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“a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
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³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’

³⁷ “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰ “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.” (Matthew 10:34-42)

Worthy to Follow Jesus

“Why do you think you would be a good fit here?” Go to a job interview and you probably will hear some variant of that question. You need to convince them that you are worthy of that job. And then after they hire you, you get to work, and every day you keep trying to convince them you really are worthy of this job. And if you aren’t, you might hear, “I’m sorry but this isn’t working out.”

So much of life is trying to judge one’s worthiness. We do this with other people or with ourselves. God does too. And to help you see where you stand, Jesus gives you a test to use. In Matthew 10 he says: **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (34-36).**

Did he really just say that? Are you serious, Jesus? Wait a second. In the Old Testament Isaiah says God’s promised Savior will be called “Prince of Peace.” At your birth the angels said on earth peace to men on those whom God’s favor rests. After he rises from the dead the first thing Jesus says to his disciples is, “Peace.” So how can you say these things in Matthew? The problem is that this world is not picking up what Jesus is putting down. They want peace. Just not the peace Jesus offers. So instead of unity, division. Instead of peace, a sword that splits even our closest relationships. That’s the result of Jesus’ message.

So here's the first test: are you willing to do deal with this? Jesus is asking and preparing you for what to expect: "Are you still ready to follow me knowing this may drive a wedge between you and your mom, dad, and your children so it's like there's an enemy living in your house?"

Next test: "**Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me**" (v.37). Really Jesus? I love my mom and dad. I love my two little girls too. I love my three brothers. I love my wife. Oh, wait a moment, Jesus says, "**Loves them more than me is not worthy of me.**" Certainly I love Jesus more than them.

Or do I? Do you love Jesus more than your family? If God were to command you as he did with Abraham to sacrifice his child, would you? Would you be ready to take your child, strap them to an altar, and even get as far as holding a knife over them? Maybe that's too extreme and unrealistic. If God chose to take mom, dad, your children out of this world before you were ready to say good-bye to them, I have a hard time believing you wouldn't be upset with God and question his good-will. Or even not that far. If your mom, dad, child—no matter how old they get—get sick and you watch them suffer, what about then? And of course you do, they're family. You love them. Then you think about sins you ignore because they are family. You don't bring it up because it's uncomfortable. You don't say anything because it doesn't seem to help. We say things like, "Family is most important!" And, yet, it's often within families where we fail to have serious conversations about God's Word and living his will in our lives. Are you worthy to follow Jesus or do you love your family too much?

Jesus continues, "**Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me**" (v.38). The Christian cross is not just any ailment, struggle, or suffering you endure in this world. The Christian Cross comes from being followers of Jesus. The cross is denying, saying "No" to me and self. It's bearing up under the weight of temptation and following God's will. So often we drop that cross when we feel that those temptations are too much for us to handle. Instead of resisting I do it because I want to. You go to that website again because it makes you feel good. You have that next drink because you like it. You lose your temper because life and people aren't going the way you want it to. Thinking about the times I have fled from that cross or refused to pick up, instead I seek my own pleasures and desires rather than God's will and I have to hang my head in shame. You too?

And still there's another. "**Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it**" (v. 39). So if I focus on me for the purpose of me, then I'm losing myself. Then I think about how many of my decisions I made with the sole focus on me, my feelings, my popularity and status with others, and on and on. You too?

When you look at yourself and your life, when I look at mine and how engrossed we are with loving self, what others think about "me", how often we get wrapped up trying to find worth in myself, loving the world, how could I ever be worthy of following Jesus? And that's the point. On my own, on your own, you are not. No one is. I disqualify myself. I

don't have the qualities God expects. Jesus isn't giving us any new standards or expectations here today. It's the very first commandment, "You shall have no other gods." Our gods may not be statues of a golden calf. But we make gods out of the good things that God has blessed us with. Instead of fearing, loving, trusting God above all things, we love the good things—including our families and especially ourselves—too much and more than God making them false gods. And, therefore, you are not a worthy follower of Jesus. But if you are not a worthy follower of Jesus, you will not be welcomed into heaven one day.

Jesus tells us these things to show you how hard it is to be his follower. It doesn't just happen because you stood in church and made a promise on your confirmation Sunday. It isn't just by coming into this building and sitting in those pews. This worthiness is not coming from you. There are no ladders you can climb to reach the expectations of God's standards.

Yes, you've heard it before. But we need to hear it again. And then we need to hear another time. And then we need to keep hearing it so we learn to stop looking to ourselves, and instead look to the one who picks up his cross for us and carries it to Calvary. Look to Jesus who at a young age of 12 went back to the temple courts to be in his Father's house instead of going back with his parents first. He's the same Jesus who will not go outside to speak to his mother and brothers because he was doing the Father's will. It's that Jesus who is familiar with the division his message brings. At one point many followers will leave him because this is a hard teaching. How difficult it was for Jesus to watch them go. So much he asks his own 12 disciples, "You don't want to leave too, do you?" (John 6:67). He felt the betrayal of a close friend in Judas. He felt the denial of another with Peter. And still, as he faces his death, "Not mine but, Father, your will be done." Because that's why he came into this world. Jesus comes to do his Father's will, to fear, love, and trust him perfectly for sinners like you and me who cannot. He picks up that wooden cross, goes to Calvary weighed down with the weight of your sins and mine. And it's there where he gives up his own life, trusting his Father's will, so that you might find life in him.

But because we are blind and lost in sin, too self-absorbed to go looking for his gift, Jesus brings it to you. It's there at the baptismal font where he washes you with the water and the Word. And in that water you are made clean with the blood of the Lamb who makes you worthy to be called child of God and follower of Jesus. He invites you to his Supper where you are united with his body and blood and the bread and wine and Jesus assures you, "You are worthy. Go in peace, your sins are forgiven." He continues to send his Spirit who works through the Word and Sacrament to keep us in the one truth faith so that we will be found worthy to receive the reward won for us in Jesus and given to us through faith

It's this message that brings division because it goes against what this world and our sinful nature wants to hear. But Jesus tells you, "Quit trying to make yourself feel worthy. Stop trying to climb the ladder. Die to yourself. And believe that I make you worthy. I was

already judged for you so that God declares your sins forgiven and worthy. You have life in me.” Jesus knows how much we will struggle. He knows at times you may feel he is asking too much. So he gives you the promise of a reward waiting for you in heaven. Notice, Jesus doesn’t call us to do great extraordinary things to have this reward. It’s welcoming and receiving. It’s a small cup of cold water. In other words, it’s the little ordinary things. Because Jesus already declared you worthy at Calvary, all you do according to God’s will is done in Jesus’ name and God commends you for it. And the simple fact is, it’s God who is working in you and through you to do good works that he has set out for you to do. Even the good works we do are not our own. And, yet, grace upon grace, God gives you credit.

Think of how I might tell my two-year-old to pick up at the end of the night. I show her the toy, I show her where to put it. And then when she does, I’m so proud of her! That’s what God does with you. He lays out the works for you and when you do it he is so proud of you, especially the little things, because you are his child. The little things like raising your children in the Lord. It’s showing selfless love to your spouse. It’s listening to mom and dad. It’s cooking the meal. It’s cleaning up afterward. It’s taking out the garbage. It’s changing diapers. It’s honoring the government and those God has set over us. The little things are the prayers you speak on behalf of one another. In the eyes of the world they may not seem that great. But because you are God’s child, they are beautiful and God sees them as deserving a reward. At the end of the day, that’s all that matters.

Are you worthy of Jesus? On your own, no. But with his perfect life and innocent death given to you and for you, Jesus makes you worthy. Amen.