

Teachings of Jesus

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Jesus: The Greatest Teacher

Pedagogy is the study of being a teacher. A study of how to teach God's Word should begin with a careful observation of the teaching style of the Greatest Teacher: Jesus. Nicodemus made a visit to Jesus one night and said, *"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him"* (Jn. 3:2). This Jewish ruler was just one of many to recognize that Jesus was a great teacher. Many others have concurred with this opinion. Josephus, the Jewish general turned Roman historian and the unbelieving satirist, Celsus claimed as much for Jesus. More recently other men have made similar observations about Jesus' teaching ability. J.W.G. Ward wrote, "he is not one among the world's teachers; He is the Teacher, unique in understanding, supreme in sympathy, and unparalleled in power to bless the human soul..." H.B. Grose said, "Jesus is the world's teacher, unique and ultimate."

Was Jesus just a great moral teacher? Jesus was not just a great teacher who came from God, He was God. Jesus claimed to be the Christ (Greek for "the anointed" Son of God, see Mark 14:61), to be able to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-11, Luke 7:36-50), and to be the only way to God the Father (John 14:6). Jesus was fully divine. He was also fully human. There was and will be no other teacher like Him.

This lesson will focus on what made Jesus such a great teacher of God's Will.

Distinctive Teaching is Appealingly Fresh

After Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount *"the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"* (Matt. 7:28-29). When Jesus opened His mouth and began to speak, it was not as one of the learned Rabbis of the day. He was like the Rabbis who stood up to read scripture and took a seat when giving their explanation. Yet in contrast, He did not speak like the scribes who quoted learned Rabbis and then gave their opinion. These were not a collection of Jewish sayings or proverbs or opinions of the day. Unlike the scribes He did not parrot the teachings of past rabbis or follow human traditions.

His preaching was radical and revolutionary. *"So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'"* (Luke 4:22). The distinctive teaching style of Jesus drew the attention of massive crowds. Yet there was no need for a fancy show or gimmicks to gain and maintain the the crowd's attention. *"Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him'"* (Mk. 1:27)

He did not go to a school for rabbis nor sit at the feet of a great Greek Philosopher. *"And the Jews marveled, saying, 'How does this Man know letters, having never studied?'"* (John 7:15), *"Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, 'Truly this is the Prophet'"* (Jn. 7:40.) This provoked the jealousy the religious leaders and teachers. Pharisees sent officers to take Jesus by force. Those sent to arrest Jesus came back empty handed. The soldiers explained, *"Never man spake like this man"* (Jn. 7:45,46).

Authoritative Teaching Is Powerful

Jesus spoke as if He had inherent authority. He spoke as if saying *"thus saith the Lord."* The

multitude was impressed by this fresh and authoritative approach (Matt. 7:29). He did not just give the views of others but boldly claimed, *"But I say to you."* "The common people were astonished. He was not a scribe. He had no religious credentials. Yet he spoke like a king. His sayings were a new Sinai. The scribes quoted authorities; he spoke with authority. They loved tradition, and no rabbi won a hearing unless he could prove that his word was based on past wisdom; so the scribes drew stale water from closed cisterns. But the words of Jesus were like a spring, clear, fresh, with power to slake the soul's thirst." (The Interpreter's Bible, New Testament Articles, Matthew and Mark, page 335).

The Jews recognized that Jesus needed authority for what Jesus did (Mt. 21:23-27). They asked Him, *"By what authority ..."* He taught and did His works (21: 23). The Jews believed that such authority must come from one who has the right to grant it -- *"Who gave thee this authority?"* Jesus recognized that they were trying to trap Him, so he turned the tables on them and they were trapped. He asked them about the source of John's authority (21:24-26). They then realized that if John's baptism was authorized by God, they should have been baptized (21:27). Jesus' answer shows that there are only two sources of authority: Heaven (divine), or from man (human).

Jesus' authority to teach originated with God, His Father. *"Jesus answered them and said, 'My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority'"* (Jn. 7:16,17). God told Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (Mt. 17:5).

The Pharisees elevated their traditions to the level of divine authority. But Jesus' authority was not based upon human traditions (Matt. 15:1) or office (Matt. 23:2-3) or perception (Mark 12:23-40) or human wisdom (1 Cor. 8:8).

Definitive Teaching is Scriptural

Any teacher of the Word of God must have a sound command of the Scriptures. Jesus knew the Scriptures well. Three times He replied to Satan, *"It is written"* (Matt. 4:1-11). Christ viewed scripture as the sustenance and standard for life. He said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Mt. 4:4). He demonstrated the proper application of scripture. He rebutted Satan's misapplication of the Word of God (Mt. 4:7). Scriptures do not contradict each other, but men contradict the them.

Jesus viewed all Scripture as the inspired, infallible Word of God. Old Testament Scripture as historically accurate. He believed the story of creation and Adam and Eve, the great flood of Noah's day, Jonah being in the belly of the great fish for three days, the healing of the disobedient Israelites by Moses' brass serpent, the wisdom and riches of Solomon, etc. He considered the Bible totally accurate. *"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled"* (Matt. 5:18).

Jesus mocked the Pharisees' understanding of the Scriptures more than once by asking them *"having you not read?"* Condemning the Sadducees' disbelief in the resurrection Jesus said, *"You err, not know the scriptures"* (Matt. 22:29). Many religious leaders of today fail to grasp the true meaning of the very scriptures they teach.

Sensitive Teaching Is Compassionate

Jesus was a "people person." His teaching reached out to all the people especially the average man. What set Him apart from other teachers was His compassion for all. *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people"* (Matthew 4:23), His compassion went beyond mere sympathy for physical suffering. He was a friend of sinners (Matt. 11:19). He saw the masses as an unprotected flock. *"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd"* (Matt. 9:36). Mark's account adds, *"so He began to teach them many things"* (Mark 6:34). You can tell a student anything, if they know you care

about them and love them. People care little what you know, until they know how much you care.

Comprehensive Teaching is Clear and Simple

The teaching of Jesus was easy for His hearers to comprehend. It was not filled with mysterious allegories or lengthy rambling lectures. His method and approach was thus to be distinguished from that of the rabbis of Judaism. Atticus Haygood, "men's teaching. Vanity or ignorance makes them seek to appear profound when they are only obscure.... 'the common people heard him gladly.' This could never be said of even the good Socrates, or the great Plato; for the 'common people' could not understand them" (26).

For the most part His messages were brief. He knew man's attention span was short and his memory fleeting. He appealed to everyday normal activities to illustrate His points, such as, birds in mustard trees, sowers in a field, widows giving money at the temple, etc. Jesus wanted His followers to learn. He would ask questions to evaluate their progress, "*Jesus said to them, 'Have you understood all these things?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'*" (Matt. 13:51). His teaching was relevant to the everyday life of His disciples. He would teach them about giving and praying. Although His teachings were often simple, they could still be very profound, such as, the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). Still, Jesus was often misunderstood. This was most often true of the most learned religious leaders of the day. However, Jesus was still skillful enough to reach their dull ears and hardened hearts. "*Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them*" (Mt. 21:45.)

Descriptive Teaching Uses Word Pictures

Jesus asked for a cup of water from a Samaritan woman at a well and turned it into a discussion about the "*living water*" only He could provide. Jesus could point to some flowers in nature and say "*consider the lilies of the field.*" Jesus had three-D powerpoints. He gave us many memorable picturesque phrases, such as, "*be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*"

Perhaps the best known examples of Jesus' word pictures is found in His parables. He was the master storyteller. For example, "*The kingdom of heaven is like...a pearl of great price...a sower who went forth to sow...a treasure hidden in a field*", etc. The parables of Jesus comprise more than one-third of His teachings as recorded in the Gospel. "*But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples*" (Mark 4:34). Although the Son of God did not invent the parable when He came to earth, He certainly mastered the use of them. "

Our English word for "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek word *parabole*. This Greek term is a compound word made up of *para* meaning beside and the verb *ballo* which means to throw or cast. Therefore, the word *parabole* means "a throwing alongside." Jesus would take a story and cast it down alongside of his teaching, so that the two can be compared and contrasted. This would assist the disciple in comprehending His lesson. The term "parable" has been given a very broad definition, such as, a "story with a meaning."

Why did Jesus use parables? Everyone loves a good story. These capture the attention and cause the mind to visualize.

On the one hand parables were used to reveal truth to the inquiring mind and on the other to conceal it from the narrowminded and self-righteous. When asked why He preached in parables Jesus explained, "*because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand*" (Matt. 13:11-13).

A parable can cause the hearers to pass judgment on the events of the story, so as to realize that they must make a similar judgment in their own lives. As the story developed, the listener would be drawn in without realizing it. "*When the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that He spake of them*" (Matthew 21:45). This is why He spoke such parables of the Two Sons

and the Wicked Tenants (Mt. 21:23-39; Mk. 12:1-9; Lk. 20:9-16).

Some of the parables were used to fulfill prophecy concerning Jesus and the coming Kingdom. *"All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world'"* (Matt. 13:34,35).

Repetitive Teaching Is Memorable

The Greek form of the word *"taught"* implies that Jesus spoke these things often. He has already taught these things in the past and was teaching them again. It would be of no surprise to find Christ teaching some of these same truths in the future. The Christ would continuously and habitually teach His disciples. Most of teaching and parenting involves repetition, repetition, repetition. This is why several of the teachings of Jesus are repeated even in the same Gospel.

Productive Teaching Indoctrinates

Six times in His sermon on the Mount Jesus said, *"You have heard that it hath been said, but I say unto you."* Jesus used repetitive phrases not only to boost memory but to indoctrinate His disciples. He put the doctrine or teaching into the people. He even command His apostles to do the same. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.* (Mt. 28:19-20)

Objective Teaching Is Internally Applied

Jesus' teaching did not deal mainly with the eternal existence of man but looked to the real source of sin: the human heart (Matt. 15:10,11,15). He said, *"a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks"* (Luke 6:45). It was not loose laws on weapon possession which lead to murder. Jesus looked to the heart of the issue. Murder begins with hating one's fellow man (Matt. 5:21,22). In the case of adultery, He contends that the lustful look is the actual perpetrator (Matt. 5:27,28). Jesus' teaching is to effect the heart where man makes his moral decisions and not merely his intellect. After Jesus spoke with two disciples *"they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'"* (Luke 24:32).

Persuasive Teaching is Convicting

Jesus did not merely teach the truth and leave others alone. He condemned sin and warned the sinner. He taught His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees meaning the pervasive false teaching. He told the apostles to warn men to believe and be baptized or else they would face condemnation (Mark 16:16). He warned that the very words He taught would serve as the standard of judgment in the final day. *"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day"* (Jn. 12:48).

Illustrative Teaching is Transforming

The Bible was not given just for intellectual information but for the soul's transformation. Jesus began with where the soul of man was - in sin. He moved the sinner with His skillful teaching to a knowledge of the sinner's condition, the need to accept His invitation, and be transformed into a Christian. Jesus said, *"a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher"* (Luke 6:40). Jesus took Peter a "rock" and made him part of the foundation of the church built upon the prophets and apostles. Jesus took John as "son of thunder" and development him into the apostle of love. He transformed Zacchaeus into a son of Abraham. He taught His disciples to pray like He did. *"Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples'"* (Luke 11:1). In order for

Jesus to be able to transform His disciples into Christ-like followers, He first had to illustrate by His example.

Effective Teaching Saves

The primary objective of Christ's mission was to seek and to save the lost (Matt. 18:11). His teaching was the means of leading men to eternal life. Jesus taught to save and He saved by teaching. *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life"* (Jn. 6:63). No matter how many times His enemies tried to test, trick or distract Him, He never strayed and went "chasing rabbits." For only Jesus is *"the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through"* Him (John 14:6).

Jesus' ministry was only about three and a half years. During that time he was able to teach twelve men. These men were so well taught, that when they carried out their mission as apostles, the world was changed forever.

Questions:

1. What observation did Nicodemus make about Jesus?
2. Was Jesus just a good or great teacher? Explain.
3. Why were the common people so amazed at the teaching of Jesus?
4. How was Jesus different in His teaching style from the scribes and rabbis of His day?
5. Why did the soldiers sent by the Jewish rulers fail to arrest Jesus?
6. What are the two possible sources of religious authority?
7. What was Jesus' source of authority to teach?
8. How does Jesus' dealing with Satan in the temptation in wilderness demonstrate His views concerning Scripture?

9. How did Jesus demonstrate compassion to the people?
10. Why was Jesus' teaching so comprehensible to the common man?
11. What is a parable?
12. Why did Jesus tell so many stories?
13. Why must effective teaching involve repetition?
14. True False Indoctrination is always a bad thing.
15. Demonstrate from the Bible that Jesus' teaching focused on the sinner's heart trouble.
16. True False Good teaching involves judging others, condemning their sins, and warning the sinner.

Application & Discussion:

1. How can a teacher be sensitive and compassionate toward their students and at the same time be judge and condemn sin and false teachers and warn the sinner?
2. Why is a Bible teacher's example so vital to effective teaching?

Homework: Whether you are a teacher at school, parent in the home, boss at work or Bible class teacher at church emulate the teaching characteristics of Jesus.

- Gregory C. Carlson, *Rock Solid Teacher: Discover the Joy of Teaching Like Jesus*
- Daniel H. King, Sr., *At the Feet of the Master Teacher*, pp. 82f; 101f
- Herbert Lockyer, *All the Teachings of Jesus in the Bible*
- John Smith *Teaching: the Heart of the Matter*
- Dale Roach, *9 Characteristics of Jesus as a Teacher*<https://likeateam.com/9-characteristics-of-jesus-as-a-teacher/>

Lesson 2: Sunday, April 14, 2019

Jesus' Teaching on His Role as Savior

Moses contemplating the questions of his fellow Israelites asked God: *"What shall I say unto them?" when they ask who sent me.* In answer to Moses's question concerning whom sent him to the Israelites God said, *"I am that I am"* (Ex. 3:14). This is also applied to Christ who used it to describe His existence before Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

In his gospel, John mentions seven "I Am's" of Jesus. The number seven is important in John's writings. He records seven miracles and seven Beatitudes in Revelation. These seven "I am" phrases are Christ's affirmations as to His identity. The claims amount to a declaration of deity - these qualities are clearly supernatural in character and the revelation of His Godhood or deity in all its fullness.

All seven answer the following questions: 1) What are man's needs? 2) How does Christ answer those needs? 3) What conditions must man meet to access these blessings found in the great I AM? If Jesus could change the hearts of men and provide for their spiritual needs, man should change his circumstances.

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35)

In the context, Jesus had miraculously fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish leaving twelve baskets of fragments (6:1-14). The people wanted to make Him king by force (v. 15). Jesus rejected their intentions. His disciples crossed on the other side of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus walked on the water (vv. 16-21). The people interested in physical food got in boats crossed the Sea and found Him in Capernaum (vv. 22-25). Jesus condemns their interest in Him as purely for satisfaction of physical hunger (v. 26). Their efforts for physical food should be supplanted with striving for the spiritual bread (v. 27). They refer to the manna God sent daily to the people in the Sinai wilderness. By eating the people could live (vv. 30,31). In effect they are telling Jesus: "If you expect us to believe, you will have to do more than simply feed us with one meal!" It was generally believed by the Jews of Jesus' day that when the Messiah appeared the phenomenon of manna would occur again. Jesus reminds them that it was not Moses, but God who gave the manna. Now, He is going to give them something better (32). Instead, the people were looking for their daily free rations.

- **Man's Need**

Homer Hailey wrote, "Prior to the coming of Jesus, the human family had sought to feed the spirit on the husks of human philosophy on the one hand and on traditions and legalistic observances of law on the other...man was in a state of spiritual malnutrition." Man has hungered for spiritual satisfaction (Mt.

5:6). Without spiritual nourishment he cannot grow and recognize good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14). Man spends his money and labors for that which cannot satisfy (Is. 55:2).

- **Christ Meets Man's Need**

The Bread Of Life comes through Christ (v. 33). There is no "bread of life" in other sources of "revelation", such as, the Book of Mormon, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, The Koran, etc. They contain spiritual garbage, not the Bread of Life. The Bread of Life warned of the danger of neglecting the bread of life while spending one's life working for the physical necessities and luxuries of life (Mt. 4:4). Most Americans are wasting their lives chasing after the temporal needs of life.

The Bread of life is satisfying. In Him the desire of the world is satisfied, and it is not a recurrent desire (v. 35). Many people are constantly searching for something to fill the void in their lives. They go from aerobics to cake decorating, from crafts to painting, from yoga to karate, from movies to music. They are constantly searching for something which is gratifying and satisfying. Their entire life is spent chasing rainbows in search of the elusive pot of gold. No need exists for us to be looking elsewhere for additional "bread".

The Bread of Life gives eternal life (v. 51). Ordinary food sustains our physical bodies for short periods of time. The Jew's forefather ate bread in the wilderness and are now dead (v. 49). Though our bodies will die, Jesus will raise us up in the last day to a glorious resurrection.

The Bread of Life brings fellowship with God (v. 56). J.W. McGarvey wrote, "...Jesus has insisted that his very life be absorbed and assimilated. ...His divinity permits us to have a spiritual communion and fellowship with him, an abiding in his presence, and indwelling of his Spirit and a veritable assimilation of life from him." (The Fourfold Gospel, p. 389).

- **Man's Responsibility**

The Jews of Jesus' day couldn't see beyond their physical appetite. Jesus made it clear as possible (vv. 63,64). Many disciples left Him, (v. 66). The Twelve understood, and knew there was no one else that could do for them what Jesus could do, (vv. 67,68).

Our first duty of discipleship is to eat of His flesh and drink of his blood (v. 53). This statement was designed to jar them loose from their shallow concepts of religion and awaken them to the realities of genuine faith. When understood in a spiritual sense, His words express the nature of discipleship in the strongest imaginable terms.

We are also to abide in Him (v. 56). Faithfulness to the Words of God. This requires disciples to cultivate an appetite. To do so is to be blessed (Mt. 5:6). Partaking of this spiritual food leads unto salvation (I Pet. 2:2). Awaking this appetite is often quite difficult. As plants turn toward the sun for nourishment, so we must turn to the Son.

Jesus is the answer to every man's needs. If man will only meet the conditions He has set forth. For man's hungry heart Christ is the bread of life, but only if man will come and eat.

"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12)

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn. 9:5)

Appropriately, Jesus made this claim during the Feast of Tabernacles. The feast commemorated the wilderness wanderings of Israel. During the week of this celebration lights were lit in four large lampstands in the Temple court. These lights were only symbolic of the pillar of fire that went before the people in their wandering, but Jesus was the real light for all nations.

Later during the same week Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth (9:1-12). First, Jesus made His claim. The miracle then confirmed the claim that Jesus is indeed the light of the world. But the Pharisees were blind to the real intent of the miracle.

- **Man's Need**

Man is wandering in the wilderness of sin and darkness (Ac. 26:28). Darkness is man's ignorance and blindness to who he is, who made him, why he exists upon the earth, where he is going and how he

can get there. All men have become children of darkness (1 Th. 5:5). The Prince of Darkness is Satan who has ruled his kingdom by means of sin and its consequences: Death. Jesus claimed that evil men love the darkness, because it hides their evil deeds (Jn. 3:19,20). Man is spiritually blind (Eph. 4:17-19) not able to direct his own footsteps.

- **Christ Can Meet Man's Need**

The coming Messiah was prophesied to be a light to the Gentiles as well as the Jews (Is. 42:6,7). Jesus was anointed for this purpose (Lk. 4:18). He is the light to this dark and blind world.

Light is critical to life on this planet. Plants need sunlight for the purpose of photosynthesis. The energy of the sun moves the weather and warms the atmosphere. Just as light is a source of life on this earth, so is Christ the source of the essentials of spiritual life. 1) He is the source of life (Jn. 1:4,9). Christ occupies the same place in the moral and the spiritual realm that the sun occupies in the natural and physical realm. Life on earth, as we know it, would cease to be if the sun were suddenly hurled out of our solar system. Nor can there be any spiritual life outside of Christ who is light and in whom there is life. 2) He is the source of knowledge. He enables men to see God. To come to the truth out of the darkness of ignorance. 3) He is the source of holiness (1 Jn. 1:5). The Son of God enables us to see men as they really are and to see God as He really is. Furthermore, the Light reveals that which separates God and man. 4) He is the source of guidance. Jehovah had been the light to His people in the wilderness as He led them by the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Man is in darkness and sin and cannot find his way out. Christ is the light at the end of a dark tunnel.

- **Man's Responsibility**

Light is useless to the physical eye that is blind (Ac. 13:11; 9:8,9), and to the spiritual perception of the heart closed to Jesus and the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:3,4). If Christ is the Light of the world, then we must follow Jesus. If we are going to follow Him, we must walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). Since we are called by the gospel into the "*marvelous light of God*" (2 Th. 2:13,14), we must give heed to the Good News and apply it.

