

Proper 8
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Matthew 10:5a, 34-42
TLC, Keene, NH

Blessed by Association

“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.”

O Lord, having originally set out to proclaim a once-inspired Word on this text for this coming Sabbath, something wasn't sitting quite right, at least not early in the week. And so, I am going to go back to the drawing board as it were, to see what it is that You might show me. I am willing to go where You would lead me. Where might that be with this Word from Your Son? Direct and counsel me. Come, O Holy Spirit, and reveal to me what it is that You would have me say. What do you want us to know? Why? What do you want us to do? Why? Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction

“Guilt by association.”

“Guilt [that is] ascribed to someone not because of any evidence but because of their association with an offender.”

As one particular article defines it ... “Guilt by association means that you personally didn't really do something wrong but that people who you are associated with did. You are judged by the company you keep, so you can be viewed as guilty because of your association with wrongdoers.”

- Kids hanging out with troublemakers who never do their homework and thus being judged by your teacher because of who your friends are, even though you tend to do your school or homework.
- Having a lot of friends who speak out in a prejudiced way and not distancing yourself from their statements so you are thought to be prejudiced as well.

- Viewing someone as dishonest simply because he or she represents the government, or administers law and order in society, where you come to believe that all people in government are dishonest even if the individual isn't bad.

[<https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-guilt-by-ssociation.html>]

This morning ... our third reading from Matthew 10 speaks to one being “blessed by association.” Here, as the disciples are sent out to be a blessing in Jesus’ name, they, too, will – on occasion – be blessed by what others do for them. We, blessed by some in the cause of the Gospel, and they most certainly blessed by us as we bring the Gospel of forgiveness in word and deed.

Main Point:

BECAUSE WE ARE BLESSED, OTHERS WILL BE BLESSED BY THE BLESSING WE ARE AND BECOME, IN JESUS’ BLESSED NAME.

Amen.

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⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them ...

As noted, this is week 3 in Matthew 10.

Week one, when we heard those initial words, it was a call to compassion ... to see people as Jesus sees people ... in their pain, grief, and need ... and then, to respond by freely giving away what we ourselves have been freely given.

Last week ... do not fear. Indeed, WE MAY FEAR LESS BECAUSE FEAR IS LESSENER BY A FEARLESS AND FAITHFUL SAVIOR.

This week, I’d like to expand a thought shared in a one of the daily devotionals a couple of weeks ago, of how folks are blessed by association with one who is a disciple of Jesus.

Where, in this morning's text, we see an important principle at work, of others blessed by those whom the Holy Spirit calls, gathers and enlightens with His gifts. Yes, while it is true, we as Christians can bring the "*aroma of death*" to a perishing planet, we are also, St. Paul says, "*the aroma of Christ to God for those who are being saved ... spreading the knowledge of him everywhere.*" [2 Corinthians 2:14-15]

This is to say that the very presence of Jesus' disciples in the world brings a blessing to our neighbors and our community, where the greatest "reward" they can receive from us is the very Savior we seek to represent and bring to them. They, then, will be "blessed by association."

Well ... not always! Where the problem that folks have with Jesus often comes about as a direct result of a problem they have with one of His followers.

Which is not to say that folks don't have problem with Jesus.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword [as "of the Spirit" - the word of God¹]. ... A person's enemies will be those of his own household."

Plenty of folks will not be outright blessed by associating with us simply because they have disassociated themselves or set themselves against the very name of Jesus. Here, the peace that Jesus speaks of is not world peace, but peace with God through a cross and belief in Jesus as His Son ... a peace in which, apart from Christ, "*the wicked cannot have.*" [Isaiah 48:22]²

¹ Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; also Luke 2:34-35

² The peace Jesus brings is "no cheap peace, no half peace, no peace by compromise. He can create peace only by destroying what is evil; and since men love evil and cling to that which separates them from the whole peace of God, His coming forces a decision between good and evil and proves to be, for all its peaceful intent, the sundering sword." [Franzmann, *Follow Me*, 96]

But may it *not* be that the problem folks have with Jesus is a result of one of His representatives – aka disciples – who give them a reason *not* to want to be associated with Him. Yes ... *O Lord, forgive. And give us, like Jonah, another chance. Amen.*

Where, only in light of God’s forgiveness, that love of God poured out on Calvary’s cross, do we even have a chance to begin with. Only out of that gracious call to salvation, are we compelled forward, in love for that same mission, that same passion for the Passion for others. Where, in light of His grace alone, do “the ungodly fare well because of the godly.” [Luther]

Where, Scripture itself bears this out. Indeed, the Bible is replete with instances in which people were blessed ... simply by associating with God’s faithful:

Like ABRAHAM, where, according to God’s promise, all the nations of the earth come to be blessed by and through him. [Genesis 12:1-3]

Or POTIPHAR and his house, where we read in Genesis 39:5:

“From the time that [Potiphar] made [Joseph] overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field.”

