

IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS 2: "THE UNUSUAL TEACHER"

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Last week we began the New Year, with an introduction of this year's theme: **"It's all about Jesus."** We considered that since Jesus is the fulfillment of OT Prophecies regarding the Messiah; that the Word of God is authoritative, that Christ's identity is authenticated, and that Jesus' purpose is accomplished. Today we'll follow that discussion related to His birth, by considering His life.

There is much in the life of Jesus to mark who He is, and what He did. In fact if you want to look at a synopsis of the life and ministry of Jesus you have only to read the first Chapter of Mark's Gospel. There in that one introductory chapter we observe Jesus doing the 6 things that became the job description of his life. Almost like a Table of Contents, in typical Markan rapid-fire fashion Jesus preached, he called disciples, he taught, he cast out demons, he healed sick people, and he went alone to pray. A case could be made to consider any one or all of those things as the primary role of Jesus' life; but for a number of reasons; the most compelling aspect of Jesus' life is his teaching. I come to that conclusion not because Jesus is most often dismissed by closed-minded skeptics as "just a good teacher", but because he is most often called "Rabbi" by his friends, his disciples, his adversaries, and his contemporaries. And as you know Rabbi simply means: "Teacher."

William A. Ward has said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. But the great teacher inspires. Jesus and his manifold, masterful teaching certainly inspires us; doesn't it? Daniel Webster offered some excellent advice to persons interested in building their lives on something stable. "If we work on marble it will perish. If we work on brass, time will rust it. If we rear temples, they will crumble to dust. But if we work on men's immortal minds, if we imbue them with high principles, with a just fear of God and love of their fellow-men, we engrave on those tablets something which time cannot efface, and which will brighten and brighten to all eternity." That is indeed what Jesus has done in the primary role of his life: teaching.

But what kind of teacher was Jesus? He used so many different teaching methods, from dialogue, to discourse, to parable, to story, to metaphor, to declarative dissertation, to individual conversation; one could rightly say that everything Jesus did should be considered a teaching moment. Nicodemus' quote from earlier would seem to imply that. So today, I want to visit with you about the two primary distinguishing marks of Jesus teaching, and conclude with a call for your decision regarding that teaching.

1. THE MOST DISTINGUISHING MARK OF JESUS TEACHING WAS ITS AUTHORITY.

There can hardly be an argument that the principle reaction from Jesus' listeners to Jesus' teaching was their astonishment at the authority of His teaching. Each gospel writer makes note of it, more than once! And most often that astonishment came at the comparative expense of the Pharisees. When the listeners compared Jesus' teaching to that espoused by the Pharisees, his was seen as containing and being delivered with authority; theirs (by comparison), seemed incomprehensible. This is no where more remarkably demonstrated than in the most famous of all Jesus' teachings: The Sermon on the Mount; from which our text verse is taken.

The Sermon on the Mount was the longest and largest single discourse of Jesus, recorded anywhere in the NT. The Sermon on the Mount has been touted by followers and skeptics of Jesus alike, as the most representative of all his life, and teaching. And lo, and behold, one of its primary illustrative subjects; the foolishness of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees tried to teach the people how to keep the Jewish religious law. They thought that the Ten Commandments were too vague for your everyday person, so they expanded on them to make them easier to understand (but harder to keep). For example: to avoid breaking the third commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD,” they refused to pronounce God’s name at all. To avoid sexual temptation they had a practice of lowering their heads and not even looking at women (the most scrupulous of these were known as “bleeding Pharisees” because of their frequent collisions with walls and other obstacles). To avoid defiling the Sabbath they outlawed thirty-nine activities that might be construed as “work.” They had broken down God’s law into 613 rules—248 commands and 365 prohibitions—and bolstered these rules with 1,521 auxiliary rules and explanations of those rules. Sounds a bit like our Discipline! It was pretty much impossible to be seen as righteous in the eyes of the Pharisees unless you quit your job and dedicated your life...to...being a Pharisee.

In many ways Jesus was the anti-Pharisee – he healed people on the Sabbath, his disciples gleaned grain to eat on the Sabbath, and did not follow the ritual code of washings very closely. Jesus opposed their rule-oriented religion to their faces, and the people interpreted this as having ‘authority’, I like that.

But notice this, Jesus didn’t just refute the Pharisee’s stupid rule keeping, or rebuke their legalistic approach to God. No, he instilled another system; he reinterpreted the Pharisees mis-interpretation of the original declaration. To the law against murder, he added, don’t even hate anyone. To questions about adultery, he forbade even looking lustily at a person not your spouse.

