

Sample Paper, Application in the form of Sermon & Bibliography:

Exegesis of Matthew 10:34-39

Submitted to Prof Dr Royce Gordon Greunler, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, in partial fulfillment of the course, Exegesis of Matthew. Please note that at the time when this paper was written, I had already completed my Intermediate Greek. For those without any Greek language background, I do not expect you to do translation or detailed discussion on Greek grammar and syntax.

Context

This pericope forms part of Matthew's Missionary Discourse (10:1-11:1) that begins with the appointment of the Twelve (10:1-4) followed by instructions concerning missionary work of the disciples (10:5-17). After addressing issues on hostility, persecution, rejection and suffering for the sake of the gospel (10:18-33), Matthew now turns to highlight the painful reality of discipleship that includes division and hostility within family and the costly demands of discipleship (10:34-39). Although the theme of division within the family has been briefly addressed earlier (10:21), Matthew now further expands this theme to emphasize "the eschatological nature of suffering...(and) the priority of Jesus and his way over against all earthly ties, including the strongest family ties".¹

This pericope falls into two parts. 10:34-36 highlights the character of the coming of Jesus and 10:37-39 draws out the implications, with 10:37 serving as the transitional statement by the reference to family members. The climax of this pericope is 10:39, establishing the foundation that there is no life apart from relationship to Jesus. Together, the emphasis on the demands of discipleship is clear. Unrivaled devotion to Jesus indicates that true disciples must: (1) expect opposition from family members (10:34-36); (2) place loyalty to Jesus above family loyalties (10:37-38); and (3) put God above self by dying to self (10:39). This discourse thus not only has relevance for the Twelve but also for the church today.

“Not Peace but a Sword”: Unrivaled Devotion to Jesus Results in Opposition from Family Members (10:34-36)

Matthew begins this pericope with a very powerful and forceful declaration, μή νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν· οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν. The essential

¹ W. D. Davies & Dale C. Allison, *A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, ICC Vol. II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 217.

message could still be conveyed if Jesus were to simply say, ἦλθον βαλεῖν μάχαιραν, “I came to bring a sword.” This, however, would remove the antithesis of this verse, which contributes to the power of these words.² The announcement of Jesus stands out against its opposite: he came to bring a sword and not peace. The emphasis of these words could further be seen in the chiasmatic structure of this section as follows:

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|----|--|
| a | μὴ νομίσητε |
| b | ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν· |
| b' | οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην |
| a' | ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν. |
| a | ἦλθον γὰρ διχάσαι ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ |
| b | καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς |
| b' | καὶ νύμφην κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς, |
| a' | καὶ ἐχθροὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οἱ οἰκιακοὶ αὐτοῦ. |

The form of the statement, μὴ νομίσητε, suggests that this would have been “the natural inclination of the disciples” and “presupposes the existence of the opinion that is denied”.³ This is legitimate, for the eschatological kingdom of God is characterized by peace (Isa. 11:9; Zech. 9:9-10; Luke 1:79, 2:14, 19:38; Acts 10:36). After all, was not the gospel a message of peace (10:13; John 14:27) and the Messiah called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:5-7)? How could Jesus praise the peacemakers (5:9) and then announce that he does not come to bring εἰρήνη but μάχαιρα? Here, Jesus brushes aside the hope of the disciples of any earthly kingly rule and the attention is now directed toward that which replaces εἰρήνη: μάχαιρα. It is interesting that Jesus does not use the word “war” as the antithesis of εἰρήνη. The use of “sword” for “war” is metonymy and this substitution “is more forceful... (and) involves the replacement of something general and ordinary by something specific and vivid... (and) also contains minor surprise”.⁴ Its effects is to heighten the contrast with εἰρήνη.

