

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## FIND OUT WHO IS WORTHY

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### Matthew 10:5-15

The Lord Jesus had a threefold ministry that should serve as the primary guide for believers: He preached, He taught, and He healed. This is well described in Matthew 9:35 where we read that *Jesus went about all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the gospel of the kingdom, and **healing** every sickness and every disease among the people.* He proclaimed the glorious message of salvation to man. He taught the details of this message to all those who would receive it. And He healed the sick, i.e., He met the physical, mental and emotional needs of those who hurt and suffered.

### Sending workers into God's harvest

Jesus' ministry is motivated by His compassion for lost people. When He looks at the world, He sees the helplessness of the people. These people have no purpose, meaning, or significance in life. They wander aimlessly on this earth. The Bible describes them as sheep without a shepherd, distressed and scattered. We read in Matthew 9:36, *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.* The word 'weary' in Greek has the idea of a sheep that is caught on a thorn. Its skin is torn by the thorn, and in pain, the animal suffers. This is the condition of the people in the world, of people who are weighed down by their sins.

All these people are like a great harvest. It is a ripe harvest, ready and desperate to be reaped. But unless there are reapers to go forth, the harvest will eventually rot in the field. Having led the disciples to see the urgency of saving man from his sins, the Lord Jesus immediately sends them out and He tells them specifically what their mission will be.

*Matthew 10:5. These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.*

*6 "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

*7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*

*8 "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

*9 "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts,*

*10 "nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.*

*11 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out.*

*12 "And when you go into a household, greet it.*

13 "If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.

14 "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

15 "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!

## Go to Israel

At this stage, the first step was to reach the Jews. The apostles were to remain in Galilee, ministering to the people of Israel only. Why this restriction? The Jews were the people with whom God made a covenant. It was proper that the gospel of the kingdom of God should first be preached to them. With few exceptions, the mission of both Jesus and His disciples before the resurrection was limited to Israel. The time for the Gentile mission will come later. In fact, Jesus said to the Syrophenician woman that He had come primarily to the house of Israel. *I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matthew 15:24).

To Israel was given the first opportunity to hear the gospel. Paul understood this well. He says in Romans 1:16, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek*, i.e., the Gentiles. Paul himself followed this pattern. In Acts 13:46, He said that he regarded it as his duty to offer the gospel first to his own countrymen. *It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.*

So the gospel must be proclaimed first to the Jews and therefore the apostles were to restrict themselves to the lost sheep of Israel. After the resurrection, they will be appointed to go *into all the world*, and teach *all nations*.

‘For the time being, don’t go to the lost of the world but go to the lost of your own house. First go to Israel and preach to them that the kingdom is very near.’ And Jesus says, *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons*. In other words, He is saying, ‘God’s power will now be working through you to accomplish His work.’ The apostles could not accomplish their mission in their own strength. They needed God’s power. And God’s power is ready to work through us too today if we are prepared to be the kind of people He can use. Where there are men of God, God’s power will be manifest. And where there is divine power, things will happen that will testify to the power of God working through us.

## Search out who is worthy

Then the Lord Jesus gives the apostles very practical instructions on financial matters and on how to come in and go out of a town or house. While they are in a particular village, the first thing that they had to do was to find out who is worthy. Jesus says, ‘When you come to this town to preach the gospel, inquire who is worthy in that town and stay with him. And when you enter the house, let your peace come upon it. However, if the people are not worthy, your peace will return to you.’

What does it mean to be worthy or unworthy? When we speak about worthiness, we are talking about an important aspect of NT teaching. The Greek word is the word *axios*. It occurs 41 times in the NT. That should give us already an idea of the importance of this word.

As Christians, we are not used to speak of someone as being worthy. We are more accustomed to think - and very rightly so - that we are all unworthy. We have learned very early in our Christian walk that man can make no claim upon God. Therefore, we say that we are unworthy of God’s gift of salvation. It is the grace of God that imparts worth and makes a person worthy of fellowship with God.

