



Loyalty Tested

JESUS IS WORTH EVERYTHING.

MATTHEW 10:16-20,26-34

An innate part of human nature is loyalty. People hold a variety of loyalties such as brand loyalties—are you a Ford™ or Chevy™ person? Coke™ or Pepsi™? Loyalty is found in choice of sports teams, television news channels, and political parties. We are loyal to these things for a variety of reasons. But the only valid reason should be, is it worthy of my loyalty? Even more poignant—is my loyalty worth dying for?



**What brands, organizations, or activities hold your loyalty?
What makes you loyal to them?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

MATTHEW 10:1-42

Disciples following rabbis was an integral part of Judaism in the first-century world. A young man would attach himself to a teacher to learn the teacher's words, observe his actions, and gain an understanding of his ways. At some point, the disciple would be called on to imitate the teacher's ministry and teaching. The intent was that one day the student would also become a teacher of disciples.

After spending weeks and months with Jesus, the time had come for Him to send His disciples out to test what they had learned. They were to preach of the kingdom of God like Jesus did and engage in a ministry of compassion as Jesus had done. Before sending them out, Jesus gave instructions about what they were to do, how they were to do it, and what to expect.

With these instructions about what to take and not take, who to go to, where to stay, and so forth, came a commissioning of the disciples for the task. Jesus "gave them authority" (Matt. 10:1) to preach and to heal. In verse 2, the disciples are called "apostles" which means "sent ones." They were commissioned to represent Jesus and His mission.

Jesus's instructions included the need to travel as simply as possible and to rely on the hospitality of others (vv. 9-11). In reality, they were to rely on God to provide their needs. Also, they were to devote their time to those who were receptive to their message and to avoid those who were hostile to them (vv. 12-15).

In Jesus's instructions, there is an extension of His description of how they would be treated (vv. 16-25). This description includes the reception of the disciples in their immediate context and extends to the reception of the gospel in the years and centuries to come. These instructions serve all believers as they live out their Christ-given ministry in the world in every generation.



Read Matthew 10:1-42 in your Bible. What warnings did Jesus give His disciples? What promises did He make to them?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SNAKES AND DOVES (MATT. 10:16-20)

¹⁶ “Look, I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. ¹⁸ You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they hand you over, don’t worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, ²⁰ because it isn’t you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you.”

VERSE 16

As Jesus was *sending* out His disciples, He gave them a stark warning. He prefaced His warning with the word *look*, which was a word of emphasis. “Pay attention” was the thought here. They were to take special note of the fact that they were being sent as *sheep among wolves*. Sheep are especially vulnerable and defenseless. The picture here was the vulnerability of Jesus’s followers in the unbelieving world to which they were sent.

Verse 16 serves as a transition between the immediate mission of the twelve disciples in their mission to the Jews of Galilee (vv. 1-15) to a more general warning of the ill treatment Jesus’s followers would experience in the days ahead. What Jesus described is what the disciples experienced in the days after His ascension.

Christ followers are to live with pure motives and cautious alertness.

In response to the opposition they would face, the disciples were to be *shrewd* as well as *innocent*. In many ancient cultures, the *serpent* represented qualities of wisdom, caution, and cunning. The followers of Jesus were to be equally alert and wise. The word *innocent* speaks of purity and integrity. Christ followers are to live with pure motives and cautious alertness.



Why are both shrewdness and innocence necessary qualities for Christ's witnesses?

VERSE 17

The wolves would have the authority to inflict punishment on the disciples. Jesus called on His followers to ***beware*** and be on guard. The term ***hand you over*** spoke of formal arrest. ***Local courts*** referred to the local synagogue councils. Saul of Tarsus fulfilled the actions described in this verse when he “requested letters . . . to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2; see also 8:1,3).

VERSES 18-20

The continued warning of Jesus to His disciples about the persecution they would face was a telling summary statement of the persecution of the church. The apostle Paul experienced what verse 18 describes when he stood before King Agrippa (Acts 25-26).

