

We will be in Matthew 10:40-42 if you want to turn there.

-Before we get to the text, I want you to do a little imagination exercise with me.

-Imagine if you will that you get two competing job offers.

-The first offer is this:

-You will start as an intern and be in that position for 5 years. During those 5 years you will only be given a stipend to cover the bare essentials. It will be tight, you will even struggle, but you will have just enough to survive.

-After those 5 years, however, you will be given a permanent job with this up and coming company, the house of your choice, the care of your choice, an extensive benefits package, and a company credit card with no limit and no restrictions on what purchases you can make with it.

-The second offer is this:

-You will start right away, be put up in company housing, have access to a company car, have a good benefits package, and make \$100k/year.

-Not a bad deal right?

-There's a catch to this offer though. Unbeknownst to you, the second company is in the process of going bankrupt and will shut its doors in 5 years, which will leave you jobless and destitute.

-Which is the better offer?

-When it's stated like that it seems like a no-brainer: stick it out for the 5 years to get to the far superior offer with the company that's going to survive, right?

-Okay, well what about these offers?

-Offer number 1: this life will be full of a mix of people accepting you and rejecting you, you will be persecuted, hated, and disowned. Every day will be a conscious choice to die a little bit more, and then in the end you will die finally, possibly at the hands of those who hate you most. But, after all of that, you will receive an endless and generous reward.

-Offer number 2: this life is yours for the living. You are free to find your own path to happiness, to pursue the depths of pleasure and self-fulfillment. You can be powerful, rich, full of possessions, comfortable, insured, self-sufficient, and you can have your fill of exciting and leisurely experiences, never having to think of anyone else's well-being other than your own. But that will give way to endless sorrow and pain.

-In other words, you have the choice to lose your life and then find it, or to find your life and then lose it.

-The choice depends on the reward that is offered, doesn't it?

-If the reward is a gold star then offer number 2 seems like the way to go.

-But what if in the end, all that we have endured, particularly in the defense and advance of the kingdom of Jesus will pass away into unfathomable goodness?

-I would submit to you that Jesus' words in Matthew 10:40-42 should lead us to believe that this is the case.

-Let me pray and then we will look at it.

-Father, as Brett read, You teach the humble. I pray that You would humble us right now. I pray that You would humble us before both Your majesty and Your generosity. I thank You for the Good News that I get the privilege of sharing this morning. But I can't share it all. Your Spirit must be here in me and work through me, and in these people hearing my voice for that Good News to be fully shared and fully known, and to be taken into our lives and to transform our lives. And so, Holy Spirit, I pray that You would be with us now, and work through Your Word, and through me, Your servant. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

-Matthew 10:40-42 says this:

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

-Let me remind us of the context.

-Jesus is about to send His disciples to "proclaim the kingdom, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons". He sending them on a missionary journey as an extension of His own ministry.

-And His instructions have been a bit of a mixed bag, but mostly filled with harsh realities, including:

-Telling them the reality that they will be both rejected and accepted...

-Those who reject them will persecute them...

-Yet they should have no fear for God controls everyone's ultimate destiny and He will be faithful to those who follow Him...

-But they should be aware that Jesus's call will cost them relationships.

-Then we come to our passage this morning.

-Really this is a fairly simple passage with four statements, one summary statement and three sub-statements, that work together to emphasize one point

-Summary statement 1: Whoever receives a disciple receives God Himself.

-Statement 2: Whoever receives a prophet is rewarded like a prophet.

-Statement 3: Whoever receives a righteous person is rewarded like a righteous person.

-Statement 4: Whoever gives the most inconsequential disciple so much as a glass of water for Jesus' sake is ensured a disciple's reward.

-There's a progression in the passage. It goes from the person of highest importance to the one of lowest.

-Jesus and the Father are of course greater than a prophet.

-Prophet, one who speaks for God, is greater than a righteous person who simply obeys God's laws.

-Whoever the phrase “one of these little ones” refers to specifically, it is clear this is a disciple who is of little account.

