

Some things turn out to be harder than we thought they'd be. Like throwing a baseball, I discovered this one time playing a carnival game with a radar gun. Basically, you threw a baseball as hard as you could against a backdrop. The radar gun would reveal the speed of your throw. Then you had to guess how fast you would throw on your second pitch. If you guessed within one or two miles an hour, you won a prize.

Well, I thought this would be easy. You simply throw the ball the first time. Then you throw it a little slower the second time and you win the prize. I thought if Major League Pitchers can throw about 95-100 miles an hour, I should be able to throw at least 90. So I threw the ball as hard as I could for my first pitch. The radar gun read 52 miles an hour. "What? That must be inaccurate." But the game host claimed it was accurate. So the game host asked me "how fast do you think your second throw will be?" "I suppose I'll do 50 miles an hour," I said. So I reared back threw a lot less forcefully just to make sure I didn't go over the 50. Then the gun came back showing 37 miles per hour. I lost and suddenly realized that throwing a baseball with control was a lot harder than I first thought.

Sometimes things turn out to be harder than we thought they'd be, like skating. I also had a friend whose parents rented out rooms to international students. I would go over to their place to watch hockey games. We would shout and scream at the TV while these international students from China politely watched. One of them, a guy named Philip Tan, really started to get into hockey. He thought that since North Americans yelled at the TV, he would start doing that too because it apparently helps the hockey players of your team do better. Philip became especially critical of how slow some of the players skated.

Then it came time for Philip to try skating for the very first time. He constantly fell. He couldn't stop so he'd get going and then glide into the snowbank. And he could only skate at a snail's pace. He realized that skating was a lot harder than he first thought. He confessed that the next time he watched a hockey game he would be less critical of their skating.

Sometimes things turn out to be harder than we first thought, like living the Christian life. We come to Christ with great excitement over our forgiveness and new life in Him. We might even believe that our lives will contain nothing but blessings and joy from now on. But after that initial spiritual high we discover sometimes the Christian life is

a real grind. In fact it's hard more often than not. We can get disillusioned or disappointed with God when that happens.

When we reach that point of discovery, we have a decision to make. Will we keep on with our Christian walk or give up because of its difficulties? Jesus knew all along about the joys and hardships that would come with following Him. He ensured that His disciples did not get a sugar coated picture of the cost of following Him. Jesus spoke plainly and honestly about the hardness of His call upon their lives. But it could be endured and even enjoyed by making Him their number one priority and receiving His glorious provisions for the journey. Jesus' hard & glorious call upon our lives - we're continuing to talk about the life of the missionary disciple of Christ.

Over the last weeks of the summer, we have been working our way through Matthew 10. It contains Jesus' teaching for missionary disciples. We saw that Jesus calls all Christians to follow Him every day in discipleship. He showed us what that looked like in Matthew 5-7. But He also calls every Christian to missionary discipleship. That means we live in a way where we proclaim and share Christ and His kingdom with those around us.

We have seen Jesus prepare His disciples for the hard parts of missionary discipleship. He gave them instruction on who they needed to reach and how they needed to trust Him for their provisions. He warned them of persecution while they spread this message. And last week we saw Jesus give reasons why they need not fear in the midst of persecution. Today, we go to the final part of this teaching where Jesus further explains the realities of missionary discipleship.

We're going to see Jesus plainly declare the difficulty of this calling. But we will also discover the glorious encouragement He provides to enable us to fulfill this calling. My prayer and hope through our time today is that no matter what you face in life right now, you will be equipped and encouraged to answer Jesus' call on your life this week and into the fall. Matthew 10:34-39 to live in hope & power & perseverance. I'm going to first read the text from the ESV and then invite you to listen to Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of it from the Message.

Matthew 10:34-39 (ESV)

<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take

his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.<sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 10:34-37 The Message (MSG)

<sup>34-37</sup> “Don’t think I’ve come to make life cozy. I’ve come to cut—make a sharp knife-cut between son and father, daughter and mother, bride and mother-in-law—cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don’t deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don’t deserve me.

