

The Coming and Going of the Disciples

by Dick Woodward

The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking inward, looking upward, and applying the golden rule in order to be effective in helping others and fulfilling the mission of the church.

Duration: 20:47

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-14, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:7-12, Luke 11:9-10

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of looking up to God and committing to Him. He highlights the need to address our own shortcomings before trying to help others. The speaker shares a story about a custodian in a church who only saw the sermon as applicable to others, not realizing that it also applied to himself. The sermon concludes with a call to continuously seek God, ask for His guidance, and be a part of His solution in the world by being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The speaker encourages listeners to let their good works shine and bring glory to God.

Transcript

Today's lesson is about asking for a meaningful coming to Christ. Listen carefully to today's lesson as together we learn to be better disciples. Ask and it shall be given you.

Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be open to you. For everyone who asks, receives.

And he who seeks, finds. And to him who knocks, it will be opened. Or what man is there among you? If his son asked for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asked for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him? Therefore whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.

For this is the law and the prophets. As we continue in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus is bringing the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to a verdict. He is bringing it to a conclusion.

To use our metaphor, he is now closing out the first Christian retreat. He began this first Christian retreat by inviting disciples to join him on a mountaintop so that he might give them the teaching that, when applied and internalized and understood, would make them the salt of the earth and the light of the world, part of his answer, part of his solution to the problems all represented at the bottom of the mountain. In this

teaching, Jesus was exhorting them to look inward and to look around, to look upward.

And as he concludes this teaching in the first paragraph of chapter 7, verses 1 through 6, he is saying to them, now make the commitment to look inward. You are never going to be part of their solution unless you have solutions yourself. You cannot save others if you are not saved yourself.

We are told that when the great English evangelist John Wesley went to Georgia in the United States, he was not yet converted. He was a believer and a follower, but he had not experienced that new birth. John Wesley said later, after he was born again, he was so enthusiastic about that spiritual date of his that he has always preached, you must be born again, you must be born again.

While he was there in Georgia trying to save the Indians, he said, I came to Georgia to save the Indians, but oh, who is going to save John Wesley? Then people would say, John Wesley, why do you always preach you must be born again? And he would say, because you must be born again. It meant so much to him that he preached it that way. But John Wesley is an example of the fact that you cannot save the Indians if you have not been saved yourself.

And so in this closing, in the first six verses, Jesus said, judge yourself first, make sure that you get the log out of your own eye before you think that you're going to be effective in helping people get the specks out of their eyes. I am amazed at how many people missed this important paragraph and the truth that it teaches. I'm sure you've heard the story about the pastor who had a custodian in his church.

Every Sunday, the custodian would say, great sermon, pastor, you really gave it to him today. And the pastor would think, I wonder when Joe, who professed to be a believer, is going to realize the message is for him too. One Sunday, there was a terrible snowstorm and nobody made it to the church except the custodian.

The pastor decided that the two of them were going to have church anyway. So he went through the whole order of worship and after preaching a great sermon and pronouncing a benediction, he went to the back door and Joe shook his hand and said, good sermon, pastor, too bad there wasn't anybody here to hear it. I think Jesus used an illustration to show us how ridiculous we are sometimes.

He gives the illustration in the opening of chapter seven when he says, why are you going around with a log or plank sticking out of your eye thinking that your purpose in life is to get the specks of sawdust out of the eyes of other people? And then Jesus said, you hypocrite. First, get that plank out of your own eye. Then you can clearly see to help your brother.

He was not really saying, as we saw in our last study, you're never allowed to judge. He was saying to judge yourself first and then you will be equipped to judge your brother in the sense of helping him. In that last verse, he said, and be discriminating in the way you minister to people, probably meaning those people at the bottom of the hill.

Everybody is not ready for everything. So never give to the dogs that which is holy and don't throw your pearls before pigs. I believe he was saying there that you have to be discerning.

You have to judge. The scriptures tells us not to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. That would apply to marriage, of course, but it would also apply to partnerships and business.

How could you obey a teaching like that at the end of second Corinthians six, if you do not judge, and if you never judge anybody, if you study the subject of judgment in the scripture, it is not as simple as judge not. There are times when you do not judge such as first Corinthians four, when the apostle Paul says, I do not know the motives of my heart. So I don't see how you can know what they are.

So in the area of heart motives, Paul says, judge nothing until the Lord comes. He, Jesus will bring to light the hidden motives of the heart, and then people will have their judgment. In the first paragraph of chapter seven, Jesus is coming down to the end, and he is saying to make the commitment to look inward.

He has exhorted the disciples in chapter five at the first part of this retreat to look inward. And now, as he is bringing this teaching to a conclusion, he is saying, you have to look inward. You will never help those people at the bottom of the mountain.

If you had not found the help yourself, you cannot lead them where you've never been. You cannot share a solution with them. If you don't have the solution yourself, you cannot communicate the spiritual values to them.

If those values are not your values. In this next paragraph, verses seven through twelve, you might say Jesus is summing up his message. Jesus is saying to make the commitment to look upward.