Jesus is the cure to man's blindness. Yet, as in most cures, there are conditions the patient must be willing to follow. For man living in darkness He is the light if man will walk in His light.

"I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7)

After Jesus had healed the man born blind many of the Pharisees tried to discredit Him. They attempted to prove that a miracle had not really taken place. But they failed establish that He had not done it by the power of God. The Pharisees with self-imposed blindness, cast the blind man whom Jesus healed out of the synagogue. They were the ushers and bouncers of their religious kingdom.

Jesus was setting up a test. He made the point that a real shepherd enters the sheep fold by way of the door; one who enters some other way is a thief, not a shepherd. If the Pharisees were genuine shepherds they would acknowledge Him and enter by the door - but in rejecting Him would prove that they were not real shepherds at all.

- ◆ **Man's Need**

Because of sin man is shut out from God. In times past the Gentiles were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:1-4). The Jewish people were shut out by the Pharisees (Mt. 23:1-5). Man needs access to the fold of God.

- ◆ **Jesus Meets Man's Need**

In ancient times the sheepfold was a circular stone corral with a single narrow opening. After the sheep were inside, the shepherd would lie down across the opening, using his own body to form the gate or "door" of the sheepfold. Nothing could enter or leave the fold without the shepherd knowing about it. Thieves would go over the wall to steal the sheep. They would not dare crawl over the shepherd.

The Door receives, does not cast out, these who believe. Christ said that "by Me" those of God's flock would enter the fold. Jesus is the only means of salvation (Ac. 4:12; Eph. 2:18). He is the one mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). No one, not Mary, the mother of Jesus, the apostles, priests, "saints", or a pope

has ever stood between us and our access to God.

◆ **Man Must Enter**

The word "*if*" clearly indicates that the benefits of His death are conditional. If we are not willing to obey the Gospel, pay the price and enter by the door we will not be a part of God's fold. To seek to enter any other way is to be a thief and a robber. What began as a sheepfold, some are making into a zoo. To them anything goes, no one is denied entrance. The goats, monkeys and alley cats are accepted, along with the sheep. But, remember Jesus turned the rich young ruler away in Mt. 19:16-22. This young man's love for money kept him from following Jesus. Today, many wish to become Christians, but they simply cannot accept entrance upon Christ's terms. Life, however, is filled with restrictions. A young person desiring to enter a particular college, may be required to pass an entrance exam. Those boarding a plane must pass security and will not be allowed to carry certain things onto the aircraft. We understand the necessity of these stipulations and restraints. How is it then, that many balk at the conditions of Christ? He is indeed the access to a better life, if man, who is shut out, will enter by Him who is the door.

***"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own"* (John 10:14)**

In this discourse Christ is contrasting the kingdom and its king with the self-righteousness of the Pharisees as self-appointed regulators of the Jewish kingdom. The point being made that the Pharisees were not true shepherds of God's flock as evidenced by their rejection of Christ. The phrase "*this fold*" is the Jewish nation over which the Pharisees considered themselves shepherds, but of whom Christ is the good shepherd. Not just good as in better, but good as in different, an entirely different kind of shepherd.

■ **Man's Need**

Sheep are very docile and dependent creatures. They are utterly dependent upon a shepherd to guide them. They cannot defend themselves from predators. Sheep must be led to water and grass. Without a leader they will wander into danger and be lost. Man is as sheep without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36; Mk. 6:34). According to the prophet Isaiah, all men like sheep have gone astray (Is. 53:6; I Pet. 2:25). Jesus said that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 15:24). However, note in the text that He mentions "*other sheep*". The Mormons claim that he was referring to the lost tribes of Israel which had migrated to America. However, these sheep represent the gentiles, for they would become one flock with the Jews under the guidance of the one shepherd (v. 16).

■ **Christ Meets Man's Need**

Jesus gives three signs so these men can identify Him as the Messiah. 1) He is the one who enters by "*the door*" (10:2). The door is the way prepared by the prophets. Which they had read and could easily have seen them pointing to this Jesus of Nazareth who in his life fulfilled them all. 2) Second, the door would be opened by "*the porter*" (10:3). John the Baptist came preparing the way for the Messiah. He had identified Christ as the Lamb of God which would take away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29). The Pharisees had rejected both John and Jesus. 3) Finally, the good shepherd would give his life for the sheep (10:7-11). This he would do upon the cross. In contrast, the hireling may not be a thief, but he flees when he sees danger. He flees because he does not care for the sheep. His sole interest in the job was how much he could earn for himself. This accurately depicts the attitude of the pharisees and other would be messiahs. Normally, the death of the shepherd would likely mean death for the sheep. With Jesus, the death of the shepherd meant life for the sheep.

All that a shepherd does for his sheep, Christ has promised to do for His disciples. He calls them by name (10:3) for he knows those that are His. The Good Shepherd leads his sheep (10:3). We will not starve or thirst, get lost or wander into danger with His guidance. Like a noble shepherd Christ has laid down His life for the sheep (10:11). Because of our sins we were worthy of death (Rom. 6:23). We had wandered from God into the wilderness of sin. Yet, out of love for the sheep Christ died for us that we may be washed in His blood and be white as snow. The Shepherd of God's flock intimately knows

His sheep (10:14). This is not a mere acquaintance with us or an accumulation of facts about us, but a close fellowship. Finally, He gathers His sheep into the fold, *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd"* (10: 16).

■ **Man's Responsibility**

In order for Christ to be a true Shepherd, the flock must recognize Him as such (10:14). Naturally, this would involve them hearing His voice (10:3) and following Him (10:4). There will be impostors that will come with a different gospel call, but the faithful sheep will not know their voice or follow them.

In Acts 20:28 the church is called *"the flock of God,"* and we are informed that it was purchased with the Blood of Christ: *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood."* In the New Testament Church there is indeed the one fold and one shepherd.

Man is in need of a guide, feeder, and protector. Christ is the Good Shepherd. He will provide all of these needs if man will follow and listen to His voice.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25,26)

Jesus had been informed that Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary was gravely ill at Bethany. Instead of dropping everything and going to his friend at his hour of need, Jesus tarried. By the time Jesus did arrive, He was met with the news that Lazarus had died and was buried. Evidently Christ knew Lazarus would die and could have come to save him, but delayed on purpose. He informed Martha that her brother would rise again. Martha did not doubt this at all, replying that she knew he would rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Two types of resurrection are spoken of here. Martha spoke of the bodily resurrection. She stated the resurrection as a doctrine. Christ stated it as a fact. Jesus not only spoke of an immediate bodily resurrection of His friend but also of the spiritual: a believer may die, but he still lives spiritually; and the believer never dies spiritually as long as he is a believer.

▶ **Man's Need**

Once we deprive something of its life, we cannot renew it. I killed a roach the other day and I wouldn't have any idea how to revive it. But then, who would want to? However unappealing, though - life is life, and as mortal men, we are obsessed with living longer, even cheating death. Man desires eternal life, even though he does not desire life everlasting.

Homer Hailey commented on this: "The great pyramids of Egypt are monuments to man's effort to provide for the future life. Buried with the pharaohs in these magnificent tombs were articles and servants to be used in the next world. From these gigantic tombs of one of the greatest of ancient civilizations to the burying grounds of the prehistoric American Indians, one finds artifacts buried with the dead to be used by them in the next life. All of these are mute witnesses to man's desire to live beyond this life; but until the coming of Jesus Christ, there was no clear positive voice that carried assurance of such life."

Without question, death is the shape our greatest fear takes. It comes in uninvited, as unwelcomed as a thief. Perhaps, the fear of death isn't a daily reality for you - but whenever death pervades your world, we experience its forceful macabre impact upon our being.

Although man rarely recognizes the dangers of spiritual death it is an even greater threat than physical death. Whereas physical death is merely the separation of the spirit from the body, spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God due to sin. Since all men have sinned (Rom. 3:23) then all men will pay the wages of sin which is death (Rom. 6:23). Paul tells us that man is *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Eph. 2:1). If one does not find the remedy for spiritual death he will suffer the Second Death which is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire - Hell (Rev. 20:14).

▶ **Christ Meets Man's Need**

Christ does not claim to simply possess power over death, but He claims to be the very force of

life - He is the resurrection from the dead and He is the Life. Life exists because He exists. The Son of God is not animated by life, but life is sustained by Him. Proof of this was provided in the resurrection of Lazarus, and also in Mk. 5 and Lk. 8. His own subjection to physical death was for the purpose that He might rise again. Therefore, the Firstborn from the dead has removed the sting of death (I Cor. 15:55) and the fear of death (Heb. 2:14,15).

▶ **Man's Responsibility**

Benefits are not just derived from Christ in the future resurrection, but these can be enjoyed now. Through Him we can have a resurrection from spiritual death, and thus preparing ourselves for the final resurrection with Him. These advantages are not without conditions. One must believe in Jesus as the Christ. No death can touch the one who trusts in Christ neither spiritual nor physical death. We walk through death by faith. Truly, faith is the victory. Yet faith is not a mere mental assent to the concept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The faith which saves is an active faith, not a dead faith (Js. 2:17-26). Honestly, how could a dead faith be victorious over sin and death. Furthermore, part of an active, obedient faith involves baptism. Baptism is in the likeness of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. After baptism one raises to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-5).

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6)

At the last supper Jesus told His disciples He was going away. But they were not to grieve over His leaving since He was going to prepare a place where His disciples could be with Him (14:1-3). Thomas replied that they did not know where He was going or how to get there. Jesus in effect is saying: "Have I ever let you down?" He did His building with a cross and an empty tomb. Again, He informs His disciples that He is the only access to the Father in Heaven.

□ **The Way**

Man is wandering and hopelessly lost. He cannot find his way back to God (Jer. 10:23). His efforts result in lies and death (Pr. 16:25). Today, man looks to psychics, denominational creeds, astrology, etc. Yet, no one is able to show him the way.

Christ alone is able to meet these needs. Up to this point in human history man had possessed no means of direct access to God. Now Christ serves as our High Priest giving every Christian clear and tranquil access to the throne of mercy (Heb. 4:15,16).

Man's response to the Way is to follow Jesus and enter the holy place with confidence "...by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way..." (Heb. 10:20).

□ **The Truth**

The world is full of lies and deceit. A grave lack of trust exists among modern man. When it comes to business dealings it is a dog eat dog world. In the religious realm it is a dogma eat dogma world. The creeds of men conflict with each other and they conflict with the Word of God. In this mass confusion, many have opted to agree to disagree. Truly, mankind is destitute of truth (I Tim. 6:5).

Christ is the very embodiment of Truth. Every time He opened His mouth He spoke truth (Jn. 8:45). The truth is in Christ (1 Tim. 2:2) and Christ was full of truth (Jn. 1:14).

To benefit oneself, you need to be in Christ. There cannot be multiple ways to God because there are not multiple truths. Jesus said, "*I am the truth.*" He didn't just give truth like Moses did, but He is truth. It is up to us to believe the Truth (1 Tim. 4:3) and obey the Truth (Rom. 2:8). What happens when we lose our way? On a trip, we stop and ask directions. We get a map. The correct map will give us the correct path. Truth is the correct standard.

□ **The Life**

This proclamation is connected with all the other "I am's". Since man is dead in sin and does not have life (I Jn. 3:15). He needs to find the source and sustainer of life. Like Ponce De Leon searching for the infamous fountain of youth.

Christ meets man's need. He is our life (Col. 3:4). He is the source of all life for "*in him is life*" (Jn.

1:4). Christ puts no one into a spiritual "coma"! He is not a spiritual "life support system". He is LIFE, and that LIFE is forever. Life is inherent in deity. Christ is the Creator and Sustainer (Ac. 17:35,38).

In order to come in contact with Life man must die to sin and arise from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Through out his physical life he must be in Christ (I Jn. 5:12).

□ **Our Identity, Plus Our Destination, Equals Our Purpose**

If we know who we are and where we are going, we then know our purpose in life. Hundreds of people including teenagers, kill themselves every day because they have no purpose. "Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing, without life there is no living" (Thomas A Kempic, Imitation of Christ, iii, 56).

For the Christian there is a Way to pursue, Truth to believe, and Life to hope for. However, it is absolutely imperative that man meet the conditions Christ was set forth. If man will follow, Christ is the Way. For the man who is deceived and ignorant He is the Truth, but man must obey Him. If man will live in Christ and let Christ live in him, then He is the Life for those who are lost in sin.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser" (John 15:1)

He had just revealed to them moments before the facts of Judas' betrayal and His own imminent crucifixion. It was necessary to stress to His disciples the importance of abiding in Him, to draw strength from Him.

Jesus spoke this on the way to Gethsemane. He didn't pull these comparisons out of mid air. He probably had passed by a vineyard and passed by the valley in which the refuse of Jerusalem was thrown out to be burned ("City dump"). Vine wood and prunings, which were useless were thrown there to be destroyed.

Using the vine as a symbol is very common in the Bible. Old Testament symbol of Israel (Ezek. 15:1-8; 19:10-14; Is. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; Hos. 10:1,2. Ps. 80:8-13). It represents the vine God planted from Egypt (Ps. 80:8) yet it brought forth wild-grapes. Israel proved to be an unproductive vine.

Historically, the vine branch was very traditional. The vine was on Jewish coins as a national emblem. It was carved over the main doors of the synagogues along with the paschal lamb or the pot of manna and Aaron's rod. Even in the Temple it could be found "Under the crown work was spread out of golden vine, with its branches hanging down from the great height, the largeness and the workmanship of which were an astonishing sight to the spectators" (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 215:11:3.).

By way of contrast, Christ is the true vine, the highest representative of Israel.

★ **Man's Need**

Without Christ man withers. He is unfruitful. What does the Husbandman (God) do with the unproductive branches of the Vine. He must prune. Then it is gathered up and cast into the city dump to be burned. God is the spiritual Husbandman of the vine (15:1) and will clip the unproductive branches for the True Vine, His Son. In the end, they will be gather in Judgment and burned.

★ **Christ Meets Man's Need**

Christ relates to his disciples in the same way a vine sustains its branches. Christ's Words must abide in us (v. 7). He is able to do whatever we ask of Him (15:7). He also loves us and makes our joy full (vv. 9,11).

★ **Man's Responsibility**

In order for Christ to abide in us we must abide in Christ (15:4). The branch must remain connected to the vine in order to bear fruit. Fruitful Christians are those who have maintained a faithful relationship with Christ who alone can make them productive and fulfilled (15:2). The specific type of vine will determine the kind of fruit the branches will produce. A grape vine will not produce elderberries. Likewise Christ will determine the productivity of Christians. Their obedience to the Vine's commandments is indispensable (15:10). Finally, since love is a two way street, and Christ loves us we must therefore abide in His love (15:11).

Jesus is the answer to man's needs if man will meet the conditions He has set forth. For the man whose life is barren He is the true Vine if man abides in Him.

We must believe in these seven "I am's" to have freedom from sin "*Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*" (Jn. 8:24). We need to believe in the I AM died for our sins. In other words, unless you are following the I AM you will not be saved.

Questions:

1. What is the connection between Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and Him being the bread of life?
2. In John 6 what is the bread of life?
3. Why did the masses leave Jesus and why did the twelve stay?
4. What were the two contexts in which Christ made the claim that He was the "*light of the world*"?
5. In what four ways is Christ the source of light to those in darkness or living in spiritual blindness?
6. Who represents the "*door*" and who represents the thieves in Christ's allegory of the sheepfold?
7. Why did sheep need a shepherd?
8. What three signs did Jesus give that He was the Messiah in His allegory of the sheepfold?
9. What does the Good Shepherd do for His sheep?
10. What proof did Christ provide that He is the resurrection and the life?

11. How are souls who are dead in sin resurrected to life?

12. How is Jesus the Way?

13. What "way," "truth," and "life" exists apart from Christ? Explain.

14. True False For every living soul there is a Way to pursue, Truth to believe, and Life to hope for.

15. Who is the Vine?

16. Who is the Husbandman?

17. Who or what are the branches?

Application & Discussion:

1. How many flocks does Christ have today? What is it? How does one get into it?

2. List the comparisons you can find between these seven statements of Jesus.

Homework: Meditate on Christ as your light, life, Good Shepherd, etc. and your responsibilities to Him this week.

Jesus' Teaching on **The Greatest Commandments**

Jesus was in Jerusalem in the final week of His ministry when the events recorded in our text took place. It was Tuesday of that week, the day that has been called "the great day of questions." Jesus dealt with five questions. Matthew records Pharisees and lawyers asking Jesus questions tempting or testing Him. Chief priests, scribes, and elders asked by what authority He worked. He refused to tell them, probably because of their unbelief. Pharisees and Herodians asked Him about giving God what was His, they marveled at His answer. Next, the Sadducees asked which of seven sisters married to a man in succession would be his wife after the resurrection. When He said none, they gave no response. A single scribe asked about the greatest commandment.

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "*Which is the first commandment of all?*" Jesus answered him, *'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment"* (Mark 12:28-34).

In many pagan religions, the relationship between a person and the deity that is worshiped is based on fear. Anyone who allowed a plurality of gods instantly and automatically set oneself apart from the people of God. No one, including scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, or ordinary child of Abram, would have quarreled with the first segment of Jesus' answer or with what He said next. The Greek word for "lord" had several meanings. It could mean the owner of a thing; it could also mean master, one who controls another; it also was used to designate a sovereign ruler whose subjects surrendered control of their lives to Him.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4. It is called the *Shema*, which is the Hebrew word for "hear" and is the first word in the verse. The phylactery, a small leather box that the scribes wore fastened to the head or arm and contained a slip on which the Shema was written. Christ shows this first or greatest commandment has not changed just because we live in the Christian Age.

A person's duties begin with an unqualified love for God. We have managed to convince ourselves that we "fall" in love as accidentally as one might trip over bump in the sidewalk. Loving God

is a conscious, deliberate choice on our part. We have all seen two dreamy-eyed young people looking longingly at one another. We have all heard of the "look of love." When you love someone with all of your heart, you think about them almost all of the time. You long to be with them. They are the priority in your life. We call this being "in love" and it is wonderful. With regard to our love for God, "*We love, because he first loved us*" (1 John 4:19).

Extent of our Love for God

♥ **With All Your Heart - Emotionally Involved**

The heart was associated with the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Since "mind" is already mentioned, this is dealing with the "emotions". What Jesus is saying is that we are to love the Lord without pretense. Love Him without reservation or just a portion of our devotion.

A young man proposed to his sweetheart as they sat overlooking a beautiful lake. "Darling," he said, "I love you more than anything else in the whole world, I want you to marry me. I'm not wealthy. I don't have a yacht or a Lamborghini like Johnny Green, or a big house or a stocks and bonds like Johnny Green, but I love you with all my heart." His sweetheart thought for a moment and then replied, "I love you with all my heart too, but tell me more about Johnny Green." In regard to our Christian commitment, how many of us are like this fickle young lady? Do we tell God we love Him and want to serve Him, and then carry on a flirtation with the world? Let us not say, "Tell me more about the world," but, "Tell me more about Jesus."

♥ **With All Your Soul - Eternally Focused**

The soul is one's spiritual essence. It is the part of one what is immortal - the I, the person who controls what one thinks and says and does. Love has been abused and watered down by a liberal mind set as a sentimental, syrupy gush about God. Our love is taking time for the eternal relationship. A. W. Tozer once said that, "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God." Charles E. Hummel's *The Tyranny of the Urgent* was written 35 years ago. It says, "Don't let the urgent take the place of the important in your life." How easy it is for us, in our hectic world, to spend so much time dealing with pressing matters that we never take time for what is eternally important.

True love of God involves total commitment. Following a great victory, King Cyrus of Persia took as prisoners a noble prince, his wife, and their children. When they were brought into the leader's tent to stand before him, Cyrus said to the prince, "What will you give me if I set you free?" He replied, "I will give you half of all that I possess." "And what will you give me if I release your children?" continued Cyrus. "Your majesty, I will give you all that I possess." The king questioned him further, "But what will you give me if I set your wife at liberty?" Looking at the one he loved so dearly, the prince replied without hesitation, "If you will restore my wife to freedom, I will give you my life." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he released the entire family without asking recompense. That evening the prince said to his wife, "Did you not think Cyrus a very handsome man?" "I did not notice him," she answered. Then she explained, "I had eyes only for the one who said he would lay down his life for me." Our love should be only for the one who laid down His life to save our souls.

♥ **With All Your Mind - Thoroughly Considered**

The mind is the seat of our reason, knowledge, and wisdom. The word "mind" is not included in the passage in Deuteronomy 6:5. Its addition here emphasizes the place of the intellect in conversion and maturity in faith and life. We are not to serve God emotionally, while committing intellectual suicide.

Don't check your brains in at the door. We don't leave your intellectual bags packed, when we worship and serve God. You see, love is not just a momentary feeling; it is a logical and specific action. Loving Jesus doesn't simply mean turning back flips down the church aisle. This love is not mindless and empty-headed. True love for Jesus manifests itself in every area of life. It is just as wrong to serve God intellectually, but with no emotion as it would be to love Him just out of our emotions.

