

Title: Confronting the conflicts on the outside.

³⁴ “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; ³⁶ and ‘a man’s enemies *will be* those of his *own* household.’ 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. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

⁴⁰ “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. ⁴¹ He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

Introduction

Last month we learnt about the conflicts that we face inside our hearts and minds as we seek to serve Jesus in our everyday lives and on special mission trips.

We learnt not to fear physical persecution, slander and rejection.

This month Matthew teaches us about the conflicts that we face on the outside of our lives.

The key to understanding this section of Jesus’s teaching is to fully understand v. 34.

v. 34 in N.K.J.

³⁴ “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

This verse is important for many reasons.

Firstly, because the Jews at that time were expecting Jesus to expel the occupying Roman army and set Israel free from occupation.

They also thought that Jesus would bring in a reign of peace and prosperity.

The reason that the Jewish people thought this was because of all the Old Testament prophecies that pointed towards **what the Messiah was going to be and achieve.**

In Isaiah 9: v. 6 the Messiah, Jesus was going to be the **“Prince of Peace”**.

Many people today might think that Christianity has failed because if Jesus is the Prince of Peace, Christianity must have failed.

There is still so much war, suffering and injustice in the world today.

There is also so much conflict even between families.

If Jesus came to bring **“Peace”** to this world, then His mission has failed.

On a human level it appears from v.34 that Jesus is being very negative about His mission and ministry.

Jesus said that He hasn’t come to bring “Peace”. He said that He has come to bring a sword of division.

How can we understand this teaching of Jesus?

The first thing we need to understand is that Jesus came to bring a **heart-felt peace.**

Jesus did not promise a human peace, but a spiritual peace.

Jesus did not offer a peace which was human based, but a peace that was heavenly based.

John 14: v.25-27. in N.K.J.

²⁵ “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

The Peace that Jesus offers us today is a peace in our heart that comes from the forgiveness of our sins.

To obtain this peace, Jesus was going to have to lay down His life and be killed by human hands and punished by His Heavenly Father.

Jesus was going to suffer God's wrath for the punishment that is due for our sins.

The reason that there is no human peace in this world today is that the nations of this world are not willing to surrender to God's will in their hearts and lives.

People generally speaking resist the offer of a heart peace with their creator God.

They would rather live a **life of self-seeking and outward pleasure**, than live their lives to honour their creator.

Jesus knew that the world would always be divided.

It would be divided between those people who have peace in their hearts and desire to follow Jesus, and those people who refuse the offer that Jesus makes to receive His peace.

In order to have this peace in our hearts and follow Jesus, there is a cost involved for every Christian.

It is like a sword that brings division and conflict.

Jesus, in this passage teaches us that there are two separations that will come in our lives, once we decide to seek forgiveness from God and obtain a peace in our hearts.

Firstly, there is the separation from the people we love, our families. (v. 35-37)

Secondly there is a separation from the world. (v. 38-39)

Finally, Jesus ends on a positive note, assuring us that our present investment in a life that follows Jesus will provide long term and eternal benefits. (v. 39-42)

1. **Separation from family and those we love. – v. 35-37.**

Not many people today have the blessing of being brought up in a Christian family.

If you have a Mother and a Father who are committed Christians, then you are very privileged. Most Christians that I know do not have Christian parents.

If you become a Christian and your parents, brothers, sisters, or relatives do not share your faith, then you have a problem.

Your problem is that you have a different heart and a different mind-set, and a different motivation for life.

You are divided, not by your choice, but by being born-again into a "New Family". **That is the family of God.**

It is not that you don't still love your parents, brothers, sisters and relatives, but you can't relate to them in the same way that you relate to other Christians.

The challenge here from Jesus is that you always put the family of God and the will of God before your unsaved family.

This challenge is very hard hitting.

Jesus is wanting the love and affection for His ministry to be at a **much deeper level** than the love that we have for our families.

This can be just as challenging for people who are brought up within a Christian family.

Once we decide to make Jesus Christ, the Lord of our lives, then everybody else gets second place.

If we deny His Lordship and Jesus takes second place, then the person in first place is like a human idol.

We then love that person more than we love Jesus.

Jesus then goes on to say that if we do love our family more than Jesus, then we are not **"worthy"** of Jesus.

In other words, we **de-value the worth of our Salvation.**

We do not value our Salvation in the way that we should. We put family before Jesus.

Jesus was reflecting the words of the Prophet Micah when He said these words.

Micah Chapter 7: v. 5-7. In N.L.T.

⁵ Don't trust anyone—

not your best friend or even your wife!

⁶ For the son despises his father.

The daughter defies her mother.

The daughter-in-law defies her mother-in-law.

Your enemies are right in your own household!

⁷ As for me, I look to the LORD for help.
I wait confidently for God to save me,
and my God will certainly hear me.

