

# Matthew 10:37-39

July 2, 2017

Abbotsford CanRC

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## First Prayer

Gracious and eternal God, it is good to be together again, this afternoon, in worship of You. And it's a special service. For 5 young men have requested and received permission to profess their faith in You this afternoon. A testimony to Your goodness, Your guidance in their lives. A testimony to their resolve to serve You with their whole lives. Let this service be upbuilding for them and for us all. Have us rejoice in You, in the gift of faith You grant. And have us all commit our lives to Your service.

Lord of Truth, as we are about to open Your Word, we pray for Your Spirit in our midst. Increase our knowledge and strengthen us in our faith, so that we may serve You all the better. Bless Your servant in teaching, bless us all as we listen. Show us the Christ. May Your revelation be enlightening to us all and help us live purpose filled lives.

We pray these things in the Name of Your Son, our Redeemer and King, Jesus the Christ.  
Amen.

Read: Matthew 10:34-42

Psalm 115:5,6

Ezekiel 24:15-19 (during sermon)

2Corinthians 11:23-29 (during sermon)

Matthew 19:16-25 (during sermon)

Text: Matthew 10:37-39

Amen-song: Psalm 27:4,6

Dear children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and guests, this past week the valedictorian address at the Credo High School graduation ceremony described the class of 2017 as being very much like Canada: diverse. The class, it was said, even had some Quebecers. Quebecers are different, but they are very much part. Trenton, Brayden, Lucas, Jason, and Brandon, I'm not sure whether it's all of you but I know it's at least some of you. What gave it away was the fidget spinners and the wings ... Quebecers: I'm not sure how you took that comment, or me now recalling it. Fact is though, Quebecers are as Canadian as British Columbians.

When it comes to the church, there is diversity too. Just read 1 Corinthians 12. The church has legs and arms and eyes and ears. Paul takes it quite far: weaker parts, indispensable parts, less honourable parts, unrepresentable parts. There's huge diversity within the body of Christ. But there's one thing that all the members have in common. That's: faith in God. That's: the security, the comfort of belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the five of you will be professing that faith this afternoon. You will be saying, before the Lord, to the church and to the world: I belong, I belong to Christ, I belong in the church, I know myself to be responsible, I am prepared to be accountable, I too may live, forever, by the grace of God, and, by the grace of Christ's Spirit, I am ready, from on now, to live for Him.

To live for Christ. What price are you willing to pay for being a Christian? Being a Christian isn't just doing the minimum: attend church every so often, contribute as funds are needed, and maybe volunteer. Being a Christian is giving your all, paying a price, just as Christ paid a price for us. Being a Christian means not only promising a lot, but also following through on promises made. Psalm 15 comes to mind: "He keeps an oath that may bring pain."

Being a Christian means living a life of self-denial. Not what I want but what Christ wants determines how I live. To be prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of Christ. To offer up that without which life would actually become awkward if not impossible. Profession of faith in Christ implies devotion to self-

denial. That's what the sermon is on this afternoon.

**We listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ summarised as follows: The Christian confesses "Jesus means everything to me". We pay attention to, (1) The command of Jesus, (2) The example of some in the past, and (3) What is being asked of us today.**

### **1) The command of Jesus.**

The Lord Jesus had called the twelve disciples together and given them the mandate to preach the Gospel in Israel. But Jesus did not let them go just like that. He explained to them how they had to conduct themselves. They were not supposed to take anything along. Instead, they had to live of whatever they would get from the people they would meet. Life would not be easy for them, Jesus warned, for some would try to silence them. However, the disciples had to preach, to call the lost sheep of Israel back, to tell them of the good news of salvation. Having instructed the disciples regarding His expectations, the Lord Jesus then went on to explain what benefit this would have for the disciples. Those who defend Jesus in their life will be defended by Jesus. Jesus warns, however, that life will not be easy. A sword will come on this earth. Those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord won't necessarily have a better life. There may be things in your life which are dear to you. But you will have to sacrifice them for Jesus. "A person's enemies will be those of his own household." Jesus has to be everything for you. He ought to be number one in your life.

That's what the words of our text make clear. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Jesus points to those things which can be most dear to someone on earth: your blood relatives. The previous generation and the next generation. Closer ties of love were not imaginable in those days. Denying your parents was the same as denying your origin. Denying your children was the same as denying your future. Without your parents you wouldn't exist. Without your children you would not continue to exist. Your identity and existence were determined in part by your parents and your children.