-There's a shift in the service offered to the ones received as well. Verses 40-41 get at the idea of hospitality with the word translated “receives”, that is, putting someone up in your home.

-This lends power to the point in v.42 where the service is reduced from an all-inclusive stay to the most basic hospitable gesture: giving someone a drink.

-So these statements build to this point: anyone who contributes to the cause of Jesus and His people, no matter how small that contribution, will be rewarded beyond the cost of the contribution.

-We don't need to look very far for supporting evidence to this claim.

-Paul's familiar statement in Romans 8:18 says, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.”

-And again Paul in 2 Cor. 4:17, “This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...”

-Both Jesus and Paul work hard to show the relative insignificance of life's difficulties, when compared to the inexpressible generosity of the Father's reward to those who participate in His kingdom building.

-Especially in the 2 Corinthians passage, Paul calls the afflictions of life both “light” (of little consequence) and “momentary” (lasting a very short period of time), but the glory is “eternal” (lasting an infinite amount of time) and a “weight” (of great consequence).

-Ultimately the reward is beyond all comparison.

-The picture they paint is that the rewards will be such that when we receive them any affliction we sustained en route will be like a bad dream that we can't quite remember.

-Have you ever had that experience? Where you wake up with your heart racing, and a feeling of fear, and you know you've had a bad dream but you can't remember what it was about.

-Then, as you realize you're in your comfortable bed, safe in your home, surrounded by loved ones, the fear fades away, because you just can't remember what you were afraid of in the first place.

-Such will be the experience when we receive our reward. We may simply not be able to remember the afflictions of life in light of the greatness of the reward.

-Recently in our Matthew series Stan has spent considerable time elaborating on the high cost of discipleship.

- The cost is indeed high, including our time, possessions, money, friends, families, and our very lives.
- Stan explained the biblical reality that to follow Jesus requires that we hand all these things over to Him.
- After he led us through considering that sobering cost of discipleship, it is my privilege to talk about the reward of discipleship, and the reward is much greater than the cost.
- Another picture of this is the story of Job, which we are likely all familiar with. To summarize:
 - Job, a righteous and abundantly blessed man, lost everything: possessions, riches, job, children, home, and health. Yet he clung to God even as he struggled with those realities.
 - Because of his faithfulness God restored everything to him, and then doubled it, so that Job 42:12 says, "And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning."
- Brothers and sisters, the cost of discipleship is paid "in the beginning", in this life which last vanishes as quickly as a vapor, but the reward of discipleship is paid out in the "latter days" of eternity.
- And so the contribution of a glass of water secures an eternal reward.
- And the one who receives a righteous person, secures a righteous person's reward.
- And the one who receives a prophet, secures a prophet's reward.
- And the one in the summary statement who receives a disciple, thereby receiving Jesus and the Father who sent Him, what reward does that one gain?
- Unlike Mark in chapter 6 of his Gospel, Matthew actually omits the departure and return of the disciples from the missionary journey Jesus sends them on.
 - One commentator I read made the point that this universalizes the experience of the disciples, and Jesus's instructions to them by addressing it apart from the actual historical event.
 - In other words, we can read Jesus's instructions to the disciples and know that they are meant for us as well.
- And what is the first statement Jesus makes again?
 - Whoever receives a disciple receives Jesus.
 - And whoever receives Jesus, receives the Father.
- And then Jesus goes on to make the rule that the rewards are doled out according to the one who is received, rather than any merit in the one who does the receiving.
- Which means to receive a disciple is to secure the reward of Jesus and the Father.
- Before we go on, let's just stop here for a minute and consider this.
- Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit desire to share the reward of their labor with those who receive them through their people.

-Now, we'll look at that with more specificity in a second, but first can we just worship God for His abundant and unmerited generosity.

-None of us has done anything to deserve this, yet He desires to draw everyone who will come into the fullness of His blessed existence.

-Who is like our God?

-As I consider the reality of such a God, the reward prepared for Him and us seems obvious; a natural outworking of a universe created, sustained, and directed by such a generous and loving God.

