

A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt Burleson

“It Sure Would be Easier”

Matthew 10: 24-39

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“It sure would be a lot easier if...” that’s the way some of the conversations must have begun back in Matthew’s church.

“I’m so tired of being ridiculed... I overheard someone in the marketplace referring to me as one of those *Christian idol worshippers*, the other day. It’d just be a lot easier if I’d never made this decision to follow Christ.”

“I know what you mean... It’d be a lot easier if I hadn’t lost my job with that fishing boat. Once he heard I was a Christian he cut me loose faster than he could throw back a small fish.”

There was plenty of conversation like that in Matthew’s church. Most every week, someone had something to report... some new hardship. Someone would be dragged into court on trumped-up charges. The next week someone would tell a story about how they couldn’t go home anymore and had no family now. The next week it was kids being removed from school. Then someone who was taken in for interrogation didn’t come back home...

Everyone could say “amen” to the notion that being a Christian made things harder. **“It sure would be easier if I wasn’t a Christian... I get tired of feeling like I’m sneaking around all the time.”**

That’s the implied backdrop behind this section in Matthew... He gathers all these teachings about getting tough and puts them into one sermon... because there are folks in the church asking, **“should it really be this hard?”**

In Jeremiah... there’s no question about it. It’s not a question anymore. Jeremiah knows that things would be easier had he not said yes to God. He’s out there telling folks that God’s judgment is coming and they think he’s nuts. Not only that, they throw him in jail...

He’s a joke... laughing stock.

He feels like God has tricked him.

Left him hanging in the wind.

And in the midst of all that dangling he says to himself, **“Sure would be easier if I didn’t have this commitment to God in my life. Maybe I just won’t say anything else.”**

I remember being in college, in some serious spiritual pain... wrestling with things. Trying to make the equation of life come out right with God as the key variable.

There was the problem of pain.

There was what seem to be such narrowness in the faith...
sentimentality and shallow thinking.

There was just the reality of God’s absence and way too many questions that seemed unanswerable. And for one like me... I can’t tell you how many times I laid in bed at night and thought to myself... **“Sure would be easier if I wasn’t a believer. It’d be so much easier if this equation didn’t have to add up. No God means no wrestling. It’d just be a lot easier if faith weren’t in the equation.”**

I'll bet you've said that along the way. Ever seen something you wanted in a store and had that little voice in your head reminding you that Jesus says if you have two coats, give one away? It'd be a lot easier to live in an overly-materialistic culture if Jesus hadn't labeled it as wrong.

"It'd just be easier" dealing with your money wouldn't it? For starters... it'd be your money and not a gift you've been entrusted with to use for the world's sake.

Jesus makes things so complicated sometimes. It'd be a lot easier for instance, debating war and the death penalty and abortion... if Jesus didn't seem to be so dead set against violence and taking a life in any way. You'd be hard pressed to read the gospel honestly and not have to wrestle in a gut-wrenching way with our use of violent force. It'd just be easier if we'd never pledged our allegiance to Christ in the first place.

It'd be easier if Jesus hadn't made the pain of the world our business, huh?

Easier if we weren't called to be faithful to this all too human thing we call "church"...

It'd be easier if Jesus hadn't revealed to us that God is not some far off, clock-making God but one who knows us and has a will for us that we must strive to live in.

Jesus makes things as hard as he does good. I mean... there is this talk in the Bible about reward... and joy... blessedness... peace. But there is plenty of talk about dying and taking up a cross. And Paul comes along and says we've been crucified... we've died.

Our lives have to take on this cruciform shape... taking up our cross and following the one who died on it.

It'd be easier doing life another way. Cruciform life is pretty messy... it seems to me. And demanding. This "coincidence of opposites" as someone has called it... Where life has to be transformed there in that collision of the vertical and the horizontal. I have to care about and be bound to both. The transcendent and this horizontal, created world.

It'd be easier if we could remove one axis.

Some of you have been thinking lately... It'd be easier working in a state university. It's not easy being with believers and having a calling from beyond you to work through profound issues... to be a community that reflects Christ... to forgive.

It'd be easier if power was all that mattered...

And majority rule was all that mattered...

But that's not the kingdom way.

So... you stay and engage and wrestle... and you look for light and hope and healing because somewhere along the way Christ has touched you and called you and there's no turning back.

And there are those of you who've been frustrated with church and with caring about the world and you've been tempted to punt... but you don't because Christ has been real to you and you've been moved so along the way.

I lay in my college dormitory wondering if life would be easier without faith and concluded that it wouldn't be, because with faith there is the hope for real and lasting meaning... purpose; without it we're an accident.

And Jeremiah tried to quit... he tried to turn in his preacher's robe but he couldn't do it, there was such a "burning in his bones" and he couldn't deny it.