We find no mention of one's spouse in this text, but spouses are not out of the picture. Nor are brothers and sisters, one's siblings. In Luke 14:26 we find the record of another time when Jesus said something like this. I quote "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

A true Christian will say: "Jesus means everything to me." He is more to me than my father and mother, my sons and daughters, my husband or my wife, my siblings.

In verse 38 we read how Jesus took this a step further. "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Taking up your cross and following Jesus. Jesus had not yet explained to the disciples at this stage that He would be crucified. The disciples would not yet have realised how literally they might have to take this. They would have understood it more generally. To them, at that time, taking up your cross means suffering what you have to suffer. If that sword to which Jesus referred earlier, shows up in your life, then you let it fall. You don't emphasise your own rights but you accept the sword willingly. You are satisfied with less.

For, warned Jesus, those who do not deny themselves, those who do not have Jesus as number one in their lives, are "not worthy of Me." Such are not allowed to call themselves followers of Jesus. Are not allowed to bring the good news of salvation on behalf of Jesus. Those who are not prepared to give up everything for the sake of their Lord and Saviour have no right to call themselves Christians.

Verse 39 makes this very clear to us. "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for

My sake will find it.”

This verse can be understood in two ways. Most people immediately think here of martyrs. You're evangelising and suddenly you're taken prisoner. You appear before the judge and you're given a choice. You can recall your words and promise to say nothing anymore. Then you will go free. Or you can stick to your testimony. Then you will be imprisoned and put to death. Jesus says: if you do the first – recall your words and be released – you will have saved your life. But in fact you will have lost it. For then you will no longer belong to Me. If you do the second – stick to your testimony and be imprisoned, even put to death – then you are truly one of My followers. In spite of the punishment, you will have eternal life in Me. This is the first way of understanding this text. It's a text about martyrs, people thrown before the lions, people burnt on the stakes, people killed by firing squads. And because we look at this text in this way we quickly think “That's not really about me.” For we live in Canada, a nation that champions diversity and freedom of speech.

There is a second explanation. It's an explanation which takes the verses 37 and 38 into consideration. Jesus began by speaking of division within families because of the Christ. He broadened this to taking up your cross: suffering for the sake of Christ. This whole is characterised by Him as 'gaining your life' or 'losing your life'. He is understood to say: “If you are busy with making your earthly life as great a success as possible. If all your attention is focused on the here and now. If you are constantly busy with your family ties, with your marriage, with not being punished on account of being a Christian, with your financial position, your career, your health. If all your energy is spent on this earthly life, at the expense of your relationship with God, you are destroying your life.” If we do not make Jesus Christ number 1 in our lives, we have lost Him. We have then lost the forgiveness of sins and the intercession of Christ. We ourselves will be held accountable for sins and it will not go well for us in the final judgment. Jesus says: “Only those who suffer on account of Me, who are less happy in this earthly life for My sake, those who when called to do so sacrifice something in order to serve Me, only they shall in the end have and receive eternal life.”

This second understanding also covers the first. But now this text is not just about martyrs. It's about anyone who follows Christ. It's about me! My confession might not be challenged but I do have to make choices in life, in favour of Christ and thus to my personal detriment. In matters of authorities, of health, of love, of possessions, of honour I am to serve the Lord.

This is not an easy message, brothers and sisters. This is difficult, extremely difficult. How are we supposed to do this? No person could do this. And yet, there it is: black on white. These are words of Jesus, no less. Young men, it's what will be asked of you in a shortly: “Do you declare that you love the Lord God and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, and to crucify your old nature?” Difficult. Maybe off-putting. Impossible.

Well, no. For the Bible tells us of people who have managed to do exactly this.

## **2) Jesus means everything to me. Let's review several examples from Scripture to learn how others have accomplished this.**

When I think of people who, maybe even more than others, had to sacrifice things to serve the Lord, I think especially of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles.

The prophets: Many of them had a hard life. Take Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prophet during the exile. Ezekiel had a hard life. A very difficult life. Take a Bible and turn with me to

Ezekiel 24:15-19.