<sup>38-39</sup> “If you don’t go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don’t deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you’ll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you’ll find both yourself and me.

Jesus starts with a shocking statement – **I have not come to bring peace but a sword.** What happened to the prince of peace that we sing about at Christmas? What happened to the angel’s praise to God before the shepherds saying “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men?” This must have been another surprise to the disciples. They will proclaim a message about peace between God and mankind. Yet Jesus says “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” My coming will divide people like a sword divides that which it strikes.

So we need to understand what kind of peace Jesus came to bring. For many of us, the phrase “peace on earth” means the absence of conflict or war. So maybe the belief was that the Messiah would come and wipe out the oppressors and then there would be no more war on the earth. But Jesus actually came to provide peace between God and human beings. We needed this reconciliation because of the war against God started by Adam and Eve in the garden. So Jesus came to bring peace between God and humans.

Some would accept Jesus’ offer and provision of this kind of peace. Others would completely reject it. To accept the peace that Jesus offers requires one first admit they are a sinner in rebellion against God. That can be a hard thing to do if you don’t think you’re a sinner or you’re doing just fine apart from God. I like how commentator Craig Keener puts it – *“The demands of the kingdom are so offensive to a world already convinced of its rightness that they provoke the world’s hostility.”* That’s why some people respond angrily to the Gospel. They think they are right in their lives apart from God. Then Jesus or one of his messengers comes along and says “the kingdom of heaven is at hand. So repent or turn away from your old way of living and turn to Jesus.” If I think I’m good and right and someone tells me that I’m not, I would react with hostility too.

Jesus alerts the disciples to this possible response with his statement “I have not come to bring peace but a sword.” Some people will respond with hostility to you and my message. We might get that response from our own family. Verses 35-37 of Matthew 10 might be some of the hardest words Jesus spoke. “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. And a person’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

What are you talking about Jesus? You do know the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment right? Honor your Father and Mother. You wrote it. You do know about the responsibilities of parents to care for and love their children right? So why do you have to use such extreme language?

Say I cut and pasted verses 35-37 onto the internet as an anonymous quote. You came across this quote. What kind of a person might you conclude made such a statement? The first thing that comes to my mind is a cult leader. This is the kind of stuff they say. They grab onto their followers. They start making these proclamations that the follower must love and obey the cult leader even over their own family. They must deny family and cut off communication and live in unquestioning obedience to the cult leader. Most cult leaders expect their followers to come live with them into some sort hyper controlling environment. They often have these delusions that they are somehow God or the only ones who know the truth.

There are really only two possible conclusions to make of these statements by Jesus. Either he was a lunatic cult leader. Or He is the supreme God – the only one who could command that people give greater supremacy to Him than anyone else in the world. **Jesus’ call requires us to give Him ultimate supremacy over our family relationships.** Supremacy is sovereignty, rule, authority and power. If Jesus were some crackpot who claimed to be God but obviously wasn’t, we could easily dismiss these statements. But Jesus is not like any other person who demands the allegiance of their followers. He’s not like a politician who makes waterfalls of promises and delivers a thimble of water. He is not a bully or thug who demands loyalty or he’ll have you beat up. He’s not like a cult leader who demands absolute unquestioning obedience that requires you to turn off your brain.

He is God the Son, the suffering servant who willingly gave up His life for your and my sin. He is the second person of the Trinity, the risen and exalted Lord who now rules the universe from the right hand of God. He is the

source of life and our lives. By him all things hold together. He is the only means of our salvation and reconciliation with God.

Therefore, the only appropriate response to Him, once we grasp His identity and mission, is to give him ultimate supremacy over our lives. If we give anyone or anything more supremacy or importance than Jesus, it's like we are saying that this thing or person is greater than Jesus. Such an action shows deep misunderstanding or rebellion against the rightful position of supremacy Jesus should hold in our lives.

