

# Matthew 10:40-42

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*Jesus shares that when someone receives one of His disciples, they are really receiving the Messiah and God who sent the Messiah. And He talks about the rewards one can expect for receiving prophets, righteous men, and giving cups of cold water to little ones in the name of a disciple.*

The parallel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 9:37; Mark 9:41, Luke 10:16, and John 13:20.

Jesus tells His disciples that whoever *receives you receives Me*. That is, when someone accepts them into their homes to provide hospitality, and those who receive the Kingdom message that Jesus commissioned His disciples to share, they are really receiving Jesus. The disciples are functioning as ambassadors of the Messiah. They are heralds of the King. *Receives* in this passage can mean to favorably respond to the message. It also can apply to Jesus's direction to have His disciples find worthy people to host them, as hospitality is something God clearly rewards (Hebrews 13:2). To receive the message means to accept it as true—to give heed to its warnings and to trust and hope in its promises. And to *receive* the message is to *receive* the person *who sent* the messengers.

Moreover, *he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me*. Anyone who accepts Jesus and His message also accepts God the Father who sent Him into the world. Jesus came to earth in obedience to His Father's will. The Son himself came to be God's Rescuer and Redeemer. Anyone *who receives* the Son, *receives* the Father *who sent* Him.

This indicates two truths. First, it indicates that the disciples are not acting on their own behalf when they proclaim the Gospel or perform miracles. They are acting on behalf of the Messiah. It is not their kingdom they are proclaiming. It is God's. Second, it indicates that just as they are acting in obedience to Jesus, Jesus is acting in obedience to the Father. Jesus repeatedly affirms this order of relationship (John 5:19, 5:23; 5:30-32, 5:37, 5:43, 6:29, 8:18-19).

Jesus then ends His instructions to His disciples by describing a series of corresponding receptions and rewards.

*He who receives a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. A prophet* was someone who received a message from God and then delivered that message to the people in obedience to God. *To receive a prophet* could include accepting the prophet's word as true and acting upon the divine message that the *prophet* shares. But in this case, since this passage ends with the example of a reward given for giving a *cup of cold water to drink*, this is likely focusing on receiving a prophet into one's home, in order to give them provision. Those who provide for the needs of a prophet will share in the *reward* that the Lord will give to the prophet.

*A prophet's reward* likely refers to the *reward* that the *prophet* gets from God according to his faithfulness to deliver the message. This reward could occur in this life or the next. In the next life promised rewards include honor and a place of importance within Jesus' kingdom (Romans 2:6; 8:17b; Revelation 3:21). Luke 8:2 appears to provide a list of Jesus' primary financial supporters. The list is headed by Mary Magdalene. This Mary was granted the great reward of getting to be the first to see Jesus after He rose from the dead, which would be a great reward she received in this life. This likely also underscores what Jesus states here, that those who supported Him in His earthly ministry will share His heavenly reward.

Jesus broadens this principle to include any *righteous man*, stating: *And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.* To *receive a righteous man* in this context likely prioritizes providing hospitality for the *righteous man*. It would be hoped that someone who provides for the righteous man will also do what the *righteous man* says and act as he acts. This would lead to an even greater blessing than just the blessing that attends providing hospitality, for the greatest fullness of life comes from knowing God by faith, and learning to walk by faith in His righteousness.

*A righteous man* is someone who lives in harmony with the accepted moral standards. The question is "Which set of or whose standards make *a man righteous*—society's or God's?" This passage is speaking of someone who walks in God's standards of righteousness. It may or may not be that men recognize this behavior as righteous. But God rewards those who walk in His ways, irrespective of the opinions of men. And God also rewards those who provide for the *righteous man*.

The *reward* for *receiving a man* who is *righteous* in the sight of God could include partaking in the honor and glory that God has for that man as well as partaking in the suffering that he endures for following God. And this is exactly what Jesus is calling His disciples to do as they share the good news about His kingdom. He is calling them to partake in His suffering and in His glory. He is calling each of them to "take up his cross (suffering) and follow Me (suffering and glory)" (Matthew 10:38). He is asking each to "lose his 'psuche'/life for My sake" (suffering), in order to find his 'psuche'/life (glory)" (Matthew 10:39).

Incredibly, Jesus, who is both THE *Prophet* (in the likeness of Moses) and THE *Righteous Man* (the "Son of Man"), tells us that if we *receive* Him, by accepting His message and living as He lived, then we will also partake and *receive* His rewards. But also, if we support and provide hospitality to those who serve Jesus, we will share in their rewards. In this section, Jesus is likely instructing the disciples to gladly receive hospitality, because in doing so they are allowing those who bless them to be blessed by God. The disciples were proud men, and may have found it odd to be depending upon others. Jesus instructs them of the importance of inviting others to share in the blessing. Paul says something similar to the Philippian church. He wanted them to give generously to his ministry so that God would reward them greatly (Philippians 4:17).

Jesus then describes a simple act of intentional kindness and offers His assurance that even these types of actions will *not* go unrequited. And His offer applies to *whoever* does the action. And the action is giving *one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a*

*disciple*. This reward would appear to apply to anyone who listens to a *disciple*, decides to follow that disciple's instructions and therefore gives a *cup of cold water to one of these little ones*.

Jesus is not giving a command to give a *cup of cold water* so much as He is describing a type of action that will be rewarded by God. The fact that Jesus uses such a commonplace, routine action such as providing a drink of water would indicate that this principle applies to any action, no matter how routine. To receive this reward the action needs to meet three basic criteria.

The first criteria is to perform the action *in the name of a disciple*. Doing something *in the name of a disciple* could mean as a *disciple* who follows Jesus. It could also mean doing an action because you are following another *disciple*. In either case, you end up doing something to serve someone because you desire to walk in obedience. The Gospel writer Mark records a similar statement.

“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”  
(Mark 9:41)

Anyone could *give a cup of cold water* in Jesus' day, but it required modest effort. This is the second criteria, that there is at least some thought and effort put into the action. To *give a cup of cold water* meant traveling to a cistern or well, and walking down its steps to draw the *water*, carrying it back up and offering it while it was still *cool*. This was something practically *anyone* who could walk could perform as long as they were willing to go to the trouble to do it.

The third criteria speaks to who the action directly benefits. Jesus says *whoever... gives to one of these little ones*, likely meaning children. Children have no real way to pay someone back for the things they *give to* them. They do not have the means to return the favor or monetarily reimburse someone for meeting their needs. The follower of Jesus is aware of this but chooses to *give to these little ones* anyway without any thought of being paid back by the little one for their service. In this, Jesus is saying take particular effort to be extra kind and invest in those, like children, who cannot pay you back in this life, because He will *reward* you. It is common to do things for those who you hope will do something for you in return. Jesus states that the greatest reward goes to those who benefit others who cannot pay them back, because they desire to serve the Lord.

The main point of His statement is this: “If in obedience to *Me*, you will go even a little bit out of your way to be kind and generous to those who cannot pay you back, I promise you, that you *shall not lose your reward from Me*.”

### **Biblical Text**

**He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”**