Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

The Path seems never-ending! – Week 7

We look at more of the choices which Jesus calls us to make – and the choices can seem never-ending. This is reality, for if we are serious the Path will call us to make choices which impact us and others for the rest of our lives. In some ways, the commands are "deeper" levels of previous commands – in others, they are new applications for new contexts.

Day 43: Do not resist the evildoer. Join the revolution.

"I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. But whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other to him as well. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your coat also. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to the one who asks you, and do not reject the one who wants to borrow from you."

"Do not resist the evildoer" seems at odds with God calling us to provide justice. Jesus is being very stretching here – for example, Roman soldiers had the ability to tell anyone to carry something on their behalf for a roman mile (1000 paces). This practice, known as "impressment," was not easy considering a soldier's backpack routinely weighed upwards of 100 pounds. In Jesus including that sentence here, He is saying "even if your dearest enemy, the one actively oppressing you and killing your fellow citizens, forces you to help him – try to help him twice as much."

What is Jesus saying the kingdom of God is like here? Why is this command so hard to live out? What would society be like if everyone lived according to this command? How does this command deepen or adjust other commands (for example, "blessed are the meek")?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 44: Love (do what is healthiest for) your enemies. Join the revolution.

""You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor' and 'hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be like your Father in heaven …. be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

In some ways this is a follow-on to the previous command. "Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you." How do you think someone from Ukraine would perceive this for a Russian soldier**?** Or someone from South Sudan regarding Sudan? Or anyplace where one party is trying to control another through force and violence. Yet that is exactly the environment Jesus is in with Judea regarding the Roman empire – the Romans had invaded and were an occupation force, killing and oppressing the Jewish people – Pontius Pilate especially has a reputation as being essentially a butcher. Jesus underlines how hard His commands are with "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Even if you don't live under enemy occupation or in a war zone, this command can be very difficult. Do you have people who strive to destroy you, to minimize you, to marginalize you? That disparage you or try to take advantage of you? What would it mean to love (do what is healthiest for) them? What would it take for you to talk to God seeking the best for them? Knowing we are NOT perfect (we are an Image of God, not THE Image of God), how can you represent God as closely as possible?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 45: Don't do things just for show. Join the revolution.

"Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people, otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven. (Give) your gift in secret. Your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. "Whenever you pray, do not (show off so that) people (notice) you. Whenever you pray, go into your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you."

Some people are very good at getting noticed for their own advancement – whether it's in a job, a volunteer capacity, at church, in the family – some people just know how to "talk a good talk." Jesus is saying don't be like that – don't do things just to advance yourself with other people or to impress them. Rather, be genuine – give because it's the right thing to do, not because it makes you look good. Talk to God because you want to talk to God, not because it makes you look good. In giving, in talking to God, when doing anything for which you may receive praise or adulation -- keep it simple, keep it private.

Are there times when it's more appropriate to do things in public than in private? Are there ways that doing things publicly may actually distract from the purpose of what you are doing? List some things which you do in private which are good to keep there.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 46: Take talking to God seriously. Join the revolution.

When you pray, do not babble repetitiously because you think that by your many words you will be heard. Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray this way:
"Our Father in heaven, may Your name be honored, may Your kingdom come, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."

This is an extenuation of the previous command: "keep it simple, keep it short." Do not babble! Jesus then gives an example of a short prayer which packs a lot into it. The Bible is sprinkled with many prayers which pack a lot of thought and / or emotion into a concise series of statements. When you're praying, don't think you're needing to "get through" to God by volume of voice or number (or repetition) of words as if God is a young child who has a hard time understanding you living at the other end of the universe. Realize that God understands you better than you understand yourself, and that a few short words are all God needs – He's right there with you and understands exactly what you mean. You don't need to impress Him or "win Him over."

If your Father knows what you need before you ask Him, why are we encouraged to pray?

We can say things in different ways. How does this prayer compare to Jesus' example:
"Father of all, who is everywhere: we hold You in reverent love. Help us to live in shalom as you designed us. Help us to follow your path, today and for eternity. Fill us with Your presence. Forgive us as we forgive. Guide us safely through our dark valleys; may we not stray from Your way. You are the ultimate reality, and we love you. May all be reconciled to you in Christ. Amen."

Please pray today for what is on your heart – talk to God about it.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 47: Forgive. Join the revolution.

"If you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins."
Jesus puts an extreme consequence behind our actions – so extreme in fact that He says, "God Almighty will act towards you just as you act towards others."

Do you think that how you behave influences how God behaves towards you? How do you think God views forgiveness? Are there people that you find it "impossible to forgive?" What can you pray to God about this? For our reflection on forgiveness, you may want to refer back to Day 16.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

"Freely you have received, freely you shall give"

Day 48: Be a good tree. Join the revolution.

"Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize them by their fruit."

Be wary of those who "bear bad fruit." Likewise, make sure you "bear good fruit" yourself! The commands which Jesus has given will lead to, in His view, good fruit out of your life – fruit which the heavenly Father will rejoice over.

Write a column of good fruit and beside it, a list of contrasting bad fruit.

Beside each column note which fruit you have seen from others' words and actions. Now do the same but examining against your own words and actions.

Pray for yourself and those you love, that you may indeed bear good fruit in all times and at all places. Discuss with others you trust if you feel capable of it.

Day 49: Rest

We come again to the seventh day, so today we rest. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.