

All That Jesus Taught Bible Study - Part 41

by Zac Poonen

Jesus' teachings emphasize the importance of doing what we have learned, and the privilege of the new covenant is having the Holy Spirit within us, not just upon us.

Duration: 25:14

Scripture: Acts 1:1, Matthew 11:1-12, Matthew 28:20, Ephesians 1:3

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of understanding and following all that Jesus taught, emphasizing the need to teach others to obey His commands. It explores the tireless nature of Jesus' ministry and the significance of preparing the way for Christ. The sermon also addresses John the Baptist's doubts, highlighting the difference between the old and new covenants and the potential believers have in the kingdom of heaven. It concludes with a call to live wholeheartedly for God, engaging in spiritual warfare to possess the riches of God's kingdom.

Transcript

We continue today with our study on all that Jesus taught. And as I've been saying repeatedly, the reason why we study this is because this was the last commission that Jesus gave to his apostles before ascending to heaven. He told them in Matthew 28 and verse 20 to teach people to obey or do or observe everything that I commanded you, and lo, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age.

Remember that promise to be with us always to the end of the age is given specifically to those who teach others to do everything that Jesus commanded. And so that's why it's important for us to go through the Gospels to discover all that Jesus taught. Otherwise we will not know, and if we don't know it, we won't be able to do it ourselves.

And then we won't be able to teach others. There's a difference between teaching people something and teaching people to do something. When we teach people something, it is just like explaining something on the blackboard.

You could teach swimming on a blackboard without knowing swimming yourself. But to teach people to do would be to actually go to the river and show them how to swim. So when Jesus told us to teach others to do, it means that we have to do it ourselves first.

And that's the principle in which Jesus himself lived. If you see Acts chapter 1 and verse 1, it says there in Acts 1 verse 1 that the first account, which is the Gospel of Luke, which Luke wrote first, before he wrote Acts and the Apostles, he tells Theophilus, the title for that Gospel of Luke is All that Jesus began to do and then to teach. So he first did and then taught.

And if Luke were to give a similar title to the Acts and the Apostles, it would be All that Jesus continued to do and to teach. Luke's Gospel was what Jesus began to do and to teach in his physical body and Acts and the Apostles is what Jesus continued to do and teach in his spiritual body. Again, the doing must come first.

So keeping that in mind, we continue with our study. We reached the end of Matthew 10 in our last episode. And now we come to Matthew chapter 11 and verse 1. And it says here that it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his 12 disciples, and that's what we studied in our last couple of sessions, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities.

You see something of that tireless nature with which Jesus served during those three and a half years ministry. He never took a vacation. He was constantly on the go with this burden to complete the ministry the Father had given him to complete on this earth.

And every true servant of God will have that same passion. Jesus taught us by his life to be tireless in our service for God. It says he went about teaching and preaching in all the cities.

And then we read when John the Baptist was in prison and he heard about the works of Christ, he sent word through his disciples and said to Christ, Are you the expected one or shall we look for someone else? Now this is interesting because later on Jesus says that John the Baptist was the greatest man born of women and the greatest prophet ever up until that time. And yet this man who was the greatest prophet had doubts about the Christ, whether Jesus was the Messiah, even though he had seen those supernatural signs at Jesus' baptism, the dove coming down, the voice from heaven, and the sense in his own spirit that this was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. So why did this doubt come into John's mind? First of all, remember that he was under the old covenant.

We cannot compare ourselves with him because in the new covenant we have the Holy Spirit and we have many privileges which people under the old covenant just didn't have. So we're not here to compare ourselves with him. But the reason is that when John was in prison, he expected Jesus to be able to deliver him.

He expected God to deliver him from prison because he had faithfully fulfilled his ministry. Why was God allowing him to be in prison? Now Paul never had that type of question when Paul was in prison. He didn't have that type of question when he was in prison, not because they were better than John the Baptist, but because they had the Holy Spirit.