He told us to look inward, and he exhorted us to look upward in this great teaching. Now he is saying, make the commitment to look upward. You will never get your solution without looking upward.

So make the commitment to look upward. These are beautiful verses. If you get into them in the original language, they read something like this.

Ask continuously and sooner or later it will be given to you. Continuously seek and you will find. Continuously knock and the door will be opened unto you.

What is he talking about here? Well, he's talking about the upward look. There are many things in the scripture that are very simple, like the forgiveness of sins. Somebody said regarding the forgiveness of sins, the Bible teaches it.

I believe it. And that settles it. But you could say, the Bible teaches it.

I question it. And so that unsettles it. But really, if you believe what the scripture says about the forgiveness of sin, and you have sin in your life that is unconfessed, then you either believe it or you don't.

And if you believe what the Bible says, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and that if we confess our sins, God will be faithful to his word and he will forgive us our sins and his blood will cleanse us from every and all unrighteousness. Now, if you believe 1 John 1, 9, where that is stated, that should settle it. It's simple.

It's as simple as putting cookies on the bottom shelf so everybody can reach them. The scriptures are there for anybody who will believe. Everything in the scripture is not like that.

Knowing God is not like that. An upward look is not like that. As we saw in chapter 6, there are some spiritual disciplines that give us a sustained and structured upward look.

You have to maintain those spiritual disciplines in order to maintain that upward look. You have to maintain and sustain your upward look every day of your life. That is what this is saying.

The words ask, seek, and knock are in the continuous tense in the Greek language. And so Jesus is not saying to ask only once or seek once or knock once. He is saying that there should be a continuous, persistent, and persevering kind of asking.

And then there should be a continuous seeking. Seeking is intense asking. And so there should be a continuous and persevering seeking.

And then what is knocking? Well, I believe knocking is very intense seeking. He is teaching that there should be a continuous, persistent, asking, seeking, and knocking. And here's the great promise.

If you will persevere in your upward look, if you will continuously ask, continuously seek, continuously knock, then the door will be opened up to you. And then here's the great promise. Everyone who asks in the right way will receive.

Everyone who seeks in the right way will find. And everyone who knocks in the right way, it will open up to him. Those are magnificent promises.

But before you focus upon verse 8, you have to focus upon verse 7. There has to be this continuous asking, seeking, and knocking. Jesus taught us that prayer is to be continuous, persevering prayer. He taught that men should pray always and not faint.

And he gave those teachings with our examples of people persisting. There was that one with the widow who kept coming to the judge. And the judge finally said, though I fear not God nor regard man, I'm going to answer this widow's problems because she's about to pester me to death.

Luke chapter 18 verses 4 and 5. Now the application is not saying God is like the unjust judge in the sense of unrighteousness and not justice. But if even an unjust judge who did not care about God or man would meet the need of an old widow because she kept coming and persevering with the unjust judge until he responded to her, how much more then would our loving and just God respond to persevering prayer? I believe this is a great teaching and to see it in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, it is a summing up. Jesus is bringing things to a verdict.

He is saying, listen, make the commitment to look up because everybody who looks up breaks through. Don't think of that as a simple thing. If you have prayed one time, God, I would like to know you.

Do not think that's going to be sufficient. He uses this great illustration. He illustrates the sin nature of human beings when he says, if you then being evil or though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children.

How much more will your father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? I think you could say what he is suggesting here in context is to make the commitment to look upward. Then in verse 12, you have what is called the golden rule. What is the rule? Well, someone has said he who has gold makes the rules.

Well, no, that's not the golden rule. This is the golden rule in Matthew chapter seven, verse 12. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you do also to them.

For this is the law and the profits, or in other words, therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. For this is the law and the profits. This is considered the greatest ethical teaching that has ever been given in terms of human relationships.

And what is it teaching? It is teaching first of all, that you must put yourself in the other person's place. I think that's the hardest part about this golden rule, putting yourself in the other person's place. Once you've done that, and that's not easy to do, ask yourself this question.

If you were that other person, what would you now want the person that you are to do? When you get the answer to that, do it. And that sums up the law and the profits, the whole Bible on the subject of human ethics, ethics that are to be applied to human relationships. In other words, Jesus is saying, look down the hill.

Now you see all those people down there? Let us say you are a white man. As you look down the hill, you see people out there who are of another race. Now think of it this way.

Put yourself in the place of that other man. Get inside his skin and ask yourself this question. If I were that man, what would I want to happen to me? And when you get the answer to that, do it.

In other words, Jesus is saying that we must make the commitment to look around. Of course, this is a two-way street. Human relationships are a two-way street.

If you are one caste or race, and you look down the hill and see someone who is different, what would you want that other person to do? Well, when you know the answer to that question, then do it because that is the golden rule of relations. By application, when you look down the hill and you see a woman, then if you were that woman, what would you want men to do? Well, then do it because that is the golden rule of domestic relations. Put yourself in the place of your wife, and you will find the golden rule for domestic relations.

If you look down the hill and you see people from another country or tribe, what do you do? Maybe those people have horrendous problems, population problems, problems of government, poverty, starvation, and famine. Put yourself in their place as you see them at the bottom of the hill. Ask yourself this question.

