

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

MATTHEW 10:24-42

IN this section we have words which have direct application to ourselves.

Just as in the great intercessory prayer of Jesus, recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John, He included us with those who were then round about Him, so here He included all those who should share in His toil, until the consummation of the age at His second advent. This, then, is a section of supreme interest to us, and of supreme helpfulness. The area of application widens. This is indicated by the instruction given to those to whom the Lord began to speak when He said, "**The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.**"

Keep these two words in mind "**disciple,**" "**servant.**" Then go to the end, and in verse forty-one, where, when dealing with that great subject of identification, He said, "**He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.**"

These are words descriptive of those to whom He speaks in this final section - not apostles exclusively, but disciples also. There cannot be an apostle who is not a disciple, but there may be a disciple who is not an apostle. The apostle is the first messenger of the King. That is the distinct office of the apostle. The apostle always breaks up new ground, flashes light into darkness that has never before received it; and we thank God for those who have been successful in that long succession of apostolic toil.

But the apostles are not the only workers in the orderliness of Christ's Church; they do not exhaust the line of service. "**And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.**"

Even these do not exhaust the line of service, for, following the word of that Ephesian declaration we read, He gave these "**For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry.**"

That is to say, the whole Church is in the ministry, and those gifted within the Church are gifted in order that they may perfect the Church for the doing of this work. So not the apostle only, not the prophet only, not the evangelist only, not the pastor and teacher only, is in the ministry, but every disciple, every servant of Jesus.

When any man receives the gift of the apostle, that constitutes him the first messenger of the King; or of the prophet, that sends him like a flame of fire through the land; or of the evangelist, that bids him go forth in wooing tenderness to bring men to Christ; or of the pastor and teacher, that enables him to feed the flock of God, and take the oversight of all sacred and holy work; all are in order to find and equip disciples and servants for ministry.

Every disciple is called into fellowship with Jesus in His work; and standing here among these first twelve, who were to be apostles, He spoke to them, and through them, to the whole company of His disciples; and in this wonderful section He teaches us supreme and fundamental lessons about our relationship with Him in service.

The work to be done is not described in detail here, but it is inferentially seen.

It is that of confessing Christ before men. That is the Church's work. It is all-inclusive. When we have said that, we have said everything we can say about the apostle, the evangelist, the prophet, the pastor and teacher, and the disciple and servant.

Whatever our gift may be within the Church, or as a member of the Church, our work is to confess Christ before men.

Confession does not mean merely saying, He is mine, and I am His. That is a blessed thing to say, and, if only all disciples would say that to men, multitudes would be born into the Kingdom of God. But by confession we are to reveal Him, to flash His glory, to make Him known.

The Church of Jesus Christ is not constituted in order that it may discuss philosophies or indulge in speculations. It is created to confess Christ, and it never ought to rest for one moment, until the last weary, sin-bound soul, in the furthest region of the world, has heard His evangel, has beheld His glory.

The first movement of this chapter had to do with men who were going to be sent away from Jesus, though, of course, identified with Him in sympathy.

In the second movement, when they were to go as sheep in the midst of wolves, and yet bound to Him by the Holy Spirit, they were to have no fear when they stood upon their defense.

This last movement becomes more gracious and tender, more searching and fiery; and the whole theme is that of the identification of the worker with Jesus, and all that it means to him as he goes forth.

- First, our Lord shows what the result of identification with Himself will be in the personal position of the workers (verses 24-28);
- Secondly, what the result of identification with Himself will be, in the matter of the workers' relationship to God (verses 29-33);
- Finally, what the result of the workers' identification with Himself will be in the matter of the workers' relationship to men who are outside, and to whom they are sent (verses 34-42).

Let us take the first of these the worker in identification with Christ.

- The Lord first stated the fact of identification. He declared the issue of identification.
- Next He spoke a word of assurance based upon the fact of identification.
- Further He uttered the commission which is the outcome of identification.
- Finally He revealed the one and only fear that need result from identification.

