

# Sermons on Matthew

## Receiving Christ

*Matthew 10:40-42*

*With Study Questions*

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**He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. <sup>-41-</sup> \_\_\_ He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. <sup>-42-</sup> \_\_\_ And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. \_**  
**(Matthew 10:40-42)**

## **A Challenging Mission**

Jesus sends His apostles on a very challenging mission. The religious and political environment that the apostles would contend with in the context of the above passage was dismal. What was left of the true religion were white-washed tombs of dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27), and the politics of first-century Rome was not one of mere ridicule of the Christian faith, but vehement hostility.

Jesus does not ignore this when issuing His marching orders. In this chapter we learn that the apostles were called to go and preach (Matthew 10:7); their message was to contain a promise of peace or a threat of judgment (10:11-15); they would encounter severe rejection and persecution (10:16-20); and don't think that there wasn't an emotional trial when they learned and saw that, on account of their message, households would be torn apart, and they would be accused of having an alliance with the devil (10:21-39). In light of all this adversity, they must not shrink back, they must not fear, the message must go forth (10:27-30).

This all culminates with a proclamation of striking intimacy. As the apostles went forward they would be comforted with the knowledge that Jesus so loved and equated Himself with them that to welcome them meant to welcome Him. And if that were not enough, to welcome Him meant you have welcomed God the Father.

### **Receiving**

Jesus taught, "**He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.**" What does it mean to *receive* one of the apostles, or to receive a righteous man? The word 'receive' has a very warm and embracing connotation. It was the word used to describe

the devout Simeon who lovingly *took* the baby Jesus up in his arms (Luke 2:28). To receive means to embrace, hold, welcome, appropriate, and make it yours.

Jesus teaches His apostles that when they are received, He is received and God the Father is received. And those who do the receiving will be granted the same reward as those delivering the message.

So in a very flesh and bones sort of way, what we see here are the apostles going out from house to house, from venue to venue, preaching the gospel in a very hostile environment and told by Jesus that a response to them was a response to Him. How would this make them feel or think? What are these words designed to evoke in the followers of Jesus?

## **Comfort**

I would feel comforted and assured. Last month while preaching at the rescue mission, I had a heckler who was armed with a knife. Last year in China, the pastors I taught were continually under governmental scrutiny; many had gone to labor camps. Occasionally we find ourselves in situations where our Christianity does not socially, philosophically or politically endear us to our surroundings. There is a comfort in knowing that Jesus so identifies Himself with us that we needn't bear this alone.

This gospel will end with a Great Commission; not to go merely to Israel (as in the current context), but to go into all the world. Jesus extends His presence in that commission as well, “. . .lo, I am with you always.” (Matthew 28:20b)

## **Authority**

A sense of authority emanates from these words as well. Not in such a way as to foster arrogance but boldness. The apostles were already told not to be fearful. Here, the charge is more offensive in nature. It is not merely a matter of not being afraid, but bringing the authority of Christ to bear in their discourse with others. Paul desired prayer for boldness (Ephesians 6:19). He challenged Timothy's timidity and urged him to power, love, and a sound mind. Jesus assures them of their office of ambassador.

**Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20a)**

Ambassadors carry the authority of the nation or king they represent. The ambassador should not be unseemly or arrogant. But neither should the ambassador shrink back from delivering the message he is commissioned to speak—knowing that he carries the authority of his king. The apostles, as do we, needed to trust that what Jesus says is true. And that, in a very real sense, to spurn the deliverer of the message is to spurn the source of the message.

It is a wrong for Christians to neglect their evangelistic commission. It is a mistake for Christians to think that as ambassadors for Christ, they do not, in a very genuine sense, represent that which is absolute in authority. To make this mistake does not benefit them in their boldness or comfort; nor does it benefit those they reach who will oft hear a less than authoritative—and therefore less than true—message.

### **Message-Bearing People**

This brings us to another point. One cannot escape the fact that Jesus is speaking of the receiving of *people*—i.e. prophets, righteous men, disciples. The response to these people is a response to Jesus. But ‘these people’ were a certain type of person—not just good people, or people who silently followed Jesus; ‘these people’ were message-bearing people.

Receiving these people or rejecting these people was not a matter of simply disliking the guy. It was disliking what he represented. And the only way you knew this was by being exposed to the message they would bring. There is a trendy sentiment in Christians circles in which people, seeking to justify their silence, say something like, ‘I try to glorify Christ, not by my words but by my actions.’

