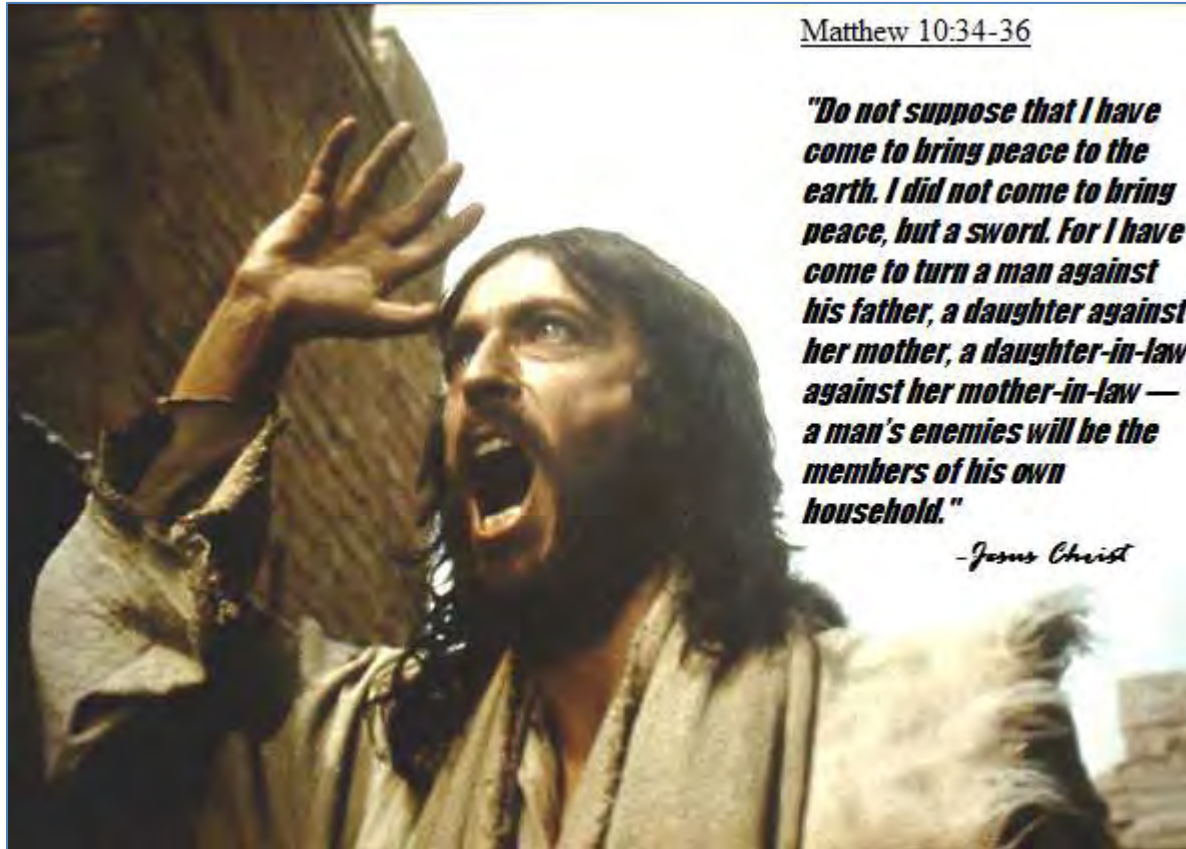


What Jesus Had to Work With

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January 10, 2019



When Jesus failed to gain John as a disciple, his ministry became far more complicated; he had to begin from scratch rather than inherit and build on John's following. Jesus thus could not take his ministry directly to Jerusalem. He remained in the remote countryside of Galilee, where he settled into the fishing village of Capernaum. There, he prepared to educate disciples.

Jesus was a demanding figure. He was strict in his discipline of self and he expected the same from his followers. He even denied his family when they failed to follow him.

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be members of his household. 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. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Matt 10:34-39)

Jesus' message was not an easy one for those along the Sea of Galilee. He lamented that those Galilean towns where he had brought his ministry could bear so little fruit. He speculated that he would have done better in the non-Jewish Galilean towns such as Tyre and Sidon:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. (Matt 11:21-22).

As he moved from village to village, Jesus faced obstruction and opposition. As Jesus told his disciples: "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head (Luke 9:58),"

Jesus accepted "the hand that he had been dealt." He did his best to inspire and raise up the illiterate disciples who had recognized him. Having nurtured them, Jesus dispatched his disciples in pairs to share the message and works that he had brought to them (Mark 6:7). Unlike John's followers, Jesus' disciples did not know the scriptures, and they had to face the well-educated scribes and priests of the day. Jesus explained that he was sending them out "as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt 10:16). He warned them that they would "be hated by all" because of him (Mark 13:13). He foresaw the tough times that lay ahead. He foresaw that they would be "handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues" and yet he encouraged them to "endure to the end (Matt 10:22)."

Jesus, with a parental heart, worried about the safety of his disciples (Matt 12:46-50). He did not wish them to face death at the hands of adversaries. He counseled them that "whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next (Matt 10:23). He tried to offer them hope: "for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes (Matt 10:23)."

Jesus' disciples proved unable to gain the following and support that he needed to advance the mission. Jesus, nevertheless, continued at the forefront by himself. He spoke with great authority and with heart and desperation, promising the future glory of God's Kingdom to those who would hear him. However, he continued to be denounced by the leaders of his day for spreading lies and blasphemy (John 10:33). Jesus once said that a teacher should not offer what was sacred to dogs or cast pearls before swine "lest they turn on him and tear him to pieces (Matt 7:6)." Yet, Jesus took that risk for himself and lived to witness the truth of those admonitions.