

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Jesus' Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (Part II)

The Cost of Discipleship

8:18-22

As Jesus increased in popularity, He did not follow the crowds or even seek to make them bigger. With the miracles associated with Him, following Him might have seemed a more glamorous life than it really was. It's not hard to imagine Jesus received many spontaneous offers like those recorded here.

The scribe's enthusiasm is easy to understand; he may have thought that there was a leadership position he could assume, being trained in the Law. But Jesus points out that faith does not bring earthly prestige. Notice that He does not say "No, you can't follow Me." He just tells the scribe the truth, without painting a romanticized version of what it was like to follow Him. This is quite the opposite of marketing techniques to "attract" believers in our modern society!

His words here don't mean that Jesus was penniless and/or homeless, but rather that His mission kept him and his disciples on the move; not an easy life!

The phrase "Son of Man" is used over 80 times in the gospels; every time it is either something Jesus said of Himself, or the words of someone quoting Jesus. He used it as a title that reflected both the glory and the humility of the Messiah (Daniel 7:13-14 and Psalm 8:4, respectively).

"Lord, let me first go and bury my father" doesn't necessarily mean that the man's father had just died; this wording is indicative that the man was asking to remain in his elderly father's house and care for him until the father died.

It's interesting that this man is referred to as one of His disciples. This demonstrates that the word "disciple" was sometimes used in rather broad sense, including those outside the group of 12 we typically think of.

“...Let the dead bury their own dead.” Kinda harsh, isn’t it? No. Jesus was not afraid to *discourage* potential disciples in the narrower sense, that is, those who would literally travel with him. On the other hand, when He come across the right men to be one of His “companion” disciples, He is downright demanding (see 9:9ff).

9:35-38

We usually focus on verse 37 here, but there’s more to this section. Jesus felt compassion for people, especially those who were distressed and downcast. Rather than being helped and cared for, the “sheep” of Israel were bullied, oppressed and denigrated by their religious leaders. Jesus sought to awaken a compassion in the hearts of His disciples for the lost sheep of Israel.

10:16-25, Persecution will come!

I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves: Jesus freely and honestly warned His disciples that they would face persecution. This persecution would come in varied forms, from legal to social to spiritual.

Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves: Jesus’ followers were and to defend themselves, though not first with earthy forms of power. Wisdom would keep them from attracting trouble unnecessarily, and avoid trouble without compromising their message and mission. “Serpents” are pretty much despised by everyone, and must use creativity (“wisdom” of a sort) to survive. Being harmless would keep them from giving in to the temptation of retaliation. This instructions applies to Christian missionaries today just as much as it did then!

But beware of men, for they will deliver you up: We already know the rest of the story, that Jesus was warning them about persecute in the civic arena (hauled up before councils) as well as the religious one (opposed by synagogue leadership).

You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake: This must’ve been shocking to Jesus’ disciples; they were not men of influence, power, or wealth. That the gospel (and its preachers) would be given attention from the likes of governors or kings must’ve been a formidable wake-up call.

For My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles: The specific mention of the Gentiles here not only suggests that the mission of the Gospel would extend beyond the Jews, as Jesus would reveal to them more specifically later, after His resurrection, but also that they, as His apostles, would be the instruments of that expansion.

Do not worry about how or what you should speak...: These are very comforting words for “meek” Christians. Jesus encourages his disciples (including us!) to trust in God in the moment, knowing that He speaks through them, even if they feel completely unprepared!

This does not mean that preachers should just “wing it”; it’s not a justification for poor preparation in teaching and preaching God’s Word. Instead, it is a promise of strength and guidance for the persecuted that are given an opportunity to bear witness to their faith.

Now brother will deliver up brother to death: Sadly, resistance to the gospel divides family members, and in fact some of the most bitter persecution would take place among families.

You will be hated by all for My name’s sake: At times and in certain places, this has been literally, observably, true. Entire cultures have hated, and continue to hate, followers of Jesus. We must admit that there are times when Christians, because of their great *unfaithfulness*, have been hated for good reason. But no one who is filled with the Holy Spirit of Christ and lives in a manner consistent with the way He lived is hated for good reason.

But he who endures to the end will be saved: This is as true for we who face relatively little real persecution as for those who weather the storms of violence that at times attend persecution. “Enduring” here is “believing” in Jesus.

