

4. Stories of Jesus:
Sharing the Reward
Matthew 10:40-42

This is the last of a series of sermons in which we have looked at the way Jesus prepared the disciples to share his ministry. He first modeled his ministry to them. He had them follow him, as he went about healing the sick, raising the dead, forgiving the unclean and preaching the message of God's grace and forgiveness.

Then Jesus called the disciples together and gave them instructions. He told them to do what they had seen him do. He gave them the authority to minister to people in his name. He was more than happy to share his power with them. He told them to start small. Begin with people they understood, their Jewish family. They weren't yet ready to go out to the Gentiles or even the Samaritans.

Jesus gave them this warning: They would be rejected and even persecuted by some of their very own people. They were not to be surprised. After all Jesus himself was rejected by many. Why would they expect to be treated any differently? But if they would boldly speak the words Christ had taught them, God would protect their souls.

But Jesus didn't end his instructions with warnings about rejection and persecution. He goes on to tell his disciples that there will some who will recognize that their words and their actions come from God. He tells them that there will be those who will offer their love and their support to them.

And Jesus tells them not to be reluctant to accept their acts of kindness, because those saints will share the reward of the prophets and the disciples, because of their understanding and appreciation of what the disciples were doing.

I remember when I was sent to my first circuit of churches, I was surprised to find that many of the members would give gifts to Becky and me. Often it was vegetables from their gardens. Sometimes they would take us out to eat. Sometimes it was tickets to a theater production. They were very creative in their gifts.

It was embarrassing to me. I was uncomfortable. When I first began the ministry, I was still a court reporter, making good money. I was probably making more money than most of the people in those churches. Finally one day, I was visiting an elderly couple. They lived in a small home. They didn't have much. As I was leaving, she handed me a ten dollar bill and told me to take Becky out on a date. I said, "Thank you. But you keep that for yourself." And she said to me, "I'm giving this to you because you are doing the Lord's work. The Lord said those who give a cup of water to one of his disciples will be rewarded." She said, "I can't preach or get out and visit the sick, or do much of anything. But I can do this for you. You take this so that I don't lose my reward." I said, "Yes, ma'am."

That couple became very important in my ministry. They were in church every Sunday, and they would say to me, "You are telling us what we need to hear. Keep preaching God's Word to us." I was a better preacher because of them. Any reward that I gain from being a preacher should belong to them. Their support was a cup of cold water that gave me the strength to do the work Christ sent me to do.

The Bible tells us that when we speak up and tell the truth, even though we will be persecuted by some, we never stand alone.

It's very difficult to stand alone. The prophet Elijah thought he stood alone. He was called by God to speak the Word of God to King Ahab. King Ahab was a man with a weak character. He was married to Jezebel, a woman who worshipped Baal. She was constantly leading him to do things contrary to the will of the Lord, and God was constantly battling against Jezebel and the worship of Baal.

After Elijah defeated the priests of Baal at Mount Carmel, Jezebel sent word to Elijah that she would have him executed. Elijah ran for his life. He went into the wilderness and fell into a deep depression. He prayed that he could die. The Lord sent an angel to minister to him and then led him up to Mt. Sinai. God spoke to Elijah there and asked him what he was doing there. Why wasn't he at the palace speaking God's word to Ahab and Jezebel? Elijah said that the people of Israel had turned against the Lord and torn down the altars of the Lord and slain the prophets and he, Elijah, was the only one left who was faithful to the Lord, and now they were about to kill him.

God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice and told him that he was not the only one left. There were 7,000 men in Israel who had never worshipped Baal and were faithful to the Lord. Then the Lord told Elijah to go find Elisha and anoint him as a prophet.

Elijah needed Elisha. Elijah was one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament. But he needed someone to support him. Elisha was a young man. He was a farmer. He became Elijah's student. He was grateful for Elijah's teaching, and he became a very great prophet himself. But that wasn't the reason God brought Elijah and Elisha together. It was because Elijah needed someone who recognized God's word and encouraged him to continue to speak God's word, in spite of the opposition and persecution.

We all need that. That's why Jesus selected twelve disciples—not one. That's why he sent them two by two. Jesus knew they would soon become discouraged if they tried to preach and teach alone.

That's why Paul always surrounded himself with a team of men who supported and encouraged him. He himself started the ministry as a part of Barnabas' team.

The point is this: Those who are called to stand up and proclaim the Word of God will eventually give in the pressure to be silent, if they are not encouraged and supported by others.

As the disciples traveled around from village to village, they encountered much resistance. But they were able to keep going. Their ministries were very successful. They came back to Jesus rejoicing in the wonderful things they had seen and done. But none of that would have been possible if they had not encountered some in every village who recognized that they were truly sent from God and truly spoke the word of God. Those who encouraged them were every bit as important as the disciples themselves.

That's why Jesus said that they would receive the same reward as the disciples. Their willingness to stand with the disciples required as much courage as the disciples. And they gave the disciples the strength to do the work Jesus had sent them to do.

Their support and encouragement were like a cup of cold water to the disciples. And Jesus said that those who give a cup of cold water to the prophets and disciples because they are prophets and disciples will share their reward.

One time I hosted an ecumenical event at the church I was serving. The preacher for this event was an Assembly of God preacher. After the service, he said, “Wesley, I don’t know how you are able to preach to these Methodists. They just sit there silently and stare at you. There are no “amens.” There are no “that’s right.” There is no response. And I said, “No response? Sure there is response. Preaching to a Methodist congregation is like leading a silent auction. There are responses all over the place. They just aren’t verbal.” And that’s true. Someone will nod their head, just a bit. Someone will look away. Someone will frown. Someone will stare intently, as if they don’t want to miss a word. By their expressions and by their body language a Methodist preacher knows that most of the congregation are right there with him as he preachers. We can see the support, even if we don’t hear it. Those eyes focused intently on you make it possible to say what Christ has sent you to say. It’s a cup of cold water.

You are not always the one to whom the Word of God has been revealed. But there are times when you hear someone take a stand, and you recognize that they are right, even though many, or even most, people strongly disagree with them and are angry with them for what they are saying. You can make all the difference by simply going to that person and saying, “What you are saying is right and true. Keep on saying it. I’ll stand with you.” In so doing, you will be giving a cup of cold water to a prophet of God, and you will surely be rewarded by God.

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