

A Singular Focus

Matt. 10:27-42

Jesus separated the twelve from His other disciples and then gave them instructions before sending them out to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. In these instructions there was much that had to do with the particular mission of the 12 at the time that Jesus sent them and there was also much that Jesus said that we could define as timeless. Principles for living or Christian service that are as practical and insightful now as they were then. We talked about several of these timeless principles last time and we will continue that theme today.

"Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops." Jesus did teach His disciples privately but never just for their own sake. He was not able to speak freely to the crowds since they were not ready to hear what He was saying. Still, He wanted them to get the message. What He privately taught the disciples was meant for the people and the disciples by reason of what they had learned were to be their teachers. Spiritual insight is never intended for just one. If God gives you understanding then He wants you to share it. Others also need to hear and to understand.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." These words were spoken in the context of persecution and resistance to the message of Christ. The enemy has often used threats to attempt to silence the disciples of the Lord. In the early days of the church in Jerusalem the disciples were excited when they were threatened since this was a fulfillment of the prophetic words of Christ and they were honored to be counted worthy to suffer something of what Jesus had suffered for them. They were also confident in the face of such threats for they were also full of faith in the power and presence of God and in His ability and willingness to further His purposes either through their suffering or through their triumph. The one thing that we must know and keep in front of us is that the

enemies' power is always very limited where God's is not. Staying right with God no matter the attitude of those around us can put you in the way of threats and even harm but this is nothing to fear. If there is a contest of wills, God will always win.

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father who is in heaven..." Here, Jesus taught that there is a parallel relationship between heaven and earth. This is not the only example. Matt 18:18, "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose

on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." A success, confessing Christ before men, is duplicated in heaven. A failure, denying Christ before men, is also duplicated in heaven. Think about this! If you have a good day for God, then you also have a good day for God in heaven. And the opposite is also true. Consider the teaching of Christ. Obedience to Him is seen in the small ways that we honor His will above our own inclinations. It may be natural for you to hold a grudge against someone who has offended you. Jesus would have you let it go. It would be natural to resent an obligation to help someone and Jesus would have you volunteer to go beyond that obligation. You might want to be sure that others are aware of your spiritual commitments and Jesus would have you meet with God in secret so that only He and you will know what has transpired between you. You might want to punish people who do the wrong thing and be kind to those who make good choices. Jesus would have you be kind to everyone. You might distinguish between people who are important and those who are insignificant. Jesus would have treat even little children with respect and dignity. None of these things are of the sort that get much attention. Living according to the law of liberty (the teachings of Christ) will not win the accolades of the world but each choice to follow His teaching will be repeated in heaven. Honor Christ and He will honor you. Live with the recognition of the significance of your every move.

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." On its face this statement seems to contradict Jesus' own teaching. Why would the advocate of loving your enemy, blessing those who curse you,

persecute you turn around and say that He has not come to bring peace but a sword? Jesus was and remains a polarizing figure. He was an outsider. He drew great crowds and this was deemed a threat by the political and religious leadership of the Jews. Then the crowds who were so enthusiastic left Him when they did not like what He was teaching. His teaching was personal. It challenged each listener to decide for themselves what they would do with what He was teaching. The story of the blind man in John 9 is a great example. Jesus made clay of dirt and spit, put it on his blind eyes and sent him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed it off and came back seeing. He soon declared his conviction that Jesus was from God. Some refused to believe that he was the blind man whom they all knew. His parents were brought in to identify him and then to explain how he could now see. They testified that yes, this is our son but as to how he can now see, we have no idea, ask him. Well, they said, Jesus may have healed you but you know that he is a sinner. The blind man (No longer blind) answered that if Jesus was a sinner then how could He have done what He did, giving sight to a man who was born blind? In the end, many refused to accept that Jesus was the one who had given sight to the blind and that He was the

Son of God. Healing the blind man put everyone who witnessed the event or who heard of it and knew the principals involved on the spot. They had to decide what they would believe about it. No one could decide for another. Within a family or even a marriage some would decide differently. The facts were so clear that you would think that there could be no dispute but some refuse to acknowledge anything that would challenge their core beliefs. One scientist, an atheist, said that the choice between believing in creation or evolution was a choice between the impossible and the unthinkable. The truth about Jesus demands that He be acknowledged as Lord of all. It makes no sense to debate with God or to bargain with Him or to try to shape Him into your own image. He is God. He is real. He is Lord. "I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. We all have a tendency to want to be in control of our lives. All in an attempt to guarantee the fulfillment and happiness that we seek. Then, strangely, nothing works out. Desperately we turn to God feeling that He is the one who is able to

patch up our lives and put them back together as we always wanted them to be. Instead, He asked that we surrender our destiny to Him. Will you give up your dreams for God? Should you take that step something incredible happens. God gives us the desires of our hearts. In giving up your life you gain your life. You discover a satisfaction and joy that goes beyond your imagination.

"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." Again acts on earth are duplicated in heaven. We receive Christ by receiving those He cares for. Jesus loves everyone but He has a particular passion for the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and the helpless. Take care of the poor and the defenseless and see your stock in heaven rise through the clouds. The opportunity to do the Christ-like act is unending. The benefits of such acts will echo through the heavens. Change your mind set. Get out of your own way. Lay up treasure in heaven - forget this earthly stuff.