

September 8, 2019

“The Parable of the Good Samaritan”

Galatians 5: 13 – 26; 1st John 4: 7 – 21; Matthew 25: 31 – 46; **Luke 10:25 – 37 (Sermon)**

A recent survey found that only 69% of Christians who regularly attend Sunday Worship services thought that they could tell The Parable of The Good Samaritan. Regardless of whether people can accurately retell this parable the underlying concept of a “*Good Samaritan*” is familiar to almost everyone. We have hospitals, churches, and charitable organizations named Good Samaritan. We all know examples of people we think of as Good Samaritans; Mother Theresa, Albert Schweitzer, or the person that stops and helps change a flat tire. We all know what a Good Samaritan is, but since there are several valuable teachings in this parable we need to spend some time wrestling with this parable.

Verse 25 tells us that an expert in The Law stood up to test Jesus by asking; “***Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.***” Actually, that question is flawed. A person does not do anything to inherit anything? Inheritance, by definition is a gift from one person to another person. An inheritance is not a payment for services rendered. Certainly this expert in The Law knew this. Yet his question is something we need to think about. People in Jesus’ day and people today mistakenly think they can do something to earn eternal life. I.e.,” *God will let me into heaven if I am a good person; or if I belong to a church and regularly attend worship, and / or if I tithe, etc.*

Jesus answers this man’s question with one of His own. “***What is written in the law?***” (Verse 26) The expert in the law answers, “***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and, your neighbor as yourself.***” (Verse 27) Jesus told him he answered correctly and said; “***Do this and you will live.***” (Verse 28) The order of the answer is important. “***Love God***” comes before “***love of neighbor.***” You see it is difficult to love a grouchy obnoxious, ungrateful neighbor unless your heart is filled with the love of God. It is only the love of God in our heart that gives us the ability to love that kind of a neighbor. Jesus’ answer to receiving eternal life is conditioned upon consistently practicing unlimited unconditional love for God and for our neighbor without ever failing. If you can meet that impossible standard, you do not need a Savior.

But this expert in The Law wanted to justify himself, so he asks Jesus another question, “***And who is my neighbor?***” (Verse 29) By asking this question this man was trying to put limits on his responsibility to loving his neighbor. I.e.; “*Lord who can I exclude? When can I quit loving my neighbor?*” At this point Jesus tells His famous Parable of The Good Samaritan.

The first person to whom we are introduced in the Parable of the Good Samaritan is an unfortunate traveler. This man had taken the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which was notoriously dangerous. It descended nearly 3,300 feet in 17 miles, running through narrow passes at several points. The terrain offered easy hiding for bandits who terrorized the travelers on this road. As this traveler made the journey, he was attacked, brutally beaten, stripped of his clothes, and left for dead. We are not given any information about the man who was beaten and robbed. But that is not important to the point of this parable.

Verse 31 tells us when a Priest came down the same road and saw the man that was robbed and beaten he passed by on the other side of the road. This priest was a Jew, a teacher, and a priest was called to be a role model for the Jewish people. The parable does not tell us why the priest did not help the man. Maybe the priest was afraid he would be beaten and robbed. Or maybe he was late to an important meeting.

Next a Levite came along and when he saw the man that was beaten he passed by on the other side of the road. The Levites were dedicated to an auxiliary ministry for the priest, especially in regards to the manual labor of caring for the Tabernacle. Levites were forbidden from serving as priest (Numbers 3:10) but the Levites assisted the priest in the work in The Temple.

The Samaritans were Jews who intermarried with the Assyrians and Canaanites. This violated The Law of Moses which stated that the Hebrews were only to marry Hebrews. The Jews did not consider the Samaritans to be citizens of Israel since the Samaritans were half-breeds. Therefore the Samaritans could not offer sacrifices in the Temple. To make matters worse, the Samaritans tried to sabotage Nehemiah's rebuilding of the Temple in 443 BC. The Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. But verses 33 – 35 tell us when a Samaritan came by; he stopped, bandaged the wounded man's wounds, put him on his donkey, paid for a room at an inn and cared for him.

