

# Believers' Bible Commentary

## on Matthew 9 & 10

### H. Power to Forgive Sins (9:1–8)

9:1 Rejected by the Gergesenes, the Savior recrossed the Sea of Galilee and came to Capernaum, which had become **His own city** after the people of Nazareth attempted to destroy Him (Luke 4:29–31). It was here that He performed some of His mightiest miracles.

9:2 Four men came to Him, carrying a **paralytic** on a crude bed or mat. Mark's account tells us that because of the crowd, they had to tear up the roof and lower the man into Jesus' presence (2:1–12). When **Jesus** saw **their faith**, He **said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."** Notice that He saw *their* faith. Faith prompted the men to bring the invalid to Jesus, and the invalid's faith went out to Jesus for healing. Our Lord first rewarded this faith by pronouncing his **sins forgiven**. The Great Physician removed the cause before treating the symptoms; He gave the greater blessing first. This raises the question whether Christ ever healed a person without also imparting salvation.

9:3–5 When **some of the scribes** heard Jesus declare the man's sins forgiven, they accused Him of blasphemy **within themselves**. After all, only God can forgive sins—and they were certainly not about to receive Him as God! The omniscient Lord Jesus read their thoughts, rebuked them for the **evil in their hearts** of unbelief, then asked them whether it was **easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Arise and walk."** Actually it's as easy to *say* one as the other, but which is easier to *do*? Both are humanly impossible, but the results of the first command are not visible whereas the effects of the second are immediately discernible.

9:6, 7 In order to show the scribes that He had authority **on earth to forgive sins** (and should therefore be honored as God), Jesus condescended to give them a miracle they could *see*. Turning **to the paralytic**, He said, **"Arise, take up your bed and go to your house."**

9:8 When the multitudes saw him walking home with his pallet, they registered two emotions—fear and wonder. They were afraid in the presence of an obviously supernatural visitation. They **glorified God** for giving **such power to men**. But they completely missed the significance of the miracle. The *visible* healing of the paralytic was designed to confirm that the man's sins had been forgiven, an *invisible* miracle. From this they should have realized that what they had witnessed was not a demonstration of God giving authority to men but of God's presence among them in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. But they didn't understand.

As for the scribes, we know from later events that they only became more hardened in their unbelief and hatred.

### I. Jesus Calls Matthew the Tax Collector (9:9–13)

9:9 The tense atmosphere building up around the Savior is temporarily relieved by Matthew's simple and humble account of his own call. A tax-collector or custom house officer, he and his fellow officials were hated intensely by the Jews because of their crookedness, because of the oppressive taxes they exacted, and most of all, because they served the interests of the Roman Empire, Israel's overlord. As **Jesus passed** the tax office, **He said to** Matthew, **"Follow Me."** The response was instantaneous; he **arose and followed**; leaving a traditionally dishonest job to become an instant disciple of Jesus. As someone has said, "He lost a comfortable job, but he found a destiny. He lost a good income but he found honor. He lost a comfortable security, but he found an adventure the like of which he had never dreamed." Not the least among his rewards were that he became one of the twelve and was honored to write the Gospel which bears his name.

9:10 The meal described here was arranged by Matthew in honor of Jesus (Luke 5:29). It was his way of confessing Christ publicly and of introducing his associates to the Savior. Necessarily, therefore, the guests were **tax-collectors** and others generally known to be **sinners!**

9:11 It was the practice in those days to eat reclining on couches and facing the table. **When the Pharisees saw** Jesus associating in this way with the social riff-raff, they went to His disciples and charged Him with "guilt by association"; surely no true prophet would eat with **sinners!**

9:12 Jesus overheard and answered, **"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."** The Pharisees considered themselves healthy and were unwilling to confess their need for Jesus. (Actually they were extremely ill spiritually and desperately needed healing.) The tax collectors and sinners, by contrast, were more willing to acknowledge their true condition and to seek Christ's saving grace. So the charge was true! Jesus *did* eat with sinners. If He had eaten with the Pharisees, the charge would still have been true—perhaps even more so! If Jesus hadn't eaten with sinners in a world like ours, He would always have eaten alone. But it is important to remember that when He ate with sinners, He never indulged in their evil ways or compromised His testimony. He used the occasion to call men to truth and holiness.