Now, it says here in v. 11, 'If you go into this house and you find somebody who is worthy...?' This means that there must be somebody who might be worthy there. How should we understand this? How can someone be worthy?

The basic meaning of *axios* is to weigh something. It is used to compare two entities, either of the same weight or of different weight. Take for example Romans 8:18 where Paul uses the word *axios* to compare between two things. He says that the sufferings of this present time are not *axios*, i.e., they are not worth comparing with the glory that we shall see in the future. The sufferings that we endure now are light compared to the splendor of the life to come.

Then its meaning extended to cover the relation between persons or things which correspond or do not correspond to one another. We compare not so much the weight as the value of entities. And since this relation implies corresponding worth, the word *axios* came finally to mean worthy. Therefore, when we say that this thing is worthy, we are saying that its value is comparable to the other. If we say that something is not worthy, we mean that its value is not comparable to the other thing. The comparison can also involve people.

In John 1:27, John the Baptist says, 'I am not worthy even to untie the strap of Jesus' sandal.' What he is saying is this. 'Jesus is so great and I am so small that I can't be worthy of Him.' There is an enormous disparity in weight, in value. In the same way, the centurion from Capernaum did not consider himself worthy for Jesus to be troubled with Him. He says in Matthew 8:8, *I am not worthy that You should come under my roof.* 'Lord, You are too great. I am too insignificant. I am not worthy that you should come.'

## **Worthy of Jesus**

In Matthew 10:37, Jesus compares the worth of our family to His worth. He says, *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.* In other words, Jesus is saying, 'If they are worth more to you than I am worth to you, then you don't understand who I am.' Here we see the connection between 'worth' and 'worthy.' What I mean is this. If you don't recognize Jesus' worth, then you are not worthy of Him. If your father, mother, wife, husband, daughter or son are worth more to you than Jesus, then the Lord Jesus says, 'You are not worthy of Me because you have not come to see who I am. I understand that all these people are important to you. But if you choose them rather than Me, then really, you do not see the value of My person.'

A person's family is the most precious relationship among human beings. However there is one relationship that should be above his relationship with his family: it is his relationship to Jesus Christ. We are to love Jesus supremely, counting Him more worthy than all, even more worthy than our own family. When we love Him in this way, Jesus will count us worthy of Him.

Then in v. 38, Jesus makes an even stronger demand. He says, *He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.* Notice the words 'He who does not take his cross.' The cross is the symbol of death and execution and Jesus is saying, 'If you are not willing to give up your life for Me, then you are not worthy of Me.' Here Jesus puts His finger on what is the most precious to us, our own life. He asks us to die to self, sacrificing our will, our ambition and our desires. All that a person wants (comfort, ease, wealth, fame, power, etc) must be placed behind Christ. 'If you don't do that, if you love yourself more than Me, then you don't understand My worth and you are not worthy of Me.' Such is the commitment that the Lord requires of us.

Jesus did not say, 'A person is worthy who tries to be religious.' He did not say, 'You are worthy because you do a lot of good deeds.' He did not say, 'You are worthy because you go to church every Sunday.' He did not say, 'You are worthy because you are baptized.' He did not say,

‘You are worthy because you are very active in your church.’ It all depends on only one thing: this matter of worth. Do you see the worth of Jesus? Do you recognize who He is? Are you able to say sincerely, ‘Lord, you are worth more than anything that I have, even my own life.’ To offer Him less than that is to insult Him.

### **Seeing the value of Jesus**

Let us summarize the Lord’s teaching concerning worthiness. There is a connection between worth and worthiness. Worthiness is a certain attitude which enables us to see the worth, the value of Christ. It is clear that no man can be worthy of God in the sense of deserving His grace. However, we can be worthy in the sense of being receptive to God’s word and having the openness to see the value of Jesus. This causes us to give all that we have, even our own life, on the altar of the cross. In taking up our cross daily, we show that we are worthy of Christ. The emphasis is not on the value of what we offer but on whether we see the incalculable value of the person of Jesus. And seeing His value, whether we will respond to Him in obedience.