To the query about tithing he pointed to the widow who gave all. To the “justice” of the law (an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth) he commands we give our right and left cheek, and if we lose our shirt, we should give our coat too, and if a soldier demands we carry his pack a mile, we should carry it two. To that famous command to love our neighbors...he says...yes, do that, but love your enemies too! Listen:

Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose...And I warn you – unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! Mt. 5: 17&20

Say what? How in the heck can we do that? His teaching took the law off “the books” and placed it in people’s hearts. His teaching made the human relationship with God to be an internal reality, instead of an external, outward, legalistic one. His authoritative teaching moved ‘religion’ from an incomprehensible and unable to be kept list of ‘dos and don’ts’ to a lifestyle relationship between humans and the divine. His teaching had authority. And:

2. THE MOST COMPELLING ASPECT OF JESUS’ TEACHING WAS ITS COMPASSION

It is most remarkable and comforting to note, that Jesus’ teaching cared little about keeping laws, and cared more about little else, than helping people. People like you and me, people like those sitting around us today, and people still seeking and longing to find and understand exactly who this Jesus is!

Jesus taught plainly and simply, using natural elements that people could comprehend and understand. He pointed to a farmer, a field, a fisherman, a bunch of sheep, (sounds like he’d play well in ND). He drew illustrations from a dried up fig tree, a small vial of ointment, a young child’s lunch. He interacted and taught women, children, and men of power, prestige, and prostitutes just the same.

He cried at his friend's death, then raised him from the grave. He drank wine at a wedding reception, and made more when the party waned. He spoke and taught most tenderly to people who were hurting, people who were lost, and people who were willing to listen. People like you...and me.

Everybody but Sam had signed up for a new company pension plan that called for a small employee contribution. The company was paying all the rest. Unfortunately, 100% employee participation was needed; otherwise, the plan was off. Sam's boss and his fellow workers pleaded and cajoled, for many weeks, but to no avail. Sam said that the plan would never pay off. Finally, the company president called Sam into his office. "Sam," he said, "here's a copy of the new pension plan, and here's a pen. I want you to sign the papers. I'm sorry, but if you don't sign, you're fired—as of right now." Sam grabbed the pen and signed the papers immediately. The rather stunned president just had to ask: "would you mind telling me why you couldn't have signed this earlier?" "Well, sir," replied Sam, "nobody explained it to me quite so clearly."

Well, we chuckle at that story, but the truth is, Jesus spoke in the same kind of way, he explained things clearly, and concisely. He was not afraid to teach and preach and speak confrontationally, but he almost always did so compassionately. I'm not so sure that rather rambunctious "teaching moment" overthrowing tables in the temple would appear very compassionate, but the rest of the time he was. He was not difficult to understand, didn't speak over people's head, used language and concepts people could understand and relate to. Yes, his teaching was authoritative, but it was also marked with compassion, grace, mercy.

And that is what distinguishes his teaching most vividly from that of the Pharisees. They cared more about keeping laws and traditions, than about people, and their conditions. The Pharisees understanding of religion left people in prison, and Jesus' teaching set the prisoners free.

That leads us to our conclusion. We have two choices, uniquely tied to each of these two teaching characteristics. Regarding his authoritative teaching; we can deny that Jesus' teaching has any authority, but that choice will lead to death. We can choose to just exchange the Pharisees legalism into some 'misconvoluted' Christian byproduct, and call it faithfulness, but that leads to bondage. Exchanging a Pharisaical legalism for a Christian one; is no solution, just more laws, more traditions, more frustration, more bondage. Legalism is easier than faithfulness...it's just not near as rewarding. Faithfulness is often messy, legalism is clean and neat and DEAD!

DENIAL WHICH LEADS TO DEATH

LEGALISM WHICH LEADS TO BONDAGE

Regarding His compassionate teaching we also must consider two choices. We can accept His compassionate teaching and begin to experience and enjoy newfound freedom. We don't have to rely on our own law-keeping failures to make us good enough for heaven...we can trust in God's grace; marvelously revealed, and taught by His Son Jesus. We can also choose adherence which leads to life. Choosing to follow Jesus is the only legitimate choice. What will you choose today? Remember, It's All About Jesus!

ACCEPTANCE WHICH LEADS TO FREEDOM

ADHERANCE WHICH LEADS TO LIFE

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