The fact of identification is revealed in the statement, **“The disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be (or become) as his master, and the servant as his lord.”**

One need hardly say anything here by way of exposition. This statement of the fact that the worker is identified with the Lord, is a wonderful statement, thrilling with grace. We readily bow to the first position, **“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.”**

The word **servant** here is *bond-servant, slave*, and means not merely a servant as one who renders service, but a servant as one who is the property of his master, and therefore renders service. That is the word that runs through the New Testament as descriptive of service. Thus our Lord introduces us to the fact of our relationship to Him.

- We are His disciples, learning.
- We are His servants, bound to obey Him.
- We are therefore not above Him.

If the statement had ended there, we should reverently have bowed the head and worshipped. But He said another thing, a very wonderful thing, a thing no other master ever said, and no other lord ever said, **“It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.”**

By this word the King teaches us that, in all our service for Him, He reckons us as identified with Himself, as going in His place, for at the conclusion He said, **“He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”**

We are His disciples, He is our Teacher, and He is above us; but His teaching is to make us become as He is, and all He is, is ours in this matter of service. Thus He brings us into the place of perfect identification with Himself.

The bond-servant, bound to obey, because the property of the King, is yet as he goes forth, identified with his Lord, with his Lord's royalty, his Lord's dignity, his Lord's authority, delegated by the King to speak for the King, in the name and nature and the power of the King.

Next we are taught the issue of that identification:

“If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household! “

That is to say, the Master has been misunderstood, the Master has been misinterpreted, and we must not expect any other experience. If the Master has not been able to make clear to certain minds the truths He has been teaching, we must remember that we have to face the same difficulty. No doubt the Lord knew that there lurked in the mind of these twelve men the thoughts that are so often with us the thought of their inability, the thought of the tremendous work He was sending them forth to do, and they trembled. They were afraid of the forces that were moving against them, and He said in effect; Yes, you will have difficulties, you will be misunderstood, you will be misrepresented, but ever remember this is the necessary issue of identification.

In view of that He uttered the word of assurance:

“Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.”

Here our Lord did not mean that the evil secrets of the hearts of evil men were going to be uncovered. That is also true, but here there is another application. It is as though He had said:

“Do not be afraid of difficulties which are in front of you; men will misunderstand and misinterpret you as they have misunderstood and misinterpreted Me; but do not be afraid; the covered thing you want to make known must be made known sooner or later; the thing that is hidden, that you strive to make real, must be revealed sooner or later.”

He said to these men and to us in effect:

“You are going out against terrible odds; I have been called Beelzebub; Men have attributed My works to demons, and My words to satanic agency; You are not going to be understood any better than I have been; but do not be afraid, the truth must triumph; the covered thing that you cannot make men see, must be seen at last; the hidden thing you desire to bring out into the light, must come out into the light at last.”

It was a great word of assurance.

Now mark the commission and it is this commission, flinging its light back upon the former consideration, that explains the previous word **“What I tell you in darkness”** that is the covered thing **“that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear”** whispered that is the hidden thing **“that preach ye upon the housetops.”**

In other words, the King said:

“You are to be acquainted with the covered things, and the hidden things, the things not seen by the rulers of this world, the things not discovered by human philosophers, of this or any other age; the things that the wise and prudent never knew; and your work is a twofold work; you are first to listen while I whisper them to you, and then to mount the house-top and proclaim them to men.”

That is the real order of Christian service.

No man has anything to say worth saying to a congregation who has not been alone and waited while the Lord whispered secrets to him.

This is our commission, **“What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light.”**

Note the change here.

He had constantly been telling them not to tell. He told them to tell the vision to no man until the Son of Man should be glorified. They were secret things which He told them in those days of preparation. Such was the attitude of the Lord during the days of His flesh; but the day was coming when they were to tell the secret, to flash the light.

That is our work to-day.

Then came the final word here, as to their personal relationship. You have only one thing to fear, said the Lord. You need not fear these men who do not understand when a hidden thing is revealed, and who, when the light flashes, will become angry. Ignorance will merge into hostility when light rebukes the sin which resulted from ignorance. And did our King ever say anything more thrilling with dignity than this, **“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”?**

There is no utterance more vibrant with victory. If a man kills the body that is the utmost he can do; and the Lord said, that by comparison, that is a small thing.

