heavenly Father; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.'

³⁴ 'Do not think that I have come to deliver peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and your enemies will be members of your own household. ³⁷ Anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and anyone who does not take up their own cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds life will lose it, and whoever loses life for my sake will find it.'

Review

In this passage, Jesus continues to give advice to the disciples about following Him and doing the work of mission. As Jesus spoke to them, however, it is unlikely that he was able to speak to them privately, because the houses and villages in those days rarely had places where groups could be addressed in private, and we know that a larger group of people often accompanied the disciples. As we read these words, it is good if we can imagine that we are 'sitting in' ourselves, listening to what Jesus had to say to the twelve, and knowing that what He says, He says to us who are His disciples today.

Jesus began with a brief highly memorable comment, stressing the close connection between Himself and the disciples, and between Jesus and God the Father; 'Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father ...' (10:32,33). The way that Jesus said this is remarkable because it anticipates the Gospel of salvation itself. Those who show their love for Jesus by becoming His disciples and do His will are those who Jesus will present to the Father! This was an amazing thing for Jesus to say, speaking as the Messiah and assuming authority to address the Father on behalf of humanity! The downside of this powerful comment is that Jesus said He would deny before the Father those who denied Him. There is no doubt that the Pharisees who were beginning to turn against Him (9:34) were in His mind as He said this, but the implications continue for us even today.

This remark appears to have triggered in Jesus' mind the problems associated with the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven (10:34f.). In Jesus' day, it was expected that when the Messiah came, He would bring a time of peace and security for all God's people. Those who believed this supported it with well known passages of scripture, for example; 'for a child has been born for us ... a Mighty God ... a prince of peace' (Isaiah 9:6) or, 'the wolf shall live with the lamb ... they will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain' (Isaiah 11:6f.). However, Jesus said 'do not think that I have come to deliver peace on earth' (10:34), which appears to turn these prophecies around! In truth, the prophets had already explained that those who anticipated peace on the 'Day of the Lord' would be wrong, and be startled at the Judgements of God; the 'day of the Lord' would be 'darkness, not light' (see Amos 5:18, Joel 1:15 Isaiah 13:6 etc.)!

Jesus went on to explain this by talking firstly about the cost of discipleship, picking up the words of Micah; 'for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.' (Micah 6:7) Jesus quoted this passage as if it applied to Himself. The nature of His mission created division because He challenged the evil embedded within the world, and it would not be long before Jesus' own family was divided about what was happening to Him (12:46f.). Indeed, the time was coming when early Christians would face the same problems, and Jewish people who responded to the Gospel were forced to break away from outraged families who felt that Christianity rejected their historical culture and heritage. Jesus spoke of course beyond His own experience and that of the early church, and His warning is as appropriate today as it was when He said it. Sometimes, to become a disciple means that other family members feel rejected, however much love is shown by those who have been saved.

The whole issue of rejection was then taken one stage further by Jesus in verse 38, where He spoke for the first time about His crucifixion. Everyone knew the terrible things done by the Romans, and their use of crucifixion to warn people not to rebel against them. So when Jesus asked His disciples to 'take up their own cross ...' He was asking them to accept that the path of the Gospel meant facing a terrible death. It was, and is, a stark message. However, the very fact that Jesus said the disciples would 'follow' Him implied that He would be crucified Himself! It is doubtful that those who heard Jesus really understood the full gravity of what He was saying, because He strongly implied that He would Himself go ahead of the disciples through death, so that they would have nothing to fear!

Lastly, Jesus spoke words that are repeated in the Gospels six times, more than any of His other sayings; 'Whoever finds life will lose it, and whoever loses life for my sake will find it.' (see also Matt 16:25, Mk 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:33, John 12:25). This is a powerful allegory reminding us of Xenophon's famous advice to troops; 'those who are prepared to die courageously are the ones who may well not die in battle'. Xenophon was concerned about winning and survival, but Jesus spoke about how to find eternal life. He explained the spiritual truth about eternal life and how it may be found even whilst we live! He also explained the if we place ourselves at the centre of our aspirations and hopes, then we are doomed to failure; but paradoxically, if we place Jesus at the centre we will find life, both in this world and the next.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In view of this text, is peace really something that the church can offer? How can the church offer 'peace' to the world?
2. Do you know of families that have been split over Christian faith? Is it possible to bring resolution to such division? If so, how?
3. What rewards do you have in mind when you think of the reward of the 'Kingdom of Heaven'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The words of Jesus in this passage are hard and difficult to hear. Yet they are profoundly important. If we accept the call to discipleship and say that we have not heard it will bring problems, then we have not been taught according to the Word! Ultimately, our security is in Christ, and if we keep our focus of Him, then our family relationships are ones which we can place into His hands, and He will help us through all the problems.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray for each of your own family members and place your relationship with them into the Lord's hands. For those you find most hard and difficult, listen carefully to what the Lord is saying to you about your responsibilities in the relationship.*
- *Plan to do something in your family life which will be uniting and help everyone to get along well; often, life goes on from month to month without us doing those things which we would love to do. Try and take the opportunity to do them!*

Final Prayer

Ever present Lord, touch the hearts of your servants, who own Your name and seek to live the Gospel. Touch them so that they might know the spiritual power at their disposal for the proclamation and establishment of Your Kingdom. Melt hearts of stone, strengthen weak hearts, and encourage those who are tiring in Your service, O Lord. May Your Kingdom come. AMEN