

Transcript

The Jesus Story - The Sermon on the Plain: Part 3

In the last eleven verses of the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus brings out several directives to help His disciples in their walk with Him.

These can be divided nicely into four sections. First there are directions as to who are we to follow. Then we have warnings concerning hypocrisy. This is followed with advice for Christian fruit inspectors. Finally, the big question: when is the Lord, really the Lord?

Throughout the time of His ministry, Jesus told many parables to illustrate points and reinforce His teaching. It would probably help us if we understood just what a parable is and why Jesus used them?

A parable has been well described as ‘an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning.’ In short, a parable is a story using objects or events from everyday life, which the people hearing the story can relate to.

But perhaps a more important question would be why did Jesus speak in parables? This was the question that the disciples one day asked Jesus, Mt 13:10:

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

11 He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

What Jesus is saying is that He speaks in parables so that only those who interpret them correctly will understand what they mean. Those who try to interpret his parables literally will certainly become confused.

The way to understand parables is to look at them in the way that they were meant to be looked at: metaphorically and spiritually.

Metaphorically simply means to describe somebody or something with a word or phrase that is not meant literally; just used as a vivid comparison. It means telling a story to express a truth.

If I said that it was ‘raining cats and dogs’, you would not expect to go outside and find the street full of cats and dogs, but you would understand what I was trying to describe.

What about when we describe someone as having a ‘heart of gold’. If someone did have a heart of gold they would not be much use to anyone, they would be dead. A golden heart would not be beating. But when someone uses that expression we know they mean. We all at some time or another use metaphors just to try and describe what we mean.

Besides using metaphors, Jesus also used parables to describe spiritual experiences. We only have time to look at one of these spiritual experiences that Jesus used; we find this in John chapter seven and verse thirty eight:

38 “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will

flow rivers of living water.”

Then In the next verse John explains just what Jesus was referring to:

39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

There are many more of these kind of metaphors: Light of the World; Salt of the Earth; the Bread of Life.

But we need to get back to our text for today. In verse 39 we have the first section, ‘Who are we to follow’:

39 And He spoke a parable to them: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?”

And here in verse 39. We have Jesus using a parable to warn His disciples of the importance of choosing very carefully who we decide to follow. We are responsible concerning the spiritual leaders we choose to follow.

This is why it is imperative that we study the Bible for ourselves so that we are able to discern between truth and error. Perhaps the best example of this would be the Christians at Berea. This is what we read concerning them in Acts 17:11:

11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

The Berean’s were eager to receive the Word of God. But they did not stop there. They searched the Scriptures daily, to make sure that what they had heard was true.

If a blind man leads a blind man, They will both fall into the ditch.

Jesus then warned us to watch out for false teachers. He compared false teachers to blind leaders. A blind leader cannot show other people the proper way to follow. He will simply lead them astray.

Jesus was not talking simply about physical blindness here. He was talking about spiritual blindness. We need to be led by those who have a clear insight into the Word of God, if we want to stay out of the ditch.

Anyone who attempts to show the way to others must first be able to see the way for themselves. It is useless trying to teach others if you yourself have not been taught. Teaching without knowledge is a recipe for disaster. This is why false teachers are so dangerous. These teachers can lead people to be lost eternally.

This also shows that we must not be blind followers. We must search God’s word ourselves so we know the truth. Then we can tell when a teacher is leading us into error.

There is I believe a very simple test to find just who the right leaders are. Here is a very simple check list:

- Just how close do they follow Jesus?
- Does their teaching fall into line with what Jesus taught?
- Does their lifestyle compare to the lifestyle of Jesus?

This would rule out most of the television evangelists. This would rule out all those prosperity gospel preachers. This is what Jesus had to say about Himself, Luke 9:58:

58 “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

When a rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking advice this was the answer that Jesus gave to him, Luke 18:22:

22 He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

And, if ever there is any doubt concerning the decisions you have to make there is a very simple guide to follow, Just ask yourself the question “What would Jesus do?”

This demonstrates our need to know as much as we possibly can about the life of Jesus.

A disciple follows and imitates the master. He seeks to become like the master. So as followers of Jesus Christ our goal must always be to follow the teachings of Jesus and imitate His example.

Paul was a great example of the kind of leader that we would be very confident in following. This was the message that Paul had for the church at Corinth, 1 Cor 11:1:

1 Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

He could say if you follow me, you will be following Christ, and that is a really great place to be in.

Jesus now moves to a fascinating parable about seeing and judging accurately. ‘Jesus warns His disciples concerning Hypocrisy’:

41 “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?”