Most Christians would say that the message that Jesus is teaching in this parable is that Jesus expects all of us to stop and help anyone who is in need. And while that is true there is more than one spiritual truth in this parable. That is because this is God's inspired word which is timeless and unlimited. It is not enough for us to just read God's word we all need to study and meditate on God's word. Think about peeling an onion. As soon as you peel off the outer layer of an onion, you expose the second layer. When you peel off the second layer of the onion you expose the third layer; etc. The expert in The Law asks Jesus; ***"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"*** The second spiritual truth is eternal life is a gift from God. You cannot do anything to earn eternal life. Ephesians 2:8 – 9 is clear; ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*** Jesus answers the expert with a question; what does The Law say? ***"He answered Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'.*** (Luke 10: 27) The third spiritual truth is God's Law requires us to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. The problem is that we all have a sinful nature and no one is capable of loving God with all that we are. And certainly we can not love our neighbor unconditionally all the time. The problem is not with The Law; the problem is none of us are capable of keeping The Law. Remember James tells us; ***For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*** (James 2:10) We all need a savior since we are not capable of keeping God's Law. So the next spiritual truth is God loves us so much that He provided a way for sinful people like me and you to have eternal life. Jesus came to earth to pay the price of our sins by dying on the cross.

After Jesus told the Parable of The Good Samaritan Jesus asked this man; ***"which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"*** (Verse 36) The expert in the law responded by saying; ***"The one who had mercy on him."*** (Verse 37) Now we see Jesus expanded the meaning of who is my neighbor. So the next spiritual truth is; loving our neighbor includes, having compassion on a person in need, showing mercy to a person in need, and going out of our way to help the person in need.

The fact that Jesus picked a Samaritan to be the hero should make us want to dig deeper because the Jews hated the Samaritans, Jews did not associate with Samaritans them, nor did they talk to Samaritans. If Jesus was just making the point that we should have compassion and minister to people in need Jesus could have told this parable with the priest or the Levite stopping and caring for the man who was robbed and beaten. If Jesus just wanted to expose the emptiness of the Jewish religious leaders Jesus could have made a Jewish lay person to be the hero who stopped and ministered to the man who was beaten and robbed. But the fact that Jesus picked a Samaritan to be the hero leads me to

believe that Jesus is also exposing and condemning their sins of prejudices, hatred, and racism. Sadly today prejudices, hatred, and racism is everywhere. And that is the message Jesus has for us today. Jesus is exposing and condemning our sin of prejudices, hatred, and racism. Today, many people hold prejudicial attitudes toward Moslems, migrants, persons of a different skin color, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, and religion. Prejudice means a person has a pre-conceived belief about another person who is different from them. A racist is anyone who harbors negative thoughts, words, or actions against a person of another race. Satan is the author of prejudices, hatred, and racism because prejudices, hatred, and racism are the exact opposite of Godly attitudes. God loves diversity. Just look at all the different kinds of trees, flowers, and birds that God created. The Bible is clear God loves everybody and God chose to create people with different colored eyes, hair, and skin. If God loves everybody and if Jesus died for the sins of the world, how can we who call ourselves Christians harbor prejudices, hatred, and racism in our heart? Prejudices, hatred, and racism are sinful because they are the opposite of Christian values. Prejudices, hatred, and racism are all sinful attitudes and they have no place in a Christian's life. In 1st John 4:8 we read; ***"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."*** 1st John 4:20 states; ***"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen"***. And 1st John 3:15 states; ***"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."***

Prejudices, hatred, and racism have no place in the church since they cause discord and division. Every one of us promised to further the peace, the purity, and the unity in the church when we made our profession of faith. And remember Jesus prayed for unity in the church on the night He was betrayed. Legislation and sensitivity training are not the answer to eliminating prejudices, hatred, and racism. The answer is for Christians to acknowledge, confess, and repent of their sin of prejudices, hatred, and racism. Christians are called to show the world how to love one another. We are called to model Christ-like behavior. The answer to eliminating prejudices, hatred, and racism is for Christians to get serious about living like Jesus taught and telling the unbelievers God has put in our life about the love of Jesus.

