

“Time to Obey”

Matthew 7:24-29; Luke 6:46-49
Sermon on the Mount Series

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight”
Jeremiah 15:16

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Introduction

We come now to the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

It is best, I believe, to understand the ending in light of the beginning.

Remember: Jesus' first public action was to select a group of men, women (and as some of them were married), presumably children; to be with him like extended family, like apprentices with a master. They traveled together; shared life together.

Then Jesus began to speak of God's kingdom, God's country, breaking into the countries of our world and to demonstrate this he went about healing every disease and illness among the people.

Against that backdrop he trekked up the side of a mountain; gathered his discipleship group close around him and began to teach his way. A great crowd of people surrounded them and listened in.

The first thing he said: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** And he continued: **Blessed are . . . , Blessed are . . . , Blessed are**

And from the blessing of God in their lives, he gave them a charge: **You are the salt of the earth . . . you are the light of the world.**

We cannot rise to the challenge of the warnings of Jesus at the conclusion of his sermon unless we hear them through the ears of a people blessed by God to be God's people in the world around us. One of those leaning close toward Jesus as the Sermon on the Mount was proclaimed was Peter, a leader of the discipleship group. Many years later he wrote this:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1Peter 2:9-10)

Jesus gathers a people who together enjoy the humble calling of turning on the light and demonstrating to those around us the goodness, the beauty, the loveliness, the wonder and the glory of God our Creator and Restorer.

We do this in faith, we often do not see the results, but the gift of Christ to his people is to intercede on behalf of others with the living God. God hears and responds to the intercessions of the people of Jesus for the people around them who are in need of all manner of help from God. God has designed things to work like this!

When this is our heartfelt identity we can hear Jesus with joy talk about the judgment of God in the conclusion of his sermon.

I say with joy, because embracing the worldview of being a creature of God who has endowed me with gifts and purpose, results in my life being of account, being worth something, for which I will at death and at the final judgment be called upon to explain.

And while this generates fear; the Bible says, **the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom**, and Jesus Christ tells me he came down from heaven to get me ready for my final accounting and he gifts me with forgiveness and the power of the Spirit to live into all God calls me to be.

Thanks be to God!

Text

The title of the first sermon on Matthew 7 was: Time to Choose. The second sermon was: Time to Do. And now the third and final sermon is: Time to Obey.

The parallel text to the houses built on rock and sand in the Gospel of Luke is prefaced with the key concern:

Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord” and do not do what I say?

Jesus is talking to us, to his disciples, to all who call him “Lord, Lord.”

All of chapter seven in the Sermon is addressed to disciples:

Enter through the narrow gate . . . walk the narrow road

Watch out for false prophets

Beware of practicing faith on the outside and not the inside

The fundamental emphasis of Jesus’ conclusion, comparing his language with other parts of Scripture, is on justice and the sure judgment of God at the end of our time.

As I said, within an understandable discomfort and fear, ultimate accountability is what gives meaning to my life and unlike the rest of the animal kingdom, people need meaning.

So, the challenge:

In the building of the house of our life make sure the foundation

which then guides, informs, determines all else

are the words of Jesus put into full practice.

The words and ways of Jesus are the gift of God to pass successfully through the judgment.

However, no matter how believable this is; no matter how sensible this is; no matter how appealing this is . . .

The question of Jesus remains as pertinent and as sharp today as when he first posed it:

Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord” and do not do what I say?

We can respond positively to the first sermon title: Time to Choose. Okay, even though I do not like having only one choice – this or that – I can swallow hard and choose.

We can respond positively to the second sermon title: Time to Do. Okay, I can get motivated and start getting something done.

But this third title: Time to Obey – this is where so often we hit the wall. It is one thing to choose and do, it is another to obey someone else telling us what they think we should choose and do!

To learn to obey is the most important and the most difficult matter in the business of life.

Application

There are a number of challenges to becoming an obedient follower of Jesus:

The prophet Ezekiel (33:30) writing some 2600 years ago records his conversation with God:

They come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear your words, but they will not obey them. For flattery is on their lips, but their heart is set on their gain. To them you are like a singer of love songs, one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; they hear what you say, but they will not do it.

‘but their heart is set on their gain’

This refers to our innate inclination to selfishness. ‘Thanks very much, but I will do it my way.’ Pastor Michelle was quite vulnerable last week and exposed to us an example of her inclination to not obey. I am not going to be as vulnerable!

The problem with the ‘heart is set on their gain’ is that ‘gain’ is either defined by the individual, or even more likely, by the individual’s peer group or various ‘gurus’.

But Jesus Christ, the one who died and was resurrected, stands before us and says I am the way, the truth, and the life. My words and way are the only foundation.

‘To them you are like a singer of love songs, one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; they hear what you say, but they will not do it.’

This, I believe references the tremendous challenge of romanticising, idealizing or abstracting the Christian Faith.

We substitute singing love songs (which is all the rage in modern worship music) for doing the hard work of simply obeying.

The problem of approaching religion as an abstraction or an idea gets rooted in our education. Much of our secular education, which goes on for years, is abstraction by design. We cannot possibly explain to school children, or college students, the total substance of a matter, so we teach them an abstract, an idea. And we develop our knowledge as a set of ideas without grasping the full design and function.

This is compounded in the Protestant branch of Christendom wherein we necessarily reacted against the ‘works’ religion of Medieval Roman Catholicism, but then ended up with people who thought a certain idea in their minds qualified them to be a Christian.

Even among us Evangelicals, who by definition, are to be practically passionate about our faith, the major tendency is still toward ideas.

We are famous for our Home Groups that study the Bible. Compounding idea upon idea. But I do think I have ever heard of an Obedience Home or Study group where the function was to go out and practice obeying Jesus.

Finally, and most likely the biggest challenge: we do not care to be obedient to Jesus Christ by being obedient to his Church.

Even within our own fellowship. It is not really a part of our culture, except in the most dire cases, for the elders and pastors to tell the members what to do.

This is where it gets super practical and, increasingly, with our secular world in many situations no longer portraying or supporting Christian truth, how are we to obey Jesus unless we have the support of 'my local congregation' that will assist me to know and do the way of Jesus?

I believe a 'shifting of gears' is required. For the security and integrity of our fellowship it is in our interest to strengthen our culture whereby there is greater clarity among us, through the leadership of pastors, elders and deacons, as to the words and ways of Jesus that we all are accountable to be obedient to.

When Jesus first preached his Sermon on the Mount, the crowds were astounded at the authority of his teaching. May the good Lord lead us as a congregation of His followers to hear and do His words, so that when the storm comes, the house of our lives will stand and be the salt of the earth and a light to the world.

Amen.