♥ **With All Your Strength - Fully Lived Out**

Strength represents the whole person. Serving God emotionally and intellectually, but with no actual obedience requiring the exercise of strength (i.e., action) would not be keeping God's

commandments and thus a negation of love. Loving God means we are going to have to place His will ahead of ours. It means that we may have to say no to some things that we might want to do. It means that we are going to have to seek the Lord's will and make it paramount in my life. It may mean that we cannot go places others can go, watch what others watch or enjoy what they enjoy. God's greatest desire for us is to love Him. We demonstrate our love for God through keeping His commandments. This is the love of God (1 Jn 5:3). This is evidence that we sincerely love Jesus (Jn 14:15)

In sixteenth century England, Oliver Cromwell ordered that a soldier be shot for his crimes at the ringing of the evening bell. But that night at the fateful hour, no sound came from the belfry. The girl who was to be married to the condemned man had climbed up into the tower and had clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. Brought before Cromwell to give an account of her actions, she only wept and showed him her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell was greatly impressed, and he said, "Your lover is alive because of your sacrifice. He will not be shot!" It doesn't take much of a person to be a lover of God - just all of him there is

Extent of Our Love for Our Neighbor

After explaining the great command was to love God, Jesus added, "*and the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'*" (Matt. 22:23). "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" was often repeated by Jesus throughout His ministry and elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). Everyone loves themselves. This is the natural instinct. Everyone therefore knows how to begin to love others, because they have learned to love themselves. This, of course, is a generalization. But consider, would you starve yourself? No. So you can have empathy and show love by feeding the hungry.

Just who is the neighbor we are commanded to love? Jesus answered that in His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In short, your neighbor is anyone who is in need of your love. Anyone in trouble who comes across your path whom you can help. You cannot help everyone. You don't have enough money or resources or time. Second, it must be someone who comes across your path. Third, you have to be able to meet the need.

The Pharisees were familiar with the Law's commandment to "*love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Lev. 19:18). But if you interpret "neighbor" to mean those who are faithful Jews, your love is limited. Enemies would be excluded. A Pharisee could see no command to love a Gentile or sinner. To them neighbor is merely someone who is near to you by being related to Abraham and keeping the Law of Moses. In this case a Gentile or sinner or enemy could not classify as a neighbor.

Jesus commands us to even love your enemies. After all, they too fit the definition of a neighbor. In His *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*" (Matt. 5:43-44).

Did Jesus require the impossible of His disciples. It sounds like a part of an utopian dream where everyone can just love each other and get along. Can a saint really love the unholy? What about loving a rapist, murderers, pornographers, child molesters, etc? Even Jesus' disciples struggled with showing love toward those who were the enemies of Christ. The "sons of thunder", James and John, wanted Jesus to call down fire upon the cities of the Samaritans who rejected Jesus (Luke 9:51-56). When Jesus was about to be arrested, Peter drew a sword and cut off the ear of Malchus (John 18:10). Yet he learned to love instead.

First, we must keep in mind that in the Greek there are different words for love. Sexual love is represented in the term *eros*. *Storge* refers to love for family members. *Phileo* is the love one has based on friendship and emotion. These first three types of love are too limited for the love of enemies. However, *agape* is love which is not founded on friendship, emotion, physical relations or an act of the flesh, it is a love that seeks and works to meet the needs of another no matter what your current attitude may be toward them or how you feel and conversely how they feel about you. *Agape* love is need oriented. God is the Ultimate Judge of the wicked, and God has set a perfect example. Jesus loves His

enemies. The best way to get rid of our enemies is to love them to the point they are turned into our friends, brothers and sisters, and fellow lovers of God.

A younger woman searched for several years for her real mother only to find out that the older co-worker she hardly liked was her real mother. Upon this discovery, she was able to get to know her mother and love her. If we recognize one another as family we will love as a family. One of the true marks of discipleship is found in those who love one another. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34,35).

Lee Iacocca once asked legendary football coach Vince Lombardi what it took to make a winning team. "There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: If you're going to play together as a team, you have got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: If I don't block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his." Perhaps the local church could be a winning team if we were to practice this "third" rule or *"new commandment"* as Jesus put it.

Without Christ's example of love, we would not know love. Love has been experienced by every child of God because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for your sins. It is only because *"He laid down His life for us"* (1 John 3:16b) that we can show His level of love for others. Christ did not just suffer death by those who hated and took His life. He gave up his life or "laid down His life." The same verb is used elsewhere to describe a shepherd sacrificing his life for the sheep (John 10:11f). Interestingly 1 John 3:16 compares with John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* If God was willing to love us enough to sacrifice His Son, why should our love for others require any less than being willing to love them enough to sacrifice our own lives.

Imagine being called upon in a situation where you had to choose between your instinctive need for self-preservation and giving your life as a self-sacrifice for a brother in Christ. Yet this is the standard of love that Jesus set for His disciples. This is not given as an option for John wrote, *"we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (1 John 3:16c). Yet so many children of God do not have enough love in their hearts to sacrifice their time, their money, their emotions, etc.

Three things are necessary for one to demonstrate his love for the brethren. First, he *"has this world's goods"* (1 John 3:17a). Not everyone is able to help another due to their own situation (Gal. 6:10). Second, he *"sees his brother in need"* (1 John 3:1). The term *"need"* here does not mean a brother's every want but the necessities of life. Finally, he has to choose to open his heart upon and make the sacrifices to meet the needs of another. However, many show their lack of love when they shut up their hearts. John says this is proof that the love of God is abiding in them.

The opposite of love is not always hate, but indifferent to the needs of others is just as unloving as being overtly hateful to another.

It is true that just giving to the needs of others will not prove you have the love of God. Remember, an atheist can be a philanthropist.

Questions:

Matching:

- | | | | |
|----------|---------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 1. _____ | 1 Corinthians 13 | a. | Emotionally in love with God |
| 2. _____ | With all your heart | b. | Intellectually in love with God |
| 3. _____ | With all your soul | c. | What Jews called Deut 6:4 |
| 4. _____ | With all your mind | d. | Great chapter on love |

5. _____ With all your strength e. Loving God with your eternal being
6. _____ Shema f. Loving God with every bit of your effort
7. True False We are to love each other like Christ has loved us.
8. True False Some people are harder to love than others.
9. How did the Pharisees' pervert Moses' teaching in Leviticus 19:18?
10. True False The Law of Moses never taught the Israelites to love their enemies.
11. Give examples of men and women of the Old Testament who loved their enemies.
12. What is the Greek word for love in this commandment? How should you define it?
13. List the three ways Jesus says this love can be expressed to our enemies?
14. How is loving one another a new commandment?
15. Why ought a Christian to lay down his life for a brother?
16. What three things are necessary to help demonstrate one's love for the brethren according to verse seventeen?

Application & Discussion:

1. Explain the relationship between love and obeying God's commandments (1 Jn. 5:3).

2. How will loving one's enemies aid us in converting them to Christ?

Homework: Make a list of those you have trouble loving (or liking) and pray for them. List ways you can go about changing your attitude about them.

Lesson 4: Sunday, April 28, 2019

Jesus Teaching on Giving

Giving: Kingdom Style

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matthew 6:1-4).

Jesus began this great sermon with eight beatitudes of kingdom righteousness. Next, came two metaphors (salt and light) of a disciple's influence upon the world. Jesus shocked these future citizens of His Kingdom by demanding their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. He then listed six illustrations (murder with the mouth, adultery in the heart, divorce by paper, empty vows, vengefulness, and abuse of enemies) of how the Pharisees' misrepresentations of the Law of Moses would fall to meet up with His standards of Kingdom righteousness. He now points out three specific acts of faithful religion where the motive is more important than the mere act itself: giving to others, praying to God, and fasting for the soul. All three must be motivated by one's relationship with and need to glorify Him and not for public recognition from men.

In this text, two motives for giving charity are under discussion: giving which is done to be seen by men and charity which is given for the sake of the need without concern for recognition or reward.

Some Christians have mistakenly assumed that Jesus was condemning the act of almsgiving. In fact, He assumes His disciples will give to those in need. In verse three He commanded His disciples: “but when you do a charitable deed.” The Jews were well-known to be charitable to one another. In fact, Judaism stood out from the pagan world which would only give to receive public recognition or curry favor from their gods. Christians would later be known for their benevolence.

◆ **Publicized Charity**

Jesus begins with an admonition against acts of righteousness, such as, almsgiving being done out of the desire for public recognition. Much of the concern of the Pharisees in their religion was the outward or external performance of their religious deeds. The problem with their motive was they wished to be noticed by men. The phrase “to be seen” comes from the Greek word *theathenai*. Our English words “theatrical” and “theater” are both derived from it. This describes the motives of the Pharisees. At the end of His ministry Jesus rebuked them because “all their works they do to be seen by men” (Matt. 23:5).

The prohibition to sound the trumpet to gain public attention to their almsgiving is not to be taken literally. “There seems to be no trace of any such custom...It is just possible that the figure may have been suggested by the ‘trumpets’ of the temple treasury - thirteen trumpet-shaped chest to receive the contributions of worshipers” (Vincent 43). Nonetheless they could have sounded a literal trumpet and this tradition has been lost to us. At any rate, Jesus prohibits His disciples from blowing or tooting their own horn to make an ostentatious display of their charitable deeds. This appears to be the problem of Ananias and Sapphira who promised to give to the needs of the saints at Jerusalem. They publically purposed to give an amount and publically gave part of it. They lied to God because they wanted recognition from men as charitable saints but were recognized by God as hypocrites. They died for their lie. They received their reward in full (Acts 5:1-11).

The reason for this prohibition of public display is that the hypocrites are known to practice this behavior of seeking recognition. Our English word “hypocrite” is taken directly from the Greek term. It is also a theatrical term which refers to an ancient Greek actor who put on a mask for the audience to pretend to be somebody he was not. Jesus is not calling all thespians “hypocrites.” In a play the audience knows the actors are not the real thing. On the public stage the Pharisees are acting out to deceive their audience into believing they were truly righteous both in their heart and with their handouts. Robertson describes them as “pious pretenders who pose as perfect” before their public (51). Keep in mind that a hypocrite is not someone whose deeds are seen by the public or even praised the men. Jesus’ and the early Christians were at times noticed for their good deeds to others by the public. Furthermore, a man or woman who does the right thing with the right motive and still fails to be perfect is not a hypocrite.

These hypocrites strive to gain recognition for their benevolence from two audiences. First, they wish to be seen by their religious following in the synagogues. Second, they desire the attention of the people in the streets. This appears to be the two main venues where they cater their acts of righteousness. Jesus later warned, “beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts” (Luke 20:46).

Once more Jesus returns to the reason the disciples must avoid the hypocritical motives of the self-righteous. The reward they receive from the audience of men is the only glory they will receive. In fact, it is the only payment. Jesus now uses an accounting term showing the reward or wages has been paid to these actors in full and the receipt has been made out. Just what rewards can men give these hypocrites. Whatever glory they are given now, it excludes any reward or glory given by God later. Perhaps, they are looking for a legacy as a great philanthropist to be remembered after their death. Or to be seen as a great religious leader among the people. His reward is as cheap as his motive. This self-aggrandizing charity to the poor will leave him poor before the Heavenly audience in the future. He has defrauded himself and has no hope of being recognized by God. He has traded away eternal blessings from the Everlasting God for momentary reward from mortals. Soon his deeds will be forgotten

by men, but God will never forget his evil motives. By failing to focus on the needs of the needy, he will lose what he needs most. If he does not receive the reward of public recognition in this life he is disappointed. If he does receive that reward, he will have regret on the Day of Judgment. Jesus warned the Pharisees, *“and whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”*(Matt. 23:12).

◆ **Private Charity**

Jesus assumes His disciples will be charitable. When they do give, it must be done in secret. This does not mean Christians should never write a check with their name and address on it to a charitable organization. It does not mean he dare not list the amount given on his tax return. Jesus is condemning unrighteous motives of giving to be rewarded by men instead of being rewarded by God. He had already commanded his disciples to let their light shine before men so they could see it and glorify God (Matt. 5:16). Again, the motive is to glorify God not self. Jesus performed many of His acts of mercy and charity before the public. His motives were far different than those of the scribes and Pharisees. Barnabas' charity was noted by the apostles (Acts 4:34-37) so much so they named him the “son of encouragement.

So pure is the motive of the giver, Jesus said *“do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”* (6:3b). This is a figure of speech not to be taken literally. After all, deeds may be accomplished anonymously, but not mindlessly. This is a way of saying that one must give as if they are unconscious of the act. It is done without giving thought to the deed because the giver is too focused on the need. The key to a proper motivation in giving is not whether someone finds out about it. The motive is selfless in consideration. The need of the beneficiary is the focus not the recognition of men. When giving the Christian is not to be self-conscious to the extent of become self-congratulatory which will lead to self-righteousness. Instead, the act of giving is to be selfless and self-forgetting. Jesus does not want *“our left hand applauding our right hand's generosity”* (Stott 132).

The source of their reward is from the Father Himself. The Old Testament points the donor to the Lord for His recognition. *“He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given”* (Prov. 19:17). Jesus contrasts the types of rewards received to these two distinct classes of almsgivers by using different words for reward in verse four. In verse two the Greek term for reward implies a wage that has been earned and paid in full. Here the properly motivated giver is rewarded with a gift from the Great Giver Himself. He promised the Israelites when they gave to the need, *“you shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land”* (Deut. 15:10-11).

Jesus gives two reasons God is the best source to look to for reward. First, God sees in secret. Not one of our deeds good or bad can go unnoticed before an omnipresent God. Whether the deed be done in the public arena or in the private closet, God is aware. He also knows our motives deep within the private/secret thoughts of the heart. Just as secret thoughts of murder and adultery are seen by God as sin, so secret thoughts and acts of good are witnessed by God and justly rewarded. What one does when he is alone with God has more to do with who he really is than what the public sees him doing.

Second, God rewards openly. Some controversy exists among scholars as to whether or not “openly” was part of the original text. However, it does not conflict with the context. When the final Day of reward comes for all men, will you be among those who here the Lord say, *“Well, done good and faithful servant”* (Matt. 25:21)? Or will you be among the hypocrites who hear: *“all the good deeds you have done have already been paid in full by the applause of men.”* This being followed by *“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!”* (Matt. 7:23).

The Widow's Two Mites

“And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain

poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, 'Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had'" (Luke 21:1-4)

Jesus spoke about money more than most other subjects. After two thousand years a study of His teachings on the subject is still relevant and practical. Truly God takes notice on how we use our money. Although money cannot buy our way into heaven, how we deal in money matters will certainly influence our eternal destiny.

◆ **The Mites**

The Scribes had just felt the strong denunciation of the Lord for their avarice in devouring widows' houses (Luke 20:46,47). Jesus turns and witnesses a poor widow giving her last two mites. Her actions stood in stark contrast to the corrupt character of the Pharisees. This was a positive object lessons for Christ's disciples to witness.

In the part of the Temple where Jesus was watching, there were thirteen boxes where alms were collected. These were called *shopherath* or trumpets because of their shape.

The widow cast in two mites. The smallest of coinage in use by the Jews worth about a fifth of a cent. Such an minute action would have gone unnoticed by the crowd. However, Jesus knew the true magnitude of her great contribution.

◆ **The Motive**

Just what would motivate a widow to cast in her last two mite. Surely it was not the same that motivated the wealthier Pharisees and scribes who gave to be seen of men. She had no idea the Son of God was watching. *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good"* (Prov. 15:3). It is love that brings sacrifice. Unlike greed and pride which does not desire to sacrifice it all, but to have it all, including the praise of men. Perhaps, this widow was motivated out of love for God and for others who might even have less than she.

◆ **The Manner**

This widow did not give because she had too. Her manner was sacrificial, not out of constraint or out of her abundant left-overs. She gave out of her poverty, not her prosperity. Her sacrifice was not a loss, but a gift. A visitor in a hospital said to a wounded soldier: "How did you lose your arm?" The soldier replied: "I didn't lose it. I gave it." The giving was after the manner of the song we sing: "Where the whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small; Love so amazing so divine, Demand my life, my soul, my all." How often do wealthy brethren contribute like they are flipping a mere tip to God. True giving to the Lord must be sacrificial at all, God gave His only Son as a sacrifice for all.

◆ **The Measure**

The widow's two mites certainly did not add up to a large quantity. The amount was not Jesus' focus. He was interested in the quality of her contribution. It represented 100%, not five percent or even ten percent of what she had, but all she had. In this sense, she gave more than any of the rich men of Jerusalem. Although the portion was small, the proportion was great.

It is estimated that if the widow's mite had been deposited at the "First National Bank, Jerusalem" to draw four percent interest semi-annually, the fund today would total 5,000,000,000,000,000,000. If the rich had given proportionately that Holy Week, what a tremendous offering the Temple would have had. Just think what the contribution would be like this Sunday if even one person gave like this widow, that is, all they have. Yet, God does not ask us to give the same portion or proportion as this widow. He has commanded us to give as we prosper. *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come"* (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

◆ **The Moral**

Not one of us may ever give in proportion to what was given by the widow two thousand years

ago. Nevertheless, her example survives in the sacred Book for your learning. No one can give as she did unless they first give themselves (2 Cor. 8:1-5). If this widow can give in a way that was so pleasing to Jesus, then any woman or man, poor or rich, young or old can be motivated by her example. This principle set for by the widow's story in the scriptures should not be limited to money, but can be applied to the giving of our time, abilities, love, etc.

Theodore Roosevelt once remarked, "There has never yet been a man in our history who led a life of ease whose name is worthy remembering." This poor widow was worth remembering from the time of Christ till the end of time. Countless millions have been given because of her example. When the collection plate is passed this Sunday can think about her and wonder what it would be like to sit next to her, watch her cast in her all, and then pass the plate to you. After studying this story how could anyone ever be proud of their offering.

Questions:

1. Was Jesus condemning the act of giving? Explain.
2. T F It is a well established historical fact that the almsgivers of Jesus' day blew a literal trumpet to attract public attention to their deed.
3. Which New Testament couple is an example of givers who were motivated by the need to be seen by men as righteous?
4. Define "hypocrite"
5. T F If a Christian does a good deed and it by chance becomes known to the public, he is a hypocrite.
6. What two places do the hypocrites wish to be seen as almsgivers? Why?
7. What is the only reward the hypocrites will receive for their giving?
8. T F Christians should never write a check with their name and address on it to a charitable organization.
9. Is the command to give in secret a contradiction of the command to let one's light shine before men in Matthew 5:16? Explain.

10. What does it mean to give so that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing?
11. How is the word "reward" in verse two different from the term used in verse 4?
12. What two reasons does Jesus give for God being the best source to look to for their reward?
13. What is a *shopherath*?
14. What did the widow give? How much was it worth? What percentage did she give?
15. What was the manner of her giving? How is that contrasted with others?
16. Why do you think the Holy Spirit had Luke record the giving of this nameless widow in his gospel?

Application and Discussion:

1. How might this passage apply to our contributions given to the Lord on Sunday morning?
2. Explain how one might let their light shine before men and glorify their Father in heaven with almsgiving.

Homework: Find someone in need this coming week. Find a way to give to their need in such a way that no one will know except God. Next, tell no one and try to forget about it by looking for your next opportunity to do good to someone else in need.

Lesson 5: Sunday, May 5, 2019

Jesus' Teaching On **Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage**

31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery." (Matthew 5:31,32)

Divorce is now commonly accepted in modern society. Almost every state has legislated laws permitting "no fault" divorce. Over fifty years ago divorce was rare. Nearly everyone today has experienced the pain of seeing a loving, monogamous relationship ripped apart by divorce.

How did divorce become so common? Several factors have played a role in the casual dissolution of holy matrimony. First, families are not as influential on or supportive of marriage. At one time a family would disown or ostracize a relative who divorced for just any reason. If a marriage was in trouble, the family would join together and use its combined years of experience, wisdom, and support

to encourage the couple. Today, parents, in-laws, siblings, etc. seem all too eager to see a marriage break up instead of make up. Second, society in general no longer uses its collective power to pressure couples to make a marriage work. Recently, there was a TV commercial advertising a website for married men or women who want to have an affair. Third, laws and courts that once protected marriages and discouraged divorce, except for adultery, etc., now have made obtaining a divorce cheaper and easier than getting married. Finally, religion has acceded to mob rule and will no longer support Biblical teachings regarding divorce. More than two thirds of the preachers for America's largest Protestant denomination recently admitted that they had never spoken on the subject. Churches are now just bandaging up the victims of divorce with support groups instead of allowing the authority of Christ inoculate marriages against divorce.

When divorce becomes common place and acceptable in the world and among the denominations, you can count on the fact that New Testament Christians are going to be strongly influenced. Some will just approve of divorce because it is culturally acceptable and legal. Others will twist the teachings of the New Testament to permit the scandalous disgrace of divorce.