42 “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.

The speck of sawdust and the plank. This playfully exaggerated setting probably comes from the time that Jesus spent in the workshop as a carpenter. Do not criticize others when you yourself deserve criticism far more.

Jesus didn’t say that it was wrong for us to help our brother with the speck in his eye. It is a good thing to help your brother with his speck, but not before dealing with the plank in your own eye.

Those who are aware of their own failings will always be less critical of the failings

of others. This does not mean that we are to ignore the trouble that some Christians may find themselves in.

James makes this very interesting comment, 5:19-20:

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,

20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

However, while the person with the speck may certainly need help, that help must come from someone who can see clearly to take out that speck.

This is what Paul wrote to the Galatians 6:1:

1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

We have all at some time or another had a speck in our eye. It is annoying, makes your eye water, and affects your ability to look at anything else. Now Jesus uses exaggeration to take this common experience and push it to a humorous extreme.

One person with a plank in his eye is trying to see to remove a speck from someone else's eye. "You hypocrite," Jesus says, "first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye".

If you don't have a sense of humour you won't be able to understand this. But Jesus was obviously enjoying this bizarre picture, and uses it to make a point: about being able to see clearly.

The point is this: until we take the time to deal with our own sins and weaknesses, we're in no position to help someone else get rid of sin in their life. The reason we're in no position to help is that we can't see clearly.

Certainly we are not to close our eyes to sin, but we are to not to rush to judgment. We need to look with the eyes of mercy and forgiveness, we need to come to the help of a fallen brother, to help, rather than to stamp on him.

Jesus doesn't say we aren't to help our brothers and sisters, to get rid of their irritating and debilitating sins, but we are to deal with our own glaring sins first so we can see to help them, rather than overreact.

An attitude of forgiveness and generosity toward others is an essential mark of someone who has been forgiven. Jesus said this is how foolish we are. We're so quick to see the imperfections in everybody else but we're blind to our own shortcomings and sins.

We now come to 'Advice for Christian Fruit Inspectors':

43 "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

44 "For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush.

45 “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.

This text needs to be looked at in two different parts. In verses 43-44 we have an illustration from nature. This is how the Message Translation puts this:

“You don’t get wormy apples off a healthy tree, nor good apples off a diseased tree. The health of the apple tells the health of the tree.

There is a great but very simple lesson here. Good Fruit, comes from a Good Tree; Bad Fruit, comes from a Bad Tree. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.”

Now in Verse 45 an example from real life. This is the Message Translation:

45 It’s who you are, not what you say and do, that counts. Your true being brims over into true words and deeds.

A man is known by the fruits of his personality and labour. False prophets cannot bring the good news to mankind and as believers we need to understand that there are many false prophets in the world.

These false prophets are intent on making money for themselves. They preach a gospel that is nothing like the gospel that Jesus preached, and nothing like the message that was preached in the early church.

In these verses Jesus tells His disciples to test preachers and teachers by their fruit. There are two tests – one is the fruit in the life of the preacher, and the other is the fruit of the doctrine that they preach.

Immediately we depend upon anything other than the Word of God we will find ourselves in trouble. But we need to be careful not allow carnal suspicion to take the place of the discernment of the Spirit. Fruit and fruit alone is the test. We need to show a little patience and wait before passing our verdict.

44 “For every tree is known by its own fruit.

Wrong teaching produces its fruit just as right teaching does if it is given time. It is easy to get alarmed and to persuade ourselves that our particular convictions are the standards that Jesus sets and to condemn everyone who does not agree with us.

So, what is the best defence against false teaching? We find the answer in Ephesians 6:17:

17 The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

This is what we need to be doing. Studying the Word of God and praying for the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Psalm 119:105 tells us very clearly:

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

It is just as important that we examine the fruit in our own lives. This is what Paul had to say about his own Christian walk, 1Co 9:27:

27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

It's who you are, not what you say and do, that counts. If we say we are right with God, the world has a perfect right to watch our private life and see if we really are.

If we say we are born again, we will be put under scrutiny, and rightly so. Luke 12:2:

2 You can't keep your true self hidden forever; before long you'll be exposed.

You can't hide behind a religious mask forever, sooner or later the mask will slip and your true face will be known.

As Christians today, we cannot afford to live a hypocritical lifestyle because it will destroy our Christian testimony. Many hypocritical Christians have derailed the work of sharing the Gospel with others.

This is why we must not only share the Gospel of salvation to the world verbally, but we must live as examples of the Christian lifestyle.