If I were those people, what would I want people to do to help me? What would I want this prosperous, affluent, blessed follower of Christ to do? When you get the answer, apply that answer, for that's the golden rule of missions. Do it because that is the way to make the commitment to look around and apply the teaching of Jesus. Of course, when you look down the hill and you see people who are not saved, people who have not experienced the miracle of salvation and regeneration, who are not believers, they don't have this eternal life that Jesus came to give, and they don't have the quality of life that God wants people to have.

Put yourself in their place. Now, as the scripture says, if you were lost and empty, if you had a body full of darkness that was so wretched and grotesque, if you were lost like that, what would you want the believer who has come to Christ and who has found his rest and his peace in Christ, who is filled with love and joy and all the other fruits of the Holy Spirit, what would you want that spiritually advantaged believer to do? When you get the answer to that question, do it because that's the golden rule of missions, and that should be the mission of the church, and that should be the whole purpose of the church. Someone has said, the church is the only organization in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members.

There's a sense in which that is very true. One of the great purposes of the church is to be a vehicle of mission. The purpose of the church is to be a missionary organization, really.

That's what Jesus is teaching here on this mountaintop. He's recruiting disciples. He will commission them right after they come off the hill to be apostles, which means sent ones or missionaries.

Eventually, after training them for three years, he will give them what we call the great commission, in which he will say to them, go to the whole world, to every creature on earth, make disciples in all the nations of the world, baptize those disciples, get them to make a clear-cut profession of faith, and then teach those disciples everything I've taught you, and I will be with you right up to the end of the age. That's in Matthew chapter 28, verses 19 through 20. That commission was given over 2,000 years ago.

That was the mission of the 12. The 12, as they implemented that mission, saw church come into existence. We need to get back to the origins of the church and see it and its purpose in a pure form and realize the mission of the church has always been the great commission.

The great commission is the charter of the church, and like any other organization, the church should fulfill the terms of her charter or she should cease and desist. Dr. Robert S. Glover said that a long time ago, and I agree with that statement. That is why as Jesus brought this retreat to a conclusion, he now told the disciples to make the commitment to look inward.

There are many people who will never look inward. Perhaps they are the dogs and the pigs. You don't throw your pearls to them.

You don't give that which is holy to them. They are never going to look inward. They are never going to consider their own need for these things.

You do not minister to everybody indiscriminately. You must make the commitment to look inward yourself and apply all this teaching first to yourself and then to the people there at the bottom of the hill. So as Jesus sums up the teaching here in chapter 7, he is exhorting in the same manner that he began the retreat.

He is saying now make the commitment to look inward. Jesus has exhorted them and us to look upward in chapter 6 and to maintain the upward look in order to have the spiritual disciplines and the spiritual values that come from the upward look. He is saying here in Matthew 7 verses 7 through 11, now make the commitment to look up.

You simply must look up. It must be a continuous persistent upward look. You have simply got to break through to God regularly and consistently before you can minister to other people.

So in these magnificent verses 7 through 11, he is saying to make the commitment to look upward. Then in the golden rule, verse 12, he is saying now make the commitment to look around. There's a sense in which the only person who is ready to look around and be part of the solution and part of the answer is the person who has looked inward and looked upward.

But it is only after you have looked inward that you can see the things that must be seen and confessed and trusted to Christ for not only the forgiveness of them but also for regeneration that will make us new creatures that do not go on repeating the same old habits. We must look inward and we must look upward. It is only when we have looked in meaningfully and looked up meaningfully that we are ready to look

around.

There's a pattern that runs through all the great biographies of scripture. I call it the coming and the going of the people of God. The great workers for God are first of all the great worshipers of God.

Before people go for Christ and for God meaningfully and fruitfully, they must come to God through Christ meaningfully and fruitfully. It is only when we have had a fruitful meaningful coming that we can have a fruitful meaningful going. And that seems to be the pattern of the way Jesus brings the first Christian retreat to a conclusion.

He is saying that you have to have a coming to God. You have to look upward and persevere and break through to him. You have to ask, seek, and knock until it is given to you, until you find, until it opens up to you.

Then you are ready to apply the golden rule. Then you are ready to make the commitment to look around. And then of course, it also follows that as you come, there's a looking inward, but there has to be this inward look and this upward look that is involved in the coming to God yourself, to Christ yourself.

That has to happen before there can be a going. One of the reasons why our going as the church has been so ineffective is that many of us only go. We don't ever really come first.

The invitation at the first Christian retreat was to have a meaningful coming to Christ. Look upward and look inward as you come and then go, go for Jesus Christ and be part of his solution and part of his answer. Be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Let your light so shine that men will see your good works and glorify your father and be pointed to your father who is in heaven. If you have already had a meaningful coming to Christ, our prayer is that God is using these lessons to prepare you to have a meaningful going for him. Please plan to be with us next time, which will be our final lesson in this special series on the Sermon on the Mount.

Now, until we meet again, may our God who gives grace and mercy fill you with encouragement as you seek to serve him each day.

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