

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: Do you recognize the name William Travis from American history? There's a story that on March 5, 1836, he faced 181 men in the center of the Alamo mission in what is now San Antonio, Texas. The Mexican army under Santa Ana, 5000 strong, had already charged twice and been repelled. Travis told his men he was willing to die there but he wouldn't force any other man to do so. Then he took his sword and drew a line in the sand. He asked everyone willing to die to cross the line. 180 men joined Travis. One did not. He was asked to gather his things and leave. The other 180 died there at the Alamo.
- B. I thought of another line in the sand. The 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians kneeling in the sand in Tripoli just before they were beheaded by ISIS.
- C. Today's passage from the Bible is a 'line in the sand'. Turn to **Matt 10**. Here Jesus tells his 12 apostles to go, two by two, throughout Israel proclaiming, "*The kingdom of heaven has come near.*" But then he warns them that they will be like sheep among wolves. "*Brother will betray brother to death,*" Jesus said, "*and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.*"
- Jesus' disciples bring such good news—"*The kingdom of heaven has come near!*"—yet the response is sometimes so treacherous and hateful. And the worst of it is that it will come from some disciples' own families!
- D. Jesus has warned his disciples about what they're going to face but then he draws the line in the sand in vv.32-33, "*Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*" So here is the question.

I. WILL YOU ACKNOWLEDGE JESUS BEFORE OTHERS, NO MATTER WHAT THE PRICE? (10:32-33)

- A. For Jesus to acknowledge us as his disciples before the Father is to be saved and welcomed into the kingdom of heaven. A lot of people have this corny idea that when they die St. Peter gives them the once over at the pearly gates and if they were a nice person and meant well they get a pass into God's magic kingdom. That's nonsense, of course. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* And Jesus tells us here that no one will come to the Father who has not acknowledged Jesus before others. This is one reason why baptism is so important. It is a way to publicly declare your faith in Jesus Christ.
- B. There are so many people who regard themselves as Christians but consider it a private matter. Your faith in Christ is not a private matter. It must be public! Paul wrote in **Rom 1:16**, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."* In **Rom 10:9-10** he said, *"If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."*
- C. You do not need to shoehorn mention of Jesus into every conversation, but we do need to be ready to seize every opportunity. **1 Pet 3:15** says, *"in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."* That answer must include acknowledging Christ, who is our hope!

Illus.: One test came for me at the most unexpected moment. In December, 1983, Susan and I were on a little vacation in Estes Park, CO. We were having breakfast in a little restaurant, minding our own business. The only other people there were four men at another table, and one was obviously a loudmouth. Incredibly, he was mocking Christianity, and in particular, the resurrection of Christ. (Who talks about that at breakfast?!) He went on and on about what a stupid teaching that was.

I could just *feel* the Lord looking at me: “*Are you going to let this go on unchallenged?*”

“*But I don’t even know these guys, and he’s bigger than me, and mean. And he probably has a gun hanging in his pickup.*” I was terribly agitated and very frightened about doing anything. No hero here! But I knew I had been flushed out and I had to stand for Jesus. I went over and challenged him gave him. “*I’m sorry to interrupt, but you are wrong about Jesus’ resurrection!*” I said. Then I gave him a flying rundown of the proofs for the resurrection. He was speechless and I was half dead. I must have shaken for an hour after that. But I had to take a stand.

Let’s continue with **v.34**, “*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*” What kind of thing is that for the Prince of Peace to say??

Jesus is not saying that he came to earth to fight. But, make no mistake, simply by coming as God’s Messiah, he *became* a sword that cut even families apart. His very presence severs even the closest bonds. Listen to what else he said (**vv.35-39**):

“*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—

a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

II. WILL YOU LOVE JESUS MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, NO MATTER WHAT THE PRICE? (10:34-39)

- A. Several times recently I've reviewed for you how strong the family bonds were in Jesus' day. In the New Testament world, a person's most important group was his blood family. [Hellerman] So imagine how unsettling Jesus' words here were: *"a man's enemies will be members of his own household."*
- B. There's a backstory to Jesus' words here. He's quoting from the prophet Micah, written some 700 years before. In those days the Israelites had grown cold and hard toward God. Their religion was all form and no function. It was Micah who said, *"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* But they wouldn't do it. They had become a fruitless, evil, corrupt, treacherous people. And they turned against anyone who condemned them. The prophet of God could find no one to trust. He said that even a godly person's wife would turn against him. That's when he wrote the words that Jesus quoted here, because Jesus was living in a similar time, when many Israelites were not at all ready to welcome their Messiah, nor anyone who was devoted to him, because they had no real interest in their God. It is still that way in some families and communities!