There are many *"Good Samaritans"* who are different from us in many ways. Think about this from the perspective of the victim in Jesus' parable. Do you think it mattered to him that the person helping him was a Samaritan? You see the skin color, religious creed, and / or national origins really do not matter when it comes to our most basic human relationships. What matters is how we think about one another and how we treat one another. Remember in Matthew 25:40 Jesus said; ***"whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*** And the converse is true; ***"whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."*** (Matthew 25:45)

Who do you identify with in this parable? Most of us would like to see ourselves as the Samaritan who was the "good guy". Most of us would not like to identify ourselves with the hypocritical Priest or the unconcerned Levite. Forget about being a *"Good Samaritan"* for a minute and identify instead with the victim. You see we are all like the man who had been robbed, beaten, and lying in the ditch. Spiritually we are all naked, vulnerable, and in desperate need of help. We all have failed to love God and our neighbor as our self. We all have fallen short of perfection, which God demands. We can not earn eternal life any more than the expert in The Law could. We all need Jesus as our Savior. I believe most everyone here has asked Jesus to be their Savior. If you have, you were given God's free gift of eternal life when you placed your faith in Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1-2, 6) If you have never asked Jesus to save your soul I beg you to do that before you leave here today. Come up to me and say; *I want Jesus to save me and I want to go to heaven when I die physically.*

God's word to us today challenges each of us to examine our attitudes and our actions. We all need to ask The Holy Spirit to expose any hint of prejudices, hatred, and /or racism that we have in our heart. We all need to ask Jesus to help us to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Will you pray that you will be a living example of God's love to your family, to your church family, to your neighbors, and to your co-workers?

AMEN

September 15, 2019

“I Am The Bread of Life”

Exodus 16: 2 – 15; Psalm 78: 1 – 29; Ephesians 2: 1 – 10; **John 6: 24 – 40 (Sermon)**

Our scripture lesson from John follows Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5,000 men with five loaves of bread and two fish. After Jesus fed the 5,000 the crowd wanted to forcefully make Jesus their physical king but Jesus withdrew and went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

In verse 24 we see the crowd went to great lengths to find Jesus. They crossed The Sea of Galilee and found Jesus in Capernaum. Jesus knew their hearts and said; ***“Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.”*** (John 6:26) Jesus was telling them their religion was shallow and they were searching for Him because they wanted another free meal.

You see Jesus forced them and Jesus forces us to think about our motives for seeking Jesus. Did we come here today for a free lunch? Did we come here because we think we are doing God a big favor by coming to church and that God will reciprocate by granting us health or by blessing us with physical possessions? Did we come here because of what Jesus can do for us? Are we like this crowd 2000 years ago who wanted the loaves of bread but not the Lordship of Christ? You see Jesus is not just concerned about our empty stomachs; Jesus is much more concerned about our empty hearts.

When Jesus exposed the shallowness of their discipleship by saying; ***“do not work for food that spoils, but food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”*** (Verse 27) the people asked Jesus; ***“What must we do to do the works God requires?”*** (Verse 28) We see that this crowd misinterpreted what Jesus said. This crowd thought Jesus was saying that God required them to work to earn everlasting life. Jesus quickly corrected them in verse 29 by saying, ***“The work that God requires is for you to believe that Jesus is the Messiah or God in the flesh.”*** ***“Believe in the One God sent.”*** Then Jesus declared; ***“I am The Bread of Life”***. (Verse 35) This is the first of the seven ***“I Ams”*** recorded in The Gospel according to John. Then in verse 41 Jesus declared ***“I am the Bread that came from heaven.”***

Then the people responded; ***“Always give us this bread.”*** (Verse 36) Jesus declared; ***“Open your eyes and see. I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst.”*** Friends that is the message for us today! ***“Open your eyes and believe”***. Today we have The Bible and the testimony of thousands of witnesses that Jesus is The Christ, The Son of God. We just need to open our spiritual eyes and to believe that Jesus is The Son of God and that it is Jesus who gives life and that Jesus wants to be a real part of our daily life!

To the crowd’s credit they had made sacrifices searching for Jesus. They did not know exactly where Jesus was but they searched for Jesus. They sacrificed to find Jesus and they did not realize what it was that they hungered for. To your credit each of you made a sacrifice to be here this morning. And I am sure many of you feel like that crowd did, that Jesus has been elusive.