And the Christians in Matthew's church kept coming to church and kept following Christ... They'd heard the story, they knew the gospel, they had the Spirit, they'd touched what was real, and as dangerous as it was, there was no turning back.

So, we stay... in the church and on the path. And while assured of Christ's presence, we're also assured in Matthew that there will be implications in our lives because of our faith. There will be real suffering of all kinds because Christ is taken seriously.

And we shouldn't forget today that some of our brothers and sisters around the world suffer physically and politically and economically as the Christians did in the first century. There are implications...

And Jesus makes this clear in Matthew...

You shouldn't expect to have it easier than your teacher. Jesus' life didn't go so well, did it? Lots of folks didn't like him... were suspicious of him...

spread malicious lies about him... He wasn't good at pleasing people.

He didn't have much of a home or place to lay his head... His friends

denied and abandoned him.

He was executed after being whipped up on.

And in the church, we sometimes mistakenly talk about Jesus taking our suffering so we don't have to... Since when?... We have to, as well. If we go deep into life and into love and into the world's reality. If we care... If we're alive... If we're committed to doing life as Jesus' follower... there will be much to endure and we should expect no less.

Perhaps not being understood... being in the minority at times.

Certainly wrestling with the hard questions.

For sure, making sacrifices for the world's sake.

Giving away time and money, instead of spending it on ourselves.

Putting lesser loyalties behind our loyalty to Christ.

Moving into hard and painful places...

Intentionally into the darkness.

But always remembering, Christ goes there before us.

And according to Jesus, in the darkness, he will tell us things... In the darkness there will be something whispered in our ear and in time this we will be able to proclaim in the light and shout from a rooftop.

It's been my experience that people love the rooftop and lots of people love shouting from there. Mostly, I don't like them and what they're shouting often doesn't seem worthy of the rooftop.

I remember being in Memorial Cafeteria at Baylor one day... I saw an acquaintance coming out of the side room with several folks. And I asked him (from some distance) what they had been doing and he shouted enthusiastically, "**We shared the Lord Jesus.**" I'm thinking that wasn't "shout from the rooftops" kind of material.

I always feel that way when well-meaning Christians are being interviewed after the game and speak about God as if God cared about the NFL or the NBA or 'American Idol.' That's not worthy of the rooftop.

Some folks confuse being obnoxious about Jesus with being a witness for him. I think the rooftops are reserved for bigger things. The Church has been given a message to shout, make no mistake about it; I just don't like it when the message is shrunk down by the one shouting and the way it's being shouted.

There's lots of cheesy stuff coming from the rooftop.

Someone asked me a good question this week; he said, "**Are you ever glad when someone's on the rooftop?**" That's a good question. "**Who needs to be up there?**" I'm thinking, those who

have been with Jesus in the darkness, in the complex places of faith and life, and heard his deepest truth there. They have something to shout for us.

I liked it when Mother Teresa shouted... She shouted after loving lots of dying people in Calcutta's streets.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who've known the Cost of Discipleship, they need to be up on the roof.

Desmond Tutu.

MLK.

I like it when Jimmy Carter is up on the roof.

And certainly there are others, millions more, who understand in real ways what Jesus is teaching about here. Those who have lost what they thought was their life, and lo and behold if they didn't find it.

Those who have been real enough and quiet enough, who've been with Jesus enough... to hear what matters most whispered in the ear. The most moving things are whispered, you know.

You've seen that commercial where the man is in some romantic- looking, European, cobblestone plaza and he's screaming out for all to hear, "**I love this woman.**" That's pretty cool, I guess. But the moving part of the commercial is when she whispers back, "**I love this man.**"

The profound things will be whispered. The most important things you ever hear and come to know will be whispered. (*an idea from Fred Craddock*)

"I'm afraid it's cancer."

"You're child is going to be all right."

"Your father meant so much to me.

"I love this man."

"I love this son, this daughter, my child in whom I'm well pleased."

If you follow Jesus, there will be implications... there must be. What that will mean for you... where it will take you... the Lord only knows. What is certain is that God will be with you... aware of you (like He is the sparrows)... and perhaps whispering the most profound things. You'll have much to offer and much to share.

Henri Nouwen once said that it's a great illusion to think that people can be led out of the desert by someone who's never been there. (*Wounded Healer*)

If you follow Christ, you'll wind up in some desert along the way... you're liable to become a real expert on the territory. You'll wind up in some controversy... you'll wind up in some dark time because you care about the world... you'll wind up not pleasing some folks... you'll wrestle with the deepest things and driest deserts. You'll have much to offer, much to share, and perhaps be called upon to shout it from the rooftop. And all of us who know what a complex and wonderful thing it is to follow Jesus will say, "**Amen.**"

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