

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, use me in whatever state I am. If I am ill, then use my sickness; if I am healthy, use my well-being; if I am upset, use my sadness; if I am joyful, use my exuberance. I willingly offer all of myself to You this day, trusting that You will make sense of it all in Your good time. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Crime

Much crime develops amongst people who have been let down by others in their youth, and they turn against society to fulfil their own needs. Pray for young people with no hope.

On-going prayers

- Pray for those who design buildings in our cities and towns
- Pray for all those bereaved by the plane crash in Madrid
- Give thanks for food and friendship

Meditation

Who can change the human heart?
Is it worth the try, or is it pre-determined?
Our beings fixed by nature or by nurture,
So that once we find ourselves in adulthood
There's little we can do to change ourselves:
We are the people who we are, no more, no less.

Listen, for God says 'no' to this!
Genes do not set the Universe in stone,
The precious human spirit is not restrained
By memories or sin: predetermined by our past!
Flexibility and change is built inside each one of us,
So living may be liberty; the soul may be set free!

The Gospel says; 'Be liberated, change!'
This Word secures the freedom of the human heart,
And Christ has forever changed hate to love,
Loss to gain, dark to light, and fear to trust;
For when the barriers break we find true liberty
Not within ourselves, but in the very heart of God.

Bible Study - Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰ 'Those who welcome you welcome me, and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and anyone who gives just a cup of cold water to one of the least of these disciples, Amen, I say to you, will not lose their reward.'

Review

Jesus says so much about discipleship in chapter 10, one would be forgiven for feeling that it is all too much. There are strict and detailed instructions (10:5-15), warnings and recommendations (10:16-23), the reminder that persecution is always at hand (10:17f.) and also the warm confirmation of the love of God which is there for all who seek to stay close to the Lord and live a life of Christian service (10:19,26,28-30). Now, in Jesus' last comments about discipleship before the Gospel story moves on to other things, He offers His disciples further encouragement about hospitality. It seems strange that Jesus should return to this subject, but it is important, as we will now find out

Verses 40-42 are all about 'reward'. In verse 40, Jesus returns to the basic theme of mission hospitality mentioned previously in the chapter (10:12ff.) Jesus says that the one who receives a disciple on mission in peace (see also 10:13), receives not just the disciple, but Jesus who sent him, and not only Jesus who sent the disciple, but the God who sent Jesus (10:40)! This is what is meant by the reward mentioned in the next two verses; it is the reward of receiving God Himself through Jesus! A disciple of Jesus should always be aware that when doing the Lord's work, they are agents of Jesus and of God Himself. This is a tremendous responsibility, and it should be a cause of great joy. How privileged we are to be used by God Almighty, and to pass on this blessing!

The following verses expand the meaning of verse 40, using the picture of a prophet, a righteous man, and the 'least' of the disciples; anyone who receives these, receives a reward from God according to the one received. It is interesting that Jesus used these three examples of discipleship: a prophet is one who declares the 'Word of God', a righteous person was a 'good' person regarded as blessed by God, and the 'least' of the disciples was just that, a follower of Jesus who made even the smallest contribution to the mission of Jesus. To receive any of these 'in peace' brought God's blessing and reward.

I pause to mention that verse 42 is a little difficult to understand, particularly if you read it in a modern translation, such as the NIV, where you will read 'and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple -- truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.' Apart from the 'cup of water' which was commonly recognized as the least acceptable symbol of hospitality in the ancient Middle East, the rest of this phrase seems more odd every time you look at it. What does Jesus mean by 'little ones'? Does He mean children? Having examined the Greek carefully, and, in common with a number of commentators, I have come to the opinion that the phrase 'little ones' does in fact mean something like 'the least of a disciple'. The verse then refers to the God's reward for the smallest act of hospitality for the least of the disciples, and this fits with the previous parallel examples.

At this point in the Gospel, Jesus had observed the increasing hostility of the Pharisees, and begun to talk ominously about death, and the bearing of the cross (10:38). In talking now about hospitality again, He was indicating that an act of hospitality towards any disciple, whatever their calling and mission and however significant or apparently insignificant their role, was an act of identifying with Jesus Himself, and with His Father. Such hospitality was essential to the Kingdom and to Jesus' own mission to go to Jerusalem to die and to save the world, so it was a valuable part of God's plan for Himself and the disciples. It could be dangerous, but it would bring its reward of life at the hands of God, the Father. The disciples had to know that their mission brought the reward of life in the Kingdom of God to themselves and also to those who identified with them and helped them by granting them hospitality. As the disciples and Jesus continued their ministry and eventually came to Jerusalem, they were able to pass on this promise as a blessing to those who helped them on the way, however small their assistance.

At each stage of this study, I have been struck by parallels with the mission of the church today. Occasionally, I have given examples, but refrain from giving more, because the text

must speak for itself. In today's passage, the implications for the task of hospitality are clear, and Jesus has made the clearest possible statement of the value of hospitality to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. The challenge of mission has been laid out by Jesus in Matthew 10 both in terms of what is to be done, and its consequences. The clear implication of the Gospel is that although this mission had been begun by the disciples during Jesus' lifetime, it was not yet finished. Now that Jesus has died and we in the church have a mission to continue His work, His instructions are just as important for us, and we must apply the principles to our own times.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss how important hospitality is within the life of your own church, and how it is expressed.
2. What is the smallest contribution that can be made to the mission work of God's people? How can this be understood?
3. Have you known what it is like to receive a blessing from others for your own hospitality? If not, what are you missing?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

In many ways, this is a strange way for this passage to end. It's emphasis of hospitality seems almost random, unless, that is, you see it from Jesus' point of view. The group of disciples were identified as one group for the first time in this passage, and this was the group that would have to stay close to Jesus as He moved towards Jerusalem. Perhaps Jesus was appealing above the heads of the disciples to those listening, so that they would make sure that proper hospitality was on offer for those who would bear the brunt of all that would follow.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Who is responsible for hospitality in your church? Hospitality for preachers, and those who are coming amongst you to do the Lord's work? Find those responsible and discuss with them their work. It would be good for God's people to be clearer about the importance of hospitality today.*
- *Ask the Lord to give you a heart which is always ready to be hospitable to people who are doing the Lord's work, and look out for those who are doing this, even those outside the normal structures of the church.*

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, dwell in my heart; Holy Spirit, convict me of my sin; Holy Spirit, encourage me in faith; Holy Spirit, stay with me on the way; Holy Spirit, fill me anew. Jesus, send me Your Holy Spirit, now and always: AMEN