-And so I would like to come at this reward from the direction of theological meditation, and then test that by looking at the Scriptures.

-It's important to understand that before the beginning, God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit lived in perfect, unimaginable joy.

-This means that God did not create out of any lack He had in Himself.

-It wasn't like the Father thought, "Man, I'm just tired of hanging out with the Son and the Spirit. I need to make some other people to hang out with."

-At first blush the fact that God created the heavens and earth completely unmotivated by any need in Himself could make the whole thing seem superfluous, as though God created the world out of purposeless boredom, but in reality it points us to the true purpose of His work.

-You see, if we remove the motivation of need from the act of creation it forces us to consider what other possible motivations God could have had for such an elaborate project.

-The answering of this question is one of the biggest tasks of life. And I don't have time to go over the infinite amount of answers to it.

-Instead, let me give you my answer to it: the motivation for God's creation of the heaven's and the earth was His generosity of relationship.

-Here's what I mean: the Trinity did not create the world because they needed anything, but because it is an intrinsic attribute of God's character to want to share the bliss of His Trinitarian relationship with others.

-In this way the world is a natural outcome of that Divine Fellowship.

-A passion project borne *out of* the overflow of their relational love and joy, not any lack *in* their

-To the increase of that relational love and joy by the adding of other beings to it.

-And so, the relationship itself is both the motivation for all of creation and the ultimate reward or goal of it. And we are invited in, or rather Jesus invites Himself in, and if we receive Him, we are promised inclusion in it.

-You see the Trinity was so happy in their relationship together that they said, "We have got to share this goodness with others!" And so they created the heavens and the earth, and filled them with creatures who could experience their love and relationship.

- Not out of need, but out of their nature of gracious generosity.
- Out of their natural drive to bless the other outside of themselves to the uttermost.
- This thought drives me to Scripture, John 17 specifically. Listen to the heart of Jesus as He prays to the Father and consider whether it sounds like the kind of relational generosity I just described.
- John 17:11 “Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”
 - Wants the 11 disciples to be one as He and the Father *are* one.
- John 17:20-21 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”
 - Doesn’t want just the 11 disciples to be one, but all Christians down through the ages.
 - But not just one with each other, but then one with Jesus and the Father!
- John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”
 - There’s the pre-Creation love that we mentioned, that motivated God’s creative work.
 - Love defines the oneness that Jesus has in mind.
- John 17:26 “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”
 - Jesus wants perfect, loving unity with His followers.
- John 17 alone is probably plenty, but there is also our identity “in Christ” that is all over the NT, Romans 8:16-17 calling us heirs of God with Christ, Eph. 1 saying God predestined us in love for adoption to fulfill His purpose of “uniting all things in Him”, and promising us an inheritance in that unity.
- I trust you can see God’s heart in these things.
 - God wants to be one with us.
 - Please just let that sink in.
- It’s here that I want to suggest that one way to sum up the overall narrative of the Bible is by looking at our desire to be united with someone else.
 - We see this desire played out all over our culture, and when it goes awry it causes a terrible mess.
 - But the Bible also speaks to this desire. The Bible begins with a marriage. Actually, it begins with a bunch of marriages: heaven and earth, light and dark, land and sea, but mainly that of Adam and Eve.
 - And in the end of the Bible’s story there is a marriage, between the Lamb and His Bride.

-Marriage is the oldest and perhaps the deepest picture of God's Trinitarian unity.

-Two who become one in loving covenant.

-But our deepest desire is not to be united with a spouse, which is why marriage is a temporary picture. It's to be united with our Creator and Savior.

-In the end, those who make up the Bride of Christ will be married into the unknowable euphoria of the Trinitarian fellowship.

-For those whose deepest desire is to be united to God what reward could be greater? Of course, the fullness of that experience is largely mystery; one which we will be exploring for all eternity.

-But I would venture it's worth the sacrifice of a cup of water, yes?

-I would say it's worth whatever sacrifice is called for. I would say it's worth the sacrifice of our whole lives.