This is harsh. I couldn't bear to think of God telling me tonight that He will take my wife from me. And that subsequently I would not be allowed to mourn. And that's how I would make something clear to you, to God's people. And yet, Ezekiel obeys. That's part of being a child of God. God is number one, God determines all. A servant has to serve. That's his duty and everything a child of God has is at God's disposal.

Even Ezekiel's wife.

The apostles: They too had a difficult life. Take Paul. When he was young, he was up and coming. He studied at the school of Gamaliel, and given his writings he was no academic push over. Paul was on his way to the top: he was given letters to give him authority to persecute Christians in Damascus. But what a life it became. When the Lord Jesus speaks with Ananias – that's the man who baptised Paul – when Jesus speaks with Ananias about Paul he says "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:16). Paul has found out what that meant. Again, take a Bible and turn with me to

2Cor 11:23-29

Paul: the servant of Jesus Christ. He certainly found out how much he had to suffer for Christ's sake!

The prophet Ezekiel and the apostle Paul. People who had to sacrifice things dear to them for the sake of God. People who were asked to show what they considered most important in their lives. There were those who did.

I'd like to consider a third person with you. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He, who spoke these words. Are they just that, "words" or are they also deeds? Is Jesus like a dictator who gets his subjects to do the dirty work for him but himself does nothing? Is Jesus willing to sacrifice things dear to Him? Of course He was! Boys and girls, who was Jesus before He came to this earth? Wasn't He the Son of God? Surrounded by divine glory and majesty. But all that He lay aside. The Son of God became a human being. Omnipresence confined to a body, eternity stepped into time. The Word of God became flesh, human flesh. The holy sinless Son of God looked like us, sinful rebellious man. Born into poverty. As a toddler, exiled to Egypt. As a preacher, He had no place to lay his head. He had no wife to share His life with. He died aged 33. At the peak of His life. And yet, He chose to die. It wasn't a natural death. It wasn't an accident. People had tried to kill Him before: In Nazareth they tried to throw Him off a cliff, on another occasion they tried to stone Jesus. But each time He'd proven more powerful. When He is taken prisoner in Gethsemane all those soldiers fall down. Jesus is powerful. Jesus lets himself be taken prisoner. He allows Himself to be crucified. His death was voluntary.

"Take up your cross and follow Me." "And follow Me." In our text the shadow of Golgotha begins to loom. Jesus doesn't just say "Suffer for my sake. I'll live in my golden palace and you be my suicide bomber." No, Jesus says "Suffer with me." Jesus asks no more of us than He Himself has done for us.

Ezekiel. Paul. The Lord Jesus. Sacrifice everything for the sake of God.

That's not easy. But there are people who made it. And now us.

**This brings us to our last thought: what is being asked of us today.**

Once more, take your Bibles and turn with me, now to  
Matthew 19:16-25.

A rich young man. Someone addicted to his riches.

Now, instead of *rich* you can read other things here.

There are people who refuse to choose between their career and God. True, often there is no dilemma: you can juggle all your responsibilities. But sometimes choices do have to be made: career advancement or your calling in the church? Does it make sense to follow courses for your work or hobbies every week and then be too busy to attend Bible study? Do we work so hard during the week that we don't even have the energy to attend church as we should on the Lord's Day?

There are people who are unwilling to choose between their earthly happiness and God. There are young people who practice as singles what God has preserved for marriage. Young people, can you really say "Jesus means everything to me" and have sex when God wants the making of love to be protected by

loyalty? Some have married, promised love and loyalty in good days and bad, and yet look elsewhere when the going gets tough. My brother, my sister, can you really say “Jesus means everything to me” and tear apart what God Himself has joined together? Satisfaction in life, “I want it and I want it now”, much of life is like that today. Pornography, affairs. We seek momentary happiness, but choices can be devastating for your eternal well-being.

Momentary happiness can be costly. There are people who went cliff diving and are now paraplegics. There are people who raced cars in an irresponsible way and paid for it. The current opioid crisis is a clear warning: you might be taking fentanyl or even carfentanyl. A moment of inattention or recklessness can be pricy. That’s true for this life. It’s as true for eternal life.

