

Great Love and Expectations 09-19-04

Matthew 10:29-42 (NIV)

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ³² "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ 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-- ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. ³⁷ "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; ³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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."

There was a middle class family in the 1950s that went abroad for the man of the house to earn his advanced degree. While there, they met a young man who longed to come to the USA to go to seminary to become a pastor. They felt the man was in earnest, so they did the required paper work, promising to meet his financial needs and provide a place for him to live. He spent a year living on the family's generosity, and was like a member of the family. After graduating, he went to look for a place to minister and they never heard from him again. You cannot help but wonder about the association and the real meaning of the relationship. Was he merely using the family's sacrificial generosity for his personal gain? Was his supposed faith in Jesus just a means to an end, his goal being to live in the land of opportunity?

On the other hand, there are many stories of those who have stepped into a needy situation, and the response of the recipient was lifelong gratitude. The recipient looked for ways to give any expression of love in return for all they had received.

We have the Bible's historical accounts of the disciples and their response to Jesus' ministry in their lives. In this very chapter, He shared His authority and power with them. Yet, within a few years, one of them betrayed Him, handing Him over to those who were seeking His life. Jesus washed this man's feet, (John 13:5) shared all things He heard from the Father, (John 15:15) and traveled throughout Israel patiently teaching Judas. He even told Judas He was going to die for him. (John 10:15) I think He even went out of His way to warn Him repeatedly of the consequences of the course he was taking, (John 15:6) and yet, Judas sold Him out.

Commented [notes1]: ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

John 13:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:15 (KJV)

Commented [notes4]: ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

John 15:6 (NIV)

There were the other eleven disciples, all of whom lived the rest of their lives in response to the love and ministry of Jesus to them personally. At least nine of them were martyred because of their faithful response to Jesus' love. Jesus knew that His ministry in their lives was going to have these vastly different responses, betrayal and committed devotion. Actually, He prefers it that way. (Revelation 3:15) What He detests is an apathetic response. Our passage for today is the continuation of His message to the disciples as He was sending them out to do the very things that He does, preach, teach, and heal. (Matthew 10:1) Since we are His present day disciples, the message is the same for us.

²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

The things that are abundant and of little consequence to us matter to God. It does not matter how low your self-esteem is, or if you think you are of little value. A sparrow doesn't have much of song. They are usually full of fleas, but God cares about them. No matter how lowly you think you are, God values you. (1 John 4:9-10) He planned your life. (Psalms 139:16b) He prepared good things for you to do even before you were born. (Ephesians 2:10) He knows the day of your death. (Job 14:5) It will not come a minute too soon or too late. He knows every detail of your life, details you do not have a clue about. (Hebrews 4:13) If you are wondering if God understands, consider the fact that He knows more details about you than you do about yourself. When you can't quite figure out what is bothering you, God knows exactly what it is. He cares. He loves you more than you could possibly imagine. "So don't be afraid," He said. As you go out with His message, do not fear because God loves you and is watching over you with good intentions. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Sometimes we think things are out of control. Things may be out of our control, but they are never out of God's control. (Psalm 24:1) Sometimes we cannot see the good that will come from tragedy, but God knows exactly how to turn the effects of evil around to result in good in your life. (Romans 8:28) What a mighty God we serve! What a loving and gracious God! (Psalm 48:1)

How should we respond? Think about it! He gave us life. Tolerated our rebellion until He could provide a just means for us to be made right with Him. (Romans 5:8) Paid the penalty we could not pay. His great love paid the ultimate price. He saw what you could be and was willing to lay down His life to see it come to pass. (Ephesians 1:18) So what should be our response? We can be like that man that used that family to get what he wanted and then dumped them. Like Judas, who experienced the power and authority of Jesus, His personal attention and service like a slave to him, and yet betrayed Jesus. However, Jesus' love has boundaries. His love resides within the confines of holy justice. It is unconditional, but it is not without any sense of justice. A response is not only proper, it is required. (Romans 10:9-10)

Jesus went on to say, ³² "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁵ I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!
Revelation 3:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹ He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.
Matthew 10:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.
¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
Psalms 139:16b (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ⁵ Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.
Job 14:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
Hebrews 4:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹ The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
Psalms 24:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ¹ Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain.
Psalms 48:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Romans 5:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ... [1]

Commented [notes18]: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ... [2]

In the second-century, when persecution became so common that every church was affected, when all the things that Jesus said in the previous passage had come to pass, churches had a difficult time deciding whom to allow into fellowship. The people who denied Jesus to save their life were not allowed in some churches. Others felt that you should not be judgmental and allowed them to worship with them. Were they going overboard? Only if Jesus was! Don't forget that in this passage, Jesus was talking to Judas Iscariot and to Peter. Peter would betray Jesus, then repent, and stand up for Him, risking his life, eventually to be crucified upside down, because he could no longer deny his Lord. That is why it was such a dilemma for the church. Was the person who renounced Christ a model of Judas or of Peter? Were they truly repentant? You can see that, for better or worse, the church was much more restrictive of whom they allowed into fellowship than we are today.

Are you ashamed to be identified with Jesus? It was years into my Christian walk before I was comfortable about carrying a Bible or speaking the name of Jesus to non-Christians. If you are struggling with being identified with Jesus, recognize it, and look for opportunities to overcome that fear. You might write out this verse and put it where you will see it regularly. But even better, spend so much time with Him you cannot help but talk about His goodness in your life. Our witness should come naturally from a life that is overflowing with Jesus.

Your theology might have a hard time with this verse. Nevertheless, Jesus said it, so I believe it. I believe He tests everyone who claims to trust Him with opportunities to stand up for or deny Jesus. (John 12:42-43) The temptation is to fit in with the world, but Children of God do not fit in with the world. (John 15:19) Christians are destined to come into conflict with the world. There will be friction because Jesus in us challenges selfish living. Light and dark will clash. (1 Peter 2:9)

³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ 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-- ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. ³⁷ "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; Last week I shared with you that, in many cultures, to become a Christian means separation from your family. It means giving up your earthly family for your heavenly one. If Jesus is Lord, you will not put a family relationship higher than your relationship with Jesus. That is idolization of the family.

I often hear the excuse that, "We did not attend because we needed some family time." What is implied is that family is more important than God is. It implies that putting God and fellowship first is somehow detrimental to family, when the opposite is true. If you love your family, you will want to see that they are regularly in fellowship. That does not mean you can't take a vacation, but if it becomes a regular excuse, your priorities are out of whack, and you are passing those distorted priorities on to your family. I am not talking about commitment to an organization but to fellowship with the body of Christ. (Hebrews 10:25)

Commented [notes19]: ⁴² Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.
John 12:42-43 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.
John 15:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

Notice that Jesus' uses this word, "worthy" - *axios*. It means to be of equal or proportionate weight. It reminds us of a pair of scales. Jesus' love will always outweigh ours, but it tells us that putting Him first in our love is only fitting. It is the only place He deserves. Putting Him in second place to family or friends or personal desire is an insult to the great sacrifice He has paid to make us right with God. It is simply inappropriate and unworthy of Him. Our love for family should insist that our love for Jesus be first. (Matthew 22:37) Only when our love for Jesus is first will we be setting the right example for our family. That will cause some to betray family members because they do not understand the need for that priority. The Creator should always come before creation, even our own family, especially for the sake of our families.

Commented [notes23]: ³⁷ Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'¹ Matthew 22:37 (NIV)

³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. In Roman times, some political and military leaders were given the right of the sword. (John 19:10) They could order a life to be taken, within certain guidelines of the law. When these authorities pronounced, "Put the cross on the man!" it meant that the person was on their way to their execution. Their life was over.

Commented [notes24]: ¹⁰ "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" John 19:10 (NIV)

Jesus is saying that if anyone wants to follow Him, the only response worthy of Jesus is to accept the sentence of death. Accept the end of your desires, hopes and dreams. I know this is contrary to much of contemporary teaching, but it is Jesus' teaching. If you want to follow Him, the only worthy response is 100%. There is no room in Jesus' kingdom for half-hearted Christianity that compromises with the world on every other issue. Your way of thinking must die. (Colossians 3:10) Your way of speaking must die. (Ephesians 5:4) Your plans for your future must die. (James 4:13-15) It is the only worthy response to His incredible offer of eternal life and the greatest love ever found.

