

Matthew 10:40-42

Introduction

We are coming now to the end of the second discourse in Matthew. Remember that Matthew has divided his Gospel into alternating sections of narrative/story and then discourse/teaching. The first discourse was the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus revealed how we are to live as citizens in His kingdom (5-7). And now the second discourse (10) has consisted of Jesus' instructions to His disciples before He sends them out on their first journey as messengers and ambassadors of the kingdom. Jesus has spent a lot of time preparing the disciples to respond appropriately to the hostility and persecution that they will receive for His name's sake. But now as Jesus concludes, He encourages the disciples by reminding them that there will be those who will receive them with acts of hospitality and kindness as though they were receiving God Himself. In fact, it would seem that Jesus' main point in these last verses is to encourage and motivate people to give His disciples a warm and hospitable reception.

I. "Whoever receives you"

What would it mean for a person to "receive" one of the twelve disciples? Well, in verses 10-11 and 14 Jesus says: "Acquire no gold nor silver nor copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics nor sandals nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart... And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town." We see that in these verses, to *receive* the disciples would involve providing them with food and lodging for as long as they were in town. Of course, it also assumes listening to their words and believing their message, but in our text this morning (40-42), the believing of the message is much more in the background while the main point is the hospitality shown to the messengers (cf. Calvin). Jesus talks about the one who receives the disciples, or the one who receives a prophet, or the one who receives a righteous person, or the one who *gives* a little one *a cup of cold water*. So in this context, when Jesus talks about those who will "receive" the disciples He is talking specifically about acts of kindness and hospitality in providing for the disciples' needs. Jesus says:

II. "Whoever receives you receives me"

So to receive the disciples was to receive Christ. To give the disciples a room and a bed was to give Jesus a room and a bed. To provide the disciples with food and drink was to provide Jesus with food and drink. This is because the disciples came to the people having been sent out *by* Jesus with *His* authority and with *His* message. To receive the *messengers* is to receive the one who *sent* the messengers.

III. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

This just keeps getting better and better and more and more amazing! To receive the disciples was to receive Christ because the disciples were sent out *by* Christ. Therefore, to receive Christ

was to receive the Father because Christ was sent into the world *by* the Father doing His Father's works and speaking His Father's words. We can easily follow the logic here. So to give the disciples food and lodging was to give Jesus food and lodging. And to give Jesus food and lodging was to give *God the Father food and lodging!* Of course, that sounds ludicrous! God doesn't need food and lodging. But then again, God doesn't need *anything* that *we* offer to *Him*. God didn't *need* the food that was offered to Him in the Old Testament peace offerings.

- ✓ Psalm 50:12-13 – If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

God didn't need the "house" (temple) that Solomon built for Him.

- ✓ Isaiah 66:1 – Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

God doesn't *need* our prayers to accomplish His will (God is not dependent upon our prayers). God doesn't need our time and labors in order to save His people (God is not dependent upon our time and labors). God doesn't need our money in order to build His kingdom (God is not dependent upon our money). And yet these are all things that we can offer up to God and that God has graciously chosen to *accept* from our hands! And, of course, God doesn't need our gifts of food and lodging – but once again, He accepts them from us as service and worship offered *to Him*. "[Jesus] intended to assure [His disciples] that, if any one would receive them in a friendly manner, and do them kind offices, he would be as highly pleased as if their benevolence had been exercised towards his own person; and not only so, but that in such a sacrifice God the Father would smell a sweet savour" (Calvin). To give the disciples food and lodging was the same thing as offering up to God Himself a sacrifice of food and lodging. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." With this foundation laid, Jesus now broadens His teaching.

IV. "The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward."

First of all, who are these prophets and righteous people? We can see from two other passages in Matthew that they are basically identical with each other.

- ✓ Matthew 13:16-17 – But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many *prophets* and *righteous people* longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.
- ✓ Matthew 23:29, 34-35 – Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the *prophets* and decorate the monuments of the *righteous*... Therefore I send you *prophets* and *wise men* and *scribes*, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town...

We know that prophets and righteous persons are basically identical with each other in this context because they are referred to *together* in these three different places (prophets and

righteous people, prophets and... righteous, prophets and righteous persons)! Since Jesus pairs the “prophets” with the more generic “righteous person”, I conclude that instead of the more technical idea of those who receive special revelation from God, Jesus is referring to prophets more *generically* as those who are appointed to preach and proclaim God’s word (cf. “prophets and wise men and scribes [teachers]”). On the other hand, since Jesus pairs righteous persons with the more specific idea of a prophet, I conclude that instead of referring to the more generic idea of anyone who has ever lived a life of integrity, Jesus is referring to righteous persons more *specifically* as those who are more prominent and well-known in God’s kingdom (cf. “the monuments of the righteous”). The point here is not importance or worth or value, but roles and responsibilities and callings. In Jesus’ day, not all were called (or expected) to literally leave everything and adopt an itinerant life of following after Jesus (contrast Mat. 4:18-22 and Mark 5:18-20). In our day, not all are called to vocational ministry or entrusted with the same roles and responsibilities in the Kingdom. And so the main emphasis of “prophets” and “righteous persons” is the place of *prominence and visibility* that they have in the work of building and advancing the kingdom.

