



Week 3 – Eschatology/Judgement

Day 1 – True Obedience - Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49

Matthew 7:24-27 “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

Luke 6:46-49 “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and don’t do what I say? I’ll show what it’s like when someone comes to me, hears my words, and puts them into practice. It’s like a person building a house by digging deep and laying the foundation on bedrock. When the flood came, the rising water smashed against that house, but the water couldn’t shake the house because it was well built. But those who don’t put into practice what they hear are like a person who built a house without a foundation. The floodwater smashed against it and it collapsed instantly. It was completely destroyed.”

Understanding the Passage:

Both of these passages come after a long teaching from Jesus. Some of the high points in this teaching are about how the poor and oppressed will be blessed. The Golden Rule is here in Matthew. Jesus’ famous “love your enemies” passage is featured here. Both Luke and Matthew contain the teaching about judging others as it relates to our judgement.

In Jesus’ time it was common for people to follow a rabbi. So a small group like Jesus and the women and men who followed him was not uncommon to see traveling and moving about together. Those who followed a rabbi would address their rabbi as Lord. So Jesus asks an honest question, “Why do you call me Lord if you do not do as I teach?” You, who have committed your life to me... you, who have dropped everything to travel around with me and learn from me... you who will one day live as I live, teaching people my way, THE way... Why are you not doing as I say? It doesn’t make sense to devote one’s life to following Jesus and then not actually do what he teaches.

In this passage Jesus says to do three things; (1) Come to me, (2) Hear my words, (3) Do as I say. One could even make the assumption here that doing these three things is like building your house on solid rock. This rhythm of continually coming to Jesus, hearing his words, and doing what he says is the rhythm of life for a disciple of Christ.

Trials and challenges will come to the front door of a Christ follower. The rains and wind will press in on all sides. But that doing what Jesus says, living out what he teaches has a solidifying and a fortifying effect on our lives. When we come, hear and do we begin to set in stone practices that are long lasting, tough, able to stand strong in the toughest of winds and highest of flood waters.

Life will throw what it can at us and those of us who aren't ready might be washed away. Those of us who are not currently practiced in doing what Jesus says to do will not hold fast to Jesus in the storm. Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes permanent. This passage teaches us that when we are practiced in our faith that practice solidifies our faith, makes it permanent. Then when the storms come the foundations holds firm.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What does it mean to do come to Jesus, hear his words, and do as He says? (vs. 47)
2. What does a life built on Christ's teachings looks like? (refer to the previous section in Matthew 7 and Luke 6)
3. Have you ever been through a crisis or challenge? Did you find it easy to cling to Jesus at that time or was it a challenge? Share with the group your journey and reflect on this.
4. What does it mean to come to Jesus, hear his words, and do as he says?

Day 2 - Matthew 21:28-31

"What do you think? A man had two sons. Now he came to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 'No, I don't want to,' he replied. But later he changed his mind and went. "The father said the same thing to the other son, who replied, 'Yes, sir.' But he didn't go. "Which one of these two did his father's will?" They said, "The first one." Jesus said to them, "I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God's kingdom ahead of you.

Understanding the Passage:

They're doing it again. The religious leaders of the day are challenging the authority of Jesus. Look to Chapter 21, verse 23. One of the chief priests directly calls Jesus out. Who are you? By who's authority do you do these things? He answers the question with a question and Jesus stumped them. He then moves into teaching about who will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven, which gets everyone's attention and does the same for us today.

The parable is simple. Both sons receive the same request from their father. Both refuse to work in the field. First take note of the relationship here. Jesus doesn't talk about a slave and a master or a CEO and employees or a coach and players. Jesus chooses a parental relationship, a relationship that even then was loving and close and contained authority, but that authority was supported by blood, love and support.

Both say no and have the right to do so. But the first son changes his mind. Even though he originally rejected the command to go work in the field he eventually goes to work in the field. The other son does not work in the field. So which did the will of the father?

We can believe in Christ. We can hope in Christ. We can love Christ. We can seek and find him. We can be in a relationship with Christ, but if we do not act as if he is real then we miss the opportunity to live within the will of the Father. This passage makes clear to us that what we do matters. It matters to Christ that we are doing the will of the Father. It matters to Jesus that we act like we believe, not simply say with our mouth that we believe.