The reason for this persecution was ***because of me***. Jesus said in John 15:20, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” In that same passage, He told the disciples they would be hated by the world because the world hated Jesus. Jesus wanted His followers to be prepared for the opposition they would face. Every trial would provide opportunity to testify of Jesus. While making their defense before these courts they would be able to present the claims of the gospel. They would have opportunities to share Jesus with ***governors and kings*** and ***Gentiles***.

Jesus already had taught His disciples not to worry about clothing and food (Matt. 6:25-34). This time, however, He told them not to ***worry*** concerning how they would answer their accusers. He promised that a proper defense would ***be given*** to them. The ***Spirit of your Father*** would provide the words. Jesus promised in John’s Gospel that the Spirit would speak of Jesus and remind the disciples of the words of Jesus (John 15:26-27; 16:13-14).



KEY DOCTRINE: God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. (See Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13-14.)

SPARROWS AND HAIRS (MATT. 10:26-31)

²⁶ “Therefore, don’t be afraid of them, since there is nothing covered that won’t be uncovered and nothing hidden that won’t be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What you hear in a whisper, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸ Don’t fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s consent. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head have all been counted. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

VERSE 26

How would Jesus’s disciples react to His warnings of suffering and persecution? Jesus told them, ***don’t be afraid***. He would repeat this injunction three times (vv. 26,28,31). The sobering fact that Christians will face opposition is affirmed repeatedly throughout the New Testament. Jesus wanted His followers to respond to coming persecution with a fearless attitude.

The last part of verse 26 could be interpreted in two ways. Obviously, Jesus wanted His disciples to know that regardless of what they were going through, they could rest assured that in the day of judgment all the deeds and motives of all people will be ***uncovered*** and ***made known***. Those who suffered for Jesus would be duly rewarded for their faithfulness under persecution. But these words of Jesus could also be instructions to take the words that He spoke privately to His disciples and make them publicly known so that others will become followers of Christ.

VERSE 27

Jesus instructed His disciples to pass on to others what He had taught them privately. They had a message to proclaim—it came from Him. They had been in private instruction, but the time had arrived for the open proclamation of the kingdom of God. The gospel message was not to be kept as a secret. Good news must

be proclaimed. Shouting from the **housetops** was a common way in the first-century world to broadcast an announcement.

VERSE 28

Once again Jesus encouraged His followers not to fear. This time, however, the source of fear was **those who kill the body**. The prospect of martyrdom was suddenly front and center for the disciples. Jesus sought to allay their fears by differentiating between the temporal and the eternal. The enemies of Christianity might kill the *body*, but they could not quench the essence of life, the **soul**. Only God could **destroy both soul and body**. **Hell** is the term “Gehenna,” which referred to the valley outside of Jerusalem where the garbage was burned. It became symbolic of the literal and eternal punishment that awaited those who rejected God. The term *destroy* doesn’t picture annihilation but rather eternal punishment. God is the one who can bring about that destruction. Therefore, Jesus said, **fear** and reverence Him.

DID YOU KNOW?

After Jesus’s death, the disciples experienced persecution and martyrdom. According to church tradition, all the apostles, except for John (and of course Judas), died for their faith.

VERSES 29-30

Whatever happens, we can trust the goodness and faithfulness of God. He watches over our every need. Jesus illustrated this from nature. In the marketplace, the least expensive items were **sparrows**. They were **sold for a penny**, which referred to a small coin that was the equivalent of a fraction of the daily minimum wage. The *sparrows* were insignificant and yet Jesus said God watched tirelessly over them. He was aware of their appointed time of death, and God is aware of our appointed time of death as well. It is all part of His providential plan.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they?” (Matt. 6:26). He said this so they would not worry.

Continuing His reference to God’s intimate care, Jesus spoke of the **hairs** on one’s **head**. For us to count the hairs on our heads

might prove to be an impossible task. But God already has **counted** them and knows their number. Our heavenly Father cares about even the smallest detail of our lives.