C. The picture here is not of Jesus cutting you away from your family, but of them wanting nothing to do with you if you love Jesus above all others. Devotion to Jesus is offensive to people at odds with God; worse, it generates deep hatred in some people even for their own blood relatives. Jesus' goal is *not* to divide families. The Bible teaches us to treasure our families and instructs on being good and godly parents and children.

I would warn you: I have seen Christians whose love for Jesus and his people is compromised by their intense love for their families. "Family first" is a motto you have to be careful about. "*Jesus and his family first,*" is what Scripture teaches. In fact, it teaches it right here in these verses. **Remember always that loving Jesus and his family *first* is the most loving thing you can do for your spouse, your kids, and your parents.**

D. Now in **v.38** Jesus says, "*Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*" Jesus used this expression more than once. Here, in this context, he is talking about our need to shoulder even the hatred of our family for Jesus' sake. It speaks of the painful death of family or other important relationships.

E. **V.39** puts that another way: "*Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*" Given that the context is about family divisions, Jesus may be saying, *Whoever decides their identity and their legacy is in their family will lose it all, but whoever loses all that for my sake will find a new identity as the son or daughter of God, the brother or sister of Jesus, the heir of all the belongs to King Jesus, and an everlasting home with the Father.*

F. *Illus.:* Do you remember how last Sunday John, who is from Muslim-dominated Uzbekistan, described the threats on his life when he became a Christian? Remember how his uncle pressed a knife to his side, demanding he turn away from his faith in Christ! John told us, “*Before Christ I didn’t like my family. But when I saw Christ and Christ transformed my heart, Christ give me big love for my family, for my parents. I was really a good son. I obeyed my parents and I love them with Jesus’ love, but [even though] I loved them they hated me.... I love my family, my brother and sisters, but they beat me, they hate me and it was hard to understand. I said, ‘Oh God, I am losing one valuable thing—my family—and it was very hard to understand.’ But God said, ‘I will give you a new family.’*”

It is that new family that Jesus is thinking about in **vv.40-42**, “*Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.*”

III. THOSE WHO LOVE JESUS ABOVE ALL OTHERS GAIN A NEW GOD-BLESSED FAMILY (10:40-42)

A. Here the tables are turned. Instead of describing the family we may lose Jesus introduces us to the family we gain. There are four kinds of people mentioned here: *you* (meaning Jesus’ disciples), *a prophet*, *a righteous person*, and *one of these little ones who is my disciple*. (Jesus is not speaking of children here, but of childlike disciples. Later in **Matt 18:3** Jesus said, “*Truly I tell you, unless you*

change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus’ disciples must be small.)

- B. In v.40 we see what a bond we have with our elder brother, Jesus. Someone who welcomes me as a Christian brother welcomes Jesus, and by welcoming me and Jesus they are also welcoming the heavenly Father who sent Jesus. All by welcoming me as a fellow believer! When we embrace and love one another as brothers and sisters, those relationships resonate all the way to the throne of God!
- C. In a similar vein, if someone welcomes one of God’s prophets—spokespersons—*because* they are God’s prophet they receive the same God-given reward the prophet does. Which, among other things, must certainly include the prophet’s devotion to God’s Word.

Likewise, if someone welcomes a righteous person because they see in that person unmistakable Christlikeness, then they receive the same reward as that person. Remember the beatitude that says, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”* So the believer in Christ who welcomes someone who feasts on righteousness will themselves be fed the banquet of righteousness.

In fact, if all you do is to give a refreshing cup of cold water to a fellow believer, no matter how humble they are, and you do it because you see in them a brother or sister in Christ, you will not go away empty-hearted.

This isn’t speaking of people who are simply kind to Christians, but of those who see Christ in Christians because they, too, trust in him.

- D. Once, Peter said to Jesus, *“We have left everything to follow you!”* *“Truly I tell you,”* Jesus replied, *“no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or*

children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.” [Mk 10:28-30]

Conclusion

Jesus does draw a line in the sand. We cannot be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must declare with our mouths and believe in our hearts that he is Lord. We must be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks us to explain our hope.

But what if I’ve failed Jesus already? Peter failed Jesus. He denied him three times in one night. Jesus had told him that the devil would test him and when the test came, Peter failed. But then, after Jesus’ resurrection, when Jesus met his disciples along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asked Peter, “*Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?*” Peter replied, “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*” Jesus repeated his question two more times, with the same answer from Peter. In response, Jesus entrusted to Peter the care of his flock. There is forgiveness and restoration for us if we rekindle our love for Christ.

Jesus’ line in the sand remains:

Will you acknowledge Jesus before others, no matter what the price?

Will you love Jesus more than anyone else, no matter what the price?