It can be said that if you look at where people spend their money and time then you'll see what they actually believe. Our credit card statements and calendars reveal our true beliefs. That being said we must also view ourselves with gentleness and grace knowing that Jesus does the same.

This parable offers us an invitation to go and work in the field of God. Jesus invites us into his economy, his job site to hear his words and do his will. And even though our first, knee-jerk reaction might be, "I can't" or "I don't have time" or "I'm not interested." We can always change our mind. Jesus offers endless opportunities for us to always readjust and come back to the work to which he's calling us.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What does this passage mean for those who have continued to reject God's invitation?
2. Take a look at your calendar and budget. What percentage of your time is spent helping the poor, the needy, or participating in faith practices, etc.? Be kind and gentle with yourself and reflect on how you might begin to

make a few changes. Perhaps you need not change one thing, but it's always good to ask the question. Be gentle and kind to yourself.

3. Where do you need to 'change your mind' in your life? What does this phrase mean to you?

Day 3 – Great Banquet – Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:15-24

Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus responded by speaking again in parables: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding party for his son. He sent his servants to call those invited to the wedding party. But they didn't want to come. Again he sent other servants and said to them, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Look, the meal is all prepared. I've butchered the oxen and the fattened cattle. Now everything's ready. Come to the wedding party!"' But they paid no attention and went away—some to their fields, others to their businesses. The rest of them grabbed his servants, abused them, and killed them.

"The king was angry. He sent his soldiers to destroy those murderers and set their city on fire. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding party is prepared, but those who were invited weren't worthy. Therefore, go to the roads on the edge of town and invite everyone you find to the wedding party.'

"Then those servants went to the roads and gathered everyone they found, both evil and good. The wedding party was full of guests. Now when the king came in and saw the guests, he spotted a man who wasn't wearing wedding clothes. He said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' But he was speechless. Then the king said to his servants, 'Tie his hands and feet and throw him out into the farthest darkness. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.'

"Many people are invited, but few people are chosen."

Luke 14:15-24 When one of the dinner guests heard Jesus' remarks, he said to Jesus, "Happy are those who will feast in God's kingdom." Jesus replied, "A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, 'Come! The dinner is now ready.' One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him, 'I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I bought five teams of oxen, and I'm going to check on them. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.' The servant said, 'Master, your instructions have been followed and there is still room.' The master said to the servant, 'Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

Understanding the Passage:

The story of the great banquet in both gospel accounts tell similar stories of a King or Host inviting people to their party that has been prepared for them. When those whom have been invited either refuse to come or come up with excuses for why they cannot make it, the host becomes angry and instructs the servants to go out and invite others in order to "fill the house." While both stories are likely the same parable with the underlying truth that God is inviting everyone into God's grand banquet, the two Gospels take on fairly different tones which probably is in accordance with the gospel writer's theology or perspective.

For instance, the gospel of Matthew is thought to be written more towards Jewish followers of Jesus, and so the language of those who were originally invited is much harsher than Luke's account. Furthermore, it remains more the focus of the parable, making the parable an allegory of salvation history from the prophets to the coming of Jesus, and concluding with the final judgment. The end of this parable can be troubling to some who are reading it without an ear towards Matthew's audience. Matthew is offering a warning to those who already find themselves on the inside of the party. To not presume on grace if they accept an invitation and do nothing but show up to the party, as the man without wedding clothes had done. This warning has a similar tone and feel to the sheep and the goats' parable where the goats thought they would be welcomed in but had no real relationship with Jesus.

The author Luke has a different audience in mind and thus focuses more on those who were originally left off the invite list. The Gentiles, the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized were all a part of Luke's central gospel message and his emphasis on them here is an example of this. Here the host is empathic about filling the house and is asking his servant to go and compel those on the outside to join him on the inside of the feast. Jesus died not only for God's chosen people, but for the entire world.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What are some of the other differences that you noticed between the two scriptures?
2. When was a time you made excuses in your relationship with God?
3. How can we be God's servants by "urging" people to come into God's House?