When they persecute you in this city, flee to another: Jesus teaches His disciples (and us) to *not* court martyrdom. We are not to run towards persecution, or even remain in its midst if provided a chance for escape, at least an honorable one.

You will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes: This is one of the hardest-to-understand statements in the entire

book of Matthew. Could Jesus really mean that He would return to this earth before the disciples would make it through all the cities of Israel?

Or is His “coming” a reference to the day of judgment by God poured out upon Judea via Roman armies in 68-70AD, was worse than the judgment that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah?

Or is “cities of Israel” a reference to all the cities in which God’s people would ultimately be found, i.e., the entire world, and therefore this is encouragement to never stop spreading the Gospel?

It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master: This is the goal of both the disciples then, and anyone who serves Jesus. We aspire to be like our Teacher and Master, as we “...are conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29)

10:26-42, But have no fear! Worldly “peace” is not Jesus’ purpose

If persecution or the threat of persecution makes us draw back from speaking and preaching God’s word, then in a way, Satan has won a victory. His threat of persecution may not have succeeded in harming us, but in holding back the work of the Word of God.

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known: Jesus promised His persecuted followers that the truth of their sacrifice would be known, even if the persecutors did their best to hide it throughout history. God would reveal all and justify His children, and will also reveal the crime of those who thought they had hidden it.

“There is no cure for the fear of man like the fear of God.”

-- Charles Spurgeon

The emphasis in this section is clearly “do not fear.” This is the third time in six verses, that Jesus’s disciples – and us! – are encouraged to trust Him and not fear the evils of man and this world.

Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven: This is not a requirement; it is a statement of objective fact! This is more about Christ’s allegiance to us than our allegiance to Him. Unfortunately, it is sometimes taught that Jesus here is demanding a public

confession of faith of all believers. That's simply wrong. This is a **promise** to those that do make such confession, those who preach the Gospel and otherwise bear witness to Jesus, that HE has OUR backs, and eternally so!

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword: The message of Jesus – as reflected in the Sermon on the Mount – is a message of peace. But it calls the individual to a radical commitment to faith in Jesus Himself, and therefore is a message of peace that divides between those who have not rejected it and those that have.

The dividing line between those who believe in Him and those who reject Him would even run through families.

The grand irony is, following Jesus actually makes us better husbands, fathers, wives, mothers, sons, daughters, etc. Yet there are times when the presence of Jesus – through the one(s) that believe in him -- divides rather than unifies.

“Family” ties are often weaponized by religious cults. Perhaps the greatest danger of idolatry comes not from what is bad, but from what is intended to be good – i.e., family relationships.

Take his cross and follow after Me: This must've been very difficult to hear. This is the first time in Matthew where Jesus mentions the instrument of His death, but he wasn't talking about His own crucifixion; it was something everyone knew about. When the Roman general Varus defeated the revolt of Judas in Galilee ca. 4 BC, he crucified over two thousand Jews, and lined the roads to and from Galilee with their crosses. Jesus was touching on a very raw nerve with these words!

When a person “took a cross” in Jesus' day, it was for one reason: to march to his death. There was no looking back when you took up your cross; the only hope for the cross-bearer was resurrection. It's tempting to interpret “cross” here as meaning minor things, like our personal trials or troubles, but Jesus uses it here to mean death – physical, as we all death to self, and the hope of resurrection to life with God.

He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it: Jesus' disciples live in a paradox. We can only find life by losing it, and we

can only live by dying. We do this first and foremost by believing that He is the Son of God, sent to save His people.

He who receives you receives Me: The good done to and for Jesus' disciples is as if it were good done to and for Jesus Himself, because they are His representatives, carrying on His ministry. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul calls us "ambassadors", and this is one of those rare cases where our modern use of the word helps understand the spiritual meaning. It is because of this ambassadorship that Christ entreats others through us. It is because of this ambassadorship that we can forgive one another. It is because of this ambassadorship that Jesus' disciples can hold the Office of the Keys.

11:25-30, Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest

I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth: How interesting is it that Jesus thanks the Father for this counter-intuitive hiding of heavenly things from the "wise" and powerful, while revealing them to "babes". There's seems to be a sense of joy in Jesus' prayer here. This love of babes (in every sense) is part of God's very nature. Jesus was *happy* that God had chosen the unlikely – those considered by this world to be babes – to respond to His Gospel. This is rather striking in the context of the escalating rejection of Jesus and His apostles we saw starting back chapter 9. This prayer also reminds us that any time we respond to Jesus, it is because of His pleasure to reveal spiritual things to babes like us.

Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him: Jesus refers to Himself as the Son, so here He proclaims that only *He had a true relationship with God the Father*, and that the Father could only be known through Him. This is astonishing; man can only know God by knowing Jesus, and one can only know Jesus according to Jesus' choice!

God the Son knows God the Father because they are completely coequal and coeternal with one another as regards Jesus' divinity (I just slipped in a little Athanasian Creed there!) So we can know God the Father only because He stoops down low to us to make Himself known to us through and in the Person of His Son.

For My yoke is easy and My load is light: What a striking contrast to the "yoke" of the Pharisee (Matthew 23:4), because we are not dependent on

our own righteousness; rather, we are now “yoked” with Jesus, the One who gives grace sufficient for every need.

12:1-8, Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat:

There was nothing wrong with taking the grain per se; this was not considered to be stealing per Deuteronomy 23:25. In fact, farmers were commanded to not completely harvest their crops to leave a little behind for the sake of travelers and the poor. The issue was the **day** on which they did this. Over the centuries rabbis had concocted a rather exhaustive list of do’s and don’ts related to the Sabbath, and this is where the violation was perceived.

For example, on the Sabbath a man could not carry something in his right hand, in his left hand, across his chest, or over his shoulder; but he *could* carry something with the back of his hand, with his foot, elbow, or in the ear, on the hair, in the hem of his shirt, or in his shoe or sandal. On the Sabbath one was forbidden to tie a knot – *except* a woman could tie a knot in her girdle. So if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well, one could not tie a rope to the bucket, but a woman could tie her girdle to the bucket and then to the rope. (Guzik)

“The Jews were so superstitious, concerning the observance of the Sabbath, that in their wars with Antiochus Epiphanes, and the Romans, they thought it a crime even to attempt to defend themselves on the Sabbath: when their enemies observed this, they deterred their operations to that day. It was through this, that Pompey was enabled to take Jerusalem.” (Clarke)

So according to **that** body of law they were guilty of at least 4 transgressions:

- Reaping
- Threshing
- Winnowing
- Preparing food

Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath:

Actually, Jesus *never* violated God’s command to observe the Sabbath or approved of His disciples violating God’s Sabbath command. But He did break man’s *legalistic additions* to God’s law to make a point of the

difference between what it means to obey God's law, and to obey man's laws, traditions, and superstitions.

Have you not read what David did when he was hungry: The first principle Jesus presents is simple and illustrated by David's experience with the priests and the showbread (1 Samuel 21). Jesus reminds them that human need is more important than observing ceremonial rituals. Counterintuitively, God established His law eternally in order to **save** man (ultimately through the perfect fulfillment of that law by Jesus), not to condemn him!

The priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless: The second principle Jesus presents is just as simple. The priests themselves "break the Sabbath" all the time. Perhaps the Pharisees didn't understand as much about Sabbath observance as they thought they did!

"The Temple ritual always involved work – the kindling of fires, the slaughter and the preparation of animals, the lifting of them on to the altar, and a host of other things. This work was actually doubled on the Sabbath, for on the Sabbath the offerings were doubled (cp. e.g. Numbers 28:9)." (Barclay)

The reference to the passage "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6), and the Pharisees' lack of understanding of this principle was also a way that Jesus brings into question the confidence that the Pharisees had in man-made traditions. They used those traditions to justify elevating principles like sacrifice above principles like mercy, when God would have them do just the opposite.

For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath: This third principle is the most dramatic, based on who Jesus is. He is greater than the temple, even as much as they honored and valued the temple. His claim to be "Lord even of the Sabbath" is a direct claim to Deity!

So Jesus is telling the religious leaders that He, much more than they, had the authority to know if His disciples broke the Sabbath law, because He is the Lord even of the Sabbath.

I think passages like this are preserved not just to demonstrate the error of the Pharisees. They are also here to prompt us to self-examination! So...

- How might we invert God's principles for the design and desire He has for our lives? Are there traditions and man-made "laws" that we elevate to faux equality with God's laws and principles?
- How might a congregation like Gloria Dei fall into such error (even if inadvertently)?
- How can we, as members of such a congregation, love God and our church in such ways as to help protect it from falling into such error?