And that's why we must never compare ourselves with Old Testament saints and prophets when we see the mistakes they made, even David committing adultery. Remember, he was under the old covenant. Many Christians don't understand the distinct difference between old covenant and new covenant.

The privilege we have of being filled with the Holy Spirit today from within, which they never had in the old covenant. It says John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. It was only upon him.

The Spirit of God was upon John but not within. Today we have the Spirit within. In the old covenant there was a veil between the soul and the Spirit.

So the Spirit could not penetrate through that into man's spirit and dwell within. The Spirit could only be upon people and flow over them and be a blessing perhaps to thousands. But in the new covenant the Spirit comes because the veil has been rent between the soul and the Spirit.

Man can have God dwelling right within his spirit and from within, from the innermost being, the rivers of living water flow. That's the difference. So we read here that John the Baptist had this doubt because the Spirit was not within him.

And so he wondered, why am I still in prison? I'm supposed to be the forerunner of Christ and I want to complete my ministry. He didn't realize that he had completed his ministry. And so when he asked this question to Jesus, are you really the Messiah? Jesus doesn't say to him, don't you remember what you saw at the baptism? No.

He understands the struggle people under the old covenant had and he says, go and report to John what you hear and see. How the blind receive sight, the lame are walking, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. That's the greatest of all.

In ascending order, blind receiving sight and the lame walking, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised up. And the greatest of all, the poor have the gospel preached to them. So the Lord was saying, here are the signs that prove that I am the Messiah.

And so we see clearly that all these signs mentioned in verse 5 were not necessarily to be repeated throughout the Christian era that throughout 2,000 years Christians would go around giving all blind people sight and making all deaf people hear and cleanse all lepers and raise all dead people. That's not the meaning. These were specific signs that were meant to endorse the fact that Jesus was the Messiah himself.

And he makes it very clear here because that was the question, how do we know you're the Messiah? It's important for us to understand what Jesus was teaching here so that we don't live under the false illusion that a lot of Christians live today that every single Christian who is sick must be healed. It doesn't work and preachers who preach that are leading others into a deception. So remember these were the signs that endorsed the fact that Jesus was the Messiah.

And then he goes on to say in verse 6, blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me, who doesn't get offended with something I do or don't do. It's very easy for Christians to be offended when they expect God to do something and he does not do it. For example, here in John the Baptist's case he was expecting Christ to deliver him from prison.

It didn't happen as he anticipated or expected. And he was disappointed and offended perhaps. And it's in this connection that the Lord is saying, blessed is he who never gets offended with me.

It's one of the things that Jesus taught that we need to practice in our own life that whether God does not do what we expect or does something which we don't expect, that we don't get offended because we believe that he is sovereign and he knows what is best for us. We don't know it ourselves but he knows what is best and he will do what is best for his children. And then as they were going away, in Matthew 11, 7, then Jesus began to speak to the multitudes about John and said to them, what did you go out into the

wilderness to look at? Were you looking for a reed shaken by the wind, an unsteady sort of person like many creatures are? They bend in whichever way the wind is blowing.

The Lord was saying, is this the type of person you went to see? You may have seen many preachers, he says, he implies, who are moved by the wind of public opinion. If people are craving for something, the reed moves that way. Today we read of seeker-friendly churches and they are trying to say that they are fulfilling Christ's ministry of being the friend of sinners.

But you don't become the friend of sinners by compromising your convictions because then you're not a friend of sinners at all because you don't deliver them from their sin and their worldliness. So seeker-friendly churches and seeker-friendly attitudes result in compromise of our convictions. We become like reeds that are swaying with the wind.

The wind blows to the left, we move to the left. The wind blows to the right, we move to the right. We see so much of that today.

We see, for example, a craze suddenly beginning of people falling down on the ground and laughing uncontrollably. Then other preachers see it and say, hey, this is the way things are going so we better manipulate and produce that in our congregation as well. And then after a while you see someone laying hands on somebody and pushing them down somewhere, usually in the West somewhere.