What then does Jesus mean when he uses the word “sword”? The word μάχαιρα appears a total of 29 times in the NT (5 times in Matt.) and carries the meaning literally⁵ and figuratively.⁶ In the LXX, there are numerous occasions where μάχαιρα is also used figuratively.⁷ Even in Jewish literature, μάχαιρα is also used figuratively for violence and war and represents eschatological

² Robert C. Tannehill, *The Sword of his Mouth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 140.

³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC Vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 104, 291.

⁴ Tannehill, *Sword*, 141.

⁵ Matt 26:47, 51, 52 (3X), 55; Mark 14:43, 47,48; Luke 22:48, 49, 52; John 18:10, 11; Acts 12:2; 16:27; Heb. 11:37; Rev. 6:4; 13:14.

⁶ Matt. 10:34; Luke 21:34; 22:36; Rom. 8:35; 13:4; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; 11:34; Rev. 13:10 (2X).

judgment or suffering. One of the woes that are to come upon the earth during the age of the Messiah and the temporary messianic kingdom is “the sending of the sword” (2 Bar. 27:5-6) that shall “pass through your midst” (1 Enoch 14:6) where sinners “shall be destroyed” (1 Enoch 91:11-12).⁸ As such, this word certainly does not carry its literal sense in this context⁹ since Jesus’ attitude toward violence and the aggressive use of weapons is consistently one of disapproval (26:51-56; Luke 22:49-51; John 18:10-11).¹⁰ This word has a metaphorical sense and part of its meaning is clarified by this antithetical setting as the opposite of εἰρήνη. BAGD classifies the meaning of μάχαιρα as “a figurative language for war” (BAGD, 496). The choice of this figure of speech is “concrete, vivid and...provoke new insight (and) is always forceful”.¹¹ It clearly tells the disciples that they who decide to follow Jesus must be prepared “for the enmity even of those who are most closely related”¹² to them. This can clearly be seen in the parallel passage in Luke 12:49-53. Instead of μάχαιρα, Luke uses διαμερισμός and this can be seen as Luke’s interpretation of the meaning of μάχαιρα.¹³ Luke’s use of “division” can be viewed as secondary and as an attempt to clarify and interpret the words of Jesus.¹⁴

The word μάχαιρα is further explained and supported in 10:35, being connected by γὰρ. ἦλθον is repeated and the infinitive διχάσαι substitutes βαλεῖν μάχαιραν. This infinitive carries the meaning “to cause a separation, separate”.¹⁵ It further develops the word μάχαιρα by referring to the cutting

⁷ Exod. 15:9; Lev. 26:33; Num 14:43; Deut. 32:41; Ps. 57:4; Prov. 12:18; Jer. 14:12-13; 15:2; 39:18; 41:2; Ezek. 5:2, 12, 17; 6:3, 11-12; Zech. 11:17; and Isa. 27:1; 34:5-7; 66:16.

⁸ Other similar statements include Wis. 5:20; Eccles 39:30; Jub. 5:9; 9:15; 1 Enoch 14:6; 62:12; 63:11; 90:19; 91:11-12; Pss. Sol. 15:7; Sib. Or. 3:316, 689, 796-799; 4:173-174; 2 Bar. 27:5-6; 40:1; and T. Jud. 23:3.

⁹ W. Michaelis, TDNT 4, 526 comments that this word “can hardly refer to military conflict”.

¹⁰ DNTT, CD-ROM also comments that Jesus has a clear conscience of rejection of violence. “In his temptation Jesus rejected outright the bringing in of the kingdom by means of political force (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Similarly, in addressing his disciples on the subject of “position” in the kingdom he declared that, as he came to serve, so their authority must be exercised through service (Luke 22:25-7 and parallels Mark 10:42-5, Matt. 20:25-8; cf. Mark 9:35; Luke 9:48; 13:32). Furthermore, in a society in which a Jew’s friend was his neighbor, and an Essene’s duty was to “love all the children of light...and hate all the children of darkness”, Jesus’ command to turn the other cheek and to love one’s enemies was a rejection of violence, to say the least (Matt. 5:38 ff.; Luke 6:27 ff.).”