Remember, the crowd had followed Jesus because He miraculously healed the sick and miraculously fed a large crowd of over 5,000. However, notice in verse 30 the crowd had the audacity to say, *if you want us to believe in you, then show us a sign like the manna in the wilderness.* But before we condemn that crowd, we need to be honest with ourselves. Because many times we try to shift the blame for our disobedience and our unbelief in Jesus by saying, ***“Lord what have you done for me today?”***

Yes to a certain degree we are all here because of what Jesus can do for us. We are here because Jesus can forgive us of our sins. We are here because Jesus can free us from the guilt of our sinful attitudes and sinful acts. We are here because Jesus is the only One who can grant us life in heaven throughout eternity and we are here because something is missing in our lives. The crowd's determination to find Jesus points us to the importance of an authentic human desire for a word from The Lord and a universal human desire to be in the presence of Almighty God.

We also see that Jesus' answer forces us to honestly look at the purity of our expectations for being here today. We all need to ask ourselves; *Did I come to be entertained or did I come to worship our creator God? Did I come to be with my friends or did I come to be in the presence of Jesus our Lord? Did I come with a hunger for Jesus to transform my life?*

In this passage Jesus assures us that as The Bread of Life He can satisfy our longing for the Divine. Jesus invites us to His table in order to feed us spiritually. You see our primary purpose for being in church should always be to be fed spiritually and seeking a closer personal relationship with our Creator God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

We do not want to miss a very important spiritual truth in verse 39 and 40. ***“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”*** Anyone who makes a sincere profession that Jesus is their Savior is guaranteed to have eternal life. The good news is that you can not lose your salvation! The key is for you truly believe Jesus is God and that Jesus can and Jesus will save you from the penalty of your sins. Your salvation is secure because Almighty God is the one who guarantees it. Jesus will not allow His sheep to be overcome by Satan and lose their salvation.

Our scripture lessons from Exodus and John's Gospel draw a corollary between the food that physically sustains life and the food that spiritually sustains life. The children of Israel were afraid and hungry and God miraculously sent manna to them in the wilderness to satisfy their physical hunger. The Jews in Jesus' day had a spiritual void in their lives and they were searching for spiritual guidance and God miraculously sent Jesus. Both the manna and Jesus are necessary for life. Both the manna and Jesus are described as bread from heaven. (Verse 41)

Today we have the privilege of celebrating The Sacrament of Communion. In The Sacrament of The Communion we celebrate the presence of God with us. The physical bread points us to The Bread of Life come down from heaven. The Bread makes the presence of God real. When we receive the Sacrament of Communion we are mystically joined with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are made one with our Lord. We are in communion with our Lord Jesus The Christ. That is why The Sacrament of The Lord's Supper is also called The Sacrament of Communion.

This is the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a banquet for poor sinners who need a rich Savior. Jesus brings everything. The only thing we bring to His Table is a yearning heart to be present with our Lord. And Jesus fulfills our spiritual void when we come to Jesus believing in Him. Believing that Jesus is God in the flesh; believing that Jesus can save us from our sins; believing that Jesus is the only One who can make us right with God; believing that Jesus makes us whole; believing that it is Jesus who is the source of life; and believing that it Jesus who gives purpose to our lives.

It is not enough to merely physically eat the elements. We need to eat with our hearts, believing the promises of our Lord Jesus Christ. We eat physical bread to satisfy our physical hunger and to sustain

physical life. And the only way to satisfy our spiritual hunger and to sustain spiritual life is to maintain a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The bread makes The Lord physically present to us. When we eat the bread, Christ restores our bodies and our souls, giving us the courage and the confidence to face another day. The promise of Exodus and John is that the bread will be available tomorrow, the next day, and everyday. The beauty of this sacrament is that Jesus shares Himself with us through the mystery of the incarnation. And Jesus The King of Kings and The Lord of Lords invites every one of us to come and dine with Him at His table. Jesus invites you to come and to be fulfilled both now and throughout eternity. **AMEN**

September 22, 2019

“A Journey of Faith”

Hebrews 11: 1 – 13; Matthew 21: 18 – 22; John 20: 30 – 31; **John 4:43-54 (Sermon)**

Several weeks ago we looked at Jesus’ first miraculous sign which was turning water into wine. Remember in the Gospel of John miracles are called signs. A sign is different from a miracle in that a sign emphasizes the significance of the act rather than the marvel of the act itself. Remember a sign points to the real thing. In this miracle Jesus demonstrates His unlimited power, presence, and knowledge and that His power, presence, and knowledge are not limited by time and/or space. This morning we will be looking at Jesus’ second miraculous sign (Verse 54) which is Jesus healing the royal official’s son. It is interesting that Jesus’ first and second miraculous sign took place in Cana of Galilee.