12:9-14, A Sabbath Healing

He went into their synagogue: A general theme through this section of Matthew is the rising opposition against Jesus. Sometimes this opposition is expressed against Him directly, and sometimes as attacks on His disciples. In proclaiming Himself Lord of the Sabbath, he accurately identified Himself as far transcending the authority of the rabbis and other religious leaders he regularly encountered. Yet here we see that Jesus, *as a faithful Jewish man*, continued to go to synagogue regularly!

Why do you think Jesus was a faithful church-going fellow, even when He had ample justification not to be?

A man who had a withered hand: At best, the Jewish leaders saw the man with the withered hand as an interesting test case, but it seems more likely that they saw this man's case as the bait for a juicy Sabbath controversy trap for Jesus. In contrast, Jesus looked at the man with compassion. The accusers probably expected Jesus would do something when He saw this man in need. Interestingly, Jesus' critics had more faith in that regard than we do at times! Modern man sometimes doubts, or perhaps just never considers, that Jesus wants to either practically or miraculously meet the needs of those in need.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath: Jesus exposes their hypocrisy by showing their greater concern for their own possessions than for a man in need, arguing persuasively that it can't be wrong to do good on the Sabbath. Then Jesus – compassionately, not to spite the hypocrites – healed the man.

Stretch out your hand: Wait; how?! When Jesus commanded the man “stretch out your hand”, He was telling the man to do something that was impossible in his current condition. Jesus’ command (word) carried not only authority, but the power to fulfill the command.

Various commentators note this in various ways:

“The man’s hand was withered; but God’s mercy had still preserved to him the use of his feet: He uses them to bring him to the public worship of God, and Jesus meets and heals him there.” (Clarke)

“He stretched out his restored hand, assuming that not till restored could the hand be stretched out. The healing and the outstretching may be conceived as contemporaneous.” (Bruce)

“Christ sometimes used the ceremony of laying on his hand; here he doth not, to let us know that that was but a sign of what was done by his power.” (Poole)

This reminds me verses like Mark 1:14-15 where Jesus says “...The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Or Acts 2:38ff where Peter says “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

We can’t; it’s not possible on our own. It is only possible with God, through the power of the Word of Christ.

Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him: So in response to this wondrous display of compassion, power, and wisdom by Jesus, these Pharisees have only hardened hearts and utter rejection.

But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there: For a time, Jesus withdrew from public ministry as the opposition rose against Him. This was not out of cowardice, but in respect to God’s perfect timing for the course and culmination of His ministry. Even as he withdrew, crowds followed them, and out of His great compassion He healed those in need. In fact, it says he healed all of them.

JAN 24:

12:22-29, Jesus saves a man possessed by a demon

Jesus here demonstrates His complete power and authority over demons, casting out demonic powers that the traditions of the day considered impossible.

Could this be the Son of David: The crowds reacted with Messianic expectation, but...

This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub: ...the Pharisees responded by attributing Jesus' power to the prince of demons, effectively accusing Jesus of sorcery, which is prohibited by God's law (Deuteronomy 18:10, etc.)

But Jesus knew their thoughts: This is remarkable, but not *necessarily* a unique mark of the divinity of Jesus. The Holy Spirit can give the gift of supernatural knowledge to any individual (the "word of knowledge" spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12:8).

Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation: Jesus observed quite logically that it makes no sense for Satan to cast out Satan! The Pharisees needed to explain how Satan benefited by the work Jesus had just done.

"Satan may be wicked, He says in effect, but he is not a fool." (Bruce)

By whom do your sons cast them out: Jesus asks a question based on their premise that He operated by Satan's power. If that were true, then how did their own Jewish exorcists cast out demons?

"The Jewish exorcists operated in conventional fashion by use of herbs and magical formulae, and the results were probably insignificant. The practice was sanctioned by custom, and harmless. But in casting out devils, as in all other things, Jesus was original, and His method was too effectual. His power, manifest to all, was His offence." (Bruce)

And then he will plunder his house: Using this analogy, Jesus explains His authority to bind Satan's power. He is stronger than the strong man. In so doing, Jesus presented a valuable principle in spiritual warfare as we

remember that Jesus allows us to use His name and authority, providing the strength needed to “bind the strong man.”

12:30-32, Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

He who is not with Me is against Me: Jesus first removes any illusions about nuance in the spiritual realm. If one is not “with” Jesus, then either by active opposition or passive disregard, you are working against Him.

Blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven: Jesus solemnly warns the religious leaders against rejecting Him by making the connection between the Spirit of God and Himself. Their rejection of Jesus – especially considering that they had witnessed Him and His work first-hand – was active rejection of the Spirit (blasphemy). What they needed to understand was that the Spirit’s ministry is to testify to Jesus as the promised Messiah (see John 15:26), so rejecting Jesus by not believing in Him was in reality rejecting the Spirit of God, which they did believe in. So this warning about committing the unforgivable sin is worded in a way to help Jews make the connection between the Spirit and Jesus, to help them understand why it was so deadly to reject Jesus.

It will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come: The eternal consequences of this sin force us to regard it seriously. How can one know if they have, in fact, blasphemed the Holy Spirit? The fact that one desires Jesus at all shows that they are not guilty of this sin. Yet continued rejection of Jesus makes us more hardened against Him and puts us on the path of a full and final rejection of Him.

Blasphemy against the Spirit is persistent, permanent unbelief. It’s not something one commits via some formulation of words. Rather, it is the ultimate disposition of a life that rejects the testimony of the Holy Spirit regarding Jesus. Even if someone says something vile, rejecting Jesus/God in the temporal sense, they can still repent and come to faith.

“Many sincere people have been grievously troubled with apprehensions that they had committed the unpardonable sin; but let it be observed that no man who believes the Divine mission of Jesus

Christ, ever can commit this sin: therefore let no man's heart fail because of it, from henceforth and for ever, Amen." (Clarke)

12:33-37, a Tree is Known by its Fruit (and so is a believer!)

A tree is known by its fruit: The bad fruit of the Pharisees' words (when they condemned Jesus) betrayed the bad root growing in their hearts.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks: Our words reveal our heart. In the immediate sense, were there were good treasure in the heart of these religious leaders, it would show itself in good words from them.

For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment: "Idle" (ἀργός, pronounced "argos") is an interesting word, almost certainly chosen because Jesus is speaking to religious leaders and teachers. It can be translated "careless", "lazy", "barren", or even "unemployed"! IOW, these are words that accomplish nothing, proving neither grace nor useful instruction.

By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned: Jesus here answers an anticipated objection – that He made too much of mere words. Instead, because words reflect the heart, one can be rightly judged by their words.

For me, this usage brings to mind James 3:1, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."

12:38-42, Jonah was a prefigure of Jesus

Teacher, we want to see a sign from You: Their desire to see a sign really expressed another way in which they hoped to reject Him. If Jesus did provide a sign, they would find some way to argue against it, thus proving to themselves that Jesus was who they already said He was – a tool of Satan (12:24).

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign: Jesus condemns their seeking after a sign. Signs, miraculous healing, etc. do not save anyone. The purpose of such things is to point to Jesus. Miraculous signs per se have no power to change the hearts of doubters and skeptics.

The sign of the prophet Jonah: Jesus assures them of a sign, but not one like they were expecting! This great sign that He would show was the sign of a resurrected Jesus. Beyond his preaching to Nineveh; Jonah's life was a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus. Jonah "gave his life" to appease the wrath of God coming upon others (the people of Nineveh), and after three days and nights of dark imprisonment, he was made alive and free.

Regarding "three days and three nights" vs. the chronology of the crucifixion until the resurrection, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah (ca. AD 100, cited by Clarke and others) explained this Jewish way of speaking: "A day and a night make a whole day, and a portion of a whole day is reckoned as a whole day." So in Jesus' day, the phrase "three days and three nights" did not necessarily require a full 72-hour period, but merely a period that included at least portions of three days and three nights. So nothing here negates, or even challenges, the biblical chronology of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Regardless, the main point here is that Jesus is telling them. "You want a sign? I am God's sign!"

12:46-50, Who are Jesus' Mother and Brothers?

His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him:

Considering the Jewish leadership's opposition to Jesus, it's possible that Jesus' family wanted to appeal to Him to be less controversial in His ministry. It's not hard to imagine that they might've been pressured by the Pharisees, or perhaps the entire Sanhedrin, to encourage restraint in Jesus' teaching and movements about the region.

Who is My mother and who are My brothers: You'd think that Jesus' family might have special privileges when it came to Jesus' ministry. It almost surprises us that they did not seem to have special access to Him. Sadly, though, his family clearly included non-believers, per John 7:5.

For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother: These beloved ones who do the will of God (i.e., believe in Jesus) stand in contrast to the "evil and adulterous generation" represented by the Pharisees earlier in this chapter.