Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 64: Family Stories

Day 441: Cleaning up

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a person, it passes through waterless places looking for rest but does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the home I left.' When it returns, it finds the house empty, swept clean, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there, so the last state of that person is worse than the first. It will be that way for this evil generation as well!" (Matthew 12:43-45)

The idea of God and of angels and spirits is foreign to many people in our world today – yet, as discussed in days 262 and 268, it was accepted in Jesus' day. The third heaven is where the spiritual beings dwell – and they can be encountered in any domain within the cosmos. The physical domains are not exclusive for only physical beings, otherwise we could not exist, being both physical and spiritual. You may think of it like a kind of soup – spiritual and physical mixed together in one big bowl.

Just like people, those spirits are not neutral – they can seek to serve God, serve themselves, or other spirits. This is the background worldview of Jesus' comment.

The point of His comment, though, is choice. For example, someone has an infection encountered through poor hygiene practices and are then healed. If they continue with the poor practices, the likelihood of them being reinfected is greater than if they change their ways and embrace improved hygiene. Likewise, if someone is healed of evil, that does not mean they are automatically filled up with good – unless they actively change their way (i.e., repent) and choose the Way of Christ, they are susceptible to "re-infection" – and the follow-up infection may be worse than the first attack was.

Jesus is also saying that this is not only an individual choice, but a societal one as well ("this generation" could be thought of as "our society").

Are there areas of your life which you need to "clean up?" Are there areas of our society which need "cleaning up?" Pray about such areas, asking Jesus to heal you, and heal society. Ask Jesus to replace evil and harm with the Holy Spirit (so you, and society, are not just 'empty houses.') Embark on better, healthier, practices for you and for society.

Note down your thoughts regarding this subject.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 442: Family

"While Jesus was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and brothers came and stood outside, asking to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside wanting to speak to you." To the one who had said this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And pointing toward his disciples he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

"Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

This was radical. Family was paramount in Jewish society, and had always been so, just as family is paramount in all tribal societies today. And Jesus is accepting the importance of family but totally changing who is in and who is out.

The family of Christ has nothing to do with blood, nothing to do with inheritance, nothing to do with political allegiances. Jesus is saying the family, His family, is made up of those who follow the head of the family – the Father. Irrespective of physical relationship.

The eventual effects of this decision were enormous, as followers of Christ now circle the globe. It also means division within physical families, as some choose to walk with Christ and some do not (as per day 427).

Separation in a physical family does not mean you stop loving them, stop pursuing what is healthiest for them – in fact, Peter addressed this in his letter (1st Peter 2:18-3:9) from the aspect of Slave, wives, and husbands:

Slaves, be subject to your masters with all reverence, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are perverse. … For to this you were called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps. He committed no sin nor was deceit found in his mouth. When he was maligned, he did not answer back; when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation, but committed himself to God who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we may cease from sinning and live for righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. For you were going astray like sheep but now you have turned back to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

(Wives) Even if some are disobedient to the word, they will be won over without a word by the way you live, when they see your pure and reverent conduct. Let your beauty not be external — the braiding of hair and wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes — but the inner person of the heart, the lasting beauty of a gentle and tranquil spirit, which is precious in God's sight …. You become her (Sarah's) children when you do what is good and have no fear in doing so.

Husbands, in the same way, treat your wives with consideration … and show them honor as fellow heirs of the grace of life. In this way nothing will hinder your prayers.

Finally, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, affectionate, compassionate, and humble. Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but instead bless others because you were called to inherit a blessing.

Peter learned his discipleship very well. We are love those within our family as if they are ourselves, for we all have the one Father. And we are to love those outside the family of Christ with even more intention, with affection, compassion, humility, living in harmony – for such an example will encourage them, more than anything else, to become part of the family themselves.