And all of this, in spite of all that Joseph had unjustly endured at the hand of his brothers ... as a slave.

Or JACOB, whose blessings spilled into the life of his deceitful, soon-to-be father-in-law Laban, who had to admit:

“If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you.” [Genesis 30:27]

Then, there is the house of OBED-EDOM, the one to whom David entrusted the Ark of the Covenant for safekeeping for a time. Where 2 Samuel 6:12 states:

“It was told King David, ‘The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God.’”

Others ...

- ✚ The SERVANT GIRL who led Naaman, the captain of the host of the king of Syria, to the prophet Elisha, and thus healed of his leprosy. [2 Kings 5]
- ✚ The WIDOW OF ZEREPHATH who was blessed by the prophet Elijah, in that not only did her grain and oil not run out during a time of great famine, her only son was brought back from the dead. ELIJAH, too, was blessed by the widow in that she fed him daily. [I Kings 17:8-16]
- ✚ Where the *coup de grace*, of course, is JESUS Himself. Where, earlier Matthew notes:

“Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,” He healed *“every disease and every affliction.”*

- ✚ And then, Jesus’ FOLLOWERS, where not only are we blessed, at times, by the kindness of others, but we – in His name – initiate and reciprocate Jesus’ kindness, by bringing the blessings of our Savior to them.

⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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.”

“People outside the church who make Christian friends, receive them warmly, and deepen their friendship with them, may not fully realize what they are doing; and Christian friends may not be fully aware of what they are doing either, says Bruner in his commentary on Matthew, “but this text promises that the warm reception of Christians is at least en route to the warm reception of the Christians’ Lord. In other words, a great deal of unrealized evangelism is going on in simple friendship.” [398f]

Child of God, do not diminish this or the small things you do, the brief words of encouragement, the prayers on behalf of your neighbors, etc. As the saying goes, wrongly attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel, and if necessary, use words.”

Wherein, it is our great joy “to bring as many friends as they can into the *living room* of the Father’s family ... But even in the backyard or on the lawn they are somehow on the Father’s property, and we should be taught by this text to be grateful for small blessings.” [Bruner, *Matthew*, 1:399]

Whereby grace by association, in small and big things, the goal is to bring them to the same Jesus, the same cross of forgiveness, the same fount of grace, and the same Table of His fellowship. Giving thanks to God to be blessed by association of not only what others do for us, but what we give to them ... namely:

✚ To point them to the One from whom all blessings flow, so that they, too, may be blessed and spiritually healed by their association with Jesus ... who even in His last hour as He hung from the cross still blessed others: namely, a centurion and a thief!

Where, the real *coup de grace* comes as we *all* stand beneath the foot of the cross covered in His love ... grace by association if there ever was such a thing.

BECAUSE WE ARE BLESSED, OTHERS WILL BE BLESSED BY THE BLESSING WE ARE, AND BECOME, IN JESUS’ BLESSED NAME.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:

“Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.”

Redeemed of the Lord, we may, or may not, ever get to see the rewards for a life of discipleship lived in Christ, but never underestimate the impact of what Christ has called you to do ... where though the rewards of which Jesus speaks may not be visible in this lifetime ... they are sure to be heard, seen and known in the next.

Where, even up to the very last word to His disciples, “Jesus adds yet one more grace to their lives. He seals them with the promise that no one shall serve His messengers, in vain; even the least, the most effortless service man can render them, the cup of cold water given to the thirsty traveler, shall not fail of its reward ...” [Franzmann, *Follow Me*, 97]

Where in coming to know many, we might be a blessing to a few, and in those who have been a blessing to us, the work of Christ will have been done. Word and deed will not return to the throne of the Father without having accomplished what they have been given to do ... what **we** have been given to do ... and all in the name of Him who has done, and continues to do, for us!

BECAUSE WE ARE BLESSED, OTHERS WILL BE BLESSED BY THE BLESSING WE ARE, AND BECOME, IN JESUS' BLESSED NAME.

Amen.