Now notice that Jesus says the prophet must be received *because* He is a prophet (Greek: “in the name of a prophet”) and the righteous person must be received *because* He is a righteous person (Greek: “in the name of a righteous person). It will not do to receive a preacher or a kingdom worker for the same reasons that we would receive any other person (to have a good time, to look good in the eyes of others, or simply because it’s the cordial and polite thing to do [cf. Hendriksen]). We must be careful to receive the preacher and kingdom worker specifically *because* they are *God’s* servants and *because* we clearly see that to receive them is to receive *God*. This needs to be our conscious thinking and our purposeful motivation. When we receive a preacher/evangelist/missionary, we are to receive him *in the name* of a preacher/evangelist/missionary. When we receive any kingdom worker, we are to receive him or her *in the name* of a kingdom worker. In this way, Jesus says that *we ourselves* will receive the reward of the missionary, or the evangelist, or the preacher/teacher, or that kingdom worker that we received – because to receive them is to receive Christ and to receive Christ is to receive God the Father!

Now what is the point of telling us about this reward? Is it so that we can get more excited because we know exactly what kind of a reward these prophets and righteous persons get (as opposed to “normal” people)? Is Jesus trying to puff us up with an inflated idea of how valuable and essential our service is to God – as though God just wouldn’t be able to get along without our hospitality, and so He is compelled to reward us more richly? Of course not! So what’s the point of promising a *prophet’s* and a *righteous person’s* reward? Well, which involves more effort and work and sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom – engaging in the life’s work of a missionary in a third world country, or providing the missionary with a week’s worth of food and lodging? The answer is obvious! And yet the one who provides the missionary with a week’s worth of food and lodging (*because he is a missionary*) will be rewarded as though he himself had done the work of the missionary! That’s kind of like the man in Jesus’ parable who worked for only the last hour of the day and yet received the same payment as those who had worked for the entire twelve hours (Mat. 20:1-16). Now if this reward was really about *merit* and payment for services, would the one who receives the missionary really get the same reward as the missionary himself? Of course not! Jesus’ point is to show us that the reward is not a *payment* for our services, but a free, generous, and gracious *gift*.

Think about it this way: the reward is simply the *evidence* that God has *accepted* our gift and *received* our worship. Remember, God doesn't *need* anything that we offer to Him. And that's not it! Everything that we give to God is ultimately unworthy of God because God is worthy of *infinitely* more than we can ever bring. This is true not only because we are *finite creatures*, but because we are *sinful human beings*. That God receives anything at all from our hands is an act of sheer mercy and grace. Therefore, the rewards that God bestows are always an expression of sheer mercy and grace! The one who welcomes a missionary/evangelist/preacher welcomes Christ, *and will receive a missionary's/evangelist's/preacher's reward*. God will graciously accept this act of service as service offered **directly to Him**. The one who receives any kingdom worker receives Christ *and will receive a kingdom worker's reward*. God will graciously accept this act of service as service offered **directly to Him**. How can it be so?!? How can it be that we can bring anything to God or that God should condescend *so far* as to accept anything at all from our hands? And yet it *is* so because Jesus has told us it is so! The God who needs no food will accept food from our hands. The God who needs no lodging will accept lodging from our hands. Praise the Lord for His mercy and His grace!

- ✓ 1 Chronicles 29:11-14 – Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.

V. “And whoever gives one of these little ones even [only] a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

From prophets and righteous persons, Jesus shifts suddenly and without any warning whatsoever to “little ones”! “Little ones” can refer literally to children, but the point here is not children but rather those who lack any special prominence or visibility in the kingdom.

- ✓ Hebrews 8:11 – And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the *least* [littlest] of them to the *greatest*.
- ✓ Revelation 19:5 (cf. 11:18) – And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small [little] and great.”
- ✓ Matthew 11:11 – Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is *least* [little] in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

“Little ones” are especially those who could be overlooked or despised (including children) by those who fancy themselves to be more “important” in the kingdom. So Jesus says to His disciples:

- ✓ Matthew 18:10 – See that you do not despise one of these little ones.

Indeed, Jesus goes so far as to say more emphatically than ever: “Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, *truly, I say to you*, he will *by no means* lose his reward.” Not only are we talking about the ones who are “least” in the kingdom, we’re also talking about something as *small and insignificant* as a cup of cold water (“*even/only* a cup of cold water”)! We might think about congratulating ourselves for giving a world renowned evangelist the royal treatment, but now Jesus is talking about giving a no-name disciple just a cup of cold water. The point here is not a sentimental sob story. The point is not philanthropy and good deeds. The point is not innocent victims who deserve our help. There is no evidence that this “little one” was dying of thirst. Notice that we give the little one a cup of cold water *not* primarily because he or she is thirsty, but rather because he or she is a *disciple*! The point is obviously not that offering someone a cup of cold water makes us so noble and worthy as to deserve or merit a reward from God! The point is that *God Himself* is here on earth in the person of that one who is least in the kingdom, so that when we offer that person a cup of cold water, God graciously *accepts* that cup of cold water as though it were He Himself who had been thirsty. The thirsty little one *needs* the water, and yet giving water to a little one has no *lasting and eternal* value in and of itself. All the world’s acts of mercy and compassion will not exempt them from the fires of hell because these acts of mercy and compassion were not offered *as unto the Lord*. It is only when we offer that little one a cup of water *because he is a disciple* (in the name of a disciple) that we can be assured of a reward because it’s only then that God graciously receives that cup of water as though it were offered directly to *Him*. Now I can see why a thirsty disciple would accept a cup of cold water. That makes sense. But only infinite mercy and grace can possibly explain why the God who is never thirsty would accept from our hands a cup of cold water.