9:13 The Pharisees' trouble was that although they followed the rituals of Judaism with great precision, their hearts were hard, cold, and merciless. So Jesus dismissed them with a challenge to **learn** the meaning of Jehovah's words, **"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"** (quoted from Hosea 6:6). Although God had instituted the sacrificial system, He did not want the rituals to become a substitute for inward righteousness. God is not a Ritualist, and He is not pleased with rituals divorced from personal godliness—precisely what the Pharisees had done. They observed the letter of the law but had no compassion for those who needed spiritual help. They associated only with self-righteous people like themselves.

In contrast, the Lord Jesus pointedly told them, **"I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."** He perfectly fulfilled God's desire for mercy as well as sacrifice. In one sense, there are no righteous people in the world, so He came to call all men **to repentance**. But here the thought is that His call is only effective for those who acknowledge themselves to be sinners. He can dispense no healing to those who are proud, self-righteous, and unrepentant—like the Pharisees.

## J. Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting (9:14–17)

9:14 By this time **John** the Baptist was probably in prison. His disciples **came to** Jesus with a problem. They themselves fasted **often, but** Jesus' **disciples did not**. Why not?

9:15 The Lord answered with an illustration. He was **the bridegroom** and His disciples the wedding guests. **As long as** He was **with them**, there was no reason to fast as a sign of mourning. But He would be taken **from them; then** His disciples would **fast**. He *was* taken from them—in death and burial, and since His ascension He has been bodily absent from His disciples. While Jesus' words do not *command* fasting, they certainly *approve* it as an appropriate exercise for those who await the Bridegroom's return.

9:16 The question raised by John's disciples further prompted Jesus to point out that John marked the end of one dispensation, announcing the new Age of Grace, and He shows that their respective principles cannot be mixed. To try to mix law and grace would be like using a **piece of new, unshrunk cloth** to patch **an old garment**. When washed, the patch would shrink, ripping itself away from the old cloth. The disrepair would be worse than ever. Gaebelein complains rightly:

A judaistic Christianity which, with a profession of Grace and the Gospel, attempts to keep the law and fosters legal righteousness is a greater abomination in the eyes of God than professing Israel in the past, worshipping idols.<sup>14</sup>

9:17 Or the mixture would be like putting **new wine into old wineskins**. The pressure caused by the fermentation of the new wine would burst the old skins because they had lost their elasticity. The life and liberty of the Gospel ruins the wineskins of ritualism.

The introduction of the Christian era would inevitably result in tension. The joy which Christ brought could not be contained within the forms and rituals of the OT. There must be an entirely new order of things. Pettingill makes this clear:

Thus does the King warn His disciples against the admixture of the old ... and the new. ... And yet this is what has been done throughout Christendom. Judaism has been patched up and adapted everywhere among the churches and the old garment is labelled "Christianity." The result is a confusing mixture, which is neither Judaism nor Christianity, but a ritualistic substitution of dead works for a trust in the living God. The new wine of free salvation has been poured into the old wineskins of legalism, and with what result? Why, the skins are burst and ruined and the wine is spilled and most of the precious life-giving draught is lost. The law has lost its terror, because it is mixed with grace, and grace has lost its beauty and character as grace, for it is mixed with law-works.<sup>15</sup>

## K. Power to Heal the Incurable and Raise the Dead (9:18–26)

9:18, 19 Jesus' discourse on the change of dispensations was interrupted by a distraught **ruler** of the synagogue whose **daughter had just died**. He knelt before the

Lord, requesting Him to come and restore her to life. It was exceptional that this ruler should seek help from Jesus; most of the Jewish leaders would have feared the scorn and contempt of their associates for doing so. **Jesus** honored his faith by starting out with His disciples toward the ruler's home.

9:20 Another interruption! This time it was a **woman** who had suffered from a hemorrhage **for twelve years**. Jesus was never annoyed by such interruptions; He was always poised, accessible, and approachable.

9:21, 22 Medical science had been unable to help this woman; in fact, her condition was deteriorating (Mark 5:26). In her extremity she met Jesus—or at least she saw Him surrounded by a crowd. Believing that He was able and willing to heal her, she edged through the crowd **and touched the fringe of His garment**. True faith never goes unnoticed by Him. He turned and pronounced her healed; instantly **the woman was made well** for the first time in twelve years.