¹¹ Tannehill, *Sword*, 141.

¹² *Ibid.*, 526.

¹³ DNTT, CD-ROM comments that this is “generally speaking indisputably taken to mean that Jesus came not to bring peace but “division” - an interpretation given support by a translation variant of the original Aramaic.” Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 167 suggests that the purpose of the use of “sword” is to bring the saying into conformity with Ezek. 38:21, “every man’s sword will be against his brother”.

¹⁴ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 218. Matthew Black, “Uncomfortable Words: The Violent Word,” *ExpTim* 81 (1970), 116 comments that this is “a deliberate softening of the harsher expression in Matthew”. Luke 12:49a contains the sayings of “fire” and “baptism” which are absent from Matt. Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship*, 166 suggests that this is Matthew’s redaction to retain “a shorter form of the tradition (Q)...(and to draw) upon the material which was more pertinent to his theme of discipleship and its implications for family ties”.

¹⁵ BAGD, 200.

function of a sword. It suggests that the separating is not only a violent act but it is also an instrument that “severs what naturally belongs together, hacking in pieces the living organism of the family”.¹⁶ Jesus divides family “just as a sword slices in half”.¹⁷

The results of the division are expressed in a series of three phrases formed in exactly the same way as follows:

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| | ἄνθρωπον | κατὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ |
| καὶ | θυγατέρα | κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς |
| καὶ | νύμφην | κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς. |

This reference of the familial division is taken from Mic. 7:6¹⁸ that refers to a time of trouble before the eschatological deliverance. The threefold phases refer to specific and close relationships within the family and although there is no reference to father and daughter, mother and son, etc., it does not mean that these relationships are not inclusive. The mode of the language itself highlights a threefold series arranged in an open-ended series and the list could easily be added with other relationships. Tannerhill observes that “the rhythmic effect of the threefold repetition of the same pattern invites additions, for a rhythm, once established, suggests its own continuance... (and) three instances are enough”.¹⁹ In such a construction, the text gains in force and the disciples are compelled to think of the closest, most personal relationships and to imagine their severance.

The choice of words in this text also clearly reflects the very purpose of the coming of Jesus, and not the side effects of his ministry. This can be reflected in the other “I” sayings of Jesus that present the purpose of the ministry of Jesus. He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfil it (5:17), not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32), not to bring peace but to cast fire upon the earth (Luke 12:49), not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45), and to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Therefore, the context does not suggest that family divisions are accidental, temporary or problems that can be overcome over time. On the other hand, it claims that such divisions are inherent in Jesus’ mission and included in the will of God “of a cup which we wish would pass from us but which we must drink”.²⁰

¹⁶ Tannerhill, *Sword*, 142.

¹⁷ Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 199.

¹⁸ There are slight differences of wording in Mic. 7:6 and 10:35-36. Matthew drops the two verbs, ἀτιμάζω and ἐπαναστήσεται and substitutes ἄνθρωπον for υἱὸς and uses the preposition κατὰ in place of ἐπι and makes some slight changes in the wording in 10:36.

¹⁹ Tannerhill, *Sword*, 142. Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 219 suggests that son-in-law is not mentioned since it is the new wife who moved into the family while the daughter mentioned is the unmarried daughter. It is not necessary to reason for any particular exclusion. The point of the passage and the literary structure itself are clear that the intention is inclusive.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

The development of such eschatological expectation of familial division is also evident in Jewish thought. “The sons shall convict their fathers and their elders...and they shall strive one with another, the young with the old, and the old with the young” (Jub. 23:16, 19-20).²¹ The Talmud also regards family dissension as increasing during the messianic age. “In the generation when Messiah comes, young men will insult the old, and old men will stand before the young; daughters will rise up against their mothers, and daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law. The people shall be dog-faced and a son will not be abashed in his father’s presence” (b. Sanhedrin 97a).²²