There are people who do not dedicate their whole life to God. They are people who join a church just as they would join a hockey league or the local fishing association. Faith is for Sunday, Monday to Saturday are for other things. The fun things. God is no priority. When finances are tight, contributions to church and donations to charities are the first to go. “I’ve got to live too, you know.” Yes. But just now or forever? God says “Do not be yoked to an unbeliever” yet some will look for a spouse among unbelievers. We know God wants us to be in control of our lives, to speak wholesome words, yet we’ll fill ourselves with alcohol, maybe even drugs, say and do the most stupid things. And then ten, fifteen years down the road we wonder why our children leave the church. Or we’re honest enough to leave ourselves. For you’ve realized, God is not number one in your life...

God always comes first, even ahead of family. Take up your cross. Lose your life.

I know, this is very black and white. But think of what Jesus said to the rich young man when he said “I’ve kept the whole law.” Jesus says “Alright then. Prove it. Go sell what you have, give it to the poor, come follow Me.” Did he have to? In the sense of, every Christian is not allowed to have any possessions? No. But Jesus is putting him to the test. Show Me where your heart is at. You’ve said you keep the fifth through ninth commandments. But what about the tenth? What about your heart? Who is number one in your life? And the young man failed dismally. Jesus shook His head and said “It is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” The Lord Jesus Himself knows this is hard!

Brothers and sisters, please realize this. I’m only being honest and up-front as Christ Himself was. Being a Christian is radical. Following Jesus has a price. Not just for martyrs in the past, in North Korea, or Muslim countries today. You also have to pay a price. Brandon, Jason, Brayden, Lucas, Trenton, the same is true for you. Your confession too may prove costly.

My experience is that, at this stage, many listeners close up. They cannot bear the message and the rest is lost on them. If that’s the way you feel, frustrated and uptight, please listen on. Such frustration is understandable. Look at how the disciples reacted. They see the young rich man walk away. And they ask “If it is so, who can be saved?”

Jesus’ answer is “With man this is impossible. But with God all things are possible.”

Be aware of this: It is God who makes the demand, but it is the same God who can bring you that far. You do not have to do it in your own power. And you should not think that you yourself are able to do it. Save your marriage at all cost? We can’t do that. Sacrifice financial gain for the sake of the church? Easier said than done. Take note of all God’s commandments all the time in every way? Impossible. Impossible with man.

But it is possible with God. Christ grants forgiveness. The Spirit enables us by living in our hearts. If you are in Christ as the branch is in the vine, you will bear fruit. You know what we need to do? We need to pray. We have to humble ourselves before God. We have to ask Him to give us the strength to fulfil His will in our lives. “Lord help me to be radical. Teach me to choose for You. Even when I dislike the choice I have to make and feel I will be worse off.”

There are many Christians who ask “how can I choose?” You’re constantly trying to have your cake in hand and eat it. The longer you postpone the choice, the greater the risk is that your faith dwindles and dies. Love for God and for His family, the church, disappears. Sin becomes all powerful in your life. The social drink becomes binge drinking or alcohol addiction. The occasional sneak-peek becomes a pornography addiction. Your marriage is on the rocks. You’re dying. Because you are trying to have a happy life on earth, trying to make the most of it for yourself, trying to save it, living in two worlds, you are losing your Life with a capital L.

When that happens, you often figure people are talking about you, but not with you. You are judged and condemned while people have no idea how much you struggle. That’s what you think. And there will be truth to that. But if you don’t come out into the open, you’ll indeed end up disappearing off the radar. Those of you who do feel left out, lonely, bitter – if you’re still in church – do realize people look to reach out to you. I hear people say: I never get invited over. That’s impossible. There’s a family, every Sunday, looking to have you over, their name is on the front of the liturgy sheet. A big stresser in the life of an office bearer is being concerned about someone and never meeting that person. Please, make yourself available and open up. And realize, office-bearers are people too, with their quirks and weaknesses. The church is a community of grace where we help each other and build each other up.

Look, no one, no one is happy without God. We all need God. Whether you are happily married or not. Whether you have a good job or are unemployed. Whether you struggle with a weakness or are doing quite fine. We need to be there for each other. We need to encourage each other.

Do realize, though: sin has to be addressed. This is not a plea for soft-peddling. The Lord Jesus did not soft-pedal on the Jews, not even on the rich young man. If someone is destroying their life you can only save them by pointing out their sin. Their sin of lack of self-denial. Their sin of loving themselves ahead of God and others. Their sin of not realizing how they are joined to Christ and how, apart from Christ, they cannot bear fruit.