9:23, 24 The narrative now returns to the ruler whose daughter had died. **When Jesus** reached the **house**, the professional mourners were wailing with what someone has called “synthetic grief.” He ordered the room cleared of visitors, at the same time announcing that **the girl was not dead but sleeping**. Most Bible students believe the Lord was using *sleep* here in a figurative sense for death. Some believe, however, that the girl was in a coma. This interpretation does not deny that Jesus could have raised her had she been dead, but it emphasizes that Jesus was too honest to take credit for raising the dead when actually the girl had not died. Sir Robert Anderson held this view. He pointed out that the father and all the others said she had died, but **Jesus** said she had **not**.

9:25, 26 In any case, the Lord **took** the girl **by the hand** and the miracle occurred—she got up. It didn't take long for the news of the miracle to spread throughout the district.

#### **L. Power to Give Sight (9:27–31)**

9:27, 28 As **Jesus departed from** the ruler's neighborhood, **two blind men followed Him**, pleading for sight. Though dispossessed of natural vision, these men had acute spiritual discernment. In addressing Jesus as **Son of David**, they recognized Him as the long-awaited Messiah and rightful King of Israel. And they knew that when the Messiah came, one of His credentials would be that He would give sight to the blind (Isa. 61:1, RSV margin). When Jesus tested their faith by asking if they believed He was **able to do this** (give them sight), they unhesitatingly responded, “**Yes, Lord.**”

9:29, 30 Then the Great Physician **touched their eyes** and assured them that because they believed, they would see. Immediately their eyes became completely normal.

Man says, “Seeing is believing.” God says, “Believing is seeing.” Jesus said to Martha, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see?” (John 11:40). The writer to the Hebrews noted, “By faith we understand ... ” (11:3). The Apostle John wrote, “I have written to you who believe ... that you may know ... ” (1 Jn. 5:13). God is not pleased with the kind of faith that demands a prior miracle. He wants us to believe Him simply because He is God.

Why did **Jesus sternly** warn the healed men to tell no one? In the **notes** on 8:4, we suggested that probably He did not want to foment a premature movement to enthrone Him as King. The people were as yet unrepentant; He could not reign over them until they were born again. Also, a revolutionary uprising in favor of Jesus would bring

terrible reprisals from the Roman government on the Jews. Besides all this, the Lord Jesus had to go to the cross before He could reign as King; anything that blocked His pathway to Calvary was at variance with the predetermined plan of God.

9:31 In their delirious gratitude for eyesight, the two men **spread the news** of their miraculous cure. While we might be tempted to sympathize, and even to admire their exuberant testimony, the hard fact is that they were crassly disobedient and inevitably did more harm than good, probably by stirring up shallow curiosity rather than Spirit-inspired interest. Not even gratitude is a valid excuse for disobedience.

### **M. Power to Give Speech (9:32–34)**

9:32 First Jesus gave life to the dead; then sight to the blind; now speech to the dumb. There seems to be a spiritual sequence in the miracles here—life first, then understanding, and then testimony.

An evil spirit had stricken this man with dumbness. Someone was concerned enough to bring the demoniac to Jesus. God bless the noble band of the anonymous who have been His instruments in bringing others to Jesus!

9:33 As soon as **the demon was cast out, the mute spoke**. Surely we may assume that he used his restored power of speech in worship and witness for the One who had so graciously healed him. The common people acknowledged that **Israel** was witnessing unprecedented miracles.

9:34 **But the Pharisees** answered by saying that Jesus cast **out demons by the ruler of demons**. This is what Jesus later labeled the unpardonable sin (12:32). To attribute the miracles which He performed by the Holy Spirit to the power of Satan was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. While others were being blessed by the healing touch of Christ, the Pharisees remained spiritually dead, blind, and dumb.

### **A. The Need for Harvest Workers (9:35–38)**

9:35 This verse begins what is known as the Third Galilean Circuit. **Jesus** traveled throughout **the cities and villages**, preaching the good news of **the kingdom**, namely, that He was the King of Israel, and that if the nation repented and acknowledged Him, He would reign over them. A bona fide offer of the kingdom was made to Israel at this time. What would have happened if Israel had responded? The Bible does not answer the question. We do know that Christ would still have had to die to provide a righteous basis by which God could justify sinners of all ages.

As Christ taught and preached, He healed all kinds of sicknesses. Just as miracles characterized the First Advent of the Messiah, in lowly grace, so they will mark His Second Advent, in power and great glory (cf. Heb. 6:5: “the powers of the age to come”).