And then you find in many third world countries people begin to imitate that and say, hey, this is the way we should be doing it. This is the way for popularity. Or you hear someone else talking about the prosperity gospel or healing and they begin to think, okay, that's what we must be preaching now.

And then they begin to sway that way. These are not prophets of God. These are people who preach to those who want their ears tickled.

Seeker friendly people, messages that are meant to please man. The Apostle Paul said in Galatians 1 verse 10, if I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Christ. It's very, very important to remember that.

That if I ever seek to please human beings, I can never be the servant of Jesus Christ. It's a fundamental principle. It's not that I can be an inferior servant.

I cannot be a servant at all. A man has to choose when he wants to preach God's word, whether he's going to be a servant of God or a servant of the people. He should not be like a reed swayed by the wind or shaken by the wind.

God wants people who are upright, like firm trees rooted in the ground, that even a storm will not shake. And so he says, did you go out to see one of these regular preachers that you've seen in your synagogues out there in the wilderness? No, not at all. Then what did you go out to see? Did you go out to see a man dressed in soft clothing? Because all those who wear soft clothing are in king's palaces.

In other words, he said, did you expect to go and see a preacher who's dressed in the latest style? With branded suits and very expensive clothes made by the most expensive tailors. He said, these people are not true servants of God. They just collect tithes from the poor people, buy expensive clothes and cars and houses for themselves.

He said, those are not true prophets. There are plenty of them today. We need these warnings today about what Jesus considered to be the mark of a true prophet.

But what did you go out to see? To see a prophet? Well, I'll tell you something. Yes, but one who is more than a prophet. It's amazing that Jesus referred to John the Baptist as someone who was more than a prophet.

I mean, in the Old Testament, the prophet was the greatest servant of God who expressed God's mind. What does it mean to be greater than a prophet? And he says, because this is the one about whom it is written, I send my messenger before my face who will prepare your way before you. All the prophets prophesied about the coming of Christ.

But John the Baptist was unique. He came to actually prepare the way just before the Messiah came. He was the last of the prophets of the Old Covenant.

And had the unique privilege of preparing the way for the arrival of the Messiah. Because he's the one who preached, repent for the kingdom of heaven is now at hand. None of the Old Testament prophets preached the kingdom of heaven.

They preached the kingdom of earth. That if you honor God, God will give you the land of Canaan and he will deliver you from your earthly enemies and he will kill the giants in Canaan and he will give you rain from heaven and bless and prosper you and heal you of your sicknesses. These are the things the Old Testament prophets prophesied.

But John the Baptist preached the kingdom of heaven. He says you've got to repent, you've got to turn around from living for these earthly things and something new is coming. The Messiah is now coming and he's not going to deliver you from the Romans, he's going to deliver you from sin.

And he's not going to help you to have a beautiful land better than the land of Canaan. He's going to lead you to a heavenly life on this earth. You're not going to get much of this earth with this new message but you're going to get all of heaven.

So in that sense he was the greatest prophet of all and that's why he said he's more than a prophet, one who is going to prepare the way before me. And he goes on to say in verse 11, truly I say to you among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist but the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. That's an amazing statement.

We who belong to the kingdom of heaven are greater than John the Baptist, have the potential to be greater than John the Baptist. It's an amazing statement. John the Baptist was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets and we can be greater even than him.

In what way? Because he could only say get ready for the kingdom of heaven is near whereas we can say the kingdom of heaven has come. It's right here. Now we can enter in and we can live this heavenly life right now.

John the Baptist could not lead people into a heavenly life. He could only prepare the way and that is the way in which we have a greater ministry than even him because he could only say Christ is coming. Now we say Christ has come, risen, ascended and you can receive him into your life.

You can receive the Holy Spirit into your life and come into a glorious new life. This is what we preach. And also, John the Baptist had the spirit upon him whereas we can have the spirit within us not on top of us.

Like every old covenant prophet including John the Baptist upon but within. There's a very fundamental difference between the old covenant and the new covenant. If you're only interested in ministry then we need the spirit upon us.

