

BACK TO BIBLE STUDY

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Objective: What did Jesus our Lord have to say, and how does that affect us?

What is the message of Jesus Christ?

Jesus said that His words were the words of life (John 6:63). “His doctrine” was from God the Father (3:34; 7:16; 14:10), and His desire was that His words dwell in the believer (15:7).

John, who outlived the rest of the apostles, had this to say about the teaching of Jesus: “whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

“But why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’”, said Christ, “and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). How can a Christian claim to surrender to the lordship of Christ and at the same time ignore His words? For the Christian, obedience is to our Lord Jesus Christ and to His gospel (2 Corinthians 10:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Reflection

How does someone transgress the doctrine of Christ?

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29; Luke 6:20-49) records some major teachings of Jesus.

Christ begins by expounding spiritual attitudes his followers should embrace. The poor in spirit, those who are touched by the plight of others to the extent that they mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst

for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers, who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, such people are spiritually rich and blessed, and are the “salt of the earth”, and they glorify the Father (Matthew 5:1-16).

Jesus then compares Old Testament instructions (what “was said to those of old”) with what He is telling His believers to do (“but I say to you”). Note the comparative phrases in Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, and 43-44.

He prefaces this comparison by saying that He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17). As discussed in Study 3, Matthew uses this word “fulfill” in a prophetic way, not in the sense of “keep” or “observe”. If Jesus had not fulfilled every jot and tittle (5:18) of the messianic prophecies, then He was an imposter. Everything written in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings concerning the Messiah had to receive prophetic fulfillment in Christ (Luke 24:44).

Jesus’ sayings are commandments for us. He refers to “these commandments” in Matthew 5:19: “these” meaning what He was about to command as opposed to “those”, which would have meant commandments previously stated.

His concern is the focus of the believer’s faith and obedience. Using comparison Jesus commands His followers to obey His sayings instead of adhering to aspects of the Law of Moses which are either insufficient (Moses’ teaching on murder, adultery and divorce in Matthew 5:21-32), or irrelevant (Moses’ teaching on oaths in 5:33-37), or against His moral view (Moses’ teaching on justice and behaviour towards enemies in 5:38-48).

In Matthew 6 our Lord, who “shapes the form, the content and ultimately the goal of our faith” (Jenkins 2001:98), goes on to differentiate Christianity from religiosity.

Real charity does not parade its good deeds in order to get praise but serves selflessly (Matthew 6:1-4). Prayer and fasting are not modelled on public displays of piety, but on a humble and godly approach (6:5-18). What we desire and acquire is neither the point nor the concern of the righteous life. The point is to seek the righteousness which Christ began to describe in the previous chapter (6:19-34).

The sermon ends forcefully in Matthew 7. Christians should not condemn others by judging them because we too are sinners (7:1-6). God our Father wants to bless us with good gifts, and the intent behind what was said to those of old in the Law and the Prophets is that we should treat others as we would like to be treated (7:7-12).

The life of the Kingdom of God is doing the will of the Father (Matthew 7:13-23), which is hearing and doing the sayings of Christ (7:24; 17:5).

To build one’s faith on anything other than His sayings is like building a house on sand, which will fall when storms come. Faith built on the sayings of Christ, however, is like a house built on a rock, a solid foundation that withstands the tests of time (Matthew 7:24-27).

To the hearers this teaching was shocking (Matthew 7:29) because the Old Testament law was regarded as the foundational rock on which the scribes and the Pharisees had built their righteousness. Christ is saying that His followers should go beyond that and build their faith on Him alone (5:20). Christ, not the Law, is the Rock about which Moses sang (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:2; 1 Corinthians 10:4). “The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

Reflection

Does the Sermon on the Mount explain who or what should be the focus of the believer’s faith and obedience?

Which aspect of the Sermon on the Mount means the most to you personally?

You must be born again

Instead of magnifying the Law of Moses, which was expected of Rabbis (Jewish religious teachers), Jesus taught as the Son of God, challenging the imaginations of the audience and the authority of their teachers.

He went as far as to proclaim: “You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). Right interpretation both of Old and New Testament Scriptures, inspired though they are for understanding salvation and for the expression of faith (as discussed in Study 1), does not bring eternal life. We must come to Jesus to receive eternal life.