A conclusion can therefore be made that the word “sword” has no contradiction with the sayings that depict Jesus as One who brings peace. The peace the Messiah brings is not the absence of conflict but a restored relationship with God. Paradoxically, in bringing this peace with God, conflict is inevitable between Christ and the antichrist, between light and darkness, between the children of God and the children of devil. This is what Jesus means by saying he came with a sword. As long as there are people who refuse to accept and follow the Prince of Peace, there will be conflict. Furthermore, this text is also not a factual statement of what always happen.²³ Jesus does not come to break up families (15:3-6; 19:4-9; Mark 7:9-13). In fact, the Bible exhorts believers to honor, obey and take care of families (Exod. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; 20:9; Deut. 5:16; 18:21; Eph. 6:1-2; Col. 3:20). The main point is that the time of Jesus and his church is not, despite the presence of the kingdom of God, the messianic era of peace. This is the time of confrontation and decision. The advent of the kingdom must not lead to a “utopian view of the here and now (and) the enthusiastic extremes of ‘over-realized eschatology’ must be avoided, for...tribulation is still the believer’s lot”.²⁴ The disciples will not only be widely hated (10:22) but they will also be rejected by their own family members for the sake of Jesus.

“Worthy of Me”: Unrivalled Devotion to Jesus Requires Placing Loyalty to Jesus above Family Loyalties (10:37)

²¹ 1 Enoch 100:2 also says, “for a man shall not be able to withhold his hands from his sons nor from his sons’ sons in order to kill him”. Similar statements are also found in 1 Enoch 56:7; Sib. Or. 1:75-76; 5:468-469; 2 Macc. 7:22-23 and 4 Ezra 5:9; 6:24; 2 Bar. 70:3, 7.

²² M. Sota 9:15 also highlights the same truth, “with the footprints of the Messiah, Children shall shame the elders, and the elders shall rise up before the children, for the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a men’s enemies are the men of his own house”.

²³ This text certainly does not refer to violence applied for political ends and zealotism. Black, *Uncomfortable Words*, 115-118 interprets the language of the sword against the background of the Jewish holy war tradition and suggests that Matthew, who himself shows an attraction to apocalyptic ideas and images, interprets μάχαιρα in similar terms. However, this argument is not convincing, as there is no evidence from the text that indicates Matthew understands missionary discipleship in holy-war terms, given the fact that the mission is not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles as well.

After addressing the character of the coming of Jesus in 10:34-36, 10:37 draws out the corollary for household allegiance. The division described in the preceding verses must not divert the disciples from loyalty to Jesus. Family relationships are important in Jewish culture and honoring one's parents is the highest social obligation where "honor to parents...ranks second only to honor God" (Jos. *Apion* 2.206).²⁵ Faithful Jews had been trained from "early childhood that they must honor their parents by providing them food, shelter, and clean clothing in their old age".²⁶ Even this must not be given precedence over the relationship with Jesus (as seen in the preposition ὑπὲρ). Any disciple that allows family relationships to divert his loyalty to Jesus is not worthy to be called a disciple or "participant in the kingdom".²⁷ The rabbinic parallels of the master-teacher relationships allow loyalty to the teacher above the parents because "his father (brought) him into the world...but his teacher that taught him wisdom brings him into the world to come"²⁸ but "no teacher would speak of "hating" one's parents by comparison".²⁹

Ἄξιος when used with a genitive of person in this context carries the meaning "does not deserve to belong to".³⁰ This word itself appears 7 times in chap. 10 and is "a relative term, comparing two entities (persons or things) by measuring the lesser against the greater. If the lesser comes up to the standard of the greater, it is worthy; otherwise it is unworthy... The worth of a man before God is decided by whether he comes into contact with the message of Christ and is obedient to it".³¹

The Hellenistic philosophers while upholding household codes, also despise family members that do not share their philosophy. Many Stoics believe that "good is preferred above every form of kinship. My father is nothing to me, but only the good...if good is something different from the noble and just, then father and brother...and all relationships simple disappear" (Epict. *Disc.* 3.3.5-6). In order to be a philosopher, one must "abandon (one's) own people" (Epict, *Disc.* 3.15.11-12).³²

The threefold statements of οὐκ ἔστιν μου ἄξιος parallel the three κατὰ clauses in 10:35. The use of this *mistic*³³ literary style clearly brings forth the force of the point that Jesus is conveying to the disciples. Goulder rightly summarizes that "the climax – he who loves parents more than me, he

²⁴ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 219.