Divorce is not just a modern day problem. The ancient Greeks' problems with short-lived marriages is illustrated by a quote from Demosthenes: "we have courtesans for the sake of pleasure; we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs." Since there was no stigma against extra marital relationships there was little hope of the longevity of the relationship in Greek marriages. Furthermore, a double standard existed between the husband and wife. She was expected to maintain moral purity, yet the man was free to engage in any sexual activity. Prostitution was not only legal, it was glorified. Greek harlots were referred to as "holy women." The money they collected was used to build temples to the love goddess Aphrodite. Next, came the *hetariae* who were mistresses of men of reputation. Divorce was also common because there was little resistance to divorce in the legal process to protect the marriage contract. All they needed were two witnesses to a verbal dismissing of a wife. However, her dowry had to be returned to her intact.

During the first five hundred years of the Roman Republic not a single divorce has been found record. The first man to divorce his wife was Spurtus Carvillus Ruaga in the year 234 B.C., and he did so because she was childless and he desired a child. Seneca tells of women who identified the years by the names of their husbands. He also remarked that in the Roman Empire that "women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married." Another cynic joked about the marriage situation when he said, "marriage brings only two happy days, the day when the husband first clasps his wife to his breast, and the day when he lays her in the tomb."

Among the Jews marriage was protected by the Law of Moses. However, there were three different schools of thought concerning the reason(s) for divorce based on the various interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Rabbi Shammai limited the reason for divorce to adultery based on Moses' statement "*some unseemly thing.*" Based on the phrase "*find no favor in his eyes.*" Rabbi Hillel took this to mean a man could divorce his wife for just any reason the husband found displeasing. The most liberal view as espoused by Rabbi Akiba who permitted a man to divorce his wife if he saw some woman more pleasing to him. Though men could divorce their wives, no wife was permitted among the Jews to obtain a divorce. In the New Testament the religious leaders held to the view a man could divorce "*for every cause*" (Matt. 19:3). Jewish girls became so fearful of divorce that some even refused to marry.

An understanding of the Law of Moses shows that God did not promote and permit frivolous divorce. In fact, a Jew did not divorce his wife even for adultery. She was stoned to death. Divorce was clearly taught to be a defilement for a priest (Lev. 21:7,14). Four hundred years before the era of the New Testament, Malachi reminded the Jews that God said, "*I hate divorce*" (Mal. 2:16). One rabbi wrote, "the very altar sheds tears when a man divorces the wife of his youth." In one unique case (Ezra 10:3-5) God actually commanded divorce. This was due to the illegality of marrying those who were not considered suitable spouses for God's children. Yet their focus on marriage and divorce was not God's original intention found in Genesis 2 of the Creation account but Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

1 *“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man’s wife, 3 if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

Just how did the Pharisees conclude from this passage Moses was promoting the permissibility of divorce on any grounds? To them the only requirement was the giving of a certificate of dismissal.

Moses’ purpose was to prevent not provide for abuses in divorce. Deuteronomy 24 assumes the evil of divorce has taken place and seeks to regulate the remarriage of the wife. The husband is nowhere encouraged or commanded to divorce. Moses’ point is if a husband does divorce his wife such divorce must not be in haste for he will not be able to take her back as a wife in the future.

Where Jesus sees Moses giving them a reluctant permission due to the hardness of the hearts, all the Pharisees saw out of this passage was a man’s legal right to divorce. Again, the Pharisees were far more concerned with the outward legal steps in a divorce, than the motives of the heart from which divorce emanated. The bill of divorcement was often composed as a legal document: “Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whosoever man thou wilt”. As long as he handed to her the bill of divorcement and read it before two witnesses, the divorce would be final. Divorce was merely a matter of legal paperwork and procedures.

Even a cursory reading of Moses’ law on divorce and remarriage will show that divorce was more than a little bit of legality. It must be *“for some uncleanness.”* The Pharisees came to view this uncleanness as something the husband could define on his own. Thus, if she burned his toast one morning for breakfast he could use this “unseemly” thing as a grounds for divorce. So just what is this *“uncleanness”* Moses speaks? It was not a proven case of fornication or adultery for this was punishable by death (Deut. 22). Neither would it be a case where the husband was suspicion of adultery for it was to be dealt with according to the law found in Numbers 5. It is highly unlikely the issue was over the wife turning out not to be a virgin (Deut. 22:13-21).

The Hebrew term *“uncleanness”* has been interpreted by some scholars to mean nakedness or nudity. It is some form of immodesty or indecency and is also referred to as *“the nakedness of a thing.”* The problem with translating the word is it is only found one other time in the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 23:13,14). It must have been a reference to sins of unfaithfulness and promiscuity that stopped just short of actual adultery.

In the previous section (vv. 27-30) Jesus promoted the idea that a married man (or any man) should not look beyond his wife and lust after another woman. Now He promotes His Kingdom righteous standards which encourage a married man to love his wife enough not to divorce her for another woman or for just any reason. The Pharisees thought they were righteous enough when they did not commit physical murder, but Jesus accused them of murdering with their heart and mouth. Next, they thought themselves righteous if they did not take another woman to bed, but Jesus accused them of adultery when they lusted for another woman. Now they think themselves to be righteous when they avoid adultery and marry only after legally presenting the proper paperwork to their first spouse. Jesus accuses them of causing adultery by putting away their wife and forcing her to commit adultery when she remarries. And the husband himself would be living in an adulterous relationship with his second wife.

Again the phrase, *“it hath been said,”* is not merely a reference to an Old Testament scripture. When Jesus quoted the Old Testament He often named the author: God, Moses or one of the prophets. When quoting scripture to deal with the temptations from Satan three times Jesus says, *“it is written”* (Matt. 4:4,7,10; cf. 11:10; 21:13 and 26:31. Jesus contrasts His teaching with Jewish tradition that distorted and misapplied the Law. Note the chart below concerning the contrast between the Law of

Moses and the teachings of Christ on marriage, divorce and remarriage.

<i>Deuteronomy 22 & 24</i>	<i>Matthew 5:31,32; 19:1-8</i>
Could not put away with approval	Could put away with approval
Not fornication for the fornicator was stoned	Cause was fornication
Defiled if remarries wife	Allowed to remarry (1 Cor. 7:10,11)

In contrast to the Pharisees' tradition allowing divorce for just any cause Jesus only allows for one exception for divorce: fornication. This passage promotes the importance God places on marriage by making divorce the penalty for adultery. Still Jesus does not command spouses to divorce their mate for adultery. It is still an allowance.

The permanency and sanctity of marriage is further protected by the penalties for divorcing a spouse without adultery first being proven. First, divorce without fornication causes wife to commit adultery. Most women of that day would be left in a position where the temptation to remarry was great. J.W. McGarvey's explained it this way, "the mere fact of divorce did not make her an adulteress, but it brought her into a state of disgrace from which she invariably sought to free herself by contracting another marriage, and this other marriage to which her humiliating situation drove her made her an adulteress" (The Fourfold Gospel). When she did remarry the husband was not complete innocent of any guilt for having put away his wife in the first place. In addition to this, divorcing his spouse without scriptural cause is sinful because it shows no love for the mate. It is wrong because it could push the divorced mate into a damning relationship. The man who puts away his wife does what God hates.

Next, when a spouse divorces for just any reason it causes the other man whom the put away spouse marries to commit adultery. This is because the wife is still bound before God to her husband (Rom. 7:1-3).

Jesus also states that in the case where a spouse is put away for fornication and chooses to remarry both the put away spouse and the new marriage partner are living in an adulterous relationship. If the spouse who is guilty of adultery was allowed to divorce and remarry freely, they would be motivated to sin to get a divorce. This is view would in no way promote the holiness of matrimony. Instead it would allow the guilty party to reap the benefits of their own sinfulness.

According to Jesus' kingdom teaching on the subject when a man divorces his wife with the cause of adultery already present at the time he decides to put her way, four people can be guilty of adultery: the wife when she remarries, the man she marries, the husband when he remarries, and the woman he marries.

By necessary inference when a spouse commits adultery the innocent spouse can remarry without the new marriage becoming an adulterous relationship. However, in every divorce there is sin. This is one reason why God hates divorce.

Keep in mind that some Christians hold the view that a man can divorce his wife for any reason and then once she remarries he can "mentality" divorce her at that point for fornication and have a right to remarry without being guilty of adultery. This treatment of Christ's teaching is on a par with the way Pharisees misinterpreted the Law of Moses. Note that Jesus clearly warns, "*whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery*" (Matt. 5:32). Moreover, Christ has given a specific order of events. First comes marriage. Next a spouse commits fornication. Third, an innocent spouse puts away the fornicating spouse for adultery. Finally, the innocent spouse can remarry without it being an adulterous marriage. Compare this to Jesus' plan of salvation: to be saved a man must hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized. If he changes the order to believe and be saved then get baptized, he has not obeyed Jesus' plan of salvation. He is still living in sin. Likewise, if a man divorces his wife, then when she remarries, he accuses her of fornication, he is not obeying the order Jesus outlined. When he remarries, he will still be living in sin.

From the first book to the last book of the Old Testament God promotes the holiness of matrimony. In Jesus' Kingdom He continues to protect the sanctity of marriage with His commandments.

What would Jesus say if He was permitted to answer the question: "Can one divorce for just any reason?" In fact, Jesus was asked this very question by the Pharisees. He gave a very detailed and concise answer in Matthew 19:1-9:

Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. 3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" 4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" 8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

Jesus was passing through the territory of Perea (which means "beyond", i.e. it was the land beyond the Jordan River). While healing the people, He was approached by the Pharisees. They asked Him, "*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?*" (19:3). The question was not asked by enquiring minds but for the purpose of testing Him or discrediting Jesus publicly before the people. Perea was the territory ruled by Herod Antipas. The same Herod whom John the Immerser condemned for having an unlawful marriage to his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. As a result of his teaching, John was imprisoned and later beheaded (Matt. 14:3-12). Perhaps, the Pharisees were hoping that Jesus would speak out and meet the same fate as His cousin. At least Jesus would go against the popular beliefs and practices of Jewish society by taking the unpopular and unscriptural view of rabbi Shammai who declared that divorce was never permitted. The Pharisees accepted the teachings of rabbi Hillel who permitted the Jews to divorce for such minor marital grievances as burning the bread or putting too much salt in the food.

Jesus started to answer by pointing out that the Scriptures were clear on this matter: "Have you not read..." This would have been an insult to the Pharisees, since they considered themselves experts in the Law of Moses. He was indicating that the Pharisees should have discovered that answer for themselves by reading the Bible.

Instead of referring to a learned rabbi or a command from the Law of Moses, Jesus points to God who designed marriage from the very beginning to be a monogamous and permanent relationship. "*He who made them at the beginning made them male and female*" (19:4). God in His wisdom and perfect creation only made one man and one woman. This not only rules out polygamy, polyandry, homosexuality, etc. but it also rules out divorce. God gave Eve to Adam to be his wife. If that did not work out there was no other woman to choose. God did not make another woman or two on the side just in case Eve put too much starch on his fig leaf. So, Jesus is saying, "No, a man cannot divorce his wife for just any reason because God only made one man and one woman in His perfect creation."

Next, to further answer the question, Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 in verse Matthew 19:5: "*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.*" Keep in mind that this was not said for the sake of Adam and Eve so much as for their posterity. After all, they did not have a mother and father, but they were joined by God together in marriage. The term for "joined" here carries the idea of being "glued together" or "cemented together as one." Once cemented, they are never meant to come

apart. Again, Jesus answers the question posed by the Pharisees: “No! God joined them to one another, so they were never to come apart.”

Jesus takes up another argument to support His teaching as verse five continues: *“and the two shall become one flesh?” So then, they are no longer two but one flesh.*” The man and the woman are no longer two distinct individuals who can leave and do as they please with whomever they please. Instead, the two are one. “One flesh” may denote the sex act in which a couple will produce a child which is literally the product of two becoming one. Again, Jesus answers, “No! Because two have been made into one and one is not to be divided into two.”

In verse six, Jesus concludes His answer for the moment by saying, *“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”* A husband and wife are like inseparable siamese twins – to separate them would bring destruction. In the marriage two become one. When one of the marriage partners puts the other away unscripturally then one becomes two, and God’s arrangement has been disregarded. God made the marriage, man has no right to destroy what God has created. The answer to the Pharisees’ questions is still, “No! Because man does not have the right to separate what God has created.”

The Pharisees are not satisfied with Jesus’ answer which is based on the creation account in Genesis. They have a ready rebuttal from Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which is alluded to in their argument in verse seven. *“They said to Him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?’”* Jesus immediately counters their argument in verse eight, *“Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”* A quick reading of the text in Deuteronomy will show two distinct facts: 1) This was not a command from Moses but a concession and 2) divorce was not allowed for any reason but for a case of “uncleanness” or “nakedness.” Whatever this involved it was not adultery. After all, adulterers were executed (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24). It must have been something just short of adultery, such as allowing another man to see her nakedness or to touch her inappropriately. However, it does not support the idea of Rabbi Hillel and the Pharisees of divorcing a wife for just any reason (like burning the toast). The Pharisees were pitting Moses against Jesus. Jesus is essentially refuting this by implying, “No! Moses did not say, ‘Yes, you can divorce for just any reason.’ If you want to quote Moses, God’s Lawgiver, you must go back to the creation account in Genesis for the answer to your question.”

Having quoted Genesis to support His teaching on divorce, Jesus now speaks from His own authority in verse nine: *“And I say to you...”* He now reminds them of His previous teaching on divorce (see Mt. 5:32) as verse nine continues, *“whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”* Jesus gives the one and only exception for divorce and that is sexual immorality or adultery. A paraphrase of Jesus’ answer would read: “No! I say you cannot divorce for just any reason. The only reason for divorce is sexual immorality.”

There is one more reason why Jesus forbids divorce for just any reason. If a man divorces his wife for just any reason he causes her to commit adultery when she remarries. Divorce for any reason is not guilt-free option. A mate cannot divorce his or her spouse for just any cause and walk away innocent of any sin. Jesus’ qualification “except for sexual immorality” only permits the innocent party who remarries to do so without becoming an adulterer or adulteress. So Jesus is giving a final “No! Because divorce for just any old reason causes others to enter adulterous relationships when they remarry and you will be held accountable for your role in these sins.”

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” What did Jesus say? He said, “No...No...No...No...No...NO...NO!!!” For those who still argue that one can divorce for just any reason Jesus would ask, “What part of ‘NO!’ don’t you understand? I told you ‘no’ seven times! How is it that you can turn around and say ‘yes’?”

Still some will argue that you can divorce for any reason so long as you do not remarry. Jesus never said that. The subject of remarriage did not come up until verse nine and was not part of the original question. This argument would have to be proved using other passages because Jesus only

gave one exception for divorce. Furthermore, this argument is still saying “yes” after Jesus has already said “no” seven times.

Questions:

1. What are several factors which play a role in the current high divorce rate?

2. What are some of the aspects of Greek culture that promoted divorce?

3. What are the three different views the Jews held on Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

4. How was adultery handled in the Old Testament?

5. T F According to the Jesus divorce was merely a matter of proper legal paperwork and procedures.

6. What is "uncleanness"?

7. Explain how there could result four adulterers when a man divorces his wife for just any reason.

8. T F Jesus' statement "*it hath been said,*" is merely a reference to an Old Testament scripture.

9. Show the contrast between the Law of Moses and the teachings of Christ on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

10. Is a spouse guilty of fornication free before God to remarry? Explain.

11. When can a spouse be allowed to remarry without it being adultery?

12. What is the "mental" divorce position and why is it wrong?

13. What were the views of Rabbi Shammai and rabbi Hillel on divorce?

14. Where did Jesus go and answer the Pharisees' question?

15. Did Moses give the Jews the right to divorce their wives for just any cause? Explain.

16. List the seven ways Jesus implied a "NO" to the Pharisees' question?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)
 - 6)
 - 7)

Application and Discussion:

1. If a man and woman have divorced, but not for the cause of fornication, what two options do they have? (See 1 Cor. 7:10,11).

2. If a man is found to be a drug dealer and a murderer, is a wife permitted by Jesus to divorce him on these grounds alone? Explain.

Homework: Find a friend, co-worker, family member or neighbor who is having marital problems and encourage them to work out their differences and avoid the sin of divorce.

Lesson 6: Sunday, May 12, 2019

Jesus' Teaching on **Prayer**

Motive in Prayer
Matthew 6:5-8

Just as Jesus assumed His disciples would give alms, He assumes they will pray: *“and when you pray”* (6:5a). In this context, Jesus is condemning those who pray in public just to be seen by others as righteous. The correct motivation for praying is to communicate with God, not to be seen by one’s fellow man.

Prayer: Wrong Motive

- ▶ **Prohibition:** *“you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray.”* Hypocrites love to pray. They love to do it in public but not so much in private. Often they will turn an opportunity to pray in public to word their private prayers. They are play actors on the stage of life where the public is the audience who are to applaud their pious performance.
- ▶ **Place:** *“standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets.”* Jesus is not condemning the posture of hypocrites. After all, both the Old and New Testaments give approval of examples of praying while standing up, laying down, sitting or kneeling. Jesus is not condemning praying in public. The place of prayer is important from the standpoint of who will be in eye-shot and ear-shot of their prayers. “The word used here (*plateia*) refers to a wide, major street, and therefore to a major street corner” (MacArthur 365).
- ▶ **Purpose:** *“that they may be seen by men.”* Praying to impress others with outward piety is a false motivation for prayer.
- ▶ **Prize:** *“Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.”* Self-glorification or the praise received from an adoring public can never match the reward of being glorified by God.

Prayer: Right Motive

- ▶ **Place:** *“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door.”* Jesus refers here to a storage closet where valuable were kept. Private prayer helps with our concentration and strengthens our faith in the presence and promises of God.
- ▶ **Purpose:** *“pray to your Father who is in the secret place.”* Properly motivated prayer will not draw attention to the one praying but to the Father who hears the prayer.
- ▶ **Prize:** *and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* Perhaps no greater contrast in the reward of properly motivated prayers and hypocritical publicized prayers can be seen than what is found in the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14).

Prayer: Proper Manner

- ▶ **Prohibition:** *“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them.”* Perhaps their verbosity was an attempt to gain the attention of God. The Ephesians cried out the name of their patron goddess, *“Great is Diana of the Ephesians”* for the space of two hours in the riot in response to the preaching of Paul in Acts 19. Buddhist use “prayer wheel” in which written prayers are attached to a wheel and as it is spun the prayers are sent forth. Keep in mind Jesus is not condemning the mere repetition of requests in prayer. What is under Divine scrutiny is not merely the repeating of a request before men or God, but the meaningless, empty, babbling of phrases merely for effect and attention. He Himself prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane that God remove the cup of suffering He was about to drink (Luke 22:36-46). Jesus also warns concerning these hypocrites, *“they think that they will be heard for their many words.”* He condemned the Pharisees who *“for a pretense make long prayer”* (Matt. 23:14). What is condemned here is not the length of a prayer, but the motive behind the length of the prayer. Jesus was known to pray all night (Luke 6:12). Praying long prayers just for the sake of racking up minutes on your knees before God is not going to impress Him.
- ▶ **Privilege:** *“For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”* Praying is a privilege. Proper prayer will be answered. An obedient heart must accompany our prayers.

"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). Another privilege of praying to our Father is His intimate knowledge of our every need. Because He is omniscient He knows before we ask. God does not need our prayers, but if we are to have Him as our Father we need to pray.

Model Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

Jesus' was the Son of God who came down from Heaven, but He often found a quiet place on earth to commune with His Father in Heaven. Despite His busy ministry, He found time to pray. He would even spend the night in prayer (Luke. 6:12). His prayer life was so unique that the disciples (Jews who had been taught the necessity of prayer from childhood) asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1-4). So, He gives them a model prayer. Luke's account is shorter than the one found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Although Christians can learn a great deal about prayer from a study of this example prayer of Jesus, it is not appropriate or correct for us to repeat it verbatim. Ironically, this prayer which is so often thoughtlessly repeated is found in the very context where Jesus condemns vain repetition in prayer. First, the prayer is asking for the coming Kingdom which has already come on the day of Pentecost when Christ, the King sat down on the right hand throne of God. Secondly, we are now to pray in the name of or by the authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus never intended His disciples to use this prayer as a lucky charm or a memorized mantra.

"Our Father Who Art in Heaven"

Proper prayer demands the right relationship with God. This prayer is only for the born-again "child of God." This prayer is the privilege of those who have a spiritual relationship with God, all others do not. To those who grew up knowing the love and care of a father who exemplified God like qualities, will find praying to the Father in Heaven comes naturally and with greater ease.

"Hallowed Be Your Name"

The term *"hollowed"* means "to set apart from everything common and profane, to esteem, prize, honor, reverence, and adore as divine and infinitely blessed" (Lenski). The Father is to be respected as holy. Everyone, especially the children of God, should regard as holy, revered, and esteemed any scriptural name of God. Prayers or casual comments which make profane references to God as "the old man up there" or omg "oh, my God" do not regard Him as holy.