This supremacy test shows up in different areas of our lives. The first area is with respect to our families. We must place our relationship with Him at the highest point of importance in our lives and then put our family relationships under Him. In declaring this, Jesus is not talking about our relationship with some distant cousin in Antarctica. Jesus talks about the closest ones in that culture. In that culture, the son trained as an apprentice under his father. So if the father was a carpenter the son was a carpenter. And in those days, most people couldn't afford to get their own house when they first got married. So sons built rooms onto their father's house. So when Jesus said, "In my father's house are many rooms, I go to prepare a place for you," he paints the image of preparing places for people to live the Father's house. If you as a son became a Christian and your father rejected Christ, you suddenly lost your teacher and you may have lost your living quarters.

Jesus came to set a daughter against her mother. The mother raised her daughter to prepare for tending to a house and children on her own. Sometimes the daughter would take her parents into her home when they were elderly. Yet if the daughter became a Christian while the mother rejected Christ, this mentoring relationship could be over.

Or say a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. We say, "What's unusual about that? there might be a lot of conflict there naturally." But remember what we just said about a newly married son? Where did he bring his newly married wife? He brought her to the room he had built onto his father's house where his mother lived. So the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law had to work very closely together maybe sharing the kitchen or working together on preparing food or sharing babysitting. And suddenly that relationship is strained because of Christ.

But does it have to be so drastic? Is Jesus saying that once you become a Christian or take another step to follow Christ you must cut ties with family members? No. But there might come times when the family's rejection of Christ

means you withdraw from something they are doing instead of participating in the family function. Or it might mean we say no to something our parents or children think we should do.

It does not mean we neglect our parents or stop loving our children. But it does mean that care for parents and children come under the supremacy of Christ. Here's a challenging one for living in our culture today. Jesus says "whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." We or our kids sign up for some program or team or activity or club or job. Suddenly we allow it to take supremacy over everything including time with God; time at church; time for youth; time for meeting with other Christians to pray and study God's Word. Nope – can't do any of that – kids are involved in this and this and this and this and this. Maybe, possibly, if there's a cancellation or an opening, I can give Christ that time.

I know this is not easy to figure out parents. Sometimes you're only connection with your child or the only positive thing in your child's life is this thing that they're part of. You see them come alive when they participate in it. But sometimes we need to evaluate whether we've given our kids and their activities a much higher supremacy than Jesus over our lives.

Jesus commands His disciples to give Him ultimate supremacy over our family relationships. **Jesus calls us to give Him supremacy over our everyday lives.** Verse 38 – "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me". At the time this statement was made, Jesus had not yet carried his own cross. But literal cross bearing was a pretty common sight in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. The Romans used crucifixion to put down rebels. They did it publicly to warn anyone else of the consequences of rebellion. So people saw the Romans force rebels and criminals to carry their crosses all over the place.

But how does taking up our cross refer to everyday life? I think Jesus uses the image to refer to embracing God's will and God's ways for our lives even when they are difficult. It means doing something we would not choose to do but we have to do.

When Jesus took up his cross, it required a radical obedience that involved self-denial. Jesus did not think that taking up his cross might be a fun Friday activity. This was the most horrible, difficult journey that anyone would ever have to make. Here was the innocent Lamb of God going to be slain for the sins of the world. And yet He went and He died which resulted in a glorious salvation.

For you and me, taking up our cross means we have to die to self-will and live according to God's will. We naturally want to do our own will which is comfortable. But often our will clashes with God's will or call. So taking our cross means we are obedient to what God commands and deny ourselves amidst those awkward, tragic or difficult situations in our lives. You might be going through something difficult or awkward in your life right now. Your self simply does not want to be there. Perhaps taking up your cross in that situation is first accepting that you are there. Then you obey what you know God wants within that situation.

One of the clearest commands to self-denial in the New Testament is given to husbands in Ephesians 5. This is the famous or depending on your perspective infamous passage that begins "wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord." That can be tough especially if the husband is a jerk. But I like to point out to couples that Ephesians gives 2 commands to wives and 5 commands to husbands. And the first one is all about self-denial. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

So husbands, were supposed to love our wives to the point of a willingness to die for her. We might think that involves taking a bullet for her in a bank robbery or shielding her body from an intruder to protect her. What a glorious way to give ourselves up for our wives. Most of us guys might even volunteer for that kind of a death because it's so noble.