The Old Testament people had a tremendous ministry with the spirit upon them but it didn't change their inner life. Samson blessed Israel in many ways but his inner life was full of lust. Even David delivered Israel from many of its enemies but he was defeated within his life by sexual lust.

That's not to be true for any servant of God in the new covenant. So when you hear of a preacher today falling into adultery or some other sin he's living like an Old Testament person even if he's been a blessing to millions. Well, a lot of people in the Old Testament prophets were a blessing to many, many people but the spirit was not within them.

So in that sense we are greater than John the Baptist. It doesn't mean that every Christian is more wholehearted. What it means is there's greater potential and like for example if we are to compare ourselves in the mathematical field because we have access to computers today we can do calculations far better and quicker than great mathematicians who lived a hundred years ago.

It doesn't mean that we are greater mathematicians than them. It means we have got greater resources and because we have greater resources we can do some things which those great minds who lived a hundred years ago could not do. So if you compare yourself with Albert Einstein who was one of the greatest geniuses in the 20th century we can do calculations faster than him.

Not because we are cleverer than him but because we have certain access to certain gadgets like computers which he didn't have access to. So it's in that way that he's saying that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist. A little boy using a computer today can calculate things faster than the great scientist Albert Einstein and with the potential we have in the new covenant we can rise higher than John the Baptist in our life.

It's not just a matter of doubt as to is Jesus the Messiah. We can come to a life where we never doubt whether Jesus is our savior or not. Even if we are in prison for years.

I mean we know of great saints of God in many lands where they were persecuted for the faith and they were in prison for many years 10-15 years but they never lost their faith. They never asked the type of question that John the Baptist asked. The reason they were more wholehearted than John the Baptist is because they had the Holy Spirit within them.

So this is the meaning of Matthew 11-11 and so we must not misuse this verse. We must not also come short of what God's expectation is in the new covenant. He wants every one of us to rise higher than John the Baptist in our inner life.

What a challenge that is. You cannot imagine John the Baptist running after women or running after money and a Christian who claims to be under the new covenant should be way above that and when they're not they're sinking below even old covenant saints. It's foolish to say that we're in the new covenant when we live at a lower standard than people in the old covenant because it says that in from

the days of John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force because all the prophets in the law prophesied until John.

So he was saying John was the dividing line between old covenant and new covenant. The law and the prophets which is the Old Testament and the old covenant was right up to John and John marked that dividing line and from that time onwards we are in the new covenant. If your mind is set on earthly things and what you're preaching is an earthly message of prosperity and healing I want to say you are more than 2,000 years outdated.

That is an old covenant message from Deuteronomy 28. It is not the message of Ephesians 1.3 which says we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. It's not the message of the prophets.

This is the message we're supposed to preach to the kingdom of heaven which has already come and one last thing we see here is Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force. Now basically Christians are people of peace. We don't fight with human beings.

We concentrate on fighting the devil. The Old Testament saints fought with human beings and that's violence. What does that mean? It's inward violence against Satan and against the flesh.

The lusts in our flesh we fight with them and violently this is the mark of those who are seeking the kingdom of heaven and these are the ones who get the kingdom of heaven. Many people do not possess the riches of God's kingdom and the devil attempts to tempt them to make them fall. So remember this it's speaking about wholehearted people.

The kingdom of heaven is possessed by men of violence and this may be the reason why some of you have not come into this heavenly life so far. You're not a person of violence in your inner life Satanic temptations that come your way. Unfortunately many Christians are more violent in their speech and behavior towards other people very often to other Christians.

These people are old covenant people or probably not even converted. A new covenant person never is violent against human beings. Never.

A person who fights with his wife or husband is not a new covenant person at all. A new covenant person is one who does violence in his inner man to the lusts in his flesh and towards satanic temptation. Such people possess the kingdom.

This is what the Lord is emphasizing here. We'll continue the study in our next episode.

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