Verse 43 tells us that Jesus left Sychar in Samaria and went to Cana in Galilee. Remember many of the people in Sychar believed in Jesus after Jesus told the woman at the well *“everything she ever did”* (John 4:29). This explains why Jesus said, *“A prophet has no honor in his own country”*. *“The Galileans welcomed Jesus”* because the Galileans were interested in seeing another one of Jesus’ miracles. (Verse 45) The Galileans did not welcome Jesus as the Messiah, but they welcomed Jesus as a miracle worker who could amaze them and entertain them. These people did not welcome Jesus because of who Jesus was; they welcomed Jesus for what Jesus could do for them! That was in direct contrast to the Samaritans in Sychar. John 4:42 says, *“They said to the woman, we no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the World.”* The people of Sychar begged Jesus to stay with them so Jesus stayed two more days there. (John 4:40) That was the same two days we read about in verse 43. And that is a question for each one of us this morning; *Are you here this morning to be entertained, or for Jesus to do something for you. Are you here because you want to worship Jesus? Do you want Jesus to change your circumstances or do you want Jesus to change you?*

In verse 46 we read: *“A certain royal official”* came to Jesus. Since it said *“royal official”* we assume that he was an officer in King Herod’s service. This means he was a man of authority and was used to giving orders and having people obey him. It also means that he was wealthy in material things. But when his son became very sick this official realized that he was totally dependent upon God. So when this royal official heard Jesus was in Cana he walked the 20 miles from Capernaum to Cana to ask Jesus to heal his son.

Verse 47 says; *“He went to him and begged Jesus to come and heal his son”*. This royal official realized he was not in charge and there was nothing he could do to heal his son. He reached the point where he knew that no amount of money or power or authority was going to help. This man has been reduced to begging. You see our prayers are genuine when we come to The Lord with empty hands, admit our inability, surrender our will, beg for mercy, and plead for The Lord to help us.

Jesus said, *“Unless you people see signs and wonders,”* Jesus told him, *“you will never believe”* (John 4:48). The *“you people”* in verse 48 is plural so Jesus is referring to all those people listening, not just the royal official. Jesus rebuked this crowd in an attempt to get them to honestly think about why Jesus performed miracles. Jesus did not come to earth to entertain; Jesus came to earth save people from spiritual and eternal death. Every one of Jesus’ miracles were designed to prove Jesus was God in the flesh, to reveal more about Jesus’ attributes, and for people to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

There is a difference in the royal official's request in verses 47 and 49. ***“He went to Jesus and begged Him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.”*** (Verse 47) Then in verse 49, ***“Sir, come down before my child dies.”*** Notice there is no request for healing in verse 49. I believe after this official heard Jesus' speak he believed Jesus was The Messiah because as soon as Jesus said, ***“You may go, your son will live”*** this official left for home. (Verse 50) I think this official wanted his son to meet Jesus before he died. This official took Jesus at His word and headed back to Capernaum. This official did not see the miracle happen, he just believed what Jesus said was going to happen. That is exactly what faith is – believing God's promises and acting on them before we experience the miracle. Hebrews 11:1 says, ***“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”***

Verse 51 says; ***“While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.”*** Then this official realized that was the exact time Jesus said; ***“Your son will live.”*** Jesus spoke and the son who was 20 miles away was healed. This boy could have been 200 miles away or 2,000 miles away, it wouldn't matter because The Lord Jesus is everywhere and His power is unlimited. Jesus said the word and the official's son was healed!

Verse 53 tells us that this miraculous sign produced the result Jesus desired. ***“So he and all of his household believed.”***

This is a wonderful story, but what is the application for us?

First remember a sign is miraculous act that reveals a spiritual truth about God. This sign reveals the awesome power of God's Word. Jesus spoke and the official's son was healed. This sign also reveals that Jesus knows the future. ***“Your son will live”***.