There is no other source of salvation. Jesus is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). There is no route to the Father except through the Son. Salvation is about coming to the man known as Jesus Christ.

How do we come to Jesus? In John 3 Nicodemus came to Jesus by night to find out more about what He taught. Nicodemus was startled when Jesus said to him “You must be born again” (3:7). “How is that possible”, queried Nicodemus, “can our mother give birth to us again?”

Jesus was talking about a spiritual transformation, a rebirth of supernatural proportions, being born “from above”, which is a complementary translation of the

Greek word “again” in this passage. Such birth begins by our believing personally in Jesus. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jesus went on to say that he or she “who hears My word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life” (John 5:24).

It is an act of faith. John the Baptist said that the person “who believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36).

Believing in Christ is the starting point of being “born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible” (1 Peter 1:23), the beginning of salvation.

Believing in Christ means accepting who Jesus is, that He is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16; Luke 9:18-20; Acts 8:37), who has “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68-69).

Believing in Christ means accepting that Jesus is God, who

- was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)
- was crucified for us that “He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9)
- “died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15)
- “died to sin once for all” (Romans 6:10) and “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14)
- “died and rose again, that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living” (Romans 14:9)
- “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22)

- was taken up “into heaven” and “will so come in like manner” as He went “up into heaven” (Acts 1:11)
- “will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:1)
- will return to earth to receive believers (John 14:1-4).

By accepting in faith Jesus Christ as He revealed Himself we are “born again”.

Reflection

What does believing in Christ mean?

How can someone be born again?

Repent and be baptised...

John the Baptist proclaimed “Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).

Jesus taught that He, the Son of God and Son of Man, had “power on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10, Matthew 9:6). This was the Gospel, that God had sent His Son for the salvation of the world.

Included in His message about salvation was repentance, “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:13). Paul clears up any confusion: “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:9). We are all sinners whom Christ calls to repentance.

Repentance is a call back to God. Biblically speaking humankind is in a state of alienation from God. Just like the prodigal son in the story in Luke 15, men and women moved away from the Father. Also, as in that story, the Father is anxious for us to return back to Him. Moving away from the Father is the beginning of sin. The issues of sin and Christian responsibility will be discussed in a Bible Study to come.

The only way back to God the Father is through the Son. Jesus said, “All things have

been delivered to Me by the Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

Therefore the beginning of repentance is to turn from other perceived paths to salvation, and to turn to Jesus.

Recognising Jesus as Saviour, Lord and coming King is witnessed to through the ceremony of baptism. Christ instructs that His disciples be baptised "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is an outward expression of an inward commitment to follow Jesus.

In Matthew 28:20 Jesus continued "teaching them to observe all the things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age". In most New Testament examples, teaching followed baptism. Note that Jesus stated clearly that He left commandments for us, as illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount.

Repentance continues in the believer's life as he or she draws closer to Christ. And, as Christ says, He is with us always. But how? How can Jesus be with us and how can meaningful repentance come about? These are discussed in the next study.

Reflection

What is the beginning of repentance?

How is baptism an outward expression of inward commitment? (See Romans 6:1-10)

Conclusion

Jesus explained that His words are the words of life, and they affect the believer in that they inform him or her about the way to salvation.

From the Statement of Beliefs of the Grace Communion International/ Worldwide Church of God UK:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/aboutus/beliefs/gospel.htm>

The Gospel

"The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God and salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the message that Christ died for our sins and has made us his own before and apart from our believing in him and has bound us to himself by his love in such a way that he will never let us go. Therefore, he calls on all humans to repent and believe in him as Lord and Saviour."

(1 Corinthians 15:1-5; Colossians 2;13; 1 John 2:2; Romans 5:8, 18-21; John 3:16-17; Luke 24:46-48; Colossians 1:19-23; Acts 8:12; Matthew 28:19-20)

Additional reading material

See list of articles sourced by the Worldwide Church of God on:

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/gospel/default.htm>

Jenkins, Michael. *Invitation to Theology*. 2001. USA: InterVarsity Press.

Next Study

Who or what is the Holy Spirit, and why is this relevant to the believer?