Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Week 57: The Great Sermon – New or Not?

How much of this is new? What does the Old Testament say?

Day 392. What are we hearing?

Before we continue further with Matthew, let's take some time to examine the Great Sermon against what we know from the Old Testament and the culture of the day. As we covered in days 357 to 364, much of what Jesus said was familiar to His immediate audience, though He took the traditional teachings and altered the context and ramifications to an extent. What about the rest of His sermon? Was He providing traditional teaching, new teaching, or a mixture? Let's review:

Day 365: Divorce. The Israelites believed that Moses had given them permission to divorce: If a man marries a woman and she does not please him because he has found something indecent in her, then he may draw up a divorce document, give it to her, and evict her from his house. When she has left him she may go and become someone else's wife. If the second husband rejects her and then divorces her, gives her the papers, and evicts her from his house, or if the second husband who married her dies, 4 her first husband who divorced her is not permitted to remarry her after she has become ritually impure, for that is offensive to the Lord (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

However, Jesus is rejecting Deuteronomy in favour of Malachi, though He is going yet further: (The Lord is testifying against you on behalf of the wife you married when you were young, to whom you have become unfaithful even though she is your companion and wife by law. No one who has even a small portion of the Spirit in him does this. What did our ancestor do when seeking a child from God? Be attentive, then, to your own spirit, for one should not be disloyal to the wife he took in his youth. "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel, "and the one who is guilty of violence," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "Pay attention to your conscience, and do not be unfaithful" (Malachi 2:14-16)).

Jesus saying, "if you divorce your wife, you cause the woman to commit adultery", was confusing – and perceptive. This is not a simple situation! Something must be weighed here – realize that if you are the husband divorcing your wife (wives were not given this "privilege"), no matter what she has done, you are committing her to adultery – and that commitment will be on your head, not hers. This was a radical interpretation.

Day 366: Oaths. Again, oaths were accepted as being part of the tradition from Moses: You must not swear falsely in my name, so that you do not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:12).

Oaths were part of life, and Leviticus is saying, "if you're going to swear an oath in the name of God, make sure you keep it." Jesus took this and elevated the teaching, saying, "Whatever you say, tell the truth. Oaths are unnecessary if you do that – in fact, if you give an oath you're not being led by God" (as we know, Article 39 (day 285) gives an exception, where an oath may be provided in a court of law). Jesus' teaching in this case was very new to His audience.

Jesus challenged the culture and understandings of His time. How does Jesus challenge the culture and understandings of our time today?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 393: Is He crazy?

Day 367, Resisting evil

… if there is serious injury, then you will give a life for a life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. (Exodus 21:23-25)

If a man beats any person to death, he must be put to death. One who beats an animal to death must make restitution for it, life for life. If a man inflicts an injury on his fellow citizen, just as he has done it must be done to him — fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth — just as he inflicts an injury on another person that same injury must be inflicted on him. One who beats an animal to death must make restitution for it, but one who beats a person to death must be put to death. There will be one regulation for you, whether a resident foreigner or a native citizen, for I am the Lord your God.'" (Leviticus 24:17-22)

Jesus said, "But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer." His audience probably thought, "That's not a recipe for justice, that's for anarchy and being beaten! That's to let evil take over!" In this command, Jesus is directly contradicting both what the Israelites understood from the Torah, and the way their culture worked – where honour, respect, and loyalty were priorities. Not mercy, and definitely not aiding the evil-doer!

Day 368, love your enemy

"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."

What??? The Israelites knew about 'love your neighbour'. And they understood 'hate your enemy' (*hate your enemy* does not occur explicitly in the OT, but was commonly inferred from passages like Deut 7:2; 30:7; Ps 26:5; Ps 139:21-22.). Jesus saying "love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you" – what kind of sense was that??? It could be argued this was counter-scriptural, counter-cultural, counter-sensible!!

Put yourself in their place – family welfare was critical, which including protecting it from outsiders and attackers. Revenge was necessary as a deterrent. And here is this wonder-worker, healer, charismatic preacher urging you: "Do not resist the evil-doer. Love them. Love your enemy. Pray for them." How would you reconcile His actions and His words, with your life? How do you do it today?