Micah was saying to the Jewish people at that time, who had fallen into sin, that it is not your family and friends who are going to give you salvation and eternal life, it is God Himself. Over the years there have been many missionaries and Christian workers that have been called by God to serve in foreign countries. These Missionaries have understood fully what it means to put Jesus and His ministry before the wants and desires of their family.

Q. How about us?

Are we willing to put Jesus first before our family?

We will never really know until we are tested by God, but we can surrender to God's will, so that if the situation came up we would be willing to follow Jesus.

When I left the U.K. in 1988 to come to Japan as a Missionary, it was perhaps harder for my Mother and brother and sisters than it was for myself and Wendy.

We brought our family with us to Japan at that time. We had three children, and our fourth child was born in Kobe in 1991. We were all together a family.

However, when God called us to return to Japan, over 4 years ago, it was a little harder. We had to leave our 4 children behind, and also our Grandchildren.

Nevertheless, it was worth it, because we valued our own salvation and surrendered to the will of God. We love Jesus more than the love that we have for our own children and Grandchildren.

Yes, we love Jesus more than our children, that is why we are here at O.I.C.

In fact, that is the only reason that we are in Japan today.

2. Separation from the world. – v. 38-39.

In v. 38-39 Jesus makes it very clear that there is a cost in following Jesus.

Jesus says that we need to take up our cross and follow Him.

We live in an age where a cross doesn't really mean very much, except that it is the symbol of Christianity.

However, in those days, the cross meant death.

People were nailed to a wooden cross, and died slowly. It was a terrible way to die.

Jesus was saying that if you wanted to follow Him, then you had to be prepared to put to death your old life and all its desires and passions, and take up a new life of discipleship, following Jesus.

It was a radical transformation.

This life-style went against the life-style of the world at that time and throughout history ever since.

Proverbs 14: v.12. in N.K.J.

¹² There is a way *that seems* right to a man,
But its end *is* the way of death.

James, the brother of Jesus definitely understood this teaching of Jesus.

James 4: v. 1-6. In N.L.T.

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? ²You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. ³And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

⁴You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. ⁵Do you think the Scriptures have no meaning? They say that God is passionate that the spirit he has placed within us should be faithful to him. ⁶And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say,

“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.”

When we become a Christian, immediately we are different in God’s eyes.
We have been justified in God’s eyes, because of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.
Jesus is our substitute sacrifice.

However, being separate from this world with all that is involved is a daily challenge.

Today in the western world we have a very compromising evangelism outlook, and this leads to Christians who don’t really take seriously the words of Jesus written in these verses.

Many Christians, if they are honest, say, “I want to be a follower of Jesus, until Jesus begins to challenge my personal plans.”

Many Christians today say “I want to be a follower of Jesus until He calls me to do something that I don’t want to do.”

If you profess to be a Christian, but you will only go so far with Jesus, then are you really a Christian?
That is something that only you can answer.

What many Christians don’t realize is that when the Christian life is lived in the way that Jesus demands, it is much more convincing and convicting to other people, than living a religion that has no real commitment.

I know that the life that Jesus calls us to live in discipleship, is not only better for us, but it is the best witness that we can give to a world that is hurting, and crying out for truth, love and peace.

When we live the life that Jesus wants us to live, separate from the world and surrendered to God, then people are more likely to listen to the Gospel message that has changed our hearts.

What Jesus is saying here to us today is sometimes quite different from what you will hear many preachers teach around the world.

However, what I can say with 100% assurance is that Jesus is 100% true and correct in His teaching on this subject.

The challenge is, do we really understand the Gospel, the way Jesus teaches it?

3. Separated for an eternal life with Jesus. – v. 39-42.

Jesus has taught His disciples about the challenges of following Him.

He ends His second teaching block by encouraging His disciples to look on the long term benefits of their future, rather than on what they might lose or give up for His sake.

Jesus is saying here that when we give up everything for Him, then actually we find something better. Yes, in the short term we may lose some things of this world, but in the long term there is a reward.

Jesus always provides for the needs of His disciples.

It is interesting to note in verse 42 that there is not only a reward for the disciple who follows Jesus, but also for the disciple who is called to support full time Christian workers.

Jesus has already told us that Gospel workers need Gospel supporters.

Disciples of Jesus are NOT just the missionaries who go, but also the missionaries who stay and pray and give. **They are just as important.**

They will be rewarded by Jesus also.

Conclusion and Application

Today as we celebrate the “Communion Service” I want us to think long and hard about how much we value the work of Jesus on our behalf.

In other words, what does the Communion service really mean to us?

How much do we value it?

In reality, the way that we live our lives in discipleship will speak clearly as to the value we place on the death of Jesus for our own souls.

2 Corinthians 5: v. 21 in N.L.T.

²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

1 Corinthians 15: v. 55-58. In N.L.T.

⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶ For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. ⁵⁷ But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.