VERSE 31

Once again, **don't be afraid**. If God watches over the sparrows, the followers of Jesus can count on God's care and concern in every circumstance. God's plans for His children are always good, even if we don't consider them good at the time. Thus, even when we are persecuted for our faith, we can trust that God is working for our good (Rom. 8:28). Not even the prospect of martyrdom should cause Christ followers to shrink back in fear. We know death is a release from the sufferings of this life and will usher us into the very presence of our loving Father for all of eternity. Paul expressed it like this: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).



What is the connection between fearing God and not fearing man?

Our heavenly Father cares about even the smallest detail of our lives.

PEACE AND SWORDS (MATT. 10:32-34)

³² "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge me before others, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

In calling the Twelve, Jesus moved them into a process of apprenticeship. First, He called them to be with Him, learn from His teachings, and observe His ministry. Then He sent them to carry out His teaching and healing ministry. The anticipation was that one day Jesus would leave them, and they would continue that work on His behalf. Hovering over this entire discipleship pattern was the prospect that they might be called to die for Jesus. Jesus would

tell them: “And whoever doesn’t take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it” (Matt. 10:38-39). Dying “because of me” would be the ultimate act of loyalty to Jesus.

VERSE 32

The word **therefore** is a transition word. This verse moves from the Twelve Jesus sent out earlier (10:1) to **everyone** who will declare their allegiance to Jesus. The word **acknowledge** means to openly confess or affirm one’s commitment to Jesus. It involves trust and dependence on Him.

Note again, there is no room for secret allegiance. Confession of Jesus as Lord was to be public, **before others**. Those who express their loyalty to Jesus will also be acknowledged by Jesus as belonging to Him. Those who honor Jesus will be honored by Christ before the very throne of God. Note this acknowledgment will take place before **my Father in heaven**. This phrase *my Father in heaven* is rarely used by Jesus in the Gospels. Oftentimes it is “your Father” or “our Father.” Jesus used the phrase *before my Father in heaven* here to speak of the final judgment. (See also Matt. 7:21.)

VERSE 33

Denying Jesus can be done either actively or passively. That is, it can be an outward declaration of rejection or take the form of a silent failure to acknowledge and follow Him. Either way, Jesus pointed to the consequences. The consequences would be simple: He will **also deny** those who deny Him. Note also that these verses are written in future tense, pointing to the coming day of judgment. This declaration of a day of reckoning also continues the theme of judgment that began in verse 28.

***Those who follow Jesus must realize
that Jesus is worth everything!***

VERSE 34

Many Jews had the false expectation that when the Messiah appeared, He would break the back of Roman oppression and usher in a period of peace and prosperity such as had characterized the nation under King David. Jesus wanted His followers to know that such was not the case. He would not **bring peace** but turmoil.

Just as in the judgment God would separate those loyal to Jesus from those who deny Him, so Jesus's presence separates people based on their loyalty to Him.

This verse introduces Jesus's teaching that loyalty to Him must take precedence over loyalty to family (v. 37). Nothing is to be more important than allegiance to Christ. Those who follow Jesus must realize that Jesus is worth everything!



What are some ways you can acknowledge Christ before others?

BIBLE SKILL: Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

In Matthew 10:16-20,26-34, Jesus used three pairs of metaphors in preparing the disciples for their mission. Create a chart with three columns. In one column list the metaphors (sheep and wolves, serpents and doves, sparrows and hairs). In the second column, write brief summaries of the truths communicated in the metaphors. In the third column, write how each applies to you using "I will" or "I can" statements.

Metaphor	Meaning	Application
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APPLY THE TEXT

- ⊕ Loyalty to Jesus may mean we encounter hostility to the gospel.
- ⊕ Believers should not fear those who oppose the truth of the gospel.
- ⊕ Loyalty to Jesus is more important than any other loyalty.

 **Discuss with your Bible study group how being part of the group helps you live out your loyalty to Jesus.**

Consider the steps in the disciple-making process of Jesus—being curious about Jesus, being with Jesus, being on mission with Jesus, and being willing to die for Jesus. Where would you place your level of loyalty at this point in your life? What step might you take to move to a new level?

Memorize Matthew 10:28.

Prayer Needs