"Thy Kingdom Come"

Both John the Baptist and Jesus came preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand (Mt. 4:17; 3:1,2; 4:17; Mk. 1:14-15; 9:1). Since Christians are already in the Kingdom (Col. 1:13) which was established nearly two thousand years ago on the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection (Ac. 2:29-36), it makes no sense to continue to pray for it to come. The term "kingdom" is often used synonymously with the term "church."

"Thy Will Be Done On Earth as it is in Heaven"

To be a part of a kingdom is to submit the rule and will of the King. Christ is King of His Kingdom and all kingdom-citizens must submit to Him.

"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"

Prayers for daily bread is a recognition of our dependence on God. Daily the disciples eat God's bread, breath His air, drink His water, and pray for all of these. As disciples are to give thanks for everything and look to God as the source of every good blessings, they are to prayer to Him concerning every care (Phil. 4:6),

"Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors"

Sin is a debt which cannot be paid by us for its wages is death (Rom. 6:23). To pray for forgiveness first demands one to see themselves as a sinner who is accountable to God for their

behavior. A daily awareness of our struggle with sin and its consequences in regard to our relationship with the Father is key to our spiritual health. Prayer for forgiveness must come from a repentant heart (Ac. 8:22) willing to confess sin (1 John 1:8-10). Receiving forgiveness from God and forgiving our fellow man are intertwined in this prayer. When we pray, with an unforgiving heart, we are in effect requesting God not to forgive us.

"Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil"

In his epistle James makes it clear that God does not tempt any Christian with evil (Js. 1:13). The key here is that God does not test or place men into situations which try their souls. God never tests men to do evil. The Devil's motivation in temptation is to cause us to choose evil and fail the test (see Job. 1:9-11; Matt. 4:1-11). The request *"lead us"* suggest the need for God's guidance in the decisions of life (Jer. 10:23)

"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

This recognized that it is God who is in control over all and only He has the power to answer our prayers. Prayers of the coming Kingdom put God back on the throne and man back on His knees before the King.

Parable of the Friend at Midnight

Luke 11:5-13

Having given them a model prayer in Luke 11:1-4, Jesus shares with them one of three of His parables on prayer.

▶ **God Is a Better Friend**

The friend did not wish to be inconvenienced or bothered. Where friendship failed importunity prevailed. The knocking continued, like a dripping faucet He is certainly not an unwilling or insensitive friend and He does not perceive us as nagging, impatient neighbors.

▶ **God Is a Great Giver**

In giving further explanation to this parable, Jesus uses three acronyms: ask, seek, and knock (11:9,10). God will answer. God answers because He is the good Giver of all things (Js. 1:5,17). God can supply all we need. We all have needs that we are unable to meet from our own meager resources, but God is an abundant giver.

▶ **God a Perfect Father**

He never offers us stones or serpents, even if in our ignorance we ask for them.

▶ **Christian's Duty in Pray Persistently**

Human beings rarely persist in activities that they come to believe are futile. Too often we knock and then run away instead of waiting for God to answer. Persistent prayer is not needed to get God's attention, but it is needed for your faith in prayer.

Parable of the Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

Only in a very few of Jesus' parables does He give the reason for teaching the parable. The purpose is *"that men always ought to pray and not lose heart"* (18:1).

Motives to Pray Always

• **God Is a Righteous Judge**

Many of the judges of the first century were known to pervert justice for a dish of meat. The judge in the story *"did not fear God nor regard man."* In other words, he dispensed justice as if there was no

God watching him and had no compassion for the rights and well being of his fellow man. Widows often were destitute of any money or power to bribe or force a judge to listen.

The contrast between God and this unjust judge is clear. Whereas God is always listening and his court is open 24/7, the unjust judge only opened his ears when it was to his advantage.

- **Men Are Helpless like the Widow**

Men are not self-reliant, instead they are dependent upon the Heavenly Father for every need.

- **Persistent Prayer Produces Positive Results** Her only weapon was persistence.

The parable's point is that if a corrupt self-centered judge can be moved by the persistent pleas of a helpless widow how much more will a loving, caring God answer the prayers of the saints who continue in prayer.

- **God Will Avenge the Elect**

Vengeance belongs to God, not man (Rom. 12:19). When it is the proper time God will move quickly to avenge the saints. Until then the saints must keep on praying.

Parable of the Pharisee & Publican

Luke 18:9-14

This is a parable of contrasts. The pharisee sees himself as a good and faithful Jew, and views the publican as a traitor. The Pharisees were the spiritual elite of Judaism in the first century. They were the "separate ones." At the other end of the moral spectrum was the publican, who was more a tax contractor of the Romans than a collector. In general, a publican was known to abuse his power and overcharge in the collection of taxes

- **Posture in Prayer**

The pharisee stood and prayed with himself. The pharisee's prayer is not about talking to God but about himself to others. He prayed by himself with himself because he saw himself separated from others who were sinners. His prayer was not one of self-examination before God but self-promotion before others.

The publican was not wanting to pray center stage. Instead, he stood afar off.

- **View of Righteousness**

The pharisee looked down on others. Jesus gives this parable as a warning against those who pray while they "*despise*" others. The word "*despise*" means "to count as nothing." The pharisee eyed the publican while he was in the midst of his prayer. But seeing the publican he drags him into his prayer before God and the world to condemn him as an extortioner.

Whereas the pharisee only saw his spiritual superiority, the publican only saw his spiritual inferiority.

- **Recognition of Sin**

The pharisee nearly pulled his arm out of socket trying to pat himself on the back. He fasted more than was required. Not only did he keep himself from all those sins mentioned, this pharisee's goodness goes above and beyond what is required in the Law of Moses. He tithed all that he had. Flaunting these righteous deeds he attempted to make God his debtor. But this man thanked God not for what God had done, but for what he had done for God.

In contrast, the publican shows self abasement by smiting his breast which was a cultural symbol of mourning. Whereas the pharisee lacked a genuine sense of sin in his own life, the publican was overwhelmed by his sin.

- **Confession of Sins**

The Pharisee confessed his greatness before God. He proclaimed his virtues rather than his vices.

In contrast, the publican confessed himself to be a great sinner. The passage literally reads that he confessed to be "*the sinner.*" The Pharisee could not even find in himself one sin.

■ **Need of Forgiveness**

The pharisee was self-sufficient requesting nothing of God in his prayer. He had no need of anything from God.

The publican begged for mercy and did not point out one good thing he had done. He did not point out that some of his sins were not all that bad. He simply begged for God's mercy.

■ **Need for Justification**

The pharisee is the epitome of self-righteousness. He trusted in his own acts of merit. He did not need God's mercy, he only needed God to reward him for his goodness. The Pharisee went home a worse man than when he had come, but the publican went home forgiven.

God rewarded the publican with justification. Justified means "declared righteous." As one preacher explained it years ago as he wrote on the black board: "Just - if - I'd never sinned."

Questions:

1. Why do hypocrites love to pray? Should all God's children love to pray? Explain.
2. Give examples of acceptable repetition from the prayers of god-fearing men and women in the Bible.
3. Explain why prayer is such a wonderful privilege.
4. How can one keep their prayers from becoming vain repetitions?
5. Why can Christians not pray the Model Prayer today?
6. What is the relationship between our requests in prayer for forgiveness and our willingness to forgive others?
7. Why ask God not to lead us into temptation, if God does not tempt any man?
8. Why is God a better friend in prayer?

9. If persistent prayer is not needed to get God's attention than why persist in our prayers?
10. What is the difference between the judge in this parable and God?
11. How were Pharisee regarded by Jews at the time? How did the Jews see the Publicans? Why?
12. By parading his virtues what did the Pharisee try to make God?
13. What defense did the Publican offer God? Why?

Application & Discussion:

1. Can studying the prayers found in Scripture help your prayer life? Explain. .
2. The neighbor made very specific requests of his friend. What are some specific requests that we should make of God?

Homework: Find a closet and shut the door and pray to God alone.

Lesson 7: Sunday, May 19, 2019

Jesus' Teaching on

Discipleship

S.I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "no," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower".

God is looking for a few good followers. These followers of Christ are called disciples.

Definition of Discipleship

Just who is a disciple and what is discipleship? First, a disciple is not simply a "pupil" or "student". The word "disciple" comes from the Greek word *mathetes*. Literally, it means "thought accompanied by endeavor". (Vine, Expository Dict. of the N.T. Words). A disciple is a follower. Jones defined a disciple as "a learner who has conformed his mind, words and actions to that of his master". The closest contemporary word to "disciple" is probably "apprentice." A disciple is more than a student who learns lessons by means of lectures and books. He is one who learns by living and working with his teacher in a daily "hands on" experience.

Luke recorded that "*the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*" (Acts 11:26). A disciple is a Christian and a Christian is a disciple. So discipleship is the process of becoming a true follower of Christ every day to the point one starts to think, talk, and act like him in their every day life.

Goal of Discipleship

As Jesus' twelve disciples walked and talked with Jesus, they became like him. "*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master*" (Matt. 10:24,25). A true disciple is willing to be like his teacher. "*A disciple is not above his teacher, but when he is fully trained he will be like his teacher*" (Luke 6:40, Phillips Translation). Becoming like Christ is the longing expressed in the song: "O 'to be like Thee." A true disciple bears the character of Christ in his life.

Traits of Discipleship

✓ **Desire to Follow Anywhere**

Jesus began to explain the characteristics of a true disciple when He said, "*if anyone desires to come after Me*" (Luke 9:23). There must be a desire to follow Jesus wherever He goes. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John and they left their nets to follow Him. He called the tax-collector, Matthew, who left his table behind to follow Jesus.

Being a disciple of Christ demands you follow Him where ever He goes or where ever He directs you to go. Whether it be like Noah was directed to build an ark or like Abraham who was sent to a lonely mountain to sacrifice his son.

Remember, who you follow determines your direction. The direction He maps out for you will determine your destination. It is like the young lady whose father was concerned about her being able to drive home at night after work in a snow storm. His advice was for her to follow a snow plow as long as she could till she was able to drive safely home. So one night it was nearly a white-out. She was in luck a snow plow drove past as she was leave the parking lot.

She followed him around and around for half an hour. Suddenly he stopped got out and ask her why she was following him. After listening to her explanation he said, "Well, I am finished plowing the store parking lot. If you like you can following across the street while a plow the snow in the church's parking lot."

✓ **Abiding in the Word**

We must abide in the Word in order to learn of him. "*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'*" (John 8:31,32). The Bible is the word of God and of Christ. Disciple is from the Latin verb "disco" meaning "to learn". True, disciples must "disco" God's Word. The twelve had a longing to learn from Jesus. They said, "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (Lk. 11:1). After hearing Him teach them using parables they requested of Him, "*Declare unto us the parable*" (Mt. 13:32).

"Abide" means "not to depart, not to leave". We must abide in what is written. The true disciple does not pick and choose what he likes out the Bible like he his choosing food off a buffet line. Failure to follow God's Word is failing to be a disciple. Jesus asked some, "*why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:33).

The result of abiding in His Word is freedom. A disciple will have freedom from the bondage of sin, ignorance, and confusion.

✓ **Preeminent Love for Christ**

Jesus said to his would-be disciples, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:26). This is a figure of speech. To take Jesus' words literally would require one to hate family when elsewhere in the scriptures we are commanded to love mother and faith (Eph. 6:1-3) and even our enemies (Matt. 5:44f). A parallel passage might help explain this apparent contradiction. Jesus also said, "*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*" (Matt. 10:37). Jesus is exaggerating by use of a hyperbole one's love for Him in comparison to a disciples love for others even those closes to him. The preeminent love for Christ would make it appear as if the disciple hates his parents and others. When forced to choose between the Lord and another person, we must choose the Lord. Loyalty to Him must surpass our loyalty to even the people we care about the most. A wife may lose her husband if she remains faithful to Christ (1 Cor. 7:12f). A man may have to break an engagement with a girl who rejects Christ and his discipleship to Him.

She chooses Jesus and breaks the engagement, even though it breaks her heart. Maybe there is a man who watches his wife walk out of their door.

A disciples love and loyalty to Christ is so great that it may cause conflict between family members. Jesus said, "*For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies will be those of his own household'*" (Matt. 10:35,36). He came to set members of a family against each other. He was saying that if you're a true disciple, you'll be willing to create a division in your own home. Sometimes the waters of our baptism separate us from our families. Now, in some parts of the world, Muslim countries for example, a person who becomes a Christian will often be cut off from his family. Fathers tell young men who profess faith in Jesus, "You are no longer my son. You are never welcome in this home. I consider you dead."

John Bunyan knew all about this in a special way. The authorities told John Bunyan to quit preaching, but he said, "I cannot quit preaching, because God has called me to preach." And they said, "if you preach, we'll put you in prison." So he said to himself, "If I go to prison,

who cares for my family? Yet how can I close my mouth when God told me to preach?" Then it was in prison that he wrote his magnificent allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

✓ **Bearing Fruit**

Jesus used an allegory The Vine and the Branches to show that disciples need to abide in Him and bear much fruit. Jesus the true vine, The father as the husbandman (vinedresser), and the disciples as branches growing in the vine. *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples"* (John. 15:8). The fruit one bears is not just making other Christians by means of sharing the Gospel. It is any positive effect resulting from the disciple abiding in Christ. It could be the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, Peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22,23). Failure to bear fruit results in not being a disciple and consequently being lost.

✓ **Self-Denial**

Again, Luke 9:23 says, *"then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"* What all is involved in denying self? Notice it does not say "deny yourself something. Jesus said to His disciples, "Let him deny himself". In other words, we are to quit living for self. We are to quit making yourself # 1. It will involve sacrificing our own righteousness, relationships, riches, etc. In order to follow Him something will have to be left behind. Even our time must be give over to Him. It is not a matter of just letting Him have four hours out of 168 a week for worship. It involves giving Him all 168 hours. No longer can one attend Saint Mattress on Sunday morning by sleeping in. A disciple gets up and worships his Lord on the Lord's Day. Don't forget this will also involve denying your own thoughts. It is now His way not yours. His wisdom not the world's.

To deny self is one of the most difficult things required of a disciple. Many of Christ's followers demanded daily food to follow Him. When He denounced their demand and would only give them the Words He spoke to eat *"from that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more"* (Jn. 6:66). Christ does not paint a pretty picture of discipleship showing it to be all roses and no thorns. He wants us to make the choice be follow Him on the basis of reality. A disciple denies what he wants, and does things God's way. A disciple cannot be like Paul Anka song "My Way" sung by Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra or the famous advertisement for a fast-food chain says: "have it your way". Shakespeare once wrote "To thine own self be true." Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6).

Christianity is not a life of ease. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus, he was told to give up all to the poor. This was too much and he went away. It is not just denying ourselves former sinful pleasures. It is a decisive saying "no" to oneself, to one's hopes and plans and ambitions, to one's likes and dislikes, to one's nearest and dearest for the sake of Christ.

✓ **Self-Sacrifice**

Now, the most difficult trait of a true disciple for last. Jesus warned, *"and whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:27). Total self-denial to the point of death. Not just any death but being crucified on a cross is implied. Death on a cross was a form of execution used by Rome for dangerous criminals. A prisoner would carry his own cross to the place of execution, signifying submission to Rome's power. He would not carry the whole cross but the horizontal piece upon his shoulders.

The story is told about Ms. Chicken and Mr. Pig were walking in town one day when they notice a sign asking for donations for a dinner given for a charity. Mr. Chicken said to Mr. Pig, "I think we ought to contribute. So I will donate a dozen eggs and you can donate the ham." "Now just hold one a moment" protested Mr. Pig, "for you it just a donation. For me its total commitment." Stephen, James, Antipas and other New Testament disciples were willing to pay

the cost of discipleship. Are you able to make such a total commitment?

Does it not seem strange that so many young people are willing to risk their lives for the thrill of extreme sports? Yet so few are willing to risk their lives to follow Christ. Only a rational person would risk jumping out of a plane, if he has first calculated the risk. He jumps for the adventure despite the possibilities of death. Christianity is not a sport, but it is an adventure. To "take up your cross" demands the crucifixion of self. It is more adventurous than a bungee cord or snow board or parachute. Taking up one's cross was not a glorious term in the first century it meant execution. It is equivalent to hoping in the electric chair every day and throwing the switch.

A Christian from America was visiting the Philippines. While walking the downtown he noticed a street vendor was advertising: "Cheap crosses for sale!" Far too many modern disciples want to have a cheap, comfortable cross. Many want a de-splintered cross, sanded smooth, light to carry, appealing to the eye, small enough to inconspicuously fit under their jacket, and padded for comfort. The only one Christ has to offer is the "Old Rugged, Cross."

Just what is this cross we bear? Is it the old broken down car you have to drive to work everyday? Is it those migraine headaches? Cross-bearing means putting self to death and living every day for Christ. Just as every day of His life He was heading for a date with a cross. When the choice is between doing what the Lord wants us to do and doing what we want to do, we must choose His will.

✓ **Daily Devoted**

To the command to take up one's cross Luke 9:23 adds "daily". Each disciple must have a cross. He must individually bear his own cross. He must do so daily. The payments due for discipleship are not once in a life time, once a year, once a month or even once a week. The cost must be paid DAILY. Someone once said, "The problem with the Christian life is that it's so daily."

The Cost of Discipleship

The context of Luke 14:25-33 is Jesus' attempt to weed out from the big crowd of followers those who would truly be His disciples. No less than three times He told them they could not be His disciples (14:26,27,33). Casual followers are not disciples. The cost of discipleship is great. It may call for a disciple to sacrifice his personal relationships with others, his possessions, his will and wants, and even his life. The price may be higher than many are willing to pay.

To illustrate the need for calculating the cost of discipleship before following Him, Jesus gives two parables. First, is the parable of the Tower Builder. *"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'?"* (Luke 14:28-30). The second is the parable of the King Going to War. *"Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace"* (Luke 14:31-32). The king had to give much thought whether his every soldier would be equal to two of the enemy. The motto of Von Moltke, the great military strategist was, "First weigh, then venture,"

Who counts the cost? The one in charge of the building project does that, the king who is responsible for the outcome of the battle. does that. Calculating the cost is not done by the construction crews, or the fighting men.

What does it cost to be a disciple of Jesus? Everything! Jesus adds one final point about discipleship: *"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple"* (Luke 14:33). It is not wrong to possess things, but it is wrong to allow things to possess you to the point that you could not even part with them to follow Jesus. Even the promise of eternal life is not enough for

some to release their grip on this material world. They are like the monkey's hunted in Africa. Hunters will find a hollow log and make a hole in it just big enough to drop a nut down into it. The monkey will reach in and grab the nut. But once it grasps the nut, it cannot pull it out of the hole. Even when hunters come with clubs they will not release their hold on the nut even to save their life.

Summary

An essential part of being a Christian is to understand the radical costs of discipleship. Whenever I have a Bible study with someone and they come to the point where they say they want to be baptized, I will normally pause and ask them to read Luke 14:25-33. In this passage Jesus is asking would-be disciples to count the cost to see if they really want to follow Him. Following Jesus involves denying your family, denial of self (notice it does not say "deny yourself something." It simply says "deny yourself"), death to self, denial of things, and total commitment. When I became a Christian I denied self. Dan Vess does not live anymore, He died and Christ now lives in him (Gal. 2:20). Taking up your cross daily is equivalent to getting into the electric chair every morning and throw the switch. The question each one of us needs to ask is: "Do I desire to be a disciple of Jesus in the Kingdom of God enough to count the cost and pay the price?"

Questions:

1. What is a disciple?
2. What is the goal of discipleship?
3. Give examples of those who were willing to follow Jesus and those who would not?
4. How does one abide in the Word?
5. Did Jesus demand of His disciples that they hate the loved ones? Explain.
6. List the various fruits one could bear for Christ as a disciple.
7. List the various things one might need to deny himself in order to follow Jesus?
8. What is the cross and scales are to carry?

9. What does taking up a cross imply?
10. Who counts the cost of discipleship?
11. Why did people mock the tower builder?
12. Why was it so important for the king to count the cost of going to war?
13. What is the cost of discipleship?

Application & Discussion:

1. Why is one to bear their cross daily and not weekly or monthly?

2. Why is it wise to have those contemplating obedience to the Gospel to first count the cost of becoming a disciple?

Homework: Assess your progress as a disciple of Jesus this week.

Lesson 8: Sunday, May 26, 2019

Jesus' Teaching Using

Paradoxes

In many ways English is a very unique language. The vocabulary of this language is filled with paradoxical statements and words. For example, a pineapple is neither pine or an apple. There is not ham in hamburger. Although eggplant comes from a plant it has nothing to do with eggs. English muffins are not from England. French fries did not originate France (they are made in "Greece"). Guinea pigs are not from Guinea and they are not pigs. Boxing rings are square and quicksand works slowly. In English you can play at a recital and recite at a play. We park in our driveways and take a drive on the parkway. We go to a sale at the store in order to save money. Cargo is sent by ship but shipments are ship via trucks. Our bodies are affected by paradoxes, such as, the nose can run and the feet can smell.