Mention those you know within the family of Christ, and those you know very well, but who are outside of Christ's family. Offer all up to Christ in prayer, and seek to show them all the love of the Father.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 443: Parables

Then the disciples came to him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He replied, "You have been given the opportunity to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but they have not. For whoever has will be given more, and will have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. For this reason I speak to them in parables: Although they see they do not see, and although they hear they do not hear nor do they understand. And concerning them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

> "'You will listen carefully yet will never understand,
> you will look closely yet will never comprehend.
> For the heart of this people has become dull;
> they are hard of hearing,
> and they have shut their eyes,
> so that they would not see with their eyes
> and hear with their ears
> and understand with their hearts
> and turn, and I would heal them.'

"But your eyes are blessed because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. (Matthew 13:10-17)

"Jesus, why don't you speak to people plainly?"
"Because if I did that, they might understand."

Why would Jesus be so confusing?

It gets back to what we previously discussed: belief.

Jesus wanted people to convert themselves. Yes, He told people to change their ways, and He criticized those who put themselves before God -- but to follow Him, to understand Him, you first must believe. He preached, as it says in Mathew 4, "Repent, (change your ways) for the kingdom of heaven is near!" But then His description of the kingdom was through parables: short fictitious narratives showing comparisons and similarities to daily life, in which the listener had to draw their own conclusions.

But, to those who decided to follow Him, to believe, they were "given the opportunity to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven."

Belief was required before hearing, and hearing was required before understanding. Following was required before belief.

We follow Jesus so that we may believe, and we believe so that we may hear and understand. Without belief our hearing is garbled, and without following our belief is short-sighted. How is your day showing that you are following Jesus? What understanding is your belief leading to?

Share with those you love.

Day 444: The Sower

On that day after Jesus went out of the house, he sat by the lake. And such a large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat to sit while the whole crowd stood on the shore.

He told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground where they did not have much soil. They sprang up quickly because the soil was not deep. But when the sun came up, they were scorched, and because they did not have sufficient root, they withered. Other seeds fell among the thorns, and they grew up and choked them. But other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. The one who has ears had better listen!" (Matthew 13:1-9)

…

"So listen to the parable of the sower:

When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches what was sown in his heart; this is the seed sown along the path.

The seed sown on rocky ground is the person who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root in himself and does not endure; when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away.

The seed sown among thorns is the person who hears the word, but worldly cares and the seductiveness of wealth choke the word, so it produces nothing.

But as for the seed sown on good soil, this is the person who hears the word and understands. He bears fruit, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown." (Matthew 13:18-23)

Follow Jesus. Believe. Hear the Word. Understand. Persevere. Do not get waylaid. Then you will bear fruit and be exceedingly bountiful.

A seed is created so a plant may be created, somehow. A plant creates seeds, somehow, so future plants may be created. The Word was planted in you so that a disciple may be created, somehow. You spread the Word, somehow, so future disciples may be created.

"Then you will bear fruit and be exceedingly bountiful." Capture your thoughts.

Share with those you trust.

Day 445: Living in the Kingdom: Darnel and Wheat

He presented them with another parable:
"The kingdom of heaven is like a person who sowed good seed in his field.

But while everyone was sleeping, an enemy came and sowed darnel among the wheat and went away.

When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the darnel also appeared.

So the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the darnel come from?'

He said, 'An enemy has done this!'

So the slaves replied, 'Do you want us to go and gather it?' But he said, 'No, since in gathering the darnel you may uproot the wheat along with it. Let both grow together until the harvest.

At harvest time I will tell the reapers, "First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burned, but then gather the wheat into my barn."""." (Matthew 13:24-30)

Jesus is saying: "This is what living in the Kingdom of God is like."

In your own words, translate Jesus' parable of wheat and darnel into your life and your society.

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 446: Mustard Seed and Yeast

He gave them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest garden plant and becomes a tree, so that the wild birds come and nest in its branches."

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until all the dough had risen."

Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the crowds; He did not speak to them without a parable. This fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has been hidden from the foundation of the world." (Psalm 78:2) (Matthew 13:31-35)

Jesus is saying: "Here are a couple of more pictures of what living in the Kingdom of God is like."

In your own words, translate Jesus' parable of mustard seed into your life and your society. Do the same for the parable of yeast.

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 447: 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.