

Matthew 10:40–42 - Bible Study Handout

Big Idea

Jesus closes His mission instructions by reminding the disciples that those who welcome them are really welcoming Him. The disciples go out with little status and no guarantee of comfort, but they carry the presence and message of Christ. Even the smallest act of kindness, like a cup of cold water, matters in God's kingdom. Nothing offered in Jesus' name is wasted.

Context

- Matthew 10 is Jesus' mission discourse to the Twelve.
- Jesus has warned the disciples about rejection, conflict, persecution, and the cost of following Him.
- These final verses shift the focus from opposition to welcome.
- In the ancient world, a messenger represented the one who sent him. To receive the messenger was to receive the sender (Keener).
- Jesus connects the disciples' mission to Himself and to the Father who sent Him.
- The passage shows that mission and hospitality belong together.
- God sees both the public witness and the quiet act of mercy.
- A cup of cold water becomes holy when it's given in Jesus' name.

Key Themes

- Welcoming Christ by welcoming His servants
- God's presence in Christian mission
- Hospitality as an act of faith
- Small acts of mercy with kingdom value
- The dignity of ordinary disciples
- Grace received and grace shared
- God's reward as gracious recognition
- The Father, Son, and disciples joined in mission

Passage Overview

Matthew 10:40 - Receiving the One Who Sends

- Jesus says, "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."
- The disciples are not important because of personal status. They matter because they belong to Jesus.
- Their authority is borrowed. Their mission is received. Their presence points beyond themselves to Christ.
- To welcome Christ's messenger is to welcome Christ. To welcome Christ is to welcome the Father.
- This gives dignity to Christian witness. When disciples go in obedience, they do not go alone.

Matthew 10:41 - Welcoming the Prophet and the Righteous

- Jesus speaks of receiving a prophet "as a prophet" and a righteous person "as a righteous person."
- To receive a prophet as a prophet means to honor the message of God that person carries.
- To receive a righteous person as righteous means to welcome a life shaped by faithfulness.
- The reward Jesus mentions is not payment earned by human goodness. It is God's gracious recognition of faithfulness (France).
- When we welcome God's work in others, we become part of that work.

Matthew 10:42 - The Cup of Cold Water

- Jesus ends with a simple image: a cup of cold water.
- This is practical, ordinary, and available to almost anyone.
- The "little ones" likely refers to Jesus' disciples in their weakness and vulnerability.
- They may be overlooked by the world, but they are seen by Christ (Davies and Allison).
- God values what the world often misses. A small kindness offered in Jesus' name matters in the kingdom of heaven.

Book Background

- The Gospel takes its name from Matthew, also known as Levi, a tax collector whom Jesus called to follow Him.
- Early Christian tradition names Matthew as the author.
- Matthew was likely written between AD 70 and 90, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.
- The Gospel presents Jesus as Israel's Messiah and the fulfillment of God's promises.
- Major themes include the kingdom of heaven, discipleship, mercy, righteousness, mission, and fulfillment of Scripture.
- Matthew 10 is the second major teaching block in the Gospel and focuses on mission.

How the Text Fits

- Matthew 10:40–42 closes Jesus' instructions before the disciples are sent.
- Earlier in the chapter, Jesus gives them authority to heal, cast out demons, proclaim the kingdom, and serve freely.
- He also tells them that some people will reject them.
- These final verses remind the disciples that God is still at work through their witness.
- Those who receive Christ's servants become part of the kingdom's work.
- The passage connects with the Old Testament pattern of receiving God's messengers. Those who welcomed God's prophets often found themselves drawn into God's blessing (Wright).
- Jesus stands in that prophetic tradition, but He is more than a prophet. He is the Son who reveals the Father.

Important Observations

- Jesus identifies Himself with His disciples.
- The disciples represent Christ, not themselves.
- Welcome is treated as a spiritual response, not just social courtesy.

- The one who receives Jesus receives the Father who sent Him.
- Prophets and righteous people are to be received as people who belong to God.
- The “little ones” matter deeply to Jesus.
- A cup of cold water is small, but it is not meaningless.
- God remembers quiet faithfulness.

Wesleyan Insights

- **Prevenient Grace:** God’s grace moves before we know how to respond. The people who welcome Christ’s messengers are being drawn into God’s work.
- **Practical Holiness:** Holiness is not only inward devotion. It takes shape in welcome, mercy, service, and care for others.
- **Works of Mercy:** Wesley taught that love of God must become love of neighbor. A cup of cold water given in Jesus’ name is a simple work of mercy (Collins).
- **Grace Before Reward:** The reward Jesus promises is not earned salvation. It is God’s gracious recognition of faith working through love.
- **Shared Mission:** The one who goes and the one who receives both have a place in God’s kingdom work.

Life Application

- We need to ask whether we welcome the people Christ sends to us.
- Some of Christ’s servants may not look impressive by the world’s standards.
- The Church is called to honor quiet faithfulness, not just visible leadership.
- Hospitality is one way we make room for Jesus.
- Small acts of mercy matter when they are offered in love.
- Not everyone will preach to crowds, but everyone can give the cup of cold water.
- A meal, a note, a prayer, a ride, a visit, a listening ear, or a small kindness can become a sign of the kingdom.
- The love and grace of God are often carried through ordinary people doing ordinary things in Jesus’ name.

Apologetic Reflection

- This passage fits the real world of first-century travel, mission, hospitality, and messengers.
- Before modern hotels and communication systems, hospitality was essential. Jesus’ words are practical, not abstract.
- The passage shows the unity of Father, Son, and disciple. The Father sends the Son. The Son sends His followers.
- Christian mission begins with God, not human ambition.
- This passage also answers the fear that small acts do not matter. Jesus says they do.
- In a world that celebrates size, influence, and attention, Jesus honors hidden faithfulness.
- The gospel teaches us that God sees what others overlook.

Details Worth Noticing

- These verses come after warnings about hardship and rejection.
- Jesus ends the chapter with welcome, not fear.
- The disciples carry Christ’s message, but they also carry His presence.
- Receiving Christ’s messenger is receiving Christ.
- Receiving Christ is receiving the Father.
- “Prophet,” “righteous person,” and “little one” show different kinds of faithful people.
- The “little ones” are not insignificant to Jesus.
- The cup of cold water is something nearly anyone can give.
- The smallest mercy can carry eternal meaning when offered in Jesus’ name.
- Reward is grace, not a paycheck.

Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think Jesus ends this difficult chapter by talking about welcome?
2. What does it mean that receiving Christ’s messenger is receiving Christ?
3. Who are the “little ones” we may be tempted to overlook today?
4. Why does Jesus place such value on a simple cup of cold water?
5. What small act of mercy can you offer in Jesus’ name this week?
6. How can our church practice holy hospitality in practical ways?

Key Verse

“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” - Matthew 10:40

Cross References

Genesis 18:1–8 • 1 Kings 17:8–16 • 2 Kings 4:8–10 • Matthew 25:34–40 • Luke 10:16 • John 13:20 • Hebrews 13:1–2

Takeaway

Matthew 10:40–42 teaches us that Christ is present in His mission and in His people. To welcome those He sends is to welcome Him. To serve even the least of His disciples is to honor Him. The kingdom of heaven is seen not only in preaching and public ministry, but also in hidden faithfulness, holy hospitality, and a simple cup of cold water given in love.