Conclusion

Now if we offer an *unbeliever* a cup of cold water *because he is made in the image of God* (cf. James 3:9), then we can be confident that God Himself will graciously receive that cup of cold water from our hands.

- ✓ Galatians 6:9-10 – And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season *we will reap*, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone...

Of course, the people of the world do not care for each other *as image-bearers of God* and so all of the world’s acts of kindness and charity will ultimately be rejected by God as simply manifesting a heart of wicked rebellion and unbelief. But when we show kindness to all people because they are image-bearers of God, we can know that God will redeem each unworthy and inadequate act of kindness by graciously *accepting it Himself*.

On the other hand, Calvin is right when he points out that “though God enjoins us to perform offices of kindness to all mankind, yet he justly elevates his people to a higher rank, that they may be the objects of peculiar [special] regard and esteem.” In Galatians 6:10, Paul concludes: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially* to those who are of the household of faith.” It is *only* the household of faith that Jesus has in mind in Matthew chapter ten when He talks about receiving prophets *because they are prophets*, righteous persons

because they are righteous persons, and little ones *because they are disciples*. God is especially pleased to graciously accept our acts of kindness and hospitality as though they were done to Himself *when the recipients are His own children*. We can think first of all of those who have more prominence in the kingdom. How many of us will be *fighting* for the opportunity to host our missionaries the next time they are in town or to extend to them in any way a special act of kindness *because* they are missionaries – and because to offer lodging to a missionary is to offer lodging to Jesus, and to offer lodging to Jesus is to offer lodging to God Himself? If we had this perspective that we have been learning about, how much more cheerful would we be when the original overnight stay turned into three nights or a week? After all, the longer the missionary stays, the more we are offering up to God as a sacrifice of worship! Pretty soon, we should find ourselves *asking* the missionaries to stay for as long as possible so that they might enlarge and increase this gift that *God* has wonderfully and graciously chosen to accept from our hands.

But then we can think, too, of the cup of cold water offered to one of those who are least in the kingdom (and in a very real sense, that's *all* of us; cf. Luke 12:32). How many of us are fighting for the opportunity to bring meals to those within the church *because* they are disciples – and because to bring a meal to a disciple is to bring a meal to Jesus, and to bring a meal to Jesus is to bring a meal to God the Father? Wow! Just think about bringing a meal to God the Father! And in all of this, Jesus has solemnly promised that we will by no means lose our reward! God will not turn down the unworthy and inadequate gifts that we offer to Him. Instead, He will accept these gifts and even reward us in His infinite mercy and grace.

- ✓ Galatians 6:10 – *So then*, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Teaching our Children

- Q. Jesus said that if someone provides food and lodging for a prophet or righteous person (missionary, evangelist, kingdom worker), they have actually provided food and lodging for whom?
 - A. To provide food and lodging for a kingdom worker is to provide food and lodging for Jesus!
- Q. Jesus said that providing food and lodging for Himself was actually to offer food and lodging to whom?
 - A. To offer food and lodging to Jesus is to offer food and lodging to God Himself!
- Q. Does God need food and lodging?
 - A. See Scriptures at top of page 2
- Q. Does God need (or is God dependent upon) *anything* that we offer to Him?
 - A. NO!
- Q. Are all of our gifts unworthy of God (not good enough for God)? Why or who not?
 - A. All of our gifts are completely unworthy of God because God deserves infinitely more than small and sinful people like us could ever give Him.
- Q. So then why does God accept anything at all that we offer to Him?
 - A. God accepts our gifts (though He doesn't need them and though they are not worthy of Him) because He is merciful and gracious to us (See 1 Chronicles 29:11-14 on page 4)!
- Q. How does God mercifully and graciously show us that He accepts our gifts?
 - A. God actually *rewards* us!!! (If not in this life, then in the life to come)

Q. Jesus said that God will be faithful to reward us for what little act?

A. Jesus said that God will be faithful to reward us even for giving *a cup of cold water* to one of the least of His disciples.

Q. If God *rewards* us for giving the cup of cold water, what does this mean?

A. It means that God has graciously chosen to accept that cup of cold water from our hands as though it were He Himself who had been thirsty.

- ✓ Discuss with your children how these wonderful and amazing truths should motivate and excite us to do good to others (especially other believers; See Galatians 6:9-10 on pages 5 & 6).
- ✓ Discuss specific ways that you can offer up sacrifices to God by doing good to others (don't forget that God graciously promises to accept and reward even the smallest and most trivial thing if it is truly done as unto *Him*).