-And so by losing our lives, we find far better ones; by losing the one that we would create for ourselves, we find the life God has prepared for us in Him, for Him, through Him, and in the end, eternally with Him.

-This is the reward of discipleship that far outweighs the cost of discipleship.

-A few just quick points of application I think this passage should bring us to:

-Application 1: Implicit in both this passage and the character of God is that God's people are about taking the Good News of the coming Kingdom, and offering it to all people. And everyone has a part to play.

-It's implicit in the passage, and some primarily go, and some primarily support.

-Both share in the same reward of marriage with the Lamb and His people.

-It's also implicit in the character of that God whose relational generosity drove Him to create the heavens and the earth so that He could share the goodness of His own experience with others.

-If we are His people, then we should have the same heart.

-Application 2: Consider the incredible importance of the Church in God's plan. It is the plan into which angels longed to look.

-The Church is the plan of God from before time made possible by the work of Jesus and realized through the power of the Spirit.

-The Church is the people who are enabled to fully enter into God's own joyful communion for eternity.

-Application 3: Disciples serving each other is like printing our own money.

-By serving and supporting each other we secure reward and train ourselves for eternity.

-Hence, service should be a thing of eager joy, not begrudging obligation.

-In closing, I remind us of the Good News we have.

-We do not speak for God as prophets because we earned such an honor, but because He graciously gave Himself to us, graciously revealed Himself to us.

-Now, because of His grace, we can take the Good News and speak for God in calling sinners to life and repentance.

-We are not righteous by our own merit, but by the righteousness of Jesus given to us by faith.

-Jesus, thirsted on the cross, but was only given sour wine, and yet He offers not just a cup of cold water, but a river of living water. He went thirsty that our thirst may be quenched.

-Like the rock in the wilderness that was split and quenched the thirst of Israel, Jesus was struck and from his side flowed blood and water.

-Blood to make us righteous, and water that we may have life and never thirst again.

-If you have not received Jesus, I would invite you to receive Him this morning. Because He offers Himself to you, and He offers an eternal reward with it.

-If you are a disciple that means you have received a disciple at some point who shared this good news with you, and so received Jesus and the Father, and so secured your eternal reward. May we proclaim Him to the increase of His glory, and that reward.

-Let us pray.

-Father these things are far too wonderful to comprehend. Far too wonderful to fit into a sermon, far too wonderful to fit into a mortal life, and so we thank you for an eternity to explore your goodness, and the great reward of discipleship. In Jesus name, amen.

-And now, to the Good Father of all generosity, who called us to Himself through the grace in Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and for eternal joy in Him with His people, be all honor, glory, and praise forever. Amen.

-I have just finished J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece *Lord of the Rings* trilogy for the first time.

-One of the most enjoyable aspects of it to me has been seeing the echoes of the Gospel with which it is filled. It's by no means a one-to-one correlation or retelling of the Gospel, but it draws on many Gospel themes and characters.

-Many characters hearken to the person of Christ, or the character of God in some way. And many of the scenes represent points in the story of redemption. The scene representing the final destruction of all evil goes like this...

-Upon the destruction of the Ring of Power, which embodies the enticement to sin and the ultimate weapon of the shadowy enemy Sauron, Samwise Gamgee collapses in utter exhaustion, supposing that he will be engulfed by the kingdom of darkness that is collapsing around him.

-Unknown to him, in his unconscious state, he is rescued by the eagles, and carried away to a peaceful place where he is tended by the King Aragorn, in whose hands are extraordinary healing powers. A healer king, does that sound familiar to anyone?

-He sleeps for two weeks straight, recovering from the many evils, difficulties, and injuries he had endured alongside the ringbearer Frodo on their harrowing journey to destroy the Ring.

-When he finally awakes, he is met with the sight of Gandalf, whom he thought was dead. Sam exclaims: "Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. Is everything sad going to come untrue? What's happened to the world?"

-In answer Tolkien writes, "'A great Shadow has departed,' said Gandalf, and then he laughed and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merriment, for days upon days without count."

-I would argue that this is a picture of what our entrance into glory will be like.