Even a wise fool knows that quite a lot and quite a few are synonymous. Kevin Hopkins wrote, "the unique lunacy of a language in which your house can burn up as it burns down, in which you fill in a form by filling it out."

The above phrases sound like a contradictions. That is just what a paradox appears to be. A paradox is a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true (en.oxforddictionaries.com).

Paradoxes are common throughout the centuries and all fields of knowledge. The sixth century B.C. Cretan philosopher, Epimenides, stated: *"All Cretans are liars."* If all Cretans are liars, then Epimenides the Cretan must also be a liar. So Epimenides was lying when he said that all Cretans are liars. Paradoxes are plentiful in the fields of science, such as, The Twin Paradox of Relativity, Olbers' Paradox, The Tea Leaf Paradox, and at last Zeno's Dichotomy Paradox. Have you ever wondered if you are traveling at the speed of light and you turn on your headlights what happens? Here is a Science Fair experiment for you child: if the buttered side of the bread always lands face down and a cat dropped always lands on its feet, then what would happen if you strapped a slice of buttered bread to the back of a cat and then dropped them. Even the doctrines of the Bible when compared are paradoxical. God is sovereign, yet man has free-will. Jesus was 100% God, and 100% human as He came from Heaven to earth. In fact, God is so great our limited language is a impotent device when it comes to explaining the limitless traits of God to our limited minds. For example, in explaining the trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit) John uses the paradoxical John's statement *"these three are one"* (1 John 5:7). No language can accurately capture the meaning.

Yet paradoxes are used by the Creator of the natural world and fill the pages of His Word. Paradoxes are found throughout the Bible. From the Old Testament comes: *"there is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches"* (Prov 13:7).

The apostle Paul was very fond of using paradoxes to teach the saints of the first century.

- *"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God"* (Rom. 6:10).
- *"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"* (1 Cor. 1:20b,21).
- *"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise"* (1 Cor 3:18)
- *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (2 Cor. 4:18).
- *"But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God:...by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor,*

- *yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor. 6:4, 8-10).*
- *“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).*
- *“For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10b).*
- *Paul in paradise “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:4).*
- *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Phil.3:7-8).*

Why did the Holy Spirit employ the use of these paradoxes throughout the Bible? Perhaps, God, who made man a thinking-creature utilizes these self-contradictory and some times absurd sounding truths to challenge what man thinks he knows to be true. They apprehend our attention by presenting a mystery or puzzle the mind needs to engage to resolve. Man is often lazy physically but especially intellectually. Christianity is a thinking man’s religion. Salvation is the result of knowing the truth and applying it. No one is saved by mere feelings or emotionalism.

Jesus therefore was very fond of using paradoxical phrases and illustrations to help His disciples understand the spiritual nature of His Kingdom in contrast to their carnal concepts of the earthly kingdom they were anticipating.

The previous lesson discussed the nature of true discipleship. In order to live the life of a follower of Christ one must first die to self or take up one’s cross daily (Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23). However, Jesus utilizes many other paradoxes throughout the Gospels.

Find Rest From Burdens By Taking on Jesus’ Yoke

Jesus gave His great invitation for all men to come to Him in the form of a paradox: *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30)*

This great invitation requires a response by the one invited. These duties are represent in the four verbs: come, take, learn, find. First, one must come to Christ. All are invited to come, because all men are exhausted to the point of absolute fatigue in their heavy labors. Especially, the burden or labor under the bondage of sin. Second, they are to take the burden or yoke of Jesus. A yoke was a frame which set across the shoulders of a man or animal allowing them to carry a burden or load. Not all yokes were equal. Some were unbalanced, ill-made, uncomfortable. Jesus has a yoke for each one which is “easy.” That is, it is a well-fitting yoke tailored to fit each individual. As a carpenter Jesus knew the importance of a custom made yoke to fit the individual man or animal. His yoke is so well made for us that the burden becomes light. God commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3). Next, those who accept Jesus’ invitation must learn from Him. Literally, it means to follow Him as His disciple. He is the best teacher to learn from or master to follow, because He is gentle and lowly in heart. Finally, they will find the rest promised by Christ. Finding comes only after coming, taking and learning. In this life the disciple will find rest from the servitude of sin (Rom. 6:16) and in eternal life rest will be found in Heaven (Rev. 14:13).

Sell All, Give to Poor to Have Treasure

The rich young ruler who came to Jesus and asked what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him, *“You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’” (Mark 10:19).* The young ruler answered that he had kept all these from early days. *“Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me” (Mark 10:21).*

Jesus explained why it is so important to have treasures in heaven in His Sermon on the Mount.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matt. 6:19,20). Later, He urged His disciples to have the right priorities, to seek God's kingdom and righteousness above all else (Mt. 6:33). The conventional wisdom holds that when we give something away, we end up with less. The paradox is that we have more. What you hoard, you lose. What you give away, you retain. Jesus said, *"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back"* (Luke 6:38). This paradox is difficult, especially if one's attention is preoccupied by material wealth. The rich young ruler *"was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions"* (Mark 10:22). Jesus' conclusion to the Twelve in the account of the story found in the Gospel of Matthew was: *"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first"* (Matthew 19:29-30).

"The First Shall Be Last, and the Last, First"

The above paradox of Jesus is found once in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). This paradox is sequel to the incident of the rich young ruler who could not bring himself to sell his property and give the proceeds to the poor. In Aesop's fable of the Hare and the Tortoise the hare was fast and in first place until he became overly confident and focused only on the here and now. As the hare napped the tortoise just went from first to last by focusing on the goal.

Being first in this competitive world is important because no one wants to be known as a loser but a winner. According to the world's standards Jesus was a loser. He was not high-born, had not formal education, own very little, and died ignominiously upon a cross. However, He is now Lord of lords and King of kings.

Following Jesus requires us to be last in order to be first in His Kingdom. The Jewish religious leaders claimed a high position in the coming Messianic Kingdom. However, Jesus said to the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem, *"the tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"* (Mt. 21:28-32).

Whosoever Will Lose His Life Will Find it

The most pervasive paradox of Christ is found several times in all four Gospels:

- ◆ Matt 10:39 - *"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."*
- ◆ Matt 16:25 - *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."*
- ◆ Mark 8:35 - *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."*
- ◆ Luke 9:24 - *"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."*
- ◆ Luke 17:33 - *"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it."*
- ◆ John 12:25 - *"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

All of us have seen this paradoxical truth in every day life. In order to find health you have to lose weight. The one talent man had to "lose" his money in order to find more. Paul gave up his life as a pharisee of pharisees to find life in Christ. The would be disciple must lose his sinful and self-willed life and find righteousness and the Will of God. The very essence of life is in risking life and spending life, not in saving it and hoarding it. Others come to the end of life only to realized that they never began to live. How you spend your life will determine whether you save your life.

For to me to live is. . . . You can fill in the blank yourself. Or would we have to say, “For to me to live is my family”; or “For me to live is my job”; or “For me to live is accumulating possessions.” If Jesus is not LORD OF ALL, He may not be LORD AT ALL!

Gain the Whole World and Lose Your Soul

What if you live for self and gain the whole world? How much of a profit is it if in turn you lose your soul? Of course who has really gained the whole world. Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Hitler tried. Remember the emperor of France called Charlemagne the Great. . When archaeologist entered his tomb they saw treasures that had been buried with him, but do you know how they found Charlemagne. He was not buried in a coffin, he was placed on a throne. There was a crown placed on his head. When he was discovered, the crown had slipped down around his skull. In his lap was the Word of God. It was opened and a bony finger was pointed to a verse: *“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”* (Luke 9:25).

Jesus is expressing the fundamental hyperbole in this paradox. No one can gain the whole world as their own. But even if they did the loss would far outweigh the gain.

Many are losing out on obtaining a life in Christ because they are too busy trying to create for themselves a temporary utopia on earth. It is said, “he who dies with the most toys wins.” However when a man dies someone else inherits it. You cannot take it with you. Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul? So, lose your life to gain a life in Christ. Compare the profit and loss columns of these two investments of life. Then you will see which is the best way to go. Nothing in the world is of comparable value to a person’s eternal soul.

Whoever Would Be Greatest of All must Be Servant of All

Contrary to the world’s concept of greatness where leaders and masters are greater than servants or slaves, Jesus said, *“Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave”* (Mark 10:43-44; also see Matthew 20:26-27; Luke 22:26). Disciples are made great by becoming little even like little children (Lk 9:48). They are exalted by being humble (Mt. 23:12). Jesus demonstrated this paradox in His example of washing the feet of the disciples (Jn. 13:13,14).

You must Die to Live

Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24). This is a paradoxical true well attested to by nature. Unless the seed is planted (buried) in the ground, there will be no resurrection of life in the form of a new plant. Only by death comes life. The grain of wheat was ineffective and unfruitful so long as it was persevered on in a sack or jar. But when it is thrown into the cold ground, and buried there as if in a tomb, it will bear fruit.

You must Hate Your Life to Love it

Jesus was not teaching His disciples to literally hate themselves when He said, *“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”* (John 12:25). Paul was willing to sacrifice his life in order to live in eternity with Him. *“For to me to live is Christ”* (Philippians 1:20-21). Disdaining one’s selfish existence in this life will allow one to focus on obtaining eternal life.

You must Be Born Again to Live in the Kingdom of God

Nicodemus, a ruler and a pharisee, came seeking an audience with Jesus one night. *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’”* (John 4:3-5). Being born

of water requires one to be baptized. Those who wish to be a part of the Kingdom of God must be born out of the waters of baptism. Their old life of sin will be washed away and the new life will result.

These paradoxes of Jesus are really the facts of common sense. How we apply them in this life will determine our eternal life. Samuel Goldwyn said, "I don't think anyone should write their autobiography until after they're dead." But until death there is time for a rewrite.

Questions:

1. What is a paradox?
2. How common are they?
3. Why are they found so abundantly in the Bible?
4. Why did Jesus use them in His teachings?
5. What are the four verbs of action taken by those who respond to the great invitation of Jesus?
6. How did the rich young ruler respond to Jesus' request?
7. Why is being first so important to the people of this world?
8. Why did the world look upon Jesus as a loser? How did He demonstrate that He is first?
9. What is the most common paradox of Jesus? What does it mean?
10. Why is gaining the whole world such a futile and profitless endeavor?

11. How does one become great in Christ's Kingdom?
12. Show from nature how dying is necessary for life?
13. Are Christians to literally hate themselves? Explain.
14. What is being born of water?

Application & Discussion:

1. Should those who teach the lost the Gospel and Bible class teachers employ the use of paradoxes? Explain
2. How do you rate in regard to apply these paradoxes to your walk with God?

Homework: Locate other paradoxes of the Bible and ponder them.

Jesus' Teaching on **Righteousness**

Kingdom Righteousness Must Exceed That of the Pharisees

Imagine the shock Jesus gave to the common people when He demanded a higher standard of righteousness than that of the Pharisees. The Pharisees would have had received an even greater trauma to their wounded ego. They had a long history with the Jews for being devout. They were the separate ones who made laws to keep them as far away from being a lawbreaker as possible. Although there is nothing wrong with striving to do one's best, these rules became traditions and then were accepted as law. The Pharisees concluded the law contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. Their idea of righteousness was a checklist system. They taught the people that to be a good Jew they must learn their rules and keep them. They failed when they accepted their oral laws and traditions of the elders as authority on a par with that of the Law of Moses. As a result they created a new standard of righteousness based on the wisdom and will of men apart from God. To keep one from breaking the Sabbath Day regulation of not working they came up with a massive convoluted list of rules. They believed one could not travel on the Sabbath more than about two fifths of a mile from home. Then they set up a rule to create a loop hole to get around the first rule. They defined home as the place where your possessions reside. So before a Sabbath, on which they wish to travel, they would place in the homes of friends a possession and thus their friend's home would be their home. As a result they could travel all over Palestine without ever breaking any rules. If a fire was burning in a room, a person could gather clay vessels and stack them to create a barrier to keep the fire from spreading to the rest of the room, but he could not put the fire out. A Gentile could come put the fire out as long as the Jew did not ask him or tell him not to.

They made these laws binding on the general population. The Jews even went so far as to condemn both Jesus and His disciples when they broke one of these traditions of the elders. Jesus condemned their use of traditions and accused them of using these to break God's actual Laws (Matt. 15:1-9).

In the last week of Jesus' life, He pronounced several woes upon the Pharisees' standard of righteousness in Matthew 23.

Kingdom Righteousness is Not Hypocritical

"Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:1-3). In other words, they were hypocritical. Jesus was constantly condemning the Pharisees by calling them hypocrites. (15:7; 22:18; 23:13,15,23,27,29). No less than eight times he called them "hypocrites" in Matthew 23. Earlier Jesus had warned His disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1).

Just what is a hypocrite? "In Greek literature the hypocrites was a person who played a part on a stage. He usually wore a mask, and in speech and action imitated the character whom he represented in the stage production. There was no necessary connotation of evil or deception involved in the early

use of the terms. Context always made it clear whether the act was to be viewed as evil or not. In the N.T. the terms are invariably evil in sense" (ISBE, V. II, p. 790). Etymologically, it had a neutral meaning "one who pretends to be something which he is not." The English word has the same meaning today. We derive our English word from the Greek word. It is but a transliteration of the Greek word: *hypokrites*.

A hypocrite is not a sinner or one who falls short of perfection. "No matter how hard I try, I just can't live the Christian life. I'll always be a hypocrite. There's no use going on. I might as well give up. Then at least I won't be a hypocrite." Not one who fails or is striving hard to do and be better but isn't. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be better than he really is, but also has no intention whatsoever of actually becoming any better. The Pharisees pretended and made no effort to improve their shortcomings. Like the Christian who claims: "I may drink too much, but at least I admit it," or "I may play around sexually, but I'm no hypocrite; I'm honest about it." It is like saying: "I know I'm a liar, but at least I'm honest about it." Those so distraught by their fear of being a hypocrite are not because they are trying to be better and not putting a pretense. If they quit trying and think they are a better person for quitting then they are hypocrites.

The greatest actors of the New Testament. Although the world admires actors who can play roles totally unlike their true personalities. God does not. God knows how to shut down the play and put these actors out of business. Acting religious does not make one righteous. The produce nothing like the kingdom righteousness Jesus requires of His true disciples. These hypocrites are like the "hen that cackles, but lays no eggs."

Kingdom Righteousness Is Not Oppressive

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being oppressive leaders of the people. *"For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers"* (23:4). They taught the Law, but did not live according to it. They taught the people to "do as I say, not as I do." This was clearly seen in their human traditions which they bound upon the people. This is clearly seen in their Sabbath day regulations. Though the Law of Moses did not define work, but the seriousness of the law is declared in the face that the person who violated the Sabbath by working *"shall surely be put to death."* (Ex. 31:1-17). For example on the seventh day of the week a Jew was permitted to add cold water to hot water in a kettle to make lukewarm water. However, they could not warm cold water in a hot kettle.

Kingdom Righteousness Does Not Glory in Outward Piety

Many are motivated to be hypocrites to appear good before others. Others just love to have the preeminence. The Pharisees did works to be seen of men. Of them Jesus said, *"but all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces"* (23:5-7a). "They took strips of parchment on which were written four passages of the law; Ex. 13:3-10; 11:16; Dt. 6:4-9; 11:13-21. These were enclosed in a leather case and were fastened to the forehead and left arm. The authority for wearing them was purely traditional, and the practice seem to have arisen from a literal interpretation... The Pharisees made the leather case large, that their righteousness might be more conspicuous" (McGarvey, p. 607). Borders of the garments "were the fringes mentioned in Num. 15:38,39; but the Pharisees offended again, even in their obedience, but wearing broader fringes than other people that they might appear more religious." The chief seats were the heads of the Greek "U" shaped tables.

Jesus also said they loved to be honored with titles. Jesus said to the Pharisees who loved to be honored with such titles, *and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'* But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:5-12). Having only been preaching

the Gospel for a couple of years I opened a letter in my office one day addressed to "Reverend Daniel R. Vess." This is a title I never use for myself and often discourage being referenced by this religious title. Being addressed as "Reverend" did not give me a sense of pride. However, I felt a bit humbled when the man who sent it addressed himself as so-and-so "The Most Holy Reverend."

Yet no man on earth should be called "Pope." It is the Latin for "father" and God alone is our Father. Call no man "Reverend" for God's name alone is to receive reverence, worship, and honor. Of course, Jesus does not condemn the calling on one's earthly parent "father." He is condemning the religious leaders who love to magnify themselves to positions of prestige, all the while requiring others to praise and honor them with religious titles. Job said, *"let me not, I pray, show partiality to anyone; Nor let me flatter any man. For I do not know how to flatter, Else my Maker would soon take me away"* (Job 32:21-22).

Kingdom Righteousness Helps Others Enter the Kingdom

By use of their traditions and self-righteous appearance, they hindered others from entering the kingdom instead of leading them to it. Jesus again said, *"but woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in"* (23:13).

Kingdom Righteousness Is Not Covetous

A teacher asked a boy, "Who were the Pharisees?" He replied, "The Pharisees were people who fasted in public and in secret devoured widows' houses." The Pharisees were motivated by covetousness. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation"* (23:14). They are like the many televangelists of our day who preach or teach false doctrines for money. They were lovers of money. Jesus condemns their extreme appetite for more material goods by their gulping down widow's homes. In Matthew 6:5-7 Jesus had already exposed them for praying to be seen of men.

Kingdom Righteousness Is Not Feigned Religious Zeal

Righteousness of the Pharisees consisted of a feigned religious zeal. *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves"* (23:15). Their motivation in making proselytes was the result of a blind evangelistic zeal. The end result of the converts was that they were often more unrighteous than the Pharisees.

Kingdom Righteousness is Honorable in Word

Jesus said, *"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it"* (23:16-22). Did Jesus condemn the swearing of oaths altogether or did He condemn the abuse of vows both in our text and in Matthew 5:33-37?

Jewish tradition approved evasive swearing (Matt. 5:34-36), as long as the Lord's name was not employed. When one breaks a vow to God or man, he has classified himself as a fool. A promise is to be kept regardless of so called loop holes. Christians should long to be honest and true.

Kingdom Righteousness Does Not Major in Minors and Minor in Majors

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin,

and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. "Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (23:23,24). They were experts as majoring in minors and minoring in majors. Jesus mentions their tithing of small seeds as an illustration. Anise "was used for medical, purposes and also for culinary seasoning, so that Pliny says the kitchen can not be without it" (McGarvey, 609). Cummin is "a condiment and a medicine, the bruised seed mixed with wine being used as a styptic, especially after circumcision. It was also used as an ingredient for salves or plasters such as were applied to the ulcers of cattle produced from bites, grubs, etc. or insects" (ibid). Jesus shows the ridiculousness of this with His humorous hyperbole of the Jew who would carefully strain out the tiny unclean gnat from his bowl of soup to avoid defilement (Lev. 1:41) only to swallow a whole unclean camel. "Righteousness consisted, above everything, in avoiding ceremonial defilement, or removing it at any time contacted, by prescribed washings and bathings" (Geikie, Cunningham, the Life and the Words of Christ, Vol. I, p. 239). They missed the true requirement of God (Mic. 6:8).

Kingdom Righteousness Focuses on Inward Purity

The Pharisees pretended to be righteous with their outward purity while harboring inward corruption. Jesus said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*" (23:25-28). Men often try to appear "better" than they are. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss pretending to be His friend when in his heart he was only after the money (Mt. 26:49). Some join a church to win community favor for their business while neglecting God's Word.

Kingdom Righteousness is Receptive of Truth

Those who preach the truth of God are often martyred. Jesus exposed the murderous hearts of the Pharisees. "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'*" *Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"*" (23:29-33). Jesus knew they were so closeminded, they would reject His word and Him as their fathers before they rejected the prophets. Many pretend to seek knowledge, but instead they are closeminded to the Truth. If they did not like the message they could just kill the messenger.

Where would the prospective citizens of Christ's coming kingdom find a standard of righteousness greater than that of the Pharisees? Jesus gave them a good start with the character traits listed in the Beatitudes. These eight contain the essential principles that produce the righteousness that exceeds. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount will give them further instructions in righteousness. It is a righteousness that exceeds which seeks God's approval rather than man's (6:1-4). It enjoys communion with God (6:5-13). It is a righteousness that is interested in heavenly treasures (6:19-23). It is not hypocritical in judgment (7:1-5). This kingdom brand of righteousness must exceed in quality and quantity anything Jesus' disciples had witnessed among the Pharisees.