²⁵ Josephus further states that "for the slightest failure in (the son's) duty toward (the parents)", he must be stoned, referring to Deut. 21:18. Similar statements are found in *Ep. Arist.* 228 and *Ps-Phocyl.* 8.

²⁶ George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew*, MBNTSC (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 468.

²⁷ Hagner, *Matthew*, 292.

²⁸ M. Baba Nezia 2:11. This passage places the teacher in the "first place" above the father, even in situation where the father and the teacher are both held captive, the disciple must first ransom the teacher before the father.

²⁹ Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 330.

³⁰ BAGD, 78.

³¹ DNTT, CD-ROM.

³² Similar statements are further developed in Epict. *Disc.* 2.22.15-16; 4.1.107; 159-160 and *Diog. Laert.* 7.1.33.

who loves children more than me, he who does not take his cross after me – bridges beautifully from the Micah text”³⁴ to 10:37-38. The identification of who is ἄξιός is an important concern of Jesus’ instruction here. It is not loving the closest family members although devotion to family is a cardinal Christian duty (Eph. 6:1-4, 1 Tim. 5:8). It is not even loving self. It is not chasing after the “good” or philosophy of the Hellenistic philosophers. What qualifies the disciples as one who is ἄξιός is unrivaled and uncompromising devotion to Jesus.³⁵

Matthew uses the adjectival participial phrase, ὁ φιλων, while in the parallel Lukan passage, the word μισέω is used (Luke 14:26). It is unnecessary to argue that Matthew in his redaction uses a weaker verb. Citing Gen. 29:31ff. And Deut. 21:15ff, Manson says that “in the OT...“love” and “hate” stand side by side in contexts where it is obvious that “hate” is not to be taken in the literal sense, but in the sense “love less”.³⁶ It is precisely this connotation that Matthew captures in his version. It is not that the disciples’ family is to be “set outside the bounds of love, but rather that devotion to Jesus is given absolute priority”.³⁷ Such expression of whole-hearted devotion is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition (Deut. 33:8-9). Hill beautifully summarizes the main point of the passage, “the verse is not an attack on family relationships and natural attachments, but a clear insistence that following Jesus is more important than family ties; if it is necessary to choose between the two loyalties, then a man ought to choose to follow Jesus”.³⁸

“Lose his Life for My Sake”: Unrivaled Devotion to Jesus Requires Putting God above Self by Dying to Self (10:38-39)

The radical statement in 10:37 is now further developed. The loyalty and allegiance to Jesus involves even greater demands: absolute obedience and self-denial. To be worthy of Jesus and his call to discipleship, one must λαμβάνει τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ. This is the first time σταυρὸς is being referred to in Matthew.³⁹

³³ M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 83-92.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 351.

³⁵ Buchanan, *Matthew*, 468, argues that Jesus’ apostles had evidently been required to become monks. This extreme argument is weak and is certainly not the point of Jesus in this passage.

³⁶ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London, SCM, 1957), 131. O. Michael, TDNT 4, 690 comments that “those who become the disciples of Jesus must be committed exclusively to him; they cannot be bound to anyone or anything else. The term “hate” demands the separation of the disciple, and the warning not to love anyone or anything more is the test. This abnegation is to be taken, not psychologically or fanatically, but pneumatically and christocentrically”.

³⁷ Barton, *Discipleship*, 170.