Next this sign shows us Jesus is concerned about our situations. Jesus answers our prayers when we come to Jesus, we humble ourselves, we ask, we trust, and we believe.” Jesus said; ***“Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*** (Matthew 21:21-22)

This miracle is important because it shows us as Christians that we do not need to go to a special healing service or to a *“faith-healing preacher”*. Whenever Jesus heals there is no mention of an *“anointed handkerchief”*, no requirement to make a donation to Jesus' ministry, there is no need to buy Jesus' tapes or CDs; there is no requirement to pay for a *“prayer of faith”*. Only Jesus can heal. We do not need someone to lay hands on us or to put anointing oil on us. We do not need the pastor to say a flowery prayer over us. We just need to come to Jesus in humility and with a repentant heart. We need to make our requests to Jesus, believe in the unlimited power of The Lord, have faith, and act on that faith. Faith is a gift that grows as we put our faith into practice.

We do not want to miss the progression of this official's faith. The progression of the official's faith is important because it is a picture of everyone's progression of faith. First a person needs to hear about Jesus. There is no indication that this official had never seen Jesus or heard Jesus speak prior to this. He had only heard what other people had said about Jesus. That is why it is so important for us to tell the people around us what our Jesus has done for us. Next there was a crisis in this official's life. His son was sick and close to death. You see, sometimes God uses troubles to get our attention. That is why we need to look at troubles as opportunities for a blessing. James 1:2 says; ***“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”*** Next, when this official came to the realization that he was unable to fix the problem and that he was totally dependent upon The Lord

he went to Jesus. This official walked 20 miles from Capernaum to Cana to see Jesus. We are not exhibiting faith when we make contingency plans. We show we are sincere when we humble ourselves before The Lord and admit that we are totally dependent upon The Lord. Verse 47 says, ***“He begged Jesus to come and heal his son.”*** Jesus gives us the key to having our prayers answered in verse 48; ***“We must believe that Jesus is God and that Jesus cares about us!”*** Belief is a verb, not a noun. We have to believe Jesus’ promises and we must act on those promises. Next, this official did not give up when Jesus rebuked the crowd. Instead this official took Jesus at His word and this official believed in Jesus. This official demonstrated his faith by leaving when Jesus said; ***“You may go. Your son will live”*** (Verse 50). This official believed Jesus’ words even though Jesus did not go to Capernaum with him. The official left and began the 7- 8 hour walk back home believing in a miracle he had not seen. The official’s faith was confirmed when his servants met him with the news that his son was healed (Verse 52). The purpose of this miracle was accomplished since; ***“this official and all of his household believed.”*** (Verse 53) Remember Jesus performs miracles today so that we will know He is God, so we will believe in Him, and so we will tell others what The Lord has done for us!

This morning you may feel like your faith is insufficient for a miracle in your life. But that is ok because this account should encourage you in your walk of faith. Remember this official did not have much faith when he began his walk of faith. His view of Jesus was limited, but he took the first step. This official’s faith increased as he listened to Jesus. Then he took the next step. Then his journey of faith was complete when he shared his faith with his family.

The account of Jesus healing the official’s son shows us how much we are dependent upon Jesus. It was recorded to encourage each of us in our walk of faith. John 20:30 -31 says; ***“Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is The messiah, The Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”***

To me one of the saddest verses in The Bible is Matthew 13:58; ***“Jesus did not many miracles there because of their lack of faith.”***

God’s word to us today challenges all of us to bring our burdens to Jesus, to claim Jesus’ promises, believe in Jesus’ unlimited power, and to step out in faith. God’s word to us also challenges us to tell other people how The Lord is working in our life.

AMEN

September 29, 2019

“You Were Chosen To Bear Fruit”

Galatians 5: 16 – 26; 2nd Peter 1: 5 – 8; Matthew 7 15 – 23; **John 15: 1- 17 (Sermon)**

Jesus often used parables and allegories to describe Himself and our relationship with Him. In this allegory God The Father is the gardener, Jesus is the true vine, and Jesus’ disciples are the branches. In this allegory Jesus is explaining our relationship with Him, our dependence upon Him, and our responsibility to Him.