Commented [notes25]: ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:4 (NIV)

If you want to find life, you must give up your life. To really know what it means to live, you must lay down selfish personal preferences. Submission to Jesus' thinking, speaking, plans for your life, future direction, is the only way to really find life. Losing your life for His sake will bring you to the place of truly finding life in Him. He is your life. (Colossians 3:4)

Commented [notes27]: ¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." James 4:13-15 (NIV)

The person with the cross on their back does not dream about what they are going to do tomorrow. They are not thinking of how they can have more and find pleasure in this or that. They are done. Life is over. They are just thinking about getting through the next few hours. They just want to endure the next few minutes. Jesus is saying that when we come to that place, we discover we have really found life. There is no worry about tomorrow. (Matthew 6:25) We are just walking in faithful obedience to our Savior, and enjoying intimate fellowship with Him moment by moment. We walk and talk with the One who loves us and understands us like no one else could. (Galatians 5:25) Who would have thought that in giving up on our own will and ways we would find what life is all about in the heart of Jesus? We find the wonderful fullness of life that God had planned for us from the beginning.

Commented [notes28]: ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Colossians 3:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes29]: ²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" Matthew 6:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes30]: ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25 (NIV)

⁴⁰ "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Remember, this is all in the context of us going out into the world to teach, preach, and heal. As we go, those who receive us, receive the Lord. (Galatians 4:14) None of

Commented [notes31]: ¹⁴ Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. Galatians 4:14 (NIV)

us understands the whole message from the first hearing of a part of it. But there is something about the Spirit within the messenger that God's sheep can see and are receptive to. They recognize something of Christ in us and are attracted to Him. (1 Thessalonians 4:8)

It is because of that acceptance of the Spirit of Christ that Jesus went on to add, ⁴¹ "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. ⁴² 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."

This is an incredible promise. In light of all the rejection predicted by Jesus, here is a great promise to those who would receive the disciples' message. It is stated as an objective truth. If someone receives anyone who speaks for God, they will receive a reward like theirs in heaven. If someone helps a follower of Jesus because he or she is serving Jesus, they are sure of receiving a heavenly reward. What an encouragement that must have been in light of the dire warnings Jesus gave!

I think He was sharing something that encouraged Him to endure. Jesus could look forward to the positive fruit that would result from His life and sacrifice and be encouraged. (Hebrews 12:2-3) He was giving them a chance to do the same, and us too. Sure, we will be rejected when we speak the truth, but look at the wonderful promise to those who receive. Consider what your ministry to them will mean in eternity. Think of how it will bless them forever. That will spur you on and help you endure.

Have you taken up the cross? Have you lost your life only to find it in Jesus? Or is your relationship with Jesus one of what you can get out of it, like the man who used the family to get to the land of opportunity? Are you accepting His generosity only to turn around and deny Him when association with Him would cause you loss? Stand up for Jesus and He will stand up for you. Deny Him before men and His just response will be to deny you before the Father.

If you will associate your life with His, then you will have the wonderful ministry of being rejected, but also of being accepted, and having a part in changing the eternal destiny of all who will receive you. That can be the joy set before you that will help you endure the rejection and persecution. The choice seems to be clearly drawn between two ways with two very different outcomes. The educational system always taught me to look for gray areas, but Jesus does not teach that way. He teaches in black and white. Be associated with Him or deny Him. Have the assurance of heaven waiting to welcome you, or know you will be rejected; influence other lives for eternal good or eternal evil. It all depends on your association with Jesus Christ in this world. Have you taken up the cross? Have you let go of your life and found it in Jesus?

Commented [notes32]: ⁸ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.
1 Thessalonians 4:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes33]: ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV)

Page 2: [1] Commented [notes17] notes

¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
Ephesians 1:18 (NIV)

Page 2: [2] Commented [notes18] notes

⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.
Romans 10:9-10 (NIV)