Share what you wrote as is appropriate.

Day 394: Do and Say

Day 369: "Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people." Be humble. This was a common refrain in scripture, especially in the prophetic writings. (He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8))

Day 371: When you pray, don't make a fuss, just do it. Talk with your Heavenly Father like you would any normal person.

This was rather radical. Wasn't He talking about the same God who warned, "on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, "Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death." (Exodus 19:11-12) and He said, "You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20).

Yes, He was. This was very new indeed.

Be humble, and humbly approach God – but approach Him. Have your life be a liturgy (a public work) of worship with God, communicating with Him freely just as you talk with any other being. Write your thoughts about such a life here:

Share your notes with those you trust.

Day 395: The Lord's Prayer

Day 372: All the separate parts of the Lord's Prayer were commonly taught be the different rabbinical schools, with one exception: "forgive us as we forgive". A conditional forgiveness? One that we set the condition for? How truly, truly radical. To say, "creator of all, limit your forgiveness of me by how much I forgive those who hate me, who are trying to ruin me..." – how risky that statement truly is. Perhaps the other radical part of the Lord's prayer is that Jesus combined all the familiar elements together and then used it as His instructional prayer. It is simple, direct, and heavily loaded.

Day 373: Forgiveness

For 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."

Underline, italicize, bold – emphasize, emphasize, emphasize. Jesus knew His audience would have trouble believing His words, so He made it explicitly clear: you want forgiveness? You'd better start forgiving…

This is so astonishing, so counter-cultural, so ambiguous compared to scripture in the Old Testament, that it is almost painful.

Review what we've discussed about forgiveness in this course. Write down who you've forgiven today, and what for.

Share your thoughts on faith, honesty, healing, and working with God.

Day 396: Fasting, accumulating treasure, looking for the light

Days 374, the teaching about Fasting, goes back to humility, which Jesus had covered in various ways. That wasn't too radical. Don't be a hypocrite. His admonition against accumulating treasure (day 375) was an affront against the "prosperity gospel", which was alive and well throughout Israel's history (and in current culture). God showed His blessing by showing wealth and power, didn't He? And Jesus said (day 376), "Don't look at that. Don't look for that. Look instead, for treasure your heavenly Father values: honesty, love, forgiveness, charity, kindness, sacrifice. Those are the true treasures. You have to choose (day 378): will you pursue (and serve) God, or will you pursue (and serve) wealth?

Then comes day 379: "Pursue His (God's) kingdom and righteousness, and all these things (everything you need) will be given to you as well."

Trust God for everything you need. He will give you what you need when you need it.

What about those who try this, and end up without a job? Or hungry? Or dead?

That is a great question, to which I don't have an answer I can give with integrity. All I can say, is that Jesus asks us to trust the Father. This would have been extremely radical to the audience of 2,000 years ago as well.

When you come upon a teaching of Jesus you can't understand or find yourself reluctant to follow, how do you reconcile it to your words and actions?

Share with your fellow explorers.

Day 397: Direction

Day 380: Judge with integrity.
Day 381: You will get what you search for.
Day 382: Do not pursue the wide gate of comfort, ease, wealth, riches, acclaim, etc. Pursue the narrow gate of obedience to Christ.
Day 383: Have integrity, and recognize the integrity of others
Day 385: the fruit of hypocrisy

All these teachings would have been familiar to Jesus' audience, except for the gate analogy. They were in sync with the Old Testament, and in sync with common rabbinical teachings. The gate analogy of obedience was in sync as far as it went, unless you extended it to obedience not to God generally, but to Christ – then it became radical and blasphemous. As you see in reading Jesus' actual words, He wasn't specific – however, there are enough hints (like Matthew 5:11's "on account of Me" and the many radical elevations / revisions of what the audience thought they already knew) and later on, explicit links (like John 10:7: "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep") to make His audience uncomfortable and amazed.

Understanding a bit more of how Jesus was expanding upon / modifying the teaching and understandings given in the Old Testmant … who do you say Jesus is? Are you able to follow all His commandments? Which do you struggle with?

Share your thoughts.

Day 398: 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.