In The Old Testament Israel is frequently symbolized as a grape vine. Grapes symbolized Israel’s fruitfulness in doing God’s work on earth. (Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:7, Jeremiah 2:21& Hosea 10:1). So when Jesus said; ***“I Am The True Vine”*** and ***“I Am The Vine”*** (Verses 1 & 5) the Jews knew Jesus was claiming to be Israel’s Messiah. A vine serves two main interrelated functions. The vine is the source of life and the vine is the source of fruit. The vine sends life giving sap to the branches so that the branches can produce fruit.

Verse 2 tells us that God The Father, the gardener: ***“He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will bear more fruit.”*** And in verse 6: ***“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.”*** The gardener removes all dead branches and he prunes the live branches so that they will produce more fruit. So what we have here is the clear teaching that God is in control of the vineyard and it is God’s desire for us to produce fruit. Jesus gives us life and the ability to produce fruit. The gardener gets the praise when fruit is produced.

In verse 5 Jesus clearly says, ***“you are the branches.”*** Branches are an extension of the vine. A branch receives life from the vine. A branch produces the fruit consistent with the kind of vine it is attached to. The life is in the vine and a branch that is cut off from the vine will die. A branch has no root. And since an unconnected branch has no life, a branch can not bear fruit by itself. There is no life and there is no fruit apart from Jesus! Jesus clearly says our purpose as a branch is to bear fruit. That is why God created us, that is why Jesus chose us, and that is why we were saved.

The vine has two kinds of branches; branches that bear fruit and branches that do not bear fruit. The branches that bear fruit are genuine believers. However, there are sinful and worldly attitudes in all of us that need to be pruned. The branches that do not bear fruit are those people who have separated themselves from the vine. They may profess to believe in Jesus but since they are not producing fruit that is an indication that genuine salvation has never taken place. Remember Jesus was teaching The 12 Disciples and Judas Iscariot was with them at this time. Sin blocks the life giving sap from flowing from the vine into the branches.

As disciples our responsibility to Jesus is clearly stated in verse 4 ***“Remain in me.”*** That message to remain in Jesus runs all through this passage. The relationship between the branch and the vine can be summed up in one word: dependence. We all are dependent upon Jesus to supply life to us. As we receive spiritual nourishment from Jesus fruit is produced. As Christians we are simply an extension of Jesus’ life. We must think according to that truth, we must act according to that truth and our whole lives must be lived in the light of that truth.

Now what does it mean to remain in Christ?

- Remaining in Christ means *“don’t leave”*. We are to remain in Jesus’ presence all day / every day.
- Remaining in Christ means we obey all of Jesus’ commands. In verse 10 Jesus says ***“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love...”*** (John 15:10) If we really love The Lord we will want to

obey all of His commandments. When we disobey Jesus we chose to remove ourselves from The Lord's presence and our sin blocks the flow of God's Spirit into our life. The way we remain in Jesus and in Jesus' love is to obey all of His commandments.(Verse 10)

- Remaining in Jesus means my first priority is for spiritual blessings not physical blessings. We want what God wants for us. Our priority is no longer for worldly attention or selfish ambition, because that is not God's goal for us. We pray according to Jesus' will rather than my own will. Remaining in Jesus means we seek The Lord's approval more than anyone else's approval.
- Remaining in Jesus means we know we are dependant on Jesus and we know we are dependent upon The Father to prune the things in our lives that are preventing us from being more fruitful. We strive to yield ourselves wholly to Jesus. We know our weakness and we are driven to prayer.
- Remaining in Jesus means loving each other (Verse 12)
- Remaining in Jesus means we live to honor and bring glory to God.

A branch that is not attached to the vine is useless!

