

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #10 Sermon on the Mount, part 2

Scripture Luke 6:39-49

Today we will think about the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. This teaching was presented a few short hours after Jesus identified the specific twelve men who would be His close companions — those whom He designated “apostles.” The Sermon on the Mount was given to introduce them to the lifestyle that Jesus expected of them.

Luke explained how these twelve men were selected. He wrote that Jesus had gone up on a mountain and spent the entire night praying to God. On the following morning He called His disciples to Him. There was probably, at that time, a large group of people following Jesus. Out of that group He chose the Twelve (*see Luke 6:12-16*). The selection of these men was critical to the future impact that Jesus wanted to have on world. That is the reason that He spent the night praying about the specific men who were to be trained for future leadership. He looked to the Father to guide Him in His decision.

After Jesus went down from the mountain with His disciples, He was confronted with a large crowd of people, many of whom sought to be cured of their diseases and delivered of evil spirits. Finally, after dealing with all of the physical needs of the crowd, Jesus began to teach His newly selected apostles.

The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus’ core teaching about the kingdom of God. He wanted the Twelve to understand the differences in attitudes and behaviors between the citizens of God’s kingdom and those who were outside the kingdom — between those who could be His true followers and those who could not. Last week we thought about the beginning of the teaching. Let me review: Jesus began with a description of the blessings which were available to the people who recognized their spiritual poverty, were hungry for the provisions of God, who wept and prayed over the evil which existed in the world, and who would endure persecutions. He then pronounced “woes” on those who were rich, well fed, happy, contented, self-sufficient, and unconcerned about spiritual matters.

The beginning part of the teaching was about attitudes which would be acceptable to God, but Jesus quickly turned to the subject of behaviors — the kinds of behaviors which were expected from individuals who were members of the kingdom. The followers of Jesus would have to love their enemies and do good to those who showed hatred to them and cursed and mistreated them. Jesus stated that the kingdom person would have to be as merciful as God the Father was merciful. Jesus explained that it was the nature of God to show kindness to everyone, including those who were ungrateful, wicked, and unresponsive to Him, and that His listeners were expected to be the same way. Jesus stated that such merciful and kind behavior would be evidence that a person was qualified to be a “son of the Most High.”

Jesus understood that He was introducing new and radical ideas to His listeners. He knew that their thinking had been shaped by centuries of misinterpretations of the Old Testament Law and misrepresentations of the purposes of the Law. The Twelve Apostles, in particular, needed to be reoriented to the truth of God and the reality of how things worked in God’s kingdom since they would be the future leaders of the Church.

The text for today has a series of four pictures which illustrate the need for disciples to take seriously the teachings of Jesus. Jesus used these illustrations to impress on His listeners the need for an adjustment, a reorientation, of their attitudes and behaviors.

Read Luke 6:39-49

The first of the illustrations is in verses 39 and 40. Jesus called attention to the folly of one blind man trying to be a guide to another blind man. The not-so-subtle implication here was that the teachers of the Jewish law did not correctly understand God and the ways of God and were not qualified to provide religious teaching to the people. The truth of the kingdom of God was a mystery to these teachers. Jesus was pointing out that His disciples must no longer follow these leaders. If they did so, they would end up in the pit.

Jesus wanted His listeners to choose and follow a competent teacher because students are dependent upon the information and guidance provided by their teachers. In the same way that a guide for the blind must see better than those who are being led, a teacher must know more than the student. Jesus wanted the disciples to understand that, from that day onward, they would have to trust Him to be their guide and authority, rather than the traditional teachers of the Law.

Jesus was the only person on earth qualified to communicate the deep truths of God. As He had stated previously, He had been sent from heaven to preach and explain the good news of the kingdom of God and to demonstrate the powers of the kingdom. He understood the ways of heaven. He wanted His followers to be like Him. He had high expectations for the Twelve, just like He has high expectations for all His followers. Just think about the implications of verse 40. While it is true that “a student is not above his teacher,” it is also true that “everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” Just think what that means in regard to the potential spiritual development of believers and their ministry activities.

If we look into another Gospel account, we will understand very clearly what Jesus meant. In the Gospel of John He said, “The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (*John 14:10-12*). In these verses Jesus was emphasizing His relationship to the Father and that He followed the guidance of the Father. In other words, the Father was the guide and teacher of Jesus in the same way that the apostles were to be trained and guided by Jesus.

Furthermore, the Father was living in Jesus, and doing His work through Jesus, just as the Jesus would later live in and do His work through the Apostles. Jesus was not above the Father, just like the Apostles could not be above Jesus, but the same kind of kingdom work would go on because the Apostles, after they were fully trained, would be like their teacher, Jesus.

We need to keep in mind that the Father now lives in us, and does His work through us. Nothing has changed in regard to kingdom people since the Sermon on the Mount. The teaching is for us just like it was for the people sitting on the mountainside more than 2000 years ago. As Jesus said to His apostles, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (*John 20:21*).

Now we come to verses 41-42. There is some confusion among commentators about the best interpretation, but if we keep in mind that Jesus had just selected the Twelve to become future leaders, then I think we can figure out the meaning. The point that Jesus wanted to make is like this: Just as it would be foolish for a student to follow a blind and obviously incompetent leader, the leader cannot presume to be able to help someone when his own faults exceeded the problems of the person in need of help. Verses 39 and 40 are from the standpoint of the student/learner. He must choose the correct teacher. Verses 41 and 42 are from the standpoint of the teacher. He must be qualified to be a teacher.