Presently this King went to the Cross without faltering, without flinching, with regal bearing, so that the men who condemned Him look for all time mean and contemptible in His presence. He went to the Cross in the power of that philosophy. Beyond the limits of human power stretch the infinite realities.

He said, Do not be afraid, there is a spiritual entity which they cannot touch. But there is One to fear.

By some strange perversion there are those who say that Jesus here meant the devil. Satan has no power to fling soul and body into Gehenna, and we are never told from Genesis to Revelation to fear the devil. We are always told to fear God. Men may destroy the body, but there is One Who can take hold of the body and the spirit, and condemn them to lie place of rubbish and ruin. Fear Him!

Then immediately, and by a change as startling as it is sudden, Jesus proceeded to discuss the relation of the worker to God, the outcome of identification with Himself.

There is an interesting merging here of the two sections.

The last closed by charging the disciples that in service only one fear is necessary or warranted, and that is the fear of God. Now carefully note the sequence.

He first tells them the truth about the God Whom they are warned to fear, by giving two very simple illustrations.

- First, He is always with a sparrow when it dies;
- Secondly, He numbers the hairs of our heads.

Always with the sparrow. Yes, do not spoil this quotation by saying that Jesus meant that not one of them shall fall to the ground without the Father's knowledge. He did not say that.

A Scotch commentator, usually to be absolutely trusted, in his commentary puts it thus, "Not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father" and then he puts in brackets, "That is without His permission," and by that parenthesis spoils his exposition.

The King said that God is with the dying sparrow! And the hairs of your head are numbered. That is a passage out of which some would-be clever men have found great amusement. They have said, Do you suppose that God counts the number of hairs in a man's head? Jesus never said so. He said God numbers them. Counting is a human process. Numbering is more than counting. It is attaching a value to everyone, almost labeling each; a far more wonderful thing than counting.

Jesus was showing that God is in the infinitely little as well as in the infinitely great, and when the tired man at his work passes his hand across his brow to brush away the perspiration and just one hair goes with it, God knows!

Do not be afraid, fear God, He is very tender, very gracious, very loving. Our Lord here charges us to fear, in order that we may be fearless; He charges upon us the fearlessness that grows out of fear. Dread Him, and Him alone, Who is able to cast the soul and body into Gehenna. But does He cast soul and body into Gehenna? It depends.

The sparrow that fulfils the purpose of its being, He gives a nest in which to die, and the nest is His own soft and infinite Presence. Do not be afraid slavishly, only fear Him because He is right. "Fear Him, ye saints, and ye will then Have nothing else to fear."

So God is here revealed in all His tenderness, and our relationship to Him is made plain.

Then notice what follows in close connection:

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."

There is a little preposition in the Greek New Testament, what Jesus said was this, "Every one therefore who shall confess in Me before men, in Him will I also confess before My Father."

But there is no such preposition in the other part of the statement “**But whosoever shall deny Me**” not in Me “**before men, him will I also deny,**” not in him “**before My Father Which is in heaven.**”

Therein is revealed the difference between identification and separation.

It is our work to confess in Christ, in the sphere of His life, to make Him the whole fact. “Who shall confess in Me before men, in him,” says Jesus, “I will confess before My Father.” That man stands before My Father in Me and I in him. Identification in confession on earth is identification in confession in heaven.

- Whenever we go forth and confess the truth in Christ, we are standing in Him, hidden and secure.
- While we are doing that, He is standing in us before the Throne confessing in us there, so that while men see Him in us, God sees us in Him.

Identification with Christ is a great responsibility as well as a great privilege. If we deny Him, then we are separate from Him, and He, in separation, denies us before His Father Who is in heaven. There remain the last few words in which the relation of those in identification with Christ to the men of the world is stated.

There are some who will refuse us; our coming will create variance, and foes, and a sword; but we are not to forget that in the presence of differences created by that variance and that sword and those foes, we must be worthy of Him. We must love Him more than husband, wife, father, mother, child. We must take up our cross and follow Him. And then, by a sudden transition, the King speaks as though standing out in the far distance welcoming the workers.

Mark the words, “**He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.**”

Oh, to meet Him and to hear Him say, You lost your life for Me, find it!

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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