So exactly what is the fruit that we as Christians are expected to produce? First the fruit that Christians are to produce is obedience to Jesus. Jesus said; ***"If you love me you will obey what I command."*** (John 14:15) And in John 15:17 ***"This is my commandment: love each other."***

Secondly the fruit that Christians are expected to produce is other Christians. One of the signs of life is that life reproduces itself. Matthew 28:19 is Jesus' great commission to believers; ***"Go and make disciples of all nations..."*** And in Acts 1:8 Jesus said; ***"You shall be my witnesses..."***

Thirdly the fruit that Christians are expected to produce is The Fruit Of The Spirit which we read about in Galatians 5:22 & 23. ***"... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."***

Without a doubt the fruit Christians are expected to produce is spiritual fruit. The New Testament describes fruit as Godly attributes (Galatians 5:22-23), righteous behavior (Philippians 1:11), living as Jesus lived (1st John 2: 5 – 6), loving one another (1st John 4:11 – 13), praise (Hebrews 13:15), as well as leading other people to faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:13-16). The only way we can lead someone to Christ is for our lives to reflect the holy attributes of Jesus. This is clear in Matthew 7:16-18. ***"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit."*** When we are exhibiting Godly attributes in our daily lives we will be fruitful and unbelievers will be attracted to Jesus Christ.

The question for each of us this morning is; *am I connected to Jesus* **or** have I become disconnected from the vine? The way we know that we are connected to Jesus is that we are producing the kind and the amount of fruit that God desires? In verse 8, Jesus said, ***"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."***

In this passage of scripture Jesus tells us there are four levels of bearing fruit; no fruit, some fruit, more fruit, and much fruit. So the next question for each of us is; *"how fruitful are you?"*

Then in verse 16 Jesus talks about His will for our lives. John 15:16 ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last."*** God designed each and every one of us to be fruitful. Jesus expects each one of us to be fruitful!

The next question for each of us this morning is; *are you bearing the fruit God designed you to produce?* The good news is we do not have to work at producing fruit. All we have to do is stay connected to Jesus and to allow Jesus to work through us. And when we allow Jesus to work through us we will produce large crops of fruit that are pleasing to Almighty God.

In this allegory Jesus also list some wonderful promises to those who remain in Him.

Jesus said ***“If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*** (John 15.7) The conditions are remaining in Jesus and Jesus’ words remaining in us. When we are spiritually alive in Jesus, and Jesus’ words remain in us, we will pray according God’s will, and then our prayers will be fruitful.

The next promise is producing much fruit. In verse 8 Jesus said; ***“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit....”*** (John 15.8) The foundational and essential fruit of abiding in Jesus is a Godly character. Remember ***“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”*** (Galatians 5.22-23). As Christians we are called to display the character of Jesus at all times and in all places. When we remain in Jesus we will produce fruit and that glorifies God. Remember your habits, your temper, your words, your attitude, and a cheerful disposition are controlled by faith in the sovereignty of God over each and every circumstance.

The third promise of remaining in Jesus in this passage is joy. Jesus said; ***“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”*** (John 15: 11) Jesus wants to share His joy with us. The key to experience joy is having our lives intertwined with Jesus.

The fourth promise of remaining in Jesus is the ability to love one another. Jesus said; ***“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”*** (John 15: 12) Jesus loves you unconditionally and sacrificially. We can only love other people the way Jesus loves us as the life and the character of Jesus flows through us by the power of The Holy Spirit.

The fifth promise is we are Jesus’ friends. Jesus said; ***“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”*** (John 15: 15) It is incredible that the creator and ruler of the universe wants to be our friend.

The purpose of a vineyard is to bear grapes, and that is exactly the point Jesus is making in this passage of scripture. God had expected The Nation of Israel to bear luscious, rich, beautiful, tasty grapes, but the only grapes He got from them were sour, rotten, stinking, and tasteless. When God looks at your life and mine, God expects to see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control exhibited in every aspect of our lives every day.

Imagine how much different our lives would become if we included Jesus in every activity of our day. Every event in our lives would become holy and an opportunity to bring glory to Almighty God. In itself there is nothing spiritual about looking after a patient, teaching a class, spending time with your children, or assisting a customer. But all of these activities can become sacred events when you do them for the glory of Jesus Christ.

God’s word to us this morning is crystal clear. Jesus chose us to be His disciples and when we chose to accept Jesus’ offer of eternal life Jesus expects us to bear fruit. So the question is; *“Are you producing Godly fruit that is pleasing to Almighty God?”* Remember Jesus said; you will be fruitful when you are connected to Jesus, you keep His Word in your heart, and you obey all of Jesus’

commands. When we are producing Godly fruit the unsaved people around us will see Godly attributes in our daily life and they will be attracted to Jesus Christ. *Jesus chose you to bear fruit.*
AMEN