9:36 As He gazed on Israel’s **multitudes**, harassed and helpless, He saw them as **sheep** without a **shepherd**. His great heart of **compassion** went out to **them**. Oh, that we might know more of that yearning for the spiritual welfare of the lost and dying. How we need to pray constantly:

Let me look on the crowd, as my Savior did,  
Till my eyes with tears grow dim;  
Let me view with pity the wandering sheep,

And love them for love of Him.

9:37 A great work of spiritual harvest needed to be done, **but the laborers were few**. The problem has persisted to this day, it seems; the need is always greater than the workforce.

9:38 The Lord Jesus told the disciples to ask **the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest**. Notice here that the need does not constitute a call. Workers should not *go* until they are *sent*.

Christ, the Son of God has sent me  
To the midnight lands;  
Mine the mighty ordination  
Of the pierced hands.  
— Frances Bevan

Jesus did not identify **the Lord of the harvest**. Some think it is the Holy Spirit. In 10:5, Jesus Himself sends out the disciples, so it seems clear that He Himself is the One to whom we should pray in this matter of world evangelization.

## **B. Twelve Disciples Called (10:1–4)**

10:1 In the last verse of chapter 9, the Lord instructed His disciples to pray for more laborers. To make that request sincerely, believers must be willing to go themselves. So here we find the Lord calling **His twelve disciples**. He had previously chosen them, but now He calls them to a special evangelistic mission to the nation of Israel. With the call went authority to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all kinds of diseases. The uniqueness of Jesus is seen here. Other men had performed miracles, but no other man ever conferred the power on others.

10:2–4 The **twelve apostles** were:

1. **Simon, who is called Peter**. Impetuous, generous-hearted, affectionate man that he was, he was a born leader.
2. **Andrew, his brother**. He was introduced to Jesus by John the Baptist (John 1:36, 40), then brought his brother Peter to Him. He made it his business thereafter to bring men to Jesus.
3. **James, the son of Zebedee**, who was later killed by Herod (Acts 12:2)—the first of the twelve to die as a martyr.
4. **John, his brother**. Also a son of Zebedee, he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. We are indebted to him for the Fourth Gospel, three Epistles, and Revelation.
5. **Philip**. A citizen of Bethsaida, he brought Nathanael to Jesus. He is not to be confused with Philip the Evangelist, in the book of Acts.
6. **Bartholomew**. Believed to be the same as Nathanael, the Israelite in whom Jesus found no guile (John 1:47).
7. **Thomas**, also called Didymus, meaning “twin.” Commonly known as “Doubting Thomas,” his doubts gave way to a magnificent confession of Christ (John 20:28).
8. **Matthew**. The former tax-collector who wrote this Gospel.
9. **James, the son of Alphaeus**. Little else is definitely known about him.

10. **Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus.** He is also known as Judas the son of James (Luke 6:16). His only recorded utterance is found in John 14:22.

11. **Simon, the Canaanite,** whom Luke calls the Zealot (6:15).

12. **Judas Iscariot,** the betrayer of our Lord.

The disciples were probably in their twenties at this time. Taken from varied walks of life and probably young men of average ability, their true greatness lay in their association with Jesus.

### C. The Mission to Israel (10:5–33)

10:5, 6 The remainder of the chapter contains Jesus' instructions concerning a special preaching tour to the **house of Israel**. This is not to be confused with the later sending of the seventy (Luke 10:1) or with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20). This was a temporary mission with the specific purpose of announcing that **the kingdom of heaven** was near. While some of the principles are of lasting value for God's people in all ages, the fact that some were later revoked by the Lord Jesus proves they were not intended to be permanent (Luke 22:35, 36).

First the *route* is given. They were **not** to go to **the Gentiles** or to **the Samaritans**, a mixed race detested by the Jews. Their ministry was limited at this time **to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**.

10:7 The *message* was the proclamation that **the kingdom of heaven** was **at hand**. If Israel refused, there would be no excuse because an official announcement was to be made exclusively to them. The kingdom had drawn near in the Person of the King. Israel must decide whether to accept or reject Him.

10:8 The disciples were given *credentials* to confirm their message. They were to **heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead,**<sup>16</sup> and **cast out demons**. The Jews demanded signs (1 Cor. 1:22) so God graciously condescended to give them signs.

As to *remuneration*, the Lord's representatives were to make no charge for their services. They had received their blessings without cost and were to dispense them on the same basis.