³⁸ David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 195.

³⁹ The cross saying appears 5 times in the synoptic gospels: Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Lk. 9:23; 14:27.

Taking up one's cross does not refer to personal problems or difficulties in life that one faces. It is a radical obedience that "entails self-denial and, indeed, a dying to self".⁴⁰ Taking up one's cross is to follow the footsteps of Jesus who is the perfect model of such radical obedience and self-denial. Taking the road of discipleship and self-denial is like carrying a cross past a jeering crowd to the site of execution.⁴¹ There is no need to argue that the cross saying is a result of Matthew's redaction based on the argument that Jesus had not yet taught them about his coming death (16:21-28).⁴² The crucifixion itself is not an uncommon sight for the disciples in Roman Palestine where "every criminal who goes to execution must carry his own cross on his back" (Plut. *De Sera Num. Vind.* 9.554B).⁴³ The imagery of the cross itself as a "cruel and disgusting penalty...the worst extreme of the tortures (and) no fitting word...can possibly describe so horrible a deed" (Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.64-66) would certainly surface in the minds of the disciples. "Cross" is a vivid metaphor that clearly brings to mind the demands of discipleship for the disciples and it must have startled the disciples. In all the cross sayings in the Gospels, τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ, "one's cross" is highlighted (except for Luke 14:27, "his own cross") and this implies that every disciple of Jesus has a cross to carry and no one can carry it for him or her, for "anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). France rightly notes that the "'cross bearing' language would have a clear enough meaning, even before (the disciples) realized how literally (Jesus) himself was to exemplify it".⁴⁴ Inevitably in some instances, self-denial may include suffering, death and even martyrdom and in this case, the cross as metaphor gives way to the cross as literal object. Jesus himself takes up his cross both "figuratively and literally".⁴⁵

After clearly highlighting the character of his coming and the demands of discipleship, Jesus now proceeds to bring across the heart of the message to his disciples in 10:49.⁴⁶ The paradox of this

⁴⁰ Hagner, *Matthew*, 293. In Pauline tradition, self-denial becomes itself a death to one's own right to make selfish desires, e.g. Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 3:3-5.

⁴¹ There are several major alternatives to the interpretation of "taking up the cross". There is no need to argue for a 1) pre-Christian expression associated with political revolutionaries; 2) demand for literal martyrdom; 3) sign represented by the Taw which symbolizes God's signature and of those who belong to Yahweh; and 4) saying that refers to the sufferings of Isaac who carried the wood on his shoulders and the followers of Jesus must follow in Isaac's footsteps to be prepared to offer themselves as a sacrifice.

⁴² Hagner, *Matthew*, 292 argues that the exhortation to take up the cross is found "more reasonably" in 16:24 and the reference in 10:38 is "anachronistic since it becomes understandable only after the initial announcement of Jesus' passion" in 16:21.

⁴³ Crimes were commonly punished by crucifixion by the Romans in the 1st century as testified by the numerous witnesses including, Jos. *Ant.* 12.5.4; 13.380, 17.10.10; *Jewish War* 2.75, 241, 253, 308, 241; 5.449-452, 7.202-203; *Life.*, 420-421; *Koh. Rab.*, 7.26.

⁴⁴ France, *Matthew*, 189.

⁴⁵ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 223.

⁴⁶ France, *Matthew*, 189 calls this passage as the "keynote of Jesus' call to discipleship".

chiastic couplet of this verse recurs frequently in the Gospels in slightly varying forms (16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33 and John 12:25). The word ψυχή includes the meaning of both “life” and “soul” and since “the soul is the center of both the earthly and the supernatural life, a man can find himself facing the question in which character he wishes to preserve it for himself”.⁴⁷ The emphasis is not upon literally losing one’s ψυχή but upon rigorous self-denial, although martyrdom is not totally out of view. Finding one’s ψυχή refers obviously to the “affirmation of life on one’s own terms within one’s self-centered framework apart from allegiance and discipleship to Jesus”.⁴⁸ In doing so, one will in the end loses one’s own life and will not inherit the eternal life of the kingdom.

