

Three Directives from Jesus

Matt. 12:38-49

I have been watching a Netflix show called Travelers. I just finished the First season of the show and so far there is only one season. The main characters of the story have come back in time to re-inhabit the bodies of recently deceased people. They have come back from a future in which the earth has been decimated by catastrophes and so the Travelers are sent by their director and assigned missions which will, if successful, change the circumstances of their present earth for the better. The Travelers lives are defined by their missions, by the circumstances of the person whose life they now inhabit, and by the directives that all Travelers are expected to observe. The directives are all numbered and I don't think that there are more than five or six. For example, The mission comes first. And, they are not to take the lives of the present day people they interact with. They are only to change the future in the specific way they are directed and not according to their own sensibilities.

The story of Travelers can translate into a spiritual metaphor. As Christians we also have a Director (the Lord Jesus Christ) for who we are on mission. Though we are not from a future made destitute by catastrophe we are living in an age that is decimated by sin and we take responsibility for choices and actions taken now that can profoundly affect eternity, for ourselves as well as others. Though there is much darkness in our present earth, we look forward to an existence free from sin, from sadness, disease or death. Like the Travelers, we have a mission and we are to abide by the directives we have received from our director.

Our passage here in Matthew offers three directives for the Christian Traveler. They are actually presented more as warnings but can be easily adopted as directives. The first warning was given to the scribes and Pharisees who asked Jesus for a sign. Jesus answered that no sign would be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now we all know that these religious leaders had witnessed many signs - that is, the miracles that Jesus did, the words that He spoke and the

life that He lived. The sign of the prophet Jonah is the sign of the resurrection. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and nights and then he was spit up on dry land from which he went to Nineveh and preached the coming judgment. The people of Nineveh believed the witness of Jonah and they turned from their sin and repented before the Lord. They were spared the judgment and the city was saved. They responded to the sign as Jonah delivered it to them. Repenting before the Lord meant

that they changed their most fundamental assumptions about life in order to conform to the will of their Creator.

Similarly, The Queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom of Solomon and came from a great distance to see if all that she had heard was true. She had only heard of Solomon. It is hard to know how direct or indirect her information was. She heard and then came to see for herself. Unlike many, she had the means to come and see and she had the status to obtain a personal interview when she arrived. Most did not have her opportunities but she took advantage of what she had and Jesus applauded her for that. In contrast to her spirit of genuine inquiry, the scribes and Pharisees had the opportunity to learn from one greater than Solomon and they did not have to journey from afar but instead, in their unbelief and resistance to God, they asked Jesus to give them a sign.

So the first directive here is: Use the opportunities that you have to receive the truth that God wants you to know. We have no problem applying this principle to our school children. What parent says to their child, "Don't worry about your homework. It is not important." And, when the child wakes up, do you ask, "Do you want to go to school today? Because, if you want, we could just go to the beach instead." No, school is seen as an opportunity for learning and we don't want our kids to miss out. Unfortunately, the kids themselves do not always value the opportunity that school represents for them. By the time they are in high school, the majority of our kids are bored with school. They see it as irrelevant. They have no sense of using their opportunity of getting an education to prepare for the future. They graduate from high school and they have no clue about what it means to be an independent adult engaged in making a life for themselves.

But spiritually, how much do we value our opportunities. You have a Bible. How much do you read it? There are Christian books, Christian TV, Christian radio, Christian music. Some are engaged in many or all of these opportunities while others are simply not. Within the church, we often make little use of the opportunities presented to us. Rita is a wonderful and gifted Children's Sunday School teacher but she only has a handful of students. If we were making the most of our opportunities, she would need a bigger room so that all the kids could come. Christian Karate and Men's discipleship classes would be overwhelmed with seekers. There would be no need for these partitions and my phone would be ringing off the hook as people called asking for more opportunities to learn and grow and become in their walk with the Lord.

Jesus' first directive here is: Use the opportunities that you have to receive the truth that God wants you to know.

In the second warning Jesus spoke of the plight of a man who is relieved of his demon but who fails to fill his life with anything else. The demon wanders around for a bit but then returns to his former house and finds it empty and clean so he moves back in and brings friends with him so that the man in question is worse off than when he started.

Jesus' second directive is: Replace every element of your old life with that which is new and that comes from God. Replace self-indulgence with acts of charity. Replace manipulation of people with trust in God. Replace the flesh with the Spirit. Replace lies with the truth. Replace vengeance with love and kindness. Replace impurity with fidelity. Fill your life with the good and keep the evil out.

Jesus' second directive is: Replace every element of your old life with that which is new and that comes from God.

In the third warning we hear of Jesus' mother and brothers coming to the ministry and seeking a chance to speak privately with Jesus. Someone brought their presence and desire to the attention of Jesus and Jesus asked, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" Then He motioned toward the crowds and 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."

The impression the passage gives is that Jesus declined to see His mother and brothers on this occasion. In John 7, Jesus' brothers give Jesus advice that was rooted in their unbelief. They were telling Him to "show Himself to the world" at the feast that was coming up in Jerusalem. They argued that if you want to be famous, you need to show off what you can do. They showed that they didn't get it and in Matt it appears that for a time even Mary did not get what Jesus was doing and she and the brothers were seeking to persuade Jesus to alter His course. This was a form of unbelief since to believe was to be convinced that Jesus was the Son of God and therefore He always knew what He was doing. He was the Teacher who was to be heard and followed rather than the Son who needed to stop and listen to His mother.

Jesus' third directive is: Do not project your thoughts upon the Lord but listen to hear what He is saying and then obey. The problem is, can you tell the difference between your thoughts and God's will? When have you been conscious that you want to do one thing while you know that what God wants is something else? Did you choose God's will rather than your own?

We must begin this process of seeking His will in the word of God. There is so much that is clear in the Word. Keep the Ten Commandments. Adopt the spirit of the law,

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself. Follow the teachings of Jesus. Let the Law of Liberty set you free. Begin with the Word.

When it comes to our circumstances we need to be open to see that there are many ways that good can be achieved in our own lives and in that of others. If you can only see one way then it is probably your way. George Mueller said that the first step in seeking God's will in a matter was to empty himself of his own will. There are many ways to solve a problem. Be open to an unexpected solution. When it comes you will know that it is from the Lord rather than from you.

Apply the spiritual principles of faith and grace and mercy and love. Be guided by the answers to those questions. If I am forgiving, how will I respond? If I exercise faith, what is the answer? If my heart is filled with love, how patient would I be?

Jesus' third directive is: Do not project your thoughts upon the Lord but listen to hear what He is saying and then obey.