

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources ■ Spiritual Friendships
■ Service In & Beyond the Church

October 23, 2020

Day 1: Matthew 7:1-5

‘Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, “Let me take the speck out of your eye”, while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.

Jesus, in the whole Sermon on the Mount, is not giving us a strategy for success in worldly relationships but a call to live in the light of the dawning kingdom of God. Jewish traditions contain exhortations to moderation, tolerance, and mercy, but the probation against judgment is unusual in the time of Jesus. The way “judge” is used could mean either “be critical” or “condemn.” Jesus does not want to ignore that judgment will come, but God will be the judge, not us. The Christian community must make ethical decisions about the behavior of others but it must do so being aware of its own failures and faults. We may be good at judging but it is not what God has called us to do.

Question: What does he mean by the “log” in your eye?

Challenge: How can we tell someone (or a group) that they are wrong, in a moral sense, without condemning them?

Scripture: Psalm 9

Day 2: Matthew 7:10-11

‘Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

The comparison between humans and God is made to show how much greater God’s love actually is. Both bread and fish were staples in the diet of those living around the Sea of Galilee. To withhold, or worse, make fun of those staples is to deny a living. For a father to do so would be the height of cruelty. If our earthly fathers can give us at least the staples then how much more will we receive from God in Heaven.

Question: What are some of the “good things” God will give us if we ask?

Challenge: Do you believe verse 10 has been true for you? If so, how has it proved true?

Scripture: Luke 6:27-45

Day 3: Matthew 7:12

‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

This verse has been (since the eighteenth century) called “The Golden Rule.” In Luke it is inserted in the Sermon on the Plain where it is integrated into the command to love one’s enemies (Luke 6:31). The rule could be interpreted as fulfilling the Great Commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). The Golden Rule is not something that is reciprocal but is something that encourages us to initiate a good deed to others.

Question: Does the verse sound like a command or a way to respond?

Challenge: Take notice of your actions for the rest of the week and see if you have followed this rule.

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-10

Day 4: Matthew 7:13-14

‘Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

There are times it seems easier to do the wrong thing but as time goes on that decision usually has very hard consequences. It is often (but