On the contrary, the one who loses his or her own life from the perspective of the kingdom of God will find it in the sense of “meaningful existence, fulfillment, purpose, or identity”.⁴⁹ This is not merely a general philosophical maxim,⁵⁰ for it is the loss of one’s own life ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ, “for my sake” that achieves the goal.⁵¹ One loses one’s life in facing opposition from family members, in unswerving loyalty to Jesus above family members and in radical obedience and self-denial, for “anyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children of fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (19:29; Luke 18:29-30). A disciple of Jesus is to follow him even to the point of death, which becomes for the disciple the entry into life. This is undoubtedly an eschatology pronouncement. Those who loses their lives in this world because they look to God (6:25-34) will win it for the life to come (John 12:25). Those who find their lives in this world by seeking to secure their earthly existence (Mark 8:36-37; Luke 9:25; 12:16-21) will lose it in the world to come.

Conclusion

The forceful language in this pericope is not directed at making discipleship more appealing but clearly spells out the demands of discipleship. The hope for peace is being brushed aside for the

⁴⁷ BAGD, 894

⁴⁸ Hagner, *Matthew*, 293.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Such philosophical statements are not uncommon during the days of Jesus, e.g. Xenophen, *Anabasis*, 3.1.43, *Cyropaedia* 3.3.45. In Jewish literature, there is a parallel saying in Tamid 32a, “Alexander of Macedon asked the wise men of the south, what shall a man do that he may live? They answered, Let him kill himself. And what should a man do that he may die? They answered, Let him keep himself alive”. Sir. 51:26, Ben Sira says that “the one who gives up his soul finds” wisdom, and the wisdom that Ben Sira wanted the Jews to learn was the Torah, the Jewish doctrines and catechism.

fearsome image of sword. Concrete close personal relationships within the family raise the consciousness that these emotional ties must not divide our loyalty to Jesus. Uncompromising allegiance to Jesus involves absolute obedience and self-denial. When understood within the context of the first century social and religious setting, the demands of discipleship in this pericope are clear. Becoming Jesus' disciples is not a vocational change, nor a political attachment, nor even a new stirring of God. It is being faced with the eternal decision of whether one would follow Jesus as the way to eternal life. This decision to be made can never be mere lip service. It can only be real if we are intensely aware of our desires and emotions and still decide that our loyalty is to Jesus and that he still comes must come first above all else. There must be no rival, no distraction, and no competition for the allegiance to Jesus. Any other attachment, whether familial or religious or economic, is substituting another god for Jesus. This is certainly a difficult teaching for it would be much easier to accept a Jesus that conforms to our values and desires so that there would not be any tension. But if we remain faithful to him as disciples carrying out his mission, Jesus promises that, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of age" (28:20). This is the call to discipleship and Jesus is still issuing the urgent call and challenge, "Come follow me". This is a call that we must either accept or reject. The choice is ours.

⁵¹ Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982, reprint), 157 interestingly comments that "for my sake" is "a claim which is monstrous if He who makes it is not conscious of being Divine".

Application: Sermon

Title: Radical Discipleship and Unrivaled Devotion

Lydia, came to Jesus when she was a young adult. She was brought up in a different religious background in Malaysia all her life until she met Jesus. Having grown up in a country that is somewhat hostile to Christianity, she suffered painful consequences when she publicly confessed her faith. She endured persecution when her family put her under interrogation by the religious authorities who questioned her why she gave up her faith to embrace Christianity. She was subsequently imprisoned, because in the views of the religious authorities, she committed apostasy the minute she professed her faith in Christ. She was finally disowned by the family and she had to leave home. She lost her family that was very dear and close to her heart. She lost her job that provided financial security. She lost her identity as she was seen as a betrayer of her former religious faith and her own ethnic group. At that time, our text, Matthew 10:34-39 speaks so clearly to Lydia. She discovered that to be a disciple of Jesus is costly. She found out that discipleship is not merely a role-play but rests on a real relationship with God. She experienced that the call of discipleship is radical. A few years after her conversion, I had the privilege to listen to Lydia shared her testimony. Her faith and testimony in Christ teaches us several important facts about discipleship as highlighted in our text.