Questions:

1. What was the standard Jesus set for Kingdom righteousness? Why would this have been a shock to His disciples?

2. Why did the Pharisees come up with a list of rules or traditions?
3. What is a hypocrite?
4. Why is it wrong to call men "pope" or "reverend" or "father" today?
5. Does the truth ever hinder people from entering the Kingdom or does it help them enter? Explain.
6. Give an example of the pharisee's feigned religious zeal.
7. How did the Pharisees strive to avoid keeping their vows?
8. Why is it so ironic that a Pharisee would swallow a camel after staining out a gnat?
9. Give examples of those who show outward righteousness without inward purity.
10. Instead of obeying the words of the prophets what did the Pharisees forefathers do? What will they end up doing?

Application & Discussion:

1. How are Christians today hypocritical like the Pharisees?
2. Give a few examples how we today major in minors and minor in majors?

Homework: Strive to practice righteousness instead of just acting righteous.

Lesson 10: Sunday, June 9, 2019

Jesus' Teaching On **The Kingdom**

When Jesus began his mission on earth He sent out the seventy to preach and the twelve to preach about the Kingdom which was to come. Jesus spoke often about His coming Kingdom and its nature.

The Kingdom Is the Church

Sometimes in the New Testament the words "kingdom" and "church" can be used interchangeably. A common belief among premillennialists Jesus failed when He first came to earth to establish His Kingdom. His plans were interrupted by His crucifixion. Thus the church was established as a mere after thought. It is to last till He can come again to establish it upon the earth.

Christ Himself demonstrates the church and the kingdom are one and the same. He promised Peter and the rest of the Apostles *"upon this rock I will build my church"* (Matt. 16:16). He next promised to give them the keys of the kingdom (16:18) and that some of them would live to see the kingdom established (18:24).

Establishment of the Church

A wide variety of theories exist with regard to the time when the Kingdom/Church was established. Some go as far back as Adam, others go with the time of Abel or with Abraham. John the Baptist has been considered the beginning point by early Baptists for the church. Some will argue for the days of Paul. According to the Book of Mormon the kingdom was established in 147 B.C. (Mosiah 18:17). Surely not all these can be true.

It is of importance to the disciples of Christ as to the when and where of the Kingdom's establishment. It helps to identify the beginning time and place of God's redeeming plan for sinful man. It points to the time when the Law of Christ came into effect for both Jew and Gentile. And it is necessary to show when and where the many kingdom prophecies were fulfilled.

Jesus, Himself, pointed to Jerusalem as the starting place of His Kingdom. *"Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high'"* (Luke 24:46-49).

According to prophecy, John the Baptist (baptizer or immerger) was one like Elijah who was to appear before the *"great and dreadful day of the Lord"* (Mal. 4:5). John was the messenger sent to prepare the way before the Lord (Mal. 3:1) and he was the *"voice of one crying in the wilderness"* (Is.

40:3). In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, about 26 A.D., John came preaching his message in preparation for the coming Kingdom. *"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"* (Matt. 3:1,2). Some have argued the Kingdom started in the days of John the Baptist. But Jesus said John was not in the Kingdom. *"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"* (Mt. 11:11). Christ came to complete the preparatory ministry begun by John the Baptist.

Jesus said, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). *"At hand"* tells the time of his message's fulfillment. Twice Christ send out groups of men to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom. First, He commissioned the seventy disciples (Lk. 10:10,11). Next, Jesus commissioned the twelve commanding them: *"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'"* (Matt. 10:7). Thayer defined the phrase *"at hand"* as "near."

Later the twelve supposed the Kingdom was to appear immediately (Lk. 19:11). This view seems to have been shared by the entire body of disciples (Mk. 11:8-10). After Christ's death, men were still waiting for the kingdom. After the resurrection and before His ascension, Christ further prepared His disciples for the coming of the kingdom. He told them *"that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem ...Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high"* (Lk. 24:47,49). After Jesus arose from the dead, lived forty days with men, and prepared to go back to the Father the disciples still were waiting for the Kingdom to be established (Acts 1:6). Jesus ascended into Heaven and the apostles waited for ten days in Jerusalem till the Day of Pentecost.

After the ascension of Jesus the apostles returned per the instructions of Jesus to Jerusalem to wait for the power from on high (Mark 9:1; Lk. 24:46-53; Acts 1:12). The power came in the form of cloven tongues like fire over the heads of the apostles. They began to speak in tongues. By simple deduction the following premisses lead to a valid conclusion. First, the Kingdom was to come with power (Mk. 9:1). Next, that power was to come with the Holy Spirit (Ac. 1:8). Then, the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost (Ac. 2:1-4). Therefore, the Kingdom of God came on the day of Pentecost.

Eight Parables on the Nature of the Kingdom

Matthew 13 is called by some as the *Sermon on the Sea*. In this chapter Jesus explains the nature of the kingdom of God by use of eight parables.

■ **The Parable of the Sower (*Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:3-9; 14-26; Luke 8:4-15*)**

Jesus begins by explain the nature of His Kingdom with the Parable of the Sower. He expounded to His disciples, *"the seed is the word of God"* (Luke 8:11). The Word of God is that seed which produces spiritual life. When the pure seed, the Word of God, is planted into the hearts of men, it produces a New Testament Christian.

Who Is the sower? Jesus was the original sower of the seed which would be called the Gospel. God has always used men (prophets) to broadcast His message. The sower in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the *"Son of Man"* (Matt. 13:37). However, there is no need to assume that in this parable it refers only to Christ. The sower would be anyone commissioned to sow the seed of the kingdom. When one becomes Christian, they become responsible for sowing the Gospel (Matt. 28:18-20)

Jesus next list four types of soil (hearts of men) and how they react to the seed (the Word of God). In the parable the seed which fell on the hard ground of the wayside was devoured by the birds of the air or *"the wicked one"*, which is the devil (Matt. 13:19). It represents the hard hearts of men who reject the Word of God. Hearts that have been turned to stone by arrogance, or the love of sin, or religious prejudice, or misguided intellectualism. The shallow hearts of men are represented by rocky soil. This soil suffers from a lack of depth. God's Word is at times hard for many Christians to follow, so they stumble over the truth. The crowded heart is where the Truth is choked out in thorny soil. Jesus says

these thorns are *"the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches"* (Matt. 13:22a). Mark adds *"the lust of other things"* (4:19) and Luke, *"pleasures of this life"* (8:14). Finally the good soil represents the good hearers. They truly receive the Word of God in their hearts and are bearing fruit which would equate to simple obedience to the Word. Nineteen times in Matthew 13, Jesus used the word *"hear."* One of Jesus' most often stated points was *"he who has ears to hear, let him hear."* It is possible for this story to "go in one ear and out the other."

■ **The Parable of the Wheat & the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43)**

The explanation to this parable is given by Jesus in response to the disciples' inquiry (13:36). It is one of the few in which we have Jesus' own explanation. Field is the World or lost humanity (13:38). The good seed are those who are children in the Kingdom (13:38). The disciples are those who compose the "good soil", In contrast, the children of the wicked one are represented in the parable by the tares (13:38). Christ would be the sower of the good seed in the world (13:37). His nemesis who sows tares is the Devil (13:39) This adversary is seeking to destroy faithful Christians (1 Pet. 5:8). The harvest is the end of the world (verse 39) or the Judgment Day. When Jesus comes again it will be harvest time (2 Thess. 1;8,9). The reapers are God's angels (13:39).

This Parable makes several points about the nature of Christ's Kingdom. The Kingdom is in the world but it is not of this world. The problem of evil in the world is a product of the Devil. God is longsuffering toward the world (2 Peter 3:9). Before harvest time is an age of grace when tares can become wheat, or sinners can be fashioned into saints. One day Christ will judge this world. Christ is Judge. Judgment day will come with some surprises for the self-righteous children of the Devil (Matt. 7:22-23). There will be punishment for the wicked and reward for the righteous. Two possibilities exist for the saints: those who are faithful will be gathered into the barn (heaven) and those who have become children of the Devil will be burned in hell. *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"* (Matt. 13:43).

■ **Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-33; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-21)**

Next, Jesus gives twin parables. Both address the small beginning and rapid growth of the kingdom. The mustard seed was proverbially small. Jesus had small beginnings. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem and the son of a carpenter of Nazareth. Jesus looked "less than the least of all seeds." The difference between a small mustard seed and large mustard tree is growth. Like the mustard seed the kingdom began to grow rapidly (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:1,7; 8:4-6; 11:21; 12:24).

■ **Parable of the Leaven (Matthew 13:31-33; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-21)**

The Parable of the Leaven speaks of the transforming power of the Kingdom. The woman took the leaven from elsewhere to mingle it with the lump. Likewise, the Kingdom is not of this world but transforms souls in this world by the spiritual influences from Heaven. Like leaven the transformation is silent and slow. Naturally, the Gospel of Christ has an inner influence. It must work within man's. We cannot see the leaven working. The Kingdom works unseen. The quality is transformed. Yeast makes bread raise, light, and tasty. The kingdom of God is a positive influence in this world. It does not make it citizens "sourdough" Christians. The transformation is complete or total. Paul wrote, *"A little leaven leavens the whole lump"* (1 Cor. 5:6). The process is complete - "the whole is leavened." Truly, the leaven like influence of the Kingdom has transformed all aspects of life in all the kingdoms of the world.

■ **Parable of the Hidden Treasure Matthew 13:44-46**

Next, Jesus utters two parables which highlight the priceless value of the Kingdom and the delight and desire to obtain the kingdom by those who find it. The kingdom is the most glorious of all treasures. Jesus uses this parable to focus our attention on the great value of the Kingdom. Once we have seen how grand it really is we will stop at nothing to make it ours. Once he has felt the sheer delight of his valuable find, the man will sacrifice anything and everything to make the field his own. Legally, if he buys the field he inherits the fortune. It demands that one count the cost to see if the sacrifice for salvation is real worth it all (Luke 14:26-33). Joy of obtaining the treasure replaces and justifies all his loss. Have you discovered the priceless value of the Kingdom of Christ? If so, do you not agree that it is worth anything and everything in your life?

■ **The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:44-46)**

In the second of these paired parables the pearl adequately represents the kingdom. Both the pearl and the kingdom are not made by the hands of men, but by God. The pearl is produced by God's laws of nature and the kingdom by His spiritual laws. The merchant has the traits of ambition, vigilance, and determination which are characteristics which Jesus esteems. These are worthy of our imitation as we seek for the Kingdom of God. The merchant is not out searching for the second best pearl. He wants the most perfect one that can be found. Jesus tells us to "*seek first the kingdom of God*" (Matt. 6:33). The price paid for this pearl could have required the man to sell all his other gemstones. This was not a problem for he knew that it was worthy of such sacrifice. Is Christ and His kingdom worth the sacrifice of your job, your family, your friends, your money, your car, yes, and even your own life?

■ **Parable of the Dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)**

Two boats with a large net were used to encircle a large area and capture every fish, creature, trash, etc. This dragnet could corral a large catch of fish which would then need to be sorted. In this parable the world of lost sinners is represented by the sea. The Fisherman are preachers of the Gospel. When Jesus called His disciples He said, "*from henceforth thou shalt catch men*" (Lk. 5:10) and "*follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men*" (Mark 1:17). The net represents the Kingdom or the church. The fish are either those who are good Christians or those who are unfaithful saints. The separation of the fish will take place on the day of Judgment. Not all the fish in the net were worth keeping. The cast-away fish of the parable are the "wicked," and those who remove them are the "angels," and the time is "the end of the world." The purpose of the purging of the net is not redemptive. The rejection is final (John 15:6; Luke 16:23-24; Matt. 7:23).

■ **Parable of the Householder (Matthew 13:51-53)**

Finally Jesus closes this long chapter the nature of His kingdom with a short parable of the Householder. With this parable Jesus pointed out five responsibilities that Christians have toward God's truth. First, Christ's disciples have the duty of ascertaining the Truth that is taught. The twelve had three years in the school of Christ. They studied in the College of the Feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39). Next they have the obligation of apprehending the truth of what is learned. Jesus asked his disciples, "*Have ye understood all these things?*" A disciple of Christ must learn with a view to understanding what He has taught. Third, is the duty of applying the truth to one's life. A disciple means a "learner," or one who follows another's teaching, and who is not only a pupil, but an adherent and imitator of his teacher (Jn. 8:31; 15:8). Truth is best learned when truth is lived. The fourth responsibility of the Christian toward God's Word is accumulating the truth in time. All true students of the Bible are ever learning. The teaching of the Kingdom, for instance, was a well-known doctrine taught by the prophets of old. It has been said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed while the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. Finally, saints have the duty of according the truth to others. Teachers of the Word in a way are accumulating by giving away. This is a paradox. It is those who obey God's Word who learn the most of God's Word and have the most to share.

Questions:

1. Show from the scriptures that the Kingdom and the church are one and the same.

2. Can a kingdom exist without a king, citizens, or law? Explain.

3. How many sowers are in the parable of the Sower? Who are they?
4. What does each type of soil represent?
5. Are these soil conditions permanently set or can they be changed?
6. In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares what do the two types of seeds represent?
7. Why does the owner of the field delay in removing the bad seed?
8. When is the harvest?
9. What do the parables of the Leaven and the Mustard Seed teach about the Kingdom?
10. Explain how Jesus and His church began small and insignificant?
11. Give examples of how the Gospel (leaven) has transformed the world we live in today?

12. What is the main purpose in the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price?

13. Why is it so important that Jesus' disciples know the true value of His Kingdom?

14. How is the Kingdom like a priceless pearl?

15. What does the sea represent?

16. Who do the fisherman represent?

17. Who are the fish and what does the net represent?

18. What happened to the fish that were cast away?

Application and Discussion:

1. What spiritual condition would you find yourself today if Christ has not yet established His Kingdom/church?

2. What factors might influence the leaven-like transformation of the individual's heart? That is, what things help or hinder the transformation within a man by the Gospel?

3. What are some things people need to be willing to give up in order to be a part of the Kingdom of Heaven?

Homework: Pray a prayer of thanksgiving that Christ's kingdom has come.

Lesson 11: Sunday, June 16, 2019

Jesus' Teaching On The Holy Spirit

Jesus' Mission and the Holy Spirit

Centuries before the birth of Jesus the Holy Spirit inspired the holy prophets of the Old Testament to foretell of the coming Messiah. In fact the Holy Spirit was involved in the miraculous birth of Jesus by the virgin Mary. *"Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt. 1:18). An angel was sent to tell Mary's husband, *"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt. 1:20).

At the Baptism of Jesus, *"the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:16b,17). *"Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness"* (Mark 1:12) *"to be tempted by the devil"* (Matt. 4:1).

Jesus cast out demons and performed His miracles in conjunction with the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:28). He also taught via the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:18-20). God gave Jesus the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Jesus was raised from the dead by the Spirit's power (Rom. 8:11). His final words in the Great Commission were through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2).

The Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit

No words of Jesus seem to have stirred more interest than the "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit". In the context Jesus had cast a demon out of a man who was blind and dumb. People were amazed and said, *"Can this be the son of David?"* They saw the miracles as evidence that Jesus may be the Christ who was to be of the lineage of David. The Pharisees and Scribes, however, were quick to derail this Messianic speculation by the people. They claimed, *"this fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons"* (Matt. 12:24). Although they could not deny that Jesus performed a miracle they could cast doubt as to the source of His power. By accusing Jesus of working by the

power of Beelzebub they could seem justified before the people in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. Simply stated the Pharisees were accusing Jesus of being in league with the Devil or Beelzebub.

Jesus responds with this warning: *"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come"* (Matt. 12:31-32). Jesus says they have not blasphemed the "Son of God", but God the Spirit or the Holy Spirit. By attributing the power behind this miracle to the Devil, they not only rob the Holy Spirit of His due glory, but they also discredit Jesus of being the Son of God.

Just what is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? Sometimes it is easier to find out what something is by first ruling out what it cannot be. The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not: murder (Ps. 51; 2 Sam. 12:9-13; Lk. 23:34; Ac. 7:58; 8:1; 1 Tim. 1:12-16); suicide; adultery (Jn. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:9-11); profanity (Mt 26:69-75; Jn. 21); merely blasphemy of God or Christ (1 Tim. 1:20); failure to obey the Gospel; rejection of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit; backsliding (Rev. 2:1-5; Gal. 6:1; James 5:17-20; Ac. 8:22); hardness of heart; etc.

Who was warned about committing the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It was those who had beheld Christ's miracles yet rejected the source of the power of His miracles: the Holy Spirit. It is a sin that was committed by non-Christians, but could be committed by Christians. Although the Pharisees could have committed this sin during the Mosaic Age, it could also be committed in the Christian Age. This sin against the Holy Spirit involves God's unwillingness to forgive. It is an act of evil speaking from an evil heart (Mt. 12:25). In Mark's account it reads, *"but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"* (3:29).

Without the Holy Spirit's testimony no one could believe that He was the Son of God. Without believing Him to be the Son of God no one could be forgiven. Their rejection of the Holy Spirit's witness would result in eternal sin.

In this regard J.W. McGarvey wrote: "Blasphemy against the Son may be a temporary sin, for the one who commits it may be subsequently convinced of his error by the testimony of the Holy Spirit and become a believer (1 Tim. 1:13). But blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is in its nature an eternal sin, for if one rejects the evidence given by the Holy Spirit and ascribes it to Satan, he rejects the only evidence upon which faith can be had; and without faith there is no forgiveness..." (The Four fold Gospel, p. 303).

Some Christians might ask: "Am I guilty of this sin?" The very fact that one is asking the question and searching the Holy Spirit revealed word indicates that they are in no danger of committing this sin. To guard against this sin one should keep an honest and good heart. As a Christian we should *"rejoice in the Lord always"* knowing *"if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

Jesus Taught the Personhood of the Holy Spirit

Jesus did not see the Holy Spirit as merely a force or a divine influence from the Father. His constant references to the Holy Spirit using personal pronouns like "he," "him," and "himself" clearly prove that He regarded the Holy Spirit as a person not as something. To Jesus the Spirit was never an it but a him (John 14:16,17,26; 15:26; 16:7,8,13,14).

Jesus also spoke of the actions of the Spirit. The Spirit spoke, taught, guided, comforted. These are not merely the actions of a thing but a person (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:13,-15; Mark 13:11).

Jesus referred to the Spirit as the Holy Spirit. (John 14:26; Luke 11;13). He is holy like God and the Son are holy. The Spirit possesses attributes of deity.

Three times in John 14-16 Jesus references the *"Spirit of Truth"* (John 14:17;15:16;16:13). God's truth is communicated to man through the work of the Holy Spirit. Today, it is revealed through the writings of the holy apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:3-5).

In Luke 4:14,18; 24:49 Jesus refers to the third person in the Godhead as *"The Spirit of power."*

During His earthly ministry Jesus performed His miracles in conjunction with the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:20; Matt. 12:28)..

Demonstrating the power of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the Heavenly Father, Jesus calls the Spirit *“the finger of God”* in Luke 11:20: *“but if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* In Matthew’s parallel account this phrase is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. *“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you”* (Matt. 12:28). Pharaoh’s magicians concluded that the miracles performed by Moses were from *“the finger of God”* (Exodus 8:19).

Finally, in John 14:16 and 15:26 the Holy Spirit is called the *“Comforter.”* This would be *“another comforter.”* Not another in the sense of a different comforter but another one that was like Jesus.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Kingdom

A great deal of the teachings of Jesus concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in the establishment of the Kingdom (church) is found in John 14-16. The context of these three chapters reveals that Jesus was preparing the apostles for the time He was to leave them. The apostles would see Him lifted up (John 8:28). He accused the Jews of seeking to kill Him (8:37,40). After the resurrection of Lazarus *“from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death”* (John 11:53). He warned that one of them would betray Him (13:21). Next, He told them He was going away but would send the Comforter from the Father.

The Holy Spirit or Comforter would do several things to help the apostles. 1) Although He would go be with the Father in Heaven, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would abide in them and remain with them forever. *“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you”* (14:16,17). 2) *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”* (14:26). 3) *“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”* (15:26). 4) *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”* (16:8). 5) *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come”* (16:13). 6) *“He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”* (16:14). Notice these promises of the Holy Spirit are given to the apostles and not all Christians. The Holy Spirit does not directly speak to individual saints today. The Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth, not partial truth. Therefore, there is no need for continued revelation of God’s will to men today.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Some hold the belief Holy Spirit Baptism is to be received by Christians today. John the Baptist promised Jesus Christ would administer this baptism (Matthew 3:11). There are only two examples of Holy Spirit Baptism in the New Testament: in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost when received by the Apostles and in Acts 10 when received by Cornelius and his household.