Day 4 – Wheat and Weeds – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared.

"The servants of the landowner came and said to him, 'Master, didn't you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?' "An enemy has done this,' he answered. "The servants said to him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?' "But the landowner said, 'No, because if you gather the weeds, you'll pull up the wheat along with them. Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvesttime I'll say to the harvesters, "First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn.'"

Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." Jesus replied, "The one who plants the good seed is the Human One. The field is the world. And the good seeds are the followers of the kingdom. But the weeds are the followers of the evil one. The enemy who planted them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the present age. The harvesters are the angels. Just as people gather weeds and burn them in the fire, so it will be at the end of the present age. The Human One will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that cause people to fall away and all people who sin. He will throw them into a burning furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. Those who have ears should hear."

Understanding the Passage:

The parable of the weeds is one of the few parables we have where Jesus also gives a plain account of its meaning, so interpreting the parable should not take much heaving lifting on the reader's part. However, the indiscernible nature between things that will go on into eternity (wheat) and things that will be destroyed or cast into the fire (weeds) can be expounded upon further. Here Jesus is reminding the reader that we are not the judge of who, or even what, is of God and there is some danger in presuming that we are. If we root out what we believe to be bad or evil, we may do harm to people in the process. I have been told that the official definition of a weed is really anything that the owner doesn't want to be in the garden and, therefore, reinforces the idea that only the owner of the field (Jesus) is the true definer of what a weed actually is.

The other thing of note in this parable is the two different sowers represented here as Jesus, who sows the good seed, and the devil, who corrupts the field under the darkness of night. This should remind the reader that not everything around us that we currently see is of God's will or purpose. These competing wills are important for us to consider when we see pain, brokenness, and injustice in our world. Even though we may not see everything clearly before the final harvest, we can proclaim that God is not responsible for the "weeds" we see around us. There will come a time when all pain and death shall cease and any corruption by the enemy will pass away.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What in our world or culture today would you describe as a "weed?"
2. How might this parable make you hesitant in claiming someone or something as not of God?
3. Jesus introduces an opposing will to the Master's, how might that influence your understanding of the world around you?

Day 5 – Barren Fig Tree – Luke 13: 6-9

Jesus told this parable: “A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He said to his gardener, ‘Look, I’ve come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I’ve never found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil’s nutrients?’ The gardener responded, ‘Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer. Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.’”

Understanding the Passage:

The theme of this parable is a clear warning that reiterates the theme of impending judgment. The owner of the fig tree (God) is questioning the usefulness of his chosen people who have yet to produce any fruit. The time is coming when they will be judged, not by their name but by their fruit.

Some people have linked the “three years” as an allegory for Jesus’ ministry. But based on commentary that I have read, that is unlikely. Regardless, the message is clear and alarming to the reader who finds themselves fruitless before the fig tree owner. God shows grace on the unrepentant by allowing more time for them to produce fruit in the coming year. This warning is in itself an act of mercy on God’s part.

Even though this passage may be directed towards a different audience, it should not be written off by us as the reader today. With our protestant emphases on grace and faith alone, we sometimes undervalue the point that what we do as believers still matters in the kingdom. John Wesley once wrote that while we are indeed justified by grace, we ought to be judged by our actions. We would be wise to remember that Jesus often times came down hardest on those who already professed to know God (the Pharisees) and showed compassion and mercy to those who had yet to know him.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection:

1. What stands out to you in this passage? What emotions does it evoke?
2. Where have you seen evidence of God’s work in your life?
3. What in your own life may need to be cut out because it is no longer useful or helpful to your walk with Christ?

Video Questions:

1. Which of the five parables discussed this week was your favorite? Which was your least favorite? Why?
2. Sometimes Eschatology (the end times) and Judgment can be hard topics of discussion. Do you find it difficult reflecting on these parables?
3. What is the connection between readiness and authentic relationship with God?
4. Based on these parables, what do you think the Kingdom of God will be like?
5. What might God be challenging you with today based on this conversation?
6. What is the hope you have in the coming Kingdom based on the parables discussed?