Matthew 10:34-39 forms part of the Missionary Discourse where Jesus appoints and sends out the Twelve disciples with instructions concerning missionary work. Jesus addresses various issues that the disciples will face including hostility, persecution, rejection and suffering for the sake of the gospel. After addressing these issues, Jesus now turns to highlight the painful reality of discipleship that includes division and hostility within family and the costly demands of discipleship.

The first important fact concerning discipleship is that ***an unrivaled devotion to Jesus results in opposition from family members (10:34-36)***. Jesus himself says that he did not come to bring peace but a sword. The choice of this figure of speech must have startled the disciples because it brushes aside any hope for kingly rule of Christ on earth that is characterized by peace. Of course the word “sword” does not carry its literal meaning here. It is used figuratively to highlight the cutting function of a sword in bringing division and separation among family member. The peace that the Messiah brings is not the absence of conflict but a restored relationship with God. Paradoxically, in bringing this peace with God, conflict is inevitable between Christ and the antichrist, between light and darkness, between the children of God and the children of devil. As long as there are people who refuse to accept and follow the Prince of Peace, there will be conflict. The disciples of Christ will not

only be widely hated (10:22) but they will also be rejected by their own family members for the sake of Jesus. Lydia clearly demonstrates this in her life as she faced opposition from her family.

Secondly, ***unrivaled devotion to Jesus requires placing loyalty to Jesus above family loyalties (10:37)***. Although family relationships are important and the bible exhorts us to honor our parents, family loyalties must not be given precedence over our relationship with Jesus. If anyone allows family relationships to divert his or her loyalty to Jesus, he is not worthy to be called a disciple. The word “worthy” is being emphasized three times by Jesus. It is a relative term, comparing two entities by measuring the lesser against the greater. If the lesser comes up to the standard of the greater, it is worthy; otherwise it is unworthy. Therefore, the worth of a person before God is decided by whether one is obedient when one comes into contact with the message of Christ. Therefore, if it is necessary to choose between the two loyalties of family and Jesus, then a disciple is to choose to follow Jesus. Lydia again is our fine example by making the painful choice to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Finally, ***unrivaled devotion to Jesus requires putting God above self by dying to self (10:38-39)***. The radical call of discipleship has even greater demands. A disciple is furthered required to have absolute obedience and self-denial. To be worthy of Jesus and his call to discipleship, one must take up his or her own cross and walk the road of discipleship and self-denial in following after Jesus. Those who find their lives in this world by seeking to secure their earthly existence (12:16-21) will lose it in the world to come. Those who loses their lives in this world because they look to God (6:25-34) will win it for the life to come (John 12:25).

The discipleship Jesus calls for is costly because it asks, “What are a person’s true values?” It does not let anyone escape with half-answers and half-commitments. Many of us may not have taken the painful path that Lydia traveled but the demands for discipleship are real. Lydia lost it all. She lost her family, security, and identity but she found herself a permanent family in the body of Christ. She found her security in Christ, the anchor of her soul. She found her identity as a child of God.

In a day where chasing after a successful career in a materialistic world seems to overwhelm everything else; in a day where pursuit of wealth is the ultimate goal; in a day where the complexity of modern living can become a trap for us, it is important to remember the seriousness and the urgency of the call of Jesus, “Come follow me”. This is the time of confrontation and decision. This is the call of discipleship. This is a call where there must be no rival, no distraction, and no competition for the allegiance to Jesus. This is a call that we must either accept or reject. The choice is yours and mine. Will you choose to come and follow Jesus and be his faithful disciple?

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