Jesus explained the reason for sending the Holy Spirit or Comforter to the Apostles (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). It was given only to them for the purpose of helping them bear witness for Christ, giving them power to declare the future, guiding them into all truth, revealing the Word of God, and the power to confirm their words with miracles and speaking in tongues. The time and place of this baptism was on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came with power. Consider the words of Jesus on the subject:

- ▶ *“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high”* (Luke 24:49).
- ▶ *“And He said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power’”* (Mark 9:1)

- ▶ *“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4,5).*

Consider the facts about the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit. 1) The Holy Spirit was to come with power. Some of the apostles would still be alive when the Holy Spirit came. 2) They would receive the power from Heaven as a Promise of the Father. 3) The apostles were to wait in Jerusalem for the power. 4) The Kingdom was to begin with the coming of this power. 5) This baptism of the Holy Spirit was to come not many days from the ascension of Jesus.

All these were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4: *“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”* The Holy Spirit came with power in Jerusalem only ten days after Jesus’ ascension. Judas was the only apostle not alive to witness it. It was the same day the Kingdom was established.

Today, we do not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is one baptism (Eph. 4:3-6). It is the water baptism which washes away our sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16).

The Holy Spirit does not directly guide us to all truth like it did the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. But through the Words of Jesus in the New Testament the Holy Spirit gives us the truth and through it life. Jesus said, *“it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life”* (John 6:63). Godet paraphrased Jesus’ words in this manner: *“My words are the incarnation and communication of the Spirit; it is the Spirit who dwells in them and acts through them; and for this reason they communicate life.”*

Questions:

1. What does it mean that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit?

2. What role did the Holy Spirit play in the ministry of Jesus?

3. Why did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of the devil?

4. Why can't the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit be murder?

5. List several things the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit involves.

6. In your own words what is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit?
7. How did Jesus demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is a someone not a something?
8. What names did Jesus give the Holy Spirit?
9. Why did Jesus have the Father send the Holy Spirit to the apostles?
10. List the verbs (actions) of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16.
11. Where were the apostles to wait for the Holy Spirit baptism?
12. Who was promised the Holy Spirit baptism?
13. When did the Holy Spirit baptism occur?
14. Can we have water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism today? Explain.

Application & Discussion:

1. How does the Holy Spirit give us life today?

2. How does the Holy Spirit guide us to truth today?

Homework: Read the Holy Spirit revealed Word of God and be taught all the Truth you need to know today.

Lesson 12: Sunday, June 23, 2019

Jesus' Teaching on **Hell**

Information provided by *The Association of Religion Data Archives* found that those over seventy-five were absolutely sure hell existed. Furthermore, they discovered education plays a major role in belief in hell, the higher the education the more likely a person is to reject belief in hell. Men (57.9%) are more likely to believe in hell than women (47.5%). Believe it or not political party affiliation makes a difference in one's believe in an eternal hell. Only 43.1% of Democrats believe in hell compared to 68.8% of Republicans. Those who consider themselves Independents are even less likely to believe in hell (40.4%) than Democrats. Regular church attendance has more to do with believing in Hell than any other factor. Thirty percent of those who never attend church services are absolutely sure there is no hell. 85.3% of those in attend church on a regular basis believe in hell.

Other polls have shown that even among the denominations people believe in Heaven but few accept the idea of an eternal place of punishment called Hell. Hell is believed by some to be an invention by the Catholic Church to control the masses with fear. Despite these views, Jesus taught just as much about Hell than He did about Heaven.

Jesus Taught Hell to Be Real

Could a loving God send some one to Hell? Jesus believed He would. *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matt 10:28). Universalism holds that everyone will eventually go to Heaven. Did Jesus teach and

believe this? *"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire"* (Matt. 5:22). Is Hell an annihilation of the body and soul or a place of never ending suffering? Jesus taught three times in Mark 9:43-49 that Hell is a place of where the fire never goes out and the worm does not die: *"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'* And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire-- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'" If Hell is not real, what did God send His Son to earth to die on the cross to save us from?

Jesus Taught that Hell is a Terrible Place

In the parable of the talents the one talent man who neglected to prepare for the master's return, was cast out into the outer darkness where *"there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matt. 25:30). The term "gnash" means "to grind the teeth together" according to Webster. The gnashing and biting of a wounded animal. If you value your teeth it sounds like you need to bring a mouth guard, if you plan on going to Hell. Furthermore, go ahead and pack plenty of pain reliever. The punishment of Hell is so painful that it would be better to lose a hand or pluck out an eye too, than for the whole body to be cast into Hell (Matt. 5:29,30).

Since there will be a great deal of pain in Hell you can also expect weeping (Matt. 25:30). Vine's says that weeping is "any loud expression of grief." A good pair of ear plugs would be needed in Hell.

Hell is a place where there will be burning. In His parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus warned that in the end God's angels will come at judgment of the world and take those who are the "tares" that is the wicked and gather them to be burned with fire. *"Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age"* (Matt. 13:40).

In Hell there is no light at the end of the tunnel. It is a place of total darkness. Jesus warned that some *"will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 8:12). In His parable of the talents the master commanded, *"cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 25:30). Jesus half-brother, Jude, described Hell as *"the blackness of darkness forever"* (Jude 13).

Jesus believed Hell to be a place of fiery torment. Although His parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is really dealing with the Hadean realm, the rich man's fate was sealed at death and his soul is lost. He was in a place of torment. He was pleading with Abraham, *"Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'* But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented'" (Luke 16:24,25). He further was tormented by the thought that his family could end up there with him. Again he cried to Abraham, *"I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment"* (Luke 16:28).

Jesus said that in Hell there will be both spiritual and bodily destruction (Matthew 10:28).

Jesus Taught that Hell Is Eternal

Jesus described Hell as an unquenchable fire (Mk. 9:48). As the bush burned before Moses and yet was not annihilated (Ex. 3:2) so are the fires of Hell. To say that Hell shall end is to say its fire shall be quenched.

In association with the unquenchable fires of Hell Jesus uses a second phrase denoting the duration of Hell. It is a place where the *"worm dieth not"* (Mk. 9:48, KJV). It is a figure borrowed from

the city dump of Jerusalem, where maggots were forever feasting on rotting corpses. The undying worm everlastingly consuming and never consumed.

In Matthew 25:46 Jesus used the same Greek word in the same sentence to describe eternal life and to describe eternal punishment. Jesus said, *“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”* The longevity of Heaven stands or falls alongside the longevity of Hell; if one will eventually end, so will the other. Any argument that will shorten the time in one will do so in the other. Thus, we must either admit the endless wretchedness of hell or give up the endless happiness of heaven. It is curious that there is no dispute over the duration of heaven. All understand the meaning of "eternal" when applied to heaven. Why would the meaning automatically change when applied to hell?

If Hell only lasted a thousand years those in torment would still have hope to one day be free from it's chains of darkness and suffering. If it were but a million years in duration one would still be able to cling to that hope. But Hell never ends and there is no hope of it ever coming to an end.

Jesus Taught That You Could Go to Hell

Hell is not just a place reserved for the most evil and infamous criminal against humanity. For many hell is a place where men and women like Hitler or terrorists belong. However, those who fail to believe in Jesus will be condemned to Hell. Jesus said, *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”*(John 3:36). Later He told His disciples, *“do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation”* (John 5:28-29). At the Great Commission Jesus told them, *“he who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16).

Hell is not just a place prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Going to Hell is a possibility even for those who are religious. Jesus asked this rhetorical question of the Pharisees: *“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”* (Matthew 23:33). He even warned that their converts would be the children of Hell. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”* (Matthew 23:15). Jesus warned His audience at the Sermon on the Mount to be careful what they call one another in anger. *“But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire”* (Matthew 5:22). Even those who practice good deeds can call Jesus “Lord” could still miss Heaven and end up in Hell. *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”* (Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus Taught That a Majority Would Go to Hell

In contrast to the doctrines of universalism and even annihilationism which teach that no one will go to Hell, Jesus believed many more people would follow the road leading to eternal destruction than those who chose the path to eternal life. *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14).

Do you believe in Hell? Do you believe it is possible you could end up in Hell? You can go to Hell. Hell is a real place and there is a real possibility that you could end up there. So start today to make plans to spend eternity with God in Heaven.

Questions:

1. Why do so many reject the idea of a literal place called hell where God will punish the wicked?

2. Show from the scriptures that Jesus believed in Hell?

3. List others in the Bible who obviously believed in Hell?

4. Why will many miss going to Heaven?

5. What are the two things the rich man requested of Abraham? Why?

Matching: Packing for Hell

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 6. _____ Flashlight | a. failure to warn others about this place |
| 7. _____ Fireproof Boat | b. torment in the flame |
| 8. _____ Pain reliever | c. weeping |
| 9. _____ Sleeping Pills | d. blackness of darkness |
| 10. _____ Regrets | e. no rest |
| 11. _____ Tissue | f. lake of fire |
12. Give the scripture where Jesus explains that punishment in Hell will be just as long as the saint's life in Heaven with God.

Application & Discussion:

1. Do you believe in Hell? Why?

2. What do you personally think is the worst part about eternal punishment in Hell?

3. How would you go about teaching someone that Hell is real and really forever?

Homework: Remember this week that no one has ever earned the right to go to Heaven. God will still be just if he sent us to hell the very first time we sinned. If you avoid the fires of Hell it will only be by the grace of God.

Lesson 13: Sunday, June 30, 2019

Jesus' Teaching On **The Second Coming**

Matthew 24:36-51

Church history records two thousand years of various men and women striving to calculate the date of Christ's return. These end time prognosticators can be found as early as around 500 AD when Hippolytus of Rome, Sextus Julius Africanus, and Irenaeus predicted Jesus would return that year. The date appears to be arrived at by a calculation based on the dimensions of Noah's ark. According to Pope Sylvester II the end would come on January 1st 1000 AD. A sixty-four year old prophetess, Joanna Southcott, claimed she was pregnant with Christ's child. He would return again in the form of baby being born on Christmas day in the year 1814. However, that was the day of her death and an autopsy showed she was not pregnant. More recently Ronald Weinland is back prognosticating Christ's return. This time he claims the Lord will return on Saturday, June 8, 2019 on the eve of Pentecost.

Throughout the years many of these false prophets have arrived at their conclusions about the Second Coming of Christ by misusing and misinterpreting various passages of scripture. Matthew chapter twenty-four has often fallen victim to this abuse. The fundamental problem with the chapter is

the failure of Bible students to recognize the chapter is dealing with two different events. First verses 4-35 are focused on the coming of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The second section of verse (36-51) are dealing with the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus said there would be signs for the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

The chapter begins with Jesus' startling prediction of the destruction of the Temple with not one stone being left upon another (Matt. 24:2). The curious disciples asked when it would be destroyed and what will be the sign that the end of the age has arrived (Matt. 24:3). Jesus said "*when you see all these things*": false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions, apostasy, and false prophets. These would serve as a sign of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in that generation. The term "*generation*" is used in Matthew 12 four times to mean Christ's own generation (12:39,41,42,45). Jesus was preaching to His own generation - the people who were living contemporaneously with Him.

Another indication that Jesus is dealing with two events is the use of "days" in the first section and the "day" in the second. The plural "*days*" is used in verses 19,22,29 and the singular "*day*" (or hour) is employed in verses 36,42,44,60; 25:13. "*That day,*" "*the day,*" and "*the hour*" are commonly used in the Scriptures to refer to the Final Judgment (Matt. 7:22; 11:22; John 5:28; 1 Thess. 5:2). Nowhere in the New Testament is the plural expression, "the days" or "those days," applied to Christ's Second Coming at the Judgment. Verse 36 is talking about the Second Coming. Jesus had just referred to the time when "*heaven and earth shall pass away*" (24:35). Days refer to Jerusalem destruction which would be preceded by signs. "*Day*" or "*hour*" reference the time of the Second Coming which has not preceding signs. "The expression 'day or hour' is used throughout Scripture to indicate a general reference to time (e.g., 7:22; 10:19; 24:42). This includes not only a literal day and -or time of day, but also the year and/or month" (Wilkins 800).

Secretness of Christ's Return

Throughout the remainder of chapter twenty-four and into chapter twenty-five Jesus makes it very clear that no one knows the time of Christ's return.

- 24:36 - *But of that day and hour no one knows...*
- 24:42 - *...you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*
- 24:44 - *...will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*
- 24:48 - *My master is staying away a long time,*
- 24:50 - *...will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.*
- 25:5 - *The bridegroom was a long time in coming...*
- 25:13 - *...you do not know the day or the hour.*
- 25:19 - *After a long time the master of those servants returned...*

Jesus even claims that the angels do not even know. "*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only*" (24:36). They knew of the time of his first coming and announced it. Notice the contrast between the "*you know*" in verse 33 and "*no one knows*" in verse 36.

Even more startling is Christ's admission that He does not even know when He is to return. This is an example of Jesus' voluntarily limiting his divine attributes. Jesus obediently restricted His knowledge to those things that the Father wanted Him to know during His earthly days of humanity. In fact, Jesus learned much of His earthly knowledge just as every human being learns, and it is for that reason that He was able to keep "*increasing in wisdom*" (Luke 2:52).

If angels and the Son of God do not know the day of the Second Coming, who does? According to Jesus only God the Father knows. "When anyone tells you that Jesus is coming soon, your guess is as good as his, and his is no good at all." Foy E. Wallace, Jr; *God's Prophetic Word* (Lufkin, TX: The Roy E. Cogdill Pub. Co., 1946), p. 201). Trying to calculate the Second Coming of Christ is therefore one of the biggest wastes of time in Bible study. When God does have the Son return every human being will be caught in total surprise along with the angels.

Suddenness of Christ's Return

To describe the suddenness of the Second Coming Christ uses the analogy of the days of Noah. *"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be"* (24:37-39). The return of Christ will be characterized by normal activities among the mass of humanity. On that day it will be business as usual. Notice Jesus' point of comparison is not the wickedness but the suddenness. While Noah built the ark, he also preached (2 Peter 2:5). But the people were just as unconcerned about his preaching as about the ark he was building. After all, they had never seen rain. Yet Noah was proclaiming a great flood was coming to destroy the whole world. The term for "flood" or "washing away" is the Greek word from which "cataclysm" is derived. Because they had never seen such a cataclysm, they ignored the idea that it could happen. Just as Noah and his generation saw not signs of coming doom, neither will this generation observe and signs of Christ's return. They went about so absorbed in their day to day lives, they did not know what hit them until they were drowning. Likewise, men and women will be going about their daily business when suddenly the Lord's Return will be upon them without a single warning sign.

Watchfulness at All Times

Next Jesus encourages His disciples to be watchful at all times by giving two illustrations of men and women engaged in activities of day to day life. *"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming"* (24:40-41).

Only the watchful will be saved. From all outward appearances both men are doing the same work and as far as we know both men and both women could be Christians. Both sets are equal in every aspect except one man and one woman are always watching for the day of Christ's Return. Therefore, one is taken and the other left behind. This makes it clear that not everyone will be saved. Universalism is not a doctrine taught by Jesus.

While the women are grinding grain with a hand mill they should be on the alert for Christ's return with continued expectancy.

In Paul's discussion of Christ's return in 1 Thessalonians he refers to Christians being "caught up" (1 Th. 5:2) to be with the Lord. Peter informs us that those left behind or not taken will be consumed in the final conflagration of the earth (2 Peter 3:10). The verb "taken" in the Matthew twenty-four means "take to safety" whereas the term "left" has the meaning of abandonment or being forsaken in the first Gospel.

The "therefore" is focusing our attention of Jesus previous description of the suddenness of the flood of Noah's day. Because Christ's return is unpredictable like Noah's flood, all men and women at all times whatever their activity needs to be watchful. The verb tense of the term "watch" indicates a continues vigilance, they are to keep on watching. Why? Because the soul of every man and woman is at stake. Jesus had warned, *"what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"* (Matt. 16:26).

Readiness: The Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief

Next, Jesus uses two parables to illustrate aspects about His Coming. First in the Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief He promotes need for readiness or preparedness. *"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"* (24:43-44).

This parable highlights a well known fact about thieves that everyone knows. Paul sums it up well: *"for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night"* (1 Th. 5:2). He does not give you any signs that he is coming to break in and steal. Imagine receiving the following note in the

mail or as a text. "Dear homeowner, I will be at your house at about 10 pm. Please leave the back door unlocked and the lights off. Remember to turn off the alarm and put up the dog; preferably in a location where he is least likely to hear me. Leave your valuables out in plain sight for easy retrieval. Do not call the police."

Of course, the modern idea of a police department did not exist in New Testament times. However, if a homeowner could be forewarned he could be forearmed to deal with the intruder. This, of course, rarely happens. So, a homeowner must be ready at all times to deal with the possibility of a thief. For security purposes many will have a dog to help watch and warn. The best kind of watchdog is one that watches and is ready to do something about an intruder.

"Therefore" or since you know this about thieves being ready or prepared is essential. The same is true about being saved before the last trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ arise. After all, it will be too late to run off to the church and get baptized. Neither will there be time to repent and confess and be restored as a faithful saint. Since our salvation is past, present and future we must be ready by obeying the gospel in the past and in the present make sure we are safe every day. Readiness will enable us to meet the Lord with gladness and without shame.

Faithfulness: The Parable of The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant

In Jesus' second parable He expounds the need for continued faithfulness. *"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (24:45-51).

This parable is a contrast between the faithful servant in verse 45-47 and the unfaithful servant in verses 48-51. The servants referenced here were the household stewards who supervised all the other servants for the master's household. He was the head of staff and was expected to care for the master's personal affairs. He would see that all the servants in the house were properly fed in a timely manner, as well as housed and cared for on a daily basis. He was the most trusted servant of the Master because of his continued faithfulness. *"Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful"* (1 Cor. 4:2). Another parable on faithfulness is found in the next chapter (Matt. 25:14-30). The faithful servant is expecting his Lord's return at any moment. This continues to motivate him to service faithfully till the master's return. A faithful and good heart lives righteously regardless of circumstances. If Christians believe Christ is coming back suddenly at any moment, they too will behave faithfully. *"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives"* (2 Peter 3:11). Therefore, they must act as if they are expecting His return any day.

In contrast the unfaithful servant has an evil heart. The master's delay in returning is twisted into a motivation for unfaithfulness. Peter warns of "scoffers" making fun of the Christian hope of a second coming because of the long delay. *"They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'"* (2 Pet. 3:4). Someone has warned that "the most dangerous day in a man's life is the day he learns there is such a word a tomorrow." This is a result of a false sense of security. However, the Lord is not delaying for His servants to be unfaithful, but He is waiting for others to become faithful. *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

The unfaithful servant was guilty of dereliction of duty. He practiced cruelty toward his fellow servants. Instead they all needed to work together to be found faithful in service when the master returned. His behavior is described as carousing. The master's delay is seen as an opportunity to

indulge in sins and pleasures of life. With the assumed extra time on his hands, he cavorts with corrupt companions. Although he is not said to be drunken himself, he is in the company of those who are drinking.

The end result is that the unfaithful servant is unprepared for the master return. He has procrastinated his faithfulness.

When the master was present he was faithful in the master absence he is not motivated to be a good steward. When the master is present again, he will find only time for deep remorse and imminent destruction. In the apocryphal book of *Susanna*, written between the Old and New Testaments, it tells of a similar punishment as an angel cuts the two liars in two with a sword. To be ready when Jesus returns means salvation, not to be ready is to perish.

So we do not know when Christ will come again. That is the closest guarded secret in the universe. If man did know he may be tempted to put off salvation until the last moment. There is an old fable in which three apprentice devils were talking to Satan. The first one said, "I will tell people there is no God." Satan replied. "That will not fool many, because they know there is a God," The second devil said, "I will tell them there is no hell." Satan said, "You will never fool many that way, because they know there is a hell." The third said, "I will tell people there is no hurry." Satan said, 'Go, and you will ruin millions."

Questions:

1. List other false prophets and the dates they have prognosticated as the time of Christ's Second Coming.
2. Why has Matthew chapter twenty-four often fallen victim to abuse and misuse by those who wish to use it to calculate the time of Christ's Return?
3. What does "days" represent in first half of Matthew 24?
4. What do the phrases "that day," "the day," and "the hour" commonly used to refer to in the New Testament and in Matthew 24?
5. How many times does Jesus point out the secretness of Christ's return in Matthew chapters 24 and 25?

6. Who knows when Christ will return? Who does not know?

7. To what is the suddenness of Christ's return compared?

8. What two illustrations does Jesus use to point out the need for watchfulness in regard to His Second Coming?

9. What will happen to the man and woman who are taken?

10. What will become of the man and woman who are left behind?

11. What does the Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief illustrate in about the Second Coming?
What does it call upon us to do?

12. Why will the first servant be rewarded when the master returns?

13. What are the characteristics or behaviors of the second servant?

14. What punishment will the second servant receive?

Application & Discussion:

1. What can you implement in your daily life to help you be ready when the Lord suddenly returns?

Homework: Learn to look forward to and love the idea that Jesus is coming back at any moment.

A young minister, fresh out of seminary, was conducting his first baptismal service. In his nervousness, he got his Scriptures confused concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper: "I now baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." As he lowered the convert into the water, he added, "And now drink ye all of it" (Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations & Quotes, p. 44).