Jesus shows that no one can hide his identity. What a person is will be known by what he does and says. What Jesus is telling the disciples is that their ministry is to be a ministry of character. What they are is more important than anything they will ever say or do.

The final result of their service will be determined by what they are in themselves.

Here is a good test for our spiritual standing. Just what are the fruits that we are presenting in our lives. In Galatians chapter five, Paul lists for us the fruits of the Spirit:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Now we come to the final part of this sermon on the plain, and Jesus is asking a question:

46 "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

This leads us to ask the question where do we stand in our relationship with Jesus? 'Is the Lord really the Lord?'

46 "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

47 "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like.

48 "He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.

49 "But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Plain with a final parable. Surrounding Jesus are hundreds of people listening. I'm sure that after his meetings, people would come up and tell him that they want to be his followers.

But how many of these hearers will be prepared to put into practice what He is teaching them?

So Jesus exhorts them to both listen to his words and put them into practice. The problem is that they hear what Jesus has to say but don't put Jesus' teachings into practice.

Too many so-called followers don't practice what they preach. They can say the words, and quote scriptures with the best of them, but when it comes right down to it their lifestyle doesn't imitate that of Jesus. They may call themselves disciples; they may call themselves followers, but they aren't following.

Saying we believe in Jesus isn't what God desires. God desires that we do what Jesus told us to do. Anyone can say that they love Jesus, but the proof is in obedience. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

The difference between hearing and obeying is the difference between hearing and really hearing. The one who really hears Jesus will obey Him.

The parable of the wise and foolish builders is told by Jesus to illustrate the difference between those who hear and act upon what they learn from Jesus, and those who hear but don't act upon what they have learned.

To put this in its proper context, Jesus has just finished teaching many things to the crowds. He then says, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord' and don't do the things which I say?" Jesus then tells this parable of the wise and foolish builders in order to illustrate these statements.

The test is not who simply claims Jesus as their Lord. Anyone can say they accept Jesus and believe in Him. But a person is not truly Jesus' disciple simply because he professes to be. He must obey the teaching of the master.

The clear teaching of Jesus is that people must not only confess Him as Lord but must also do the will of the Father, because it makes no sense to call Jesus 'Lord' and then ignore his words. It is not enough to hear and approve Jesus' teaching, it must also be lived out.

There are those who appear to others (and even to themselves?) to be true disciples but who do not come up to the mark. They call Jesus 'Lord' but do not follow his teaching; they listen to his words but do not obey them.

The parables and sayings in this sermon focus primarily on authentic Christian living and the need for a firm and genuine foundation that will carry us through in difficult times.

True followers not only hear his words, but they act on his words, allowing his message to make a difference in their lives.

Let me try to take this just one step further. Like most preachers, Jesus would preach the same sermon on different occasions to different crowds. In Matthew's gospel we

have recorded the Sermon on the Mount. This is more or less the same message but Matthew seems to go into more detail in Matthew 7:

20 “Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

21 “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.

22 “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?’

23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

How are we to understand how this group of believers will not be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven?

23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

In these solemn words Jesus says He will have to say to some preachers, some prophetic students, and, some workers of miracles: “Depart from Me, you that work iniquity.”

To work iniquity is to twist out of the straight; these men have twisted the message of God and made it into misleading lies.

“Depart from Me,”: these are the most appallingly and condemning words that could be said to anyone.

“By their fruit you will recognize them.” There are true prophets and there are false prophets. The Bible teaches about these in 2 Peter. Chapter 1 is a good illustration of this where Peter speaks at some length about them, and describes some of the fruits that we should be producing.

Peter was well placed to talk about these things because he had spent three years with Jesus. He learnt from Jesus. He heard firsthand the words of the Sermon on the Mount. This is the clear direction Peter brings in verse ten, with some very simple and sound advice:

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is what we read a little further on in second Peter 3:9:

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

So the will of the Father is that nobody should perish but that everyone should come to repentance.

In fact, that is why many people get away with the dreadful things they do because God is giving time for people to repent and to turn to Him. God does not want anyone to go to hell. That is why Jesus died on the cross, to take the punishment for our sins so we can be accepted by a holy, perfect God when we receive Jesus into our lives.

If we do not accept Jesus we will be rejected by God because it is only through Jesus that we can be received. Whether we are religious or not makes no difference.

We can prophesy, do miracles, cast out demons and do all the things we think are good and Godly, but if we do not have Jesus as our personal Saviour we will not be accepted by Him. However much we call Him 'Lord', he is not Lord of our lives because we have not fulfilled the will of the Father which is to come to Him through Jesus.