I think these verses refer back to characteristics explained in the earlier part of the Sermon on the Mount, when the qualifications for kingdom membership were introduced. For example, we learned that kingdom people must not judge and condemn others. Jesus did not want His apostles to immediately start judging the spiritual conditions of others because He had selected them for a special position. He did not want them to have the same attitudes and behaviors of the spiritually blind leaders of the Jewish people, who were too often proud and arrogant and looked down on the people. If the Apostles were to become like their Teacher, they would have to learn how to show love and mercy to others, not make judgments about them. If they were to be guides and teachers for others, they would first have to demonstrate in their own lives the truths they would teach to others.

In verses 41 and 42 Jesus used the literary technique of hyperbole to emphasize His point that kingdom oriented leaders needed to take care of their own faults before they tried to help others. The apostle who failed to remove the plank sticking out of his own eye before trying to help others would be a hypocrite, and Jesus did not want any of His followers to be hypocrites.

Jesus wanted the Apostles to understand that they would be able to show mercy only after they understood mercy. They would be able to show love to others only after they had experienced the love of God in their own lives. They would not be able to forgive until they understood how much they had been forgiven. The point is that people must make an honest appraisal of and deal with their own sins before they become qualified to help others who want to deal with their sins.

On several other occasions, Jesus spoke about the qualities of leadership. He taught that one of the most important attitudes of a kingdom person was the willingness to serve others, to put the concerns of others ahead of personal concerns, to be humble. That is what Jesus did. Scripture declares that “Christ came to serve, not to be served” (*Matthew 20:28*). We are informed that “He laid down His life for others.” In similar fashion, kingdom people must not pursue personal interests but put the needs of others ahead of their own concerns.

This theme continues in verses 43-45. Just as the student becomes like his/her teacher, that is, becomes the product of the teacher, so fruit is the product of the tree to which it is attached. This principle of good fruit from good trees and bad fruit from bad trees goes back to the time of creation. During the process of creation, described in Genesis chapter 1, there was a refrain which was repeated several times: animals, fish, birds, and vegetation all reproduced “after their own kind.” “Each living entity was recognized by its own fruit.”

Jesus used this illustration to indicate that the principle of physical reproduction was also true in the spiritual realm. People are known by what is produced in their lives. What is on the inside will make itself known by what comes out. Good things are manifested if there is good in the heart of a person. Bad things are manifested when there is evil in the heart. The inward self, what we are deep in our character and personality, determines the actions of an individual. Scripture informs us that only the Lord is able to see the heart. However, we can learn some things about a person by observation because outward actions are a barometer of what is going on inside the heart.

In the earlier part of this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the kind of actions which were acceptable in the kingdom of God. The ability to love one's enemies, do good to those who hate, bless those who curse, and pray for those who mistreat, only comes out of individuals who have been radically changed on the inside. Note what Jesus said in verse 45: it is what is "stored up" inside that determines what a person is. The heart is like a "storehouse" (the word is literally "a treasury"), a repository of either good or bad. In the context of His teaching, Jesus wanted His apostles to know that their lives would have to be reshaped from the inside before they would be able to minister effectively to others.

There is one more illustration to talk about. Jesus used this last illustration to indicate the kind of unshakable future which would be available for those who would obey His words and, in contrast, He described the sad result of those individuals who would not obey. There are three statements which clearly indicate the theme of obedience. "Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I say?" and "the person who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a house on a secure foundation," and then the contrast, "the person who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a house without a foundation." It is not just knowledge and information that denotes authentic obedience, but application — whether people actually do what Jesus tells them to do or not.

The man who dug down deep and laid the foundation of his house on rock represented people who were obedient and careful to do everything just the way that Jesus wanted. This man's hard work was worth it because his house stood firm and secure in the storms of life. In contrast, the other man built a house without any foundation, and his house did not hold up in the torrent of water. It collapsed in total destruction. This foolish builder represented people who refused to apply the teachings of Jesus, who refused to live according to the ways of God, and instead chose to live according to their own rules.

Jesus did not add any comment after His comparison of the two builders. I don't think He needed to. Jesus concluded His teaching with some implied questions: "OK. Now that you have heard my words, what are you going to do? How are you going to respond?" "Are you going to do what I say or not?" I'm sure the minds of the apostles and other listeners were spinning over the radical ideas presented by Jesus. They had just been given an incredible introductory lecture about the kingdom of God by the Master Teacher. Jesus' objective had been the reorientation of the attitudes and behaviors of His listeners, and He had given them lots to think about.

The last illustration was the call to action, the call for listeners to apply the teaching to their lives — to recognize Who Jesus was, recognize His authority, follow Him as Guide and Teacher — and to obediently carry out His instructions. Scripture indicates that some of the listeners took Jesus words to heart, and their attitudes and behaviors changed. They learned how to get through all the storms and afflictions of life triumphantly. Others unfortunately walked home at the end of the day unchanged in their attitudes and with no desire to change their behavior.

Jesus wanted to shape the thinking of all of the people with whom He came in contact. In particular, He wanted to shape the character of the men who would be the future leaders of the Church. He also wanted to shape us. He wants us to be modern day disciples. He wants us to, more and more, live under His authority and, more and more, become like Him, our Teacher, and, more and more, live like members of the kingdom of God.

Some Thoughts for Reflection:

1. Are you sure you have been born again into the kingdom of God?
This is the most basic step.
2. The study of the Word is essential for spiritual growth.
3. Next is the application of the teachings of Scripture (obedience)
4. Evidence of the good fruit in your life comes from relating to others with love, mercy, forgiveness, and generosity.