10:9, 10 They would not be required to make advance *provision* for the journey. After all, they were Israelites preaching to Israelites, and it was a recognized principle among the Jews that the laborer deserves his food. So it would not be necessary for them to take **gold, silver, copper, food bag, two tunics, sandals, or staffs**. Probably the meaning is *extra* sandals or an *extra* staff; if they already had a staff, they were permitted to take it (Mark 6:8). The idea is that their needs would be supplied on a day by day basis.

10:11 What arrangements were they to make for *housing*? When they entered a **city**, they were to look for a **worthy** host—one who would receive them as disciples of the Lord and who would be open to their message. Once they found such a host, they were to stay with him as long as they were in the city, rather than moving if they found more favorable living conditions.

10:12–14 If a **household** received them, the disciples were to **greet** the family, showing courtesy and gratitude in accepting such hospitality. If, on the other hand, a house refused to host the Lord's messengers, they were not obligated to pray for God's **peace** on it, that is, they would not pronounce a benediction on the family. Not only so,

they were to dramatize God's displeasure by shaking **the dust** off their **feet**. In rejecting Christ's disciples, a family was rejecting Him.

10:15 He warned that such rejection would bring severer punishment **in the day of judgment** than the perversion of **Sodom and Gomorrah**. This proves that there will be degrees of punishment in hell; otherwise how could it be **more tolerable** for some than for others?

10:16 In this section Jesus counsels the twelve concerning their *behavior in the face of persecution*. They would be like **sheep in the midst of wolves**, surrounded by vicious men bent on destroying them. They should **be wise as serpents**, avoiding giving needless offense or being tricked into compromising situations. And they should be **harmless as doves**, protected by the armor of a righteous character and faith unfeigned.

10:17 They should be on guard against unbelieving Jews who would hale them into criminal courts and flog them **in their synagogues**. The attack against them would be both civil and religious.

10:18 They would be dragged **before governors and kings** for Christ's sake. But God's cause would triumph over man's evil. "Man has his wickedness but God has His way." In their hour of seeming defeat the disciples would have the incomparable privilege of testifying before rulers and **Gentiles**. God would be working all things together for good. Christianity has suffered much from civil authorities, yet "no doctrine was ever so helpful to those appointed to govern."

10:19, 20 They need not rehearse what they would say when on trial. When the time came, **the Spirit** of God would give them divine wisdom to answer in such a way as to glorify Christ and utterly confuse and frustrate their accusers. Two extremes should be avoided in interpreting verse 19. The first is the naive assumption that a Christian never needs to prepare a message in advance. The second is the view that the verse has no relevance for us today. It is proper and desirable for a preacher to prayerfully wait before God for the appropriate word for a specific occasion. But it is also true that in crises, all believers can claim God's promise to give them wisdom to speak with divine intuition. They become mouthpieces for the Spirit of their Father.

10:21 Jesus forewarned His disciples that they would have to face treachery and betrayal. **Brother** would accuse **brother**. **Father** would betray **his child**. **Children** would become informers against their **parents**, resulting in the execution of the parents.

J. C. Macaulay put it well:

We are in good company in enduring the world's hatred. ... The servant may not expect better treatment at the hands of the enemy than the Lord Himself received. If the world had nothing better than a cross for Jesus, it will not have a royal carriage for His followers: if only thorns for Him, there will not be garlands for us. ... Only let us see that the world's hatred of us is really "for Christ's sake," and not on account of anything hateful in us and unworthy of the gracious Lord whom we represent.<sup>17</sup>

10:22, 23 The disciples would **be hated by all**—not by all without exception, but by all cultures, nationalities, classes, etc., of men. "**But he who endures to the end will be saved.**" Taken by itself, this could seem to imply that salvation can be earned by steadfast endurance. We know it cannot mean this because throughout the Scriptures

salvation is presented as a free gift of God's grace through faith (Eph. 2:8, 9). Neither can the verse mean that those who remain faithful to Christ will be saved from physical death; the previous verse predicts the death of some faithful disciples. The simplest explanation is that endurance is the hallmark of the genuinely saved. Those who endure to the end in times of persecution show by their perseverance that they are true believers. This same statement is found in Matthew 24:13 where it refers to a faithful remnant of Jews during the Tribulation who refuse to compromise their loyalty to the Lord Jesus. Their endurance manifests them as genuine disciples.

In Bible passages dealing with the future, the Spirit of God often shifts from the immediate future to the distant future. A prophecy may have a partial and immediate significance and also a complete and more distant fulfillment. For instance, the two Advents of Christ may be merged in a single passage without explanation (Isa. 52:14, 15; Mic. 5:2–4). In verses 22 and 23 the Lord Jesus makes this kind of prophetic transition. He warns the twelve disciples of the sufferings they will undergo for His sake, then He seems to see them as a type of His devoted Jewish followers during the Great Tribulation. He leaps forward from the trials of the first Christians to those of believers prior to His Second Advent.

The first part of verse 23 could refer to the twelve disciples: But **“when they persecute you in this city, flee to another . . .”** They were not obligated to remain under the tyranny of their enemies if there was an honorable way to escape. “It is not wrong to escape from danger—only from duty.”

The latter part of verse 23 carries us forward to the days preceding Christ's coming to reign: **“... you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.”** This could not refer to the mission of the twelve because the Son of Man had already come. Some Bible teachers understand this as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. However, it is difficult to see how this holocaust can be spoken of as “the coming of the Son of Man.” It seems far more plausible to find here a reference to His Second Coming. During the Great Tribulation, Christ's faithful Jewish brethren will go forth with the gospel of the kingdom. They will be persecuted and pursued. Before they can reach all the cities of Israel, the Lord Jesus will return to judge His foes and set up His kingdom.

There might seem to be a contradiction between verse 23 and Matthew 24:14. Here it is stated that **not all the cities of Israel** will be reached **before the Son of Man comes**. There it says that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world before His Second Advent. However, there is no contradiction. The gospel will be preached in all nations though not necessarily to every individual. But this message will meet stiff resistance, and the messengers will be severely persecuted and hindered in Israel. Thus, not all the cities of Israel will be reached.

10:24, 25 The disciples of the Lord would often have occasion to wonder why they should have to endure ill treatment. If Jesus was the Messiah, why were His followers suffering instead of reigning? In verses 24 and 25, He anticipates their perplexity and answers it by reminding them of their relationship to Him. They were the disciples; He was their Teacher. They were servants; He was their Master. They were members of the household; He was the Master of the house. Discipleship means following the Teacher, not being superior to Him. The servant should not expect to be treated better than his

Master. If men call the worthy Master of the house “**Beelzebub**” (“lord of flies,” an Ekronite god whose name was used by Jews for Satan), they will hurl even greater insults at the members of His **household**. Discipleship involves sharing the Master’s rejection.

10:26, 27 Three times the Lord told His followers not to fear (vv. 26, 28, 31). First, they should **not fear** the seeming victory of their foes; His cause would be gloriously vindicated in a coming day. Up to now the gospel had been relatively **covered** and His teachings had been comparatively **hidden**. But soon the disciples must boldly proclaim the Christian message which up to this point had been told them in secret, that is privately.

10:28 Second, the disciples should **not fear** the murderous rage of men. The worst that men can do is **kill the body**. Physical death is not the supreme tragedy for the Christian. To die is to be with Christ and thus far better. It is deliverance from sin, sorrow, sickness, suffering, and death; and it is translation into eternal glory. So the worst men can do is, in a real sense, the best thing that can happen to the child of God.

The disciples should not fear men but should have a reverential **fear** of **Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell**. This is the greatest loss—eternal separation from God, from Christ, and from hope. Spiritual death is the loss that cannot be measured and the doom that should be avoided at all cost.

The words of Jesus in verse 28 evoke memories of the saintly John Knox, whose epitaph reads, “Here lies one who feared God so much that he never feared the face of any man.”

10:29 In the midst of fiery trials, the disciples could be confident of God’s care. The Lord Jesus teaches this from the ubiquitous sparrow. Two of these insignificant birds were **sold for a copper coin**. Yet **not one of them** dies outside the **Father’s will**, without His knowledge or His presence. As someone has said, “God attends the funeral of every sparrow.”

10:30, 31 The same God who takes a personal interest in the tiny sparrow keeps an accurate count of the **hairs of the head** of each of His children. A strand of hair is of considerably less value than a sparrow. This shows that His people are **of more value to Him than many sparrows**, so why should they fear?

10:32 In view of the foregoing considerations, what is more reasonable than that the disciples of Christ should fearlessly **confess Him before men**? Any shame or reproach they might bear will be abundantly rewarded in heaven when the Lord Jesus confesses them **before His Father**. Confession of Christ here involves commitment to Him as Lord and Savior and the resulting acknowledgment of Him by life and by lips. In the case of most of the twelve, this led to the ultimate confession of the Lord in martyrdom.

10:33 Denial of Christ on earth will be repaid with denial **before God in heaven**. To deny Christ in this sense means to refuse to recognize His claims over one’s life. Those whose lives say, in effect, “I never knew You” will hear Him say at last, “I never knew you.” The Lord is not referring to a temporary denial of Him under pressure, as in Peter’s case, but to that kind of denial that is habitual and final.

#### **D. Not Peace But a Sword (10:34–39)**

10:34 Our Lord’s words must be understood as a figure of speech in which the visible results of His coming are stated as the apparent purpose of His coming. He says

He **did not come to bring peace but a sword**. Actually He did come to make peace (Eph. 2:14–17); He came that the world might be saved through Him (John 3:17).

10:35–37 But the point here is that whenever individuals became His followers, their families would turn against them. A converted father would be opposed by his unbelieving son, a Christian mother by her unsaved daughter. A born again mother-in-law would be hated by her unregenerate daughter-in-law. So a choice must often be made between Christ and family. No ties of nature can be allowed to deflect a disciple from utter allegiance to the Lord. The Savior must take precedence over father, mother, son or daughter. One of the costs of discipleship is to experience tension, strife, and alienation from one's own family. This hostility is often more bitter than is encountered in other areas of life.

10:38 But there is something even more apt to rob Christ of His rightful place than family—that is, the love of one's own life. So Jesus added, “**And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.**” The cross, of course, was a means of execution. To take the cross and follow Christ means to live in such devoted abandonment to Him that even death itself is not too high a price to pay. Not all disciples are required to lay down their lives for the Lord, but all are called on to value Him so highly that they do not count their lives precious to themselves.

10:39 Love of Christ must overmaster the instinct of self-preservation. **He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it.** The temptation is to hug one's life by trying to avoid the pain and loss of a life of total commitment. But this is the greatest waste of a life—to spend it in the gratification of self. The greatest use of a life is to spend it in the service of Christ. The person **who loses his life** in devotedness to Him **will find it** in its true fullness.

#### **E. A Cup of Cold Water (10:40–42)**

10:40 Not everyone would refuse the disciples' message. Some would recognize them as representatives of the Messiah and receive them graciously. The disciples would have limited ability to reward such kindness, but they need not fret; anything done for them would be reckoned as being done for the Lord Himself and would be rewarded accordingly.

To receive Christ's disciple would be tantamount to receiving Christ Himself, and to receive Him was the same as receiving the Father **who sent** Him, since the one sent represents the sender. To receive an ambassador, who stands in the place of the government that commissions him, is to enjoy diplomatic relations with his country.

10:41 Anyone **who receives a prophet** because he is a **prophet shall receive a prophet's reward**. A. T. Pierson comments:

The Jews regarded the reward of the prophet as the greatest; because, while kings bore rule in the name of the Lord, and priests ministered in the name of the Lord, the prophet came from the Lord to instruct both priest and king. Christ says that if you do no more than receive a prophet in the capacity of prophet, the same reward that is given to the prophet will be given to you, if you help the prophet along. Think of that if you are inclined to criticize a speaker! If you help him to speak for God, and encourage him you will get part of his reward; but if you make it difficult for him to discharge his office, you will lose your reward. It is a great thing to help a man who is seeking to do good. You

should not regard his dress, his attitude, his manners or his voice; but you should look beyond these things and say, "Is this message of God for me? Is this man a prophet of God to my soul?" If he is, receive him, magnify his word and work, and get part of his reward.<sup>18</sup>

The one **who receives a righteous man** because he is **a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward**. Those who judge others by physical attractiveness or material affluence fail to realize that true moral worth is often cloaked in very humble guise. The way a man treats the most homespun disciple is the way he treats the Lord Himself.

10:42 No kindness shown to a follower of Jesus will go unnoticed. Even **a cup of cold water** will be grandly rewarded if it is given to **a disciple** because he is a follower of the Lord.

Thus the Lord closes His special charge to the twelve by investing them with regal dignity. It is true that they would be opposed, rejected, arrested, tried, imprisoned, and perhaps even killed. But let them never forget that they were representatives of the King and that their glorious privilege was to speak and act for Him.