Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 73: The People of God changing, and Testing.

Day 504: The people of God changing (part two)

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a pit for its winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went on a journey. When the harvest time was near, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his portion of the crop. But the tenants seized his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first, and they treated them the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and get his inheritance!' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

"Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will utterly destroy those evil men! Then he will lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his portion at the harvest."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?

"For this reason I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and the one on whom it falls will be crushed." When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds because the crowds regarded him as a prophet. (Matthew 21:33-46)

This story, as the leaders found out, had nothing to do with vines or grapes. In this parable (essentially, a parable is a pointed metaphor), Jesus recounted how the prophets were treated when they pleaded with the Israelites to bring forth fruit of justice, mercy, and love. He forecasts his own death and placement as the cornerstone of the new temple of God; and Jesus makes explicit, "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who produce its fruit."

Does that mean that if we do not produce "good fruit", we shall be abandoned?

No. It means that people's fruit shows the type of tree they are. The type of tree they are shows the garden they are living in. However, God never abandons – as Jesus said, "He came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Those who reject Jesus and God's Way of love, however, will find themselves "falling on the cornerstone."

How do I know if I'm giving good fruit?

In a way, Jesus is recapitulating days 497-500 – the fruit which God looks for is love. Paul expanded this in Galatians 5:22-23 ("the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.") and Ephesians 5:8-9

("Live like children of light — for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth — trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.").

The kingdom of God belongs to those who walk in love. All others will find it unbearable.

Why do some reject ways of love, of pursuing health for those around them? Give examples of how you are living in love, benefitting those around you. Give examples of how you've recently thanked Jesus for His love for you.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 505: The people of God changing (part three)

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to summon those who had been invited to the banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Look! The feast I have prepared for you is ready. My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet."' But they were indifferent and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest seized his slaves, insolently mistreated them, and killed them. The king was furious! He sent his soldiers, and they put those murderers to death and set their city on fire.

Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but the ones who had been invited were not worthy. So go into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' And those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all they found, both bad and good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the wedding guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' But he had nothing to say. Then the king said to his attendants, 'Tie him up hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!' For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:1-14)

"Those who reject God and God's way of love will find themselves outside the kingdom, much to their eternal dismay. God will continue to invite all His Image Bearers, all His Children, until the kingdom is full. However, if someone tries to come in and does not wear the clothes of love, that person will leave, for they will prefer eternal despair to living in love. Love will be unbearable for them."

The people who God had previously invited into His kingdom rejected His invitation, by refusing to live in His love. God continually searches His creation for Images of Him which will live with Him, in love. People will choose darkness, or light; those who choose light, choose life. Christ is the Way, for Christ is love embodied; Christ is life given freely. Life and love come out of each other, death and despair likewise. People choose, and the fruits of their life show their choice. People will live where their fruit are most likely to grow.

I beg you: choose light, choose life, choose love, choose Christ. Note down where your heart is, what fruit you see in your life, what tempts you into darkness, and what helps you into light.

Share your thoughts with God.

Day 506: Taxes?

Then the Pharisees went out and planned together to entrap him with his own words. They sent to him their disciples along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are truthful and teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You do not court anyone's favor because you show no partiality. Tell us then, what do you think? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus realized their evil intentions and said, "Hypocrites! Why are you testing me? Show me the coin used for the tax." So they brought him a denarius. Jesus said to them, "Whose image is this, and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Now when they heard this they were stunned, and they left him and went away. (Matthew 22:15-22)

They were sneaky. First, they flattered Jesus, implicitly trying to coerce Him into giving a straight answer in the name of 'honesty without partiality.' If Jesus had said, "yes, pay taxes as according to the law", they could have claimed that Jesus was an anti-Jewish agent of Rome, to be despised and rejected like the tax collectors were. If Jesus had said, "no, do not pay taxes as they are used to oppress our people", they could have claimed He was citing a rebellion, and turned Him over to Pilate for prosecution. They thought they had Him trapped in a no-win situation.

Jesus was wily.

Very. He out-foxed the foxes.

But what did He mean, "give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."?

We can be fairly certain what God wants (as per the last few days). What belongs to humans on earth? That's for each of us to decide. Jesus was clear that God does not care about earthly fortune or power or fame – those are mere distractions; shiny baubles for the magpies.

What do you give God? What do you give "Ceasar"?

Share with your fellow explorers why this is important.

Day 507: Marriage?

The same day Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to him and asked him, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and father children for his brother.'

Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The second did the same, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her."