But most of us don't get that out. Jesus calls us to die to ourselves daily as a way to love our wives. So we want to go out with the guys or play a video game or stop off at the watering hole or watch a game instead of communicating and finding out how she's doing. So we're willing to take a bullet but infringe on my video game or TV time or time with the guys? No way! Yet if we give Jesus ultimate authority in our lives, that's exactly what we might need to do. Jesus calls us to give Him ultimate supremacy over our everyday lives by taking up our crosses and denying ourselves.

Jesus concludes this paragraph with one other area. **Jesus calls us to give Him ultimate supremacy over the trajectory and pursuits of our lives.** Verse 39 – Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will find it. Talk about a paradox. What does Jesus mean here? To find one's life here means to live a life with a self-centered focus and no thought of Christ. If we go and just pursue life apart from Christ, we will end up losing out on life reconciled with God. But if we lose our lives – or lay out our life dreams and pursuits under His supremacy, then we will live the life God has prepared for us to live. We will find the life God has for us. I hope that you can look back over your life as a Christian

and see how your pursuit of the things of this world has faded and your pursuit of Christ and life with Him has brightened.

The more we hang on to our pursuits and life direction apart from Christ, the more likely we will lose this eternal life. But the more we let go of the world and its pursuits, the more we gain the joy of life with Christ.

If you are lost pursuing your life, you can find it by losing it to Jesus – giving up your life’s direction and authority to Him. Turn away from your way of doing it apart from Him and turn to His way of doing it under His loving, perfect, guiding authority. As Jesus said “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. He will come into your life and bring you peace with God.

Christians, some of us may look at this and say, “well, if that’s what’s required, that’s we’ve got to do. So let’s just get down to living this difficult Christian life.” Others of us might say, “I’m barely surviving right now. And you expect me to engage in something even more difficult and taxing?

It’s not “I can do this in my own strength,” and “I have no strength to do anything”. How can we live out this hard command? **Jesus’ command to give Him ultimate supremacy requires a daily reset to Him as our ultimate satisfaction.** Sometimes, we can view Jesus as a servant waiting in the shadows of our lives. We call to him when things go wrong. We expect him to come out of the shadows and comfort us and make us feel better and maybe even solve our problems. Then we expect him to go back into the shadows while we get on with enjoying the good life.

But in reality, Jesus is not some bell hop that we can call for our every need so we can get back to finding satisfaction in life. Jesus is our ultimate satisfaction. John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace* and pastor for 40 years wrote this. *A monarch may give a token gift to all of his subjects, but the gift must be divided. But Jesus has unsearchable, inexhaustible riches of grace to bestow. . . . May he give us an eager appetite, a hunger and thirst that will not be put off with anything short of the bread of life; and then we may confidently open our mouths wide, for he has promised to fill them.*

He also declares that Christ is the all sufficient shepherd to guide us; the all sufficient husband to provide for us; the all sufficient prophet to bring God’s word to us; the all sufficient priest to make intercession for us; the all sufficient king who rules over all; the all sufficient friend who walks right beside us through everyday life. The Christian life is lived by faith to find Christ as “all in all in himself” and to see Christ as “all in all for us” has the power to cheer our sorrowing



hearts, strengthen our spiritual eagerness, make hard duties easy and make bitter experiences sweet, “ if we will look to Christ as our sufficiency.

But life’s hardships and difficulties can blur our vision of His sufficiency. We must daily reset to Him as our ultimate satisfaction by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we don’t, satisfaction depends on things going well, getting what I want, and putting happiness in the hands of people and circumstances you have no control over. Newton writes *“Every step along the path of life is a battle for the Christian to keep two eyes on Christ. I find that to keep my eye simply upon Christ, as my peace, and my life, is by far the hardest part of my calling.*

Trusting in Christ and His sufficiency is our great consolation for whatever goes on in our lives. Yes, the Christian life is harder than it first seemed to be. We need to first give over every area of our lives to Jesus’ supremacy. Then we must turn to Him as our ultimate satisfaction and sufficiency for everything we need and face in life.