This is what is going to be used as a test for those that Jesus sent forth. The apostles were to give the greeting of peace to every home and place they approached. If the people were worthy, they were to continue their message of peace. If the people were unworthy, then the message of peace was to return to the disciples.

In other words, the Lord Jesus is saying, ‘If they can really see the value of My person, they will be receptive to your message. Then remain with them and impart to them the blessings of the gospel. But if they prove unreceptive, it is because they can’t see My worth. Then take your peace back to yourselves, who know how to value it.’ We can see from this that the peace which they wished to the household goes out and is effective, but it is not automatic. It depends on the attitude of the receiver. If he is not worthy, it will result in its return. This means that the blessing is lost, which is tantamount to a curse. Jesus says in v. 40, *He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.* The apostles’ message of peace was of great value because of their relationship to Christ. The loss of their peace was equivalent to the loss of their presence and therefore the loss of Jesus.

### **Shake the dust off your feet**

The Lord Jesus expected His message and His apostles to meet with rejection as well as acceptance. If the people rejected the apostles, He asked them to leave by shaking the dust off their feet. This was to be a symbol that God would reject them even as they had rejected Him. It was customary for Jews to carefully remove the dust from their shoes and clothing after having passed through a Gentile land and before re-entering Jewish territory, because Gentile areas were regarded as unclean. Thus when the apostles were told to shake off the dust of the houses and cities of Israel who were unreceptive to the gospel, they were being taught that even in their own nation those people were considered as pagans.

But it means more than that. This dust-shaking rite is a sign of total dissociation. The apostles shook themselves from all connection with them, and all responsibility for the guilt of rejecting the message of peace. They were saying, ‘I have nothing to do with you. I don’t even want the dust from your house to remain on my shoes. From now on, I have no responsibility whatsoever for what is going to happen to you. I invited you to receive God’s salvation. I invited you to repent and to receive His love. But if you do not want to receive it, if you do not want to hear this good news, then I have no responsibility for anything that happens to you thereafter. I clean the dust off my feet.’

The same idea of dissociation was expressed by Pilate when he washed his hands in Matthew 27:24. There we read, *When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was*

*rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."* Here instead of taking the dust off his feet, Pilate washed his hands. But the meaning is the same. People wanted Jesus' death. However Pilate regarded this request as an unjust killing. By washing his hands and drying them off, he was symbolizing that he was exonerating himself from the whole affair and declaring the people to be the guilty party in the death of Jesus.

This is essentially what the disciples were doing. They were saying to the people, 'Come to God and be healed from your sinfulness. Repent. The kingdom of God is at hand. If you don't come to God, the consequences are terrible. You are going to perish. And I'm ready to do anything to impress that upon you. But if nothing makes you respond to the gospel, then I have nothing more to do with that responsibility. I clean the dust off my feet. I fear for you very much, but I can't be responsible for your decision.'

### **Worse than the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah**

What is so terrible that you should react in this way? Jesus warns that in the last judgment, unreceptivity to the gospel is a sin more culpable than the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah are often used in the Bible as examples of the worst sinners. In Jude 7, it says that *they serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

Rejection of God's messenger and of the gospel condemns a person to a terrible fate. He will be judged. And his judgment is going to be more severe than even the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. In other words, it is worse not to believe the gospel than to imitate the wicked men of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah never had the opportunity to hear God's Son. Our responsibility is much greater because our privilege to hear God's Son is much greater. And therefore, unreceptivity to the gospel is a sin greater than the sins committed by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

God is so concerned about our salvation that He warns us of the consequences of refusing that salvation. He is telling us that refusing His love is not simply a matter of taking it or leaving it. To leave it is to die. To turn away from God's love is to perish.