Jesus answered them, "You are deceived because you don't know the scriptures or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. Now as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living!" When the crowds heard this, they were amazed at his teaching." (Matthew 22:23-33)

We're supposed to marry our brother's wife if he dies?

That was a rule given to the Israelites thousands of years before Jesus' time (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), and not followed (an example of it is given in the book of Ruth). The Sadducees were trying to trap Jesus in the supposed ridiculousness of the concept of the resurrection leading to eternal life.

They didn't believe in the resurrection?

Nope – the Sadducees taught there was no resurrection; that after this life, people went to Sheol (you could think of it as an 'eternal sleep') if they existed at all.

So just like the previous conversations really had nothing to do with trees or mountains or vineyards or banquets or taxes, this one has nothing to do with marriage.

That's right – the Sadducees were challenging Jesus on his statement that 'the Son of Man will rise again on the third day.' They were basically claiming that Jesus didn't know what He was talking about regarding the resurrection, and therefore everything He said could be dismissed as malarkey.

Jesus was rather forceful in His response: "you know neither scripture nor the power of God." I.e., "it's not me who doesn't know what He's talking about, it's you." He then puts them on the spot – according to Jesus' argument, if they acknowledged God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (which was the name they gave God), they must acknowledge that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive with God – otherwise, God is not God over the living, but only the dead – which was clearly ridiculous as it put God into the place of a specific or lesser God (like Osiris, Egyptian god of the dead). This therefore meant that resurrection must exist, and was open to those in the kingdom of God.

Resurrection exists – Jesus' resurrection body is able to traverse between earth and the three heavens. As you walk with Jesus, you can look forward to resurrection with Him, and the coming time when God, our loving Father, will walk amongst His Images, and there is no separation between earth and the spiritual heaven (Revelation 21:1-5). Write down some thoughts of what it will be like to live at that point in eternity.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 508: Love

Now when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they assembled together. And one of them, an expert in religious law, asked him a question to test him: "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40)

Love. "All you need is love." While this last statement is not strictly true, love is the fruit which "feeds" God. Love is what best reveals God's character. As we've discussed before, in reading the bible, three commands dominate:

1.) Be brave / do not fear / have courage (Joshua 1:9)
2.) Trust God / have faith in God / believe in God (John 14:1)
3.) Love. Love God, love the faithful, love your family, love your neighbours, love the stranger, the outcast, the outsider; love. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Paul refers to these as 1.) hope, 2.) faith, 3.) love (1st Corinthians 13:13). And the greatest of these is love.

Everything written in the law and the prophets, everything written in the bible, is to be understood in light of these two commandments: Love God with all you are, and love your neighbour as if your neighbour is yourself. The examples showing lack of love (and there are many in the bible) are there for us to learn from, the examples showing love being given are there for us to aspire to. The Way of Holiness is the Way of Love.

Write down how you have loved Jesus, loved your heavenly Father, and loved people this past week.

Share your with those you trust.

Day 509: The Christ

While the Pharisees were assembled, Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said, "The son of David." He said to them, "How then does David by the Spirit call him 'Lord,' saying, "'The Lord said to my lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David then calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one was able to answer him a word, and from that day on no one dared to question him any longer. (Matthew 22:41- 46)

The Sadducees have been silenced, and now the Pharisees. The Pharisees, broadly speaking, agreed with much of Jesus' theology, and in fact some Pharisees became disciples (possibly Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and the Apostle Paul are notable examples). For the main part, their conflict with Jesus was a.) his criticism of their hypocrisy and b.) their belief that He wasn't the Messiah.

Jesus calls them to question their understanding of the Messiah: "If the Messiah is strictly a human son from the line of King David, why would David, being King, call Him "Lord" when it is written "God said to my Lord, 'sit at my right hand…'"? (Psalm 110:1)

The Pharisees could not answer Jesus because they could not comprehend that the Messiah (the Anointed One) could be Lord (divine). Peter directly addressed this later, when he said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36)

Jesus has answered all the traps and confusions of His critics, and they dare not engage Him now, as He has won the arguments. They were trying to prove Him wrong, and they could not.

If you are trying to earnestly understand Jesus however, He is eager to engage with you.

Write down some questions you have for Jesus, and ask them of Him in prayer. Then sit in silence for 5-10 minutes, and record what thoughts / impressions / words / emotions come to you.

Share as you feel appropriate.

Day 510: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! Fill yourself with Light. 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.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God. Be in shalom. Love. Pursue what is healthiest.