Brothers and sisters, as we encourage and admonish each other, do so to save, not to condemn. Be moved by love. Don’t do it because you have to. If you do it because you ‘have to’ you’re no better than the rich young man who ticks of the commandments he has kept. But speak from your heart and speak to the heart of the other. Don’t let someone sink in their own mire. But be an instrument in God’s hand to save others from the fire of hell.

For this is serious. There are Lives at risk.

**The Christian confesses: Jesus means everything to me.** “Everything”: that’s a lot. God can ask much of us. Ezekiel was not allowed to mourn for his wife. Paul had to sacrifice his whole life. Jesus gave the most: divine glory exchanged for a cross.

Those who place matters of this earth above God are not worthy of Him. Thanks be to God for pointing us the way. For giving us the strength through the Spirit. Pray and work. Yes, work out your own salvation, whatever the cost. Bear fruit. It is worth the effort.

Brayden, Lucas, Brandon, Trenton and Jason, we’ve had good classes together. I was brutally honest at the start and figured some of you might even walk out on me. You didn’t. And we talked. No one is perfect. And you know that of yourselves. But you don’t have to be perfect, you don’t have to be without sin, to profess faith in God, to belong to Christ, to be seated at His table. And what I came to appreciate during the classes we had together is the proof that your hearts are in the right place. You know what you need to do and you have said, time and time again, it’s what you want. If you fight with sin – and we all do – don’t give up. As the Form for Baptism says: do not despair of God’s mercy nor continue in sin. For guess what? The covenant of grace God has with us is an everlasting covenant. And so, profess your faith and live it.

Which also means: dare to say with Paul “For I am convinced that the sufferings of this present time

are not worth comparing with the glory, which is to be revealed over us.”

Amen.

#### Prayer of Application

Gracious and merciful God, You do indeed mean everything to us. You are our life. In Christ we have all things and without Him we'd be nowhere. Help us by Your Spirit to walk in Your ways, to live with You and for You. May the joy of Your salvation fill our minds, our hearts, our lives. Have us bear fruit as we are joined to the life-giving vine, Christ our Saviour. Teach us to deny ourselves, to humble ourselves before Your throne, and to strive in all of life to do Your will.

Amen

Psalm 27:4, 6

Public Profession of Faith

Psalm 119:4,5

#### Thanksgiving and prayer

Heavenly God, gracious Father, we thank You that these five young men could profess their faith in You in our midst this afternoon. We thank You that thus Your covenant with us is confirmed with the seal of faith. You called them to be Yours when they were yet infants. You claimed them as Yours. And today we see how they indeed are committed to You, acknowledging Your claim. Be with them as they continue on the road of life. Strengthen them in serving You. Feed them by the proclamation of Your Word and the use of the sacraments. Confirm them in their conviction that they have been accepted by You in spite of their sins, will be renewed by the power of Your Spirit, as they indeed belong to Christ and to His people.

We pray for all those who have not reached that point of professing their faith. Where a change of heart is needed, bring it about. Where encouragement is needed, grant zeal for the cause of Your Kingdom. Where knowledge is lacking, enlighten the mind. Cause all to recognize their calling in Your world, their calling to be loving and loyal as You are. So cause Your Kingdom to come.

We pray for Your church throughout the world. Bless all who worship You in truth and uprightness. May they all be safe in their faith. Be with those persecuted for Your Name's sake. Keep them safe, especially safe in the faith. Be with new churches, young churches, reforming churches. Bless all who labour in the work of mission and outreach. Bless churches that are well established, grant them zeal in reaching out, grant them loyalty to Your holy Word.

We thank You Lord, for Your goodness. We will express our gratitude with our gifts. May our gifts proclaim Your mercy to those who will receive them.

Bless us, Lord, in the week that lies before us. Have us enjoy all our activities. Keep us safe, especially if we travel. Have us enjoy the opportunities You give us and rejoice in Your love and grace.

Lord, we look forward to the coming of Your Kingdom. Then we will see You face-to-face. Then we no longer need sacraments to strengthen our weak faith. For then our faith will be verified knowledge. We will know You in a most perfect way. May Your Kingdom come soon.

We ask these things of You, as Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen.