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## THE ULTIMATE EXTREME SPORT Matthew 10

I'm not a big fan of the Olympics, but I did catch snippets of the recent Winter Games on television. At one point they were having the downhill ski competition. In this race skiers basically get at the top of a steep mountain, point their skis downhill and go straight down as fast as they can. I noticed the skiers were going 80 miles per hour. Does that seem like a good idea to you? What could go wrong with going 80 on a couple of slender skis?

I also noticed competitions in which both snowboarders and skiers were flying off ramps and doing crazy stunts full of twists, flips and turns in the air. You don't just decide one day to try complicated tricks like that and nail them the first time. There is a lot of practice involved, and that practice surely would involve a lot of failed attempts. That means a lot of rough landings that are going to be painful. There will be lots of bumps and bruises, and probably some broken bones along the way. Then, of course, there were those wild and crazy, hair on fire, adrenaline junky curlers sliding their rocks along the ice. Okay, maybe not them.

It caused me to wonder why people do such extreme things. Why do people pursue sports that involve great risk of injury or even death? Maybe there's something missing in me, but I've never gotten the lure of death or serious injury. Although last fall I personally did decide to try an extreme sport. I attempted one Saturday to watch 5 college football games in one day. That's extreme, and it is about sports, right? Unfortunately I failed because Laurie threatened to have me declared legally dead if I spent that long on the couch.

The typical answer to why people do such crazy things as surf awesome 60 foot waves is that they are nuts. They have a death wish. Or they are adrenaline junkies. But Eric Brymer is a researcher from England who has studied and interviewed extreme athletes. His research has revealed that the thrill, the adrenaline rush, is a factor, but not necessarily the biggest one. In his book, *Phenomenology and the Extreme Sports Experience* he says these people claim their sports help them "feel closer to nature, more self-aware, at peace and even transcendent." He says, "There's an ineffable aspect people find very hard to describe, a feeling of coming home." Much of their satisfaction, he says, comes from going through the grind and accomplishing something very hard. Most of them, surprisingly, are meticulous in their preparation and practice.

That idea of being at peace, experiencing a sense of transcendence, of coming home, is appealing to all of us. We all want that. I just think I'd like to get it in a way other than facing some hair raising, death defying experience. `Today I want to point you to an extreme sport that anyone can do. It is a "sport" that can bring that peace, that transcendence, that satisfaction, that sense of coming home. Only it's not really a sport at all. It is responding to a challenge given by Jesus in Matthew 10.

### JESUS NAMED HIS STARTING LINEUP

In high school I recall cut day, when the baseball coach posted the names of guys who made the varsity team. I remember hardly being able to look at that list, fearing it was going to be bad news, but then being surprised to see my name on the list. I had made the team! When the games started and the coach posted the starting lineup the news wasn't so good. My name was never on the lineup. In retrospect I wonder why the coach kept me on the team because he apparently had no intention of ever letting me play. My senior year I think I had a whopping total of 3 appearances at the plate. My innings played could be counted on one hand. I was the Moonlight Graham of the East Bakersfield Blades.

The beginning of Matthew 10 was a little like that. Jesus had hundreds of followers, but he picked a lineup of 12. Hundreds of followers were not going to make the cut. He posted his list of those who made the team. Some are familiar. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Matthew, Judas. Some are not as familiar. Philip, Thaddeus, Bartholomew, Simon the Zealot. Jesus granted to these guys the authority and power to do the kinds of things he had been doing, healing the sick and commanding spiritual forces to leave people alone.

It is remarkable that notorious Judas, the traitor, likely had the ability to heal in the name of Jesus! That thought is hard for me to wrap my head around, but it suggests we would be wise not to measure the spiritual quality or maturity of a person on the basis of their ability to do apparently amazing works.

Notice that the group included Matthew, who worked for the Romans as a tax collector. The ancient Jews chafed at the Roman occupation. They hated the presence of Romans and their "Pax Romana" that ruled over them. Matthew was a Jew who betrayed his own people to get rich by collaborating with the hated oppressors. Meanwhile Jesus included Simon the Zealot. Zealots were Jews who did more than chafe at the Roman occupation. They sought to do everything they

could to end it. That included violence. In their minds they were freedom fighters. The Romans considered them terrorists. They engaged in asymmetric warfare. So in this group you had a Roman collaborator and a Roman-hating terrorist. How do you suppose those two got along? It must have made for some interesting conversations.

Jesus sent them out in pairs to preach the message that the kingdom of God was near in the form of Jesus. We can't know this for sure but I'm thinking maybe he didn't send Matthew and Simon as one of the pairs. This preaching journey was not a permanent or long term event. It was a short term mission trip for this group.

### JESUS GAVE AN ORIENTATION

You don't send people out on a mission without giving them some instructions, some orientation. We see Jesus doing this in verses 5-15. It is apparent that this was intended to be a fairly short term trip. Jesus told them not to pack for the trip. Don't bring a bag or extra clothes. Don't bring extra cash. Just go and trust that your needs will be provided.

There are people who try to draw application for us about how we should live from these instructions. I believe that is a mistake. This was a specific event involving those guys. Jesus did not intend this to be general instruction for all of his followers about how they were always to live. To pattern our lives after these instructions would be like assuming that because the prophet Elisha told Naaman he should go wash in the Jordan River to be cured of his disease that whenever we get sick we should go wash in the Jordan River.

### JESUS GAVE SOME PROPHECY

Beginning in verse 16 the tone of what Jesus is saying changes. Here he shifts to talking about the long term future and what will happen to his followers when they spread the news of Jesus over the long haul. We know this is a much longer look at history from the fact that he says they are going to go before governors and kings. That was not going to happen on that first short term trip, but would occur later.

We can also see that something has changed from noting who they were to go preach to. In verses 5-6 he said, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." But in verse 18 he says, "On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles." Obviously something has changed. Prior to verse 16 he was talking about what they would do specifically on that first trip. After that he began talking about what would happen in the future.

The picture was more than a bit daunting. They would be flogged, arrested, persecuted and hated. They would find themselves in situations where they didn't even know what to say, but the Holy Spirit would give them the words to speak. Of course, all of these things came true in the history of the church. In fact, they happened to that group of disciples that he was preparing that day, just years later.

Verse 23 creates some heartburn for some people. Jesus says, "You will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes." This is not referring to that first mission trip. It is a reference to the entire history of the church. It says that the gospel is going to continue being proclaimed throughout Israel and everywhere else for the duration. The job won't be completed before Jesus comes back.

### JESUS GAVE REASONS TO BE BOLD

The description of what lie ahead for the disciples and for followers of Jesus in the future was, to put it mildly, sobering. Jesus was appointing these men to be his apostles, his representatives, but he wanted them to be very clear about what awaited them. It was a dark picture of hardship, persecution and pain.

Had I been one of them I know I would have at least had some second thoughts there. Last year we co-signed a mortgage for Michael and Carissa so they could qualify for the loan and buy a house. Recently we did the same for Toby and Anna. The intent in both cases is that we would never actually have to pay any of the mortgages. But there comes that moment when you actually have to sign the papers. You look at the numbers on the documents and see how much money you will be responsible to pay back and there's that hesitation, that moment of doubt. Yikes, what if something happens and this actually becomes my responsibility? Those numbers are huge and scary. But fools rush in where angels fear to tread, so we signed the papers.

This was that kind of moment for the apostles. This is like the loan documents where Jesus spelled out in detail exactly what they were signing up for. If you didn't have some hesitation, some scary doubts, you wouldn't be human. This is really what following Jesus is going to cost? Yikes!

It reminds me of when we had to get new carpet for our house. The carpet we really wanted would have been great, but I wasn't anxious to sell one of my organs on the black market to pay for it, which is what it would have taken. But the low end carpet was only a slight improvement on a dirt floor. Wasn't there something

sort of in between? I suspect some disciples were wondering if there was some position between being flogged and persecuted on one hand or not following Jesus at all on the other.

It turned out there wasn't. If they were going to be a part of that chosen group they would have to accept the cost of it. They would have to go in knowing they were signing up for opposition, rejection, persecution, hardship and pain. Why would they ever sign up for that kind of treatment? Jesus gave them some good reasons in verses 24-33.

First they will be like Jesus. The whole point of following Jesus was to become like him, right? Jesus was such an amazing person, so dynamic, so good, so wise, so joyful, so loving, so full of life, that they wanted to become like him. That's why we follow him, at least in part, correct?

But notice in verses 24-25 Jesus talked about the student being like the teacher. He said that is enough. The world mistreated him. It rejected and persecuted him. Some in the world said he was demonic. So if they follow him they should not be surprised if they are also mistreated, rejected, persecuted, called demonic. I was sickened when I saw the horrible things one minor "celebrity" said after Billy Graham died. Lauren Duca, a writer for that noteworthy and scholarly journal, *Teen Vogue*, commenting on Graham's death said of him, "Have fun in hell." If Graham were alive to hear something like that he would have taken comfort in the fact that having such things said about him made him like his Lord Jesus.

A second reason for being willing to sign up for such arduous duty was that the Father cares about us. In verses 29-31 Jesus talked about how the Father cares even about sparrows to the point that he knows the details of their lives. And he cares far more about Jesus' followers than he does about sparrows. So he said, "Don't be afraid." Whatever happens, the Father will be taking care of you every moment.

One of the most important reasons is that if we're unwilling to stand up for Jesus in this world, Jesus won't vouch for us in the next. But if we are faithful to him, he will. In other words, there is a reward in eternity if we will follow Jesus, and that reward is infinitely more valuable than anything in this life, for it is eternal.

## JESUS CALLED FOR COMMITMENT

Verse 34 is surprising. Jesus said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Uh, what now? What

happened to “peace on earth” when Jesus was born? What about Isaiah saying he would be the Prince of Peace? Didn’t Jesus come to bring peace?

We have to interpret what Jesus said in its context. I’ve noticed that in our hypersensitive, media saturated culture people go ballistic if someone says something that even sounds like it might get in the same time zone as something currently considered politically incorrect. What is missing badly in our society is a desire to understand what a person is actually saying.

If you rip this quote out of its context it sounds bad. Jesus came to bring war, not peace. But in the context he is warning his chosen disciples about the difficulties ahead. One of them is that taking a stand for Jesus will bring conflict into their lives, and that conflict might occur in their own families. In verse 35 he depicts it as “a man against his own father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Following Jesus was going to bring division in families. These men and those who come in their footsteps might find that some of their own family members will oppose them. So Jesus says in verse 37, “Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”

I had a friend who was Jewish, but he came to believe Jesus is Messiah. He put his faith in Jesus. This upset his family terribly. They argued with him, even threatened to have no more to do with him. He had a choice forced upon him. He could have Jesus or he could have his family, but he could not have both. That’s exactly what Jesus was talking about. He said if you are to follow him it may be costly, but you need to pay the price.

Jesus summed up his point in verses 38-39. “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” That last statement is one of the most profound truths in all of the Bible and one that we find nearly impossible to believe and live by. It says taking care of yourself first, looking out for number one, will produce only death. And it produces death *always*. The way to experience life is to give up your selfish pursuit and give yourself away by serving Jesus.

But notice that first statement. We’re not worthy of Jesus unless we take up the cross. That statement has led to sayings that are common today like “we all have our crosses to bear.” We interpret a cross to bear as some difficult thing, a burden we have to shoulder in life. Maybe that’s some really annoying person you have to put up with, or some painful on going circumstance. Laurie has a cross to bear in

being married to a guy who has some of the most boring tastes in the world, who gets stuck in ruts and doesn't like either coffee or chocolate.

However, in Jesus' day that's not what the image of a cross conjured up. In his the cross didn't evoke merely something that was hard to keep putting up with. You were talking about dying in the most horrible way you could ever imagine. What would it mean to willingly take up a cross? It would mean saying, "I don't care how painful this might be. I don't care that it will mean the end of my plans, my dreams, my interests, my very life. I choose this and purposely let all of those things die, even if it is excruciatingly painful."

That is the commitment Jesus challenges us to make. He is telling us to be worthy of him we must go all in. We must say, "From now on I live for Jesus, I follow him with no reservations and no holds barred." Life being about me and my happiness is over. In Galatians 2:20 Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Exactly. In 2 Corinthians 5:15 Paul wrote that Christ died for all, "that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them." That's what it means to take up the cross.

I recently saw the movie *13 Hours* on television. It tells the story of the attack on American personnel in Benghazi back in 2012. You probably know the story. An American special diplomatic compound in Benghazi was attacked by a large number of Islamic militants. The compound had a woefully inadequate security staff of 2 men. It was supposedly protected by Libyan forces, but they vanished as soon as the attack began. The compound was quickly overwhelmed and set on fire. They sent out pleas for help. Less than a mile away there was a secret CIA base. They had a security force of 6 private security contractors who were all former Special Forces veterans. Hearing the calls for help Tyrone Woods, who commanded the security team, wanted to go immediately. There was some delay, but he finally insisted on going. In one scene he faces his small team, all of them heavily armed and says, "None of you have to go." It wasn't their responsibility, and they faced enormous odds against them if they went. It was highly likely they would not all survive. Not one of them balked. They went, and spent the rest of the night fending off one attack after the other. 2 of them did not survive, including Woods himself. That moment they faced a terrible choice. To go meant very likely their lives were over. Jesus gives us that kind of challenge. If you go, you are giving up the life you've always led, the life of doing what you want because it is best for you. Take up the cross and follow.

## APPLICATION

### ANSWER THE CALL

Though we do not have the same mission and role those 12 men were given that day, Christ has given us a challenge akin to the one he gave them. He challenges us to pick up the cross and follow him. Romans 12:1 says, “Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” Romans 6:13 says, “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.”

Did you notice the last part of that verse. “Offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.” We use electronic drums in our church. They enable us to control the sound of drums, which often can be so loud they drown out everything else. But electronic drums do have a potential flaw. In the past we’ve had experiences with the electronics on them failing. Sometimes when that happens the drums will fire when the drummer isn’t doing anything. You get random sudden clangs from cymbals or drum strikes. Everyone looks at the poor drummer thinking, “what are you doing?” He’s sitting there thinking, “I didn’t do anything!” Those drums are an instrument. They are only useful when they see themselves as totally available at every moment to the drummer to do with as he pleases. When they go off on their own they become a curse, not a blessing. We are to see every part of our being, our words, our actions, our thoughts, our priorities, the time we control, the money we have, our sexuality, our intelligence, our abilities, every part of it, as instruments dedicated to God’s use.

We have not been arrested, flogged, hauled before governing authorities or physically threatened. I hope we never will be. But we will face the challenge of following Jesus. That challenge is to take up the cross, meaning make the commitment those men made. It is seeing life as lived for my purposes, my comfort, my success, my glory and my will as being over. It has been nailed to a cross and executed. So now my life is to be all about serving Christ, doing what he says to do.

For us to take up the cross and follow Jesus quite likely will not come down to being flogged, imprisoned or executed, though it certainly does for many of our brothers and sisters in the world today. However, it has enormous implications for how we live and the kind of people we are. It will mean that the driving and deciding factor in how we use our time and money is not how we want to use it, but how Jesus wants to use it. The determining factor in how we relate to people is

not how we can get what we want from them, but how Jesus wants us to treat them. It means my words, my tone of voice, even my facial expressions should be all about what Jesus wants them to be, not what I want.

Years ago I had a colleague who had been a good friend who, for reasons I have never understood, turned on me and went on a campaign to undermine me and ultimately to get me removed from my job. It hurt my feelings. It made life very difficult for me. It made me look bad in the eyes of some people. I had to go to some extreme lengths to just handle some of his accusations and maneuvering. It eventually proved quite costly for me. But I had to think about what it means to take up the cross. To take up a cross meant for me to die. Hey, if Rick Myatt is dead, is he offended if a supposed friend betrays him? If Rick is dead, is he concerned with what people think of him? If Rick is dead is he going to be angry and upset with this guy? If Rick is dead is he going to fight back at that guy and make it his goal to defend himself and defeat that guy? Seems to me if Rick is dead he won't do any of those things, because he's dead. Dead people are quite consistent in not getting upset with others or worried about how they look. They just kind of chill there in the graves and let the chips fall where they may. But what that guy did was wrong! You need to let everyone know that or he gets away with it. Actually, no, I don't. He doesn't get away with anything. My Father will deal with him in a just way, and he will take care of me no matter what that guy does, so I'll just leave him to Dad.

It occurs to me that this taking up the cross thing would be revolutionary in a marriage. Imagine a husband and a wife who both have decided that they are in the relationship for one reason. That reason is to follow Jesus. They see themselves as having taken up the cross, thus died, and they then exist purely to serve the person they are married to. What a dynamic relationship that would become.

### KNOW THAT IT WILL BE WORTH THE PRICE

Everything in life has a price tag. Whatever you do, you will pay for it in some way. You pay for it in time and effort, the loss of other opportunities, maybe even money. Even if it is sleeping in on a weekend morning, you pay a price for that. You expend time for that purpose, time that you can never get back.

When it comes to buying something what are the determining factors? Is this a good deal? Is this something I really want to trade my resources for? Am I getting sufficient return for the price I'm paying? I don't hate shopping for clothes as much as some guys, but I'm not fond of it. One reason for that is that it usually induces an existential crisis for me because I go through those kinds of

deliberations about buying any article of clothing. A couple of nights ago Laurie and I were in a store and briefly looked at some shoes for me. Immediately the crisis began. I have difficulty getting shoes that fit well, plus I have a tendency to be stuck in a rut. I hate shopping for shoes because I have no confidence that when I start wearing the new shoes they will feel as good as I would like. I just punted on looking at the shoes because I couldn't deal with the pressure that crisis brings. I know I will struggle with the decision of whether or not to buy the shoes. Are they a good deal? Are they really something I want to trade my money for? Am I going to get an adequate return for the price I pay, meaning, do they really fit, are they comfortable, am I really going to wear them and like them? I usually don't know the answers to those questions so I find myself paralyzed. But I do know that if I buy them I likely will have buyer's remorse when I get home. Oddly, Laurie never seems to be bothered by such crises. So I guess I need to be more like Laurie.

Those same deliberations come up when we consider answering the call of Jesus. He has just told us there is a price to pay for following him. Is this a good deal? Is this really what you want to trade your resources, in this case your entire life, for? Are you going to get sufficient reward if you make this deal? Jesus assures you that though the price of accepting his challenge might be terribly steep, it will be worth every penny. In fact, it is the best deal you will ever make.

If you accept his challenge you will start becoming like Jesus, the best person who has ever lived. If you accept his challenge you can rest easy because God will care for you at every moment of life. The thing that most keeps us from taking up the cross and following Jesus is we are so hyper concerned with self. How will I get what I want? How can I keep from getting hurt? How can I be happy? The question is, do you think the Father really loves you? Do you think he is actually going to take care of you? If you do, then you don't need to fret about those things. You've heard it from me often. What God supplies is enough. Is that true? If it is, then you don't have anything to worry about. Ever. God will take care of you, so give yourself to him without reservation.

Years ago Laurie and I were scheduled to fly home on a redeye flight. The flight was delayed, and during the delay we went to a restaurant near our gate in the airport where Laurie got some coffee and I got some juice. We told our server about our flight delay and I shared my strong suspicion that our flight was going to be canceled. She said, "Yeah, just last week a flight about this time was canceled and all those people had to spend the night in the airport." When we went back to the gate area I was convinced it was going to be our bedroom. Most of those dumb airport seats are broken up by armrests so there's no place you can lie down. I

didn't want to spend the night on the floor, so I went hunting and found some spots where Laurie and I could stretch out for the night. I claimed them as our territory. I was sure I had acted wisely when the airline personnel began handing out blankets. Sure enough, our flight was canceled. I was feeling proud of myself for having had the foresight to arrange beds for us. All the other folks on our flight were just out of luck. Good luck trying to sleep on the floor. But then the airline folks informed us they were going to put us up in hotels. I began fretting. Great, but how are we going to get to a hotel? We don't have a car. Which hotel? Are they sure they can get a room for us? They introduced a woman whose business was "Airline Concierge." She would take care of everything for us. She booked the rooms, arranged buses to take us to the hotels. All we had to do was follow her directions. We got on the bus, they took us to the hotel, we went to the front desk where they handed us room keys and some toiletries, including toothbrushes, and we went to our room. I had fretted over where we would spend the night, and I saw others as competing for sleeping space. I had to beat them to it. Then I fretted over how we could get to a hotel. But all I needed to do was trust that woman and she took care of everything, and did it better than I could have.

Jesus tells us to take up the cross and follow him, and Creation Concierge will take care of everything, so we don't have to fret, we don't have to compete with everyone to get what we think we need. He'll take care of it, because he loves us.

If you follow Jesus, take that radical step and accept the challenge, you will find life. There is nothing in this world that can give you eternal life. And there is nothing in this world that can give you true peace, real, lasting joy, unconditional love and the ability to love unconditionally, meaning, and a dynamic connection to the God of the universe. Only taking Jesus' challenge can give those things. In John 15:11 after instructing his men to obey his commands Jesus said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." What else can you do in life that will guarantee you divine joy, total joy? There are a lot of good things in life, but none that can guarantee you total joy. None that can give you eternal life, the life you really long for.

I had a friend who was a professional golfer. At one point he reached one of the highest peaks someone in his career can reach when he won the US Open. I had another friend who knew all about what that meant. He told me that just winning that tournament meant our friend who won was set for life. That was a joyful high point for him and it for sure made his financial future secure, which is a great thing. But it didn't give him eternal life. It didn't enable him to have joy in trials that came later in his life. It didn't give him peace with God. It didn't really even

give him peace with himself and with other people. Jesus promises if we give up self and follow him, he will give us life, peace and joy that nothing else can give.

To the degree that we hold back our lives and hearts, that we serve our selfish interest rather than following Jesus with all our heart, we lose a little bit of life and a little bit of joy.

One last thing, the last couple of verses of this chapter tell us that if we accept Jesus' challenge we will also be a blessing to other people. What more could you want? You become like Jesus, the Father takes care of you, you get life, and you become a blessing to others. This is the deal of a lifetime. Let's take it, and throw ourselves into the extreme sport of taking up our cross and following Jesus without reservation.