There is a not so subtle conceit in these words. Are you saying that you are such a righteous person that someone, by merely looking at your stellar behavior, will encounter the proposition that Jesus died on the cross to save sinners?

Christians should exhibit good behavior. But Christians are to bring news. Gospel means good news. Jesus was having His followers deliver a message. Given a proper opportunity, Christians should herald Jesus and inform the world that faith in Christ is their only hope.

### **Reality**

Another implication is reality. What I mean by this is that those who respond to the deliverers of the message know that they are responding to

God. It is not as if Jesus is saying that those who receive you receive me (or as is stated elsewhere, “reject me”) but they don’t really know what they are doing. The ambassador is not cloaked.

When I was presented with the gospel by a young man years ago, I saw many faults and insecurities in him. Yet at the same time I seemed to know that what he was saying and who he was representing was genuine. Jesus comes through in the message.

## **Support the Person/Message**

There is also a call to sacrificially support those who represent Christ. The context of this passage indicates that those who receive and support the apostles would find themselves in positions of sacrifice, duress, persecution and estrangement. We must continually support that on-going proclamation of the gospel of Christ, even if it means sacrifice on our parts.

## **Responsibility**

I must say that I find this passage immensely challenging. Jesus is saying that the acceptance or rejection of me is the acceptance or rejection of Him! My son has my name, he has my look, and he has a lot of my traits. It’s not too hard to look at him and see the connection. And I can say that to reject my son is to reject me on a number of levels.

But when I look at myself I must say that the dissimilarities between me and Jesus far outweigh the similarities. I have to ask myself how much more is the rejection or acceptance of me a rejection or acceptance of my current culture, my frailties, my weaknesses and baneful disposition than Christ. The receiving or rejection of Christ through me only makes sense to the extent that I accurately present Him in my life and language.

Do our words, doctrines, actions, and disposition so truthfully reflect Christ that a response to us is truly a response to Christ? Such should be the case. We should have in our beings, in our minds, in our hearts the light of Christ—the saltiness of Christ. As Jesus had taught earlier:

**You are the salt of the earth; \_\_but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. <sup>-14-</sup> \_\_ You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>-15-</sup> Nor do they \_\_light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are in***

**the house.<sup>-16-</sup> Let your light so shine before men, \_\_that they may see your good works and \_\_glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)**

## **A Reward**

Then there is the reward. I have found that I have neither the sagacity nor the poetic grace to give a remotely satisfactory expression of heaven or hell. We learn here that there is no distinction between the prophet's reward and the one who receives the prophet's message. There is no distinction between the just man's reward and those who receive the just man. And as if to tie the smallest indication of faith to the greatest possible reward, which can never be lost, Jesus talks of giving only a cup of cold water to a little one in the name of a disciple.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that the rewards are not earned but gracious. Jesus says that the reward is given, not earned. I may tell my children that if they're good we'll go to Disneyland. That doesn't mean they've earned a trip to Disneyland. If they show up at the front gate of Disneyland and try to get in by saying "We were good today so our father says we get in," the ticket-taker will hardly be impressed. Dad still has to shell out the dough. The price paid for our rewards was paid by Christ on Calvary.

What can be said of a reward from God?

**Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ' Come, you blessed of My Father, \_\_inherit the kingdom \_\_prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).**

When I went to China, I came home to my family which had prepared signs, paintings, cards and a warm welcome. I was only gone for a couple of weeks. How indescribable the glory of the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world! And though I think my family knows me and loves me, their knowledge of me and love for me is simply not comparable to that of Christ's. If ever Christians had a thought that they had earned anything—that they had contributed one iota to their own peace and glory with Christ—one glance at heaven will put a rapid end to that thinking.

## **Conclusion**

In summary we learn that our touchpoint with God is through Christ and those who deliver His message. Our response to that message must be active and faithful. And God grants His heavenly rewards to those who have placed their faith in that the good news that Jesus has come to save sinners.

### Questions for Study

1. What was the religion/ political environment at the time of this passage (page 2)?
2. Review the marching orders of Jesus (page 2)?
3. What does it mean to “receive” (page 3)?
4. What happens when one receives a follower of Jesus (page 3)?
5. Why would this be comforting to a Christian (page 3)?
6. What does this concept imply in terms of authority and boldness (pages 3, 4)?
7. What is the nature of the people being received or rejected (pages 4, 5)?

8. What does this tell us about the people who hear the message (page 5)?
9. What responsibility does this bring to Christians (pages 5, 6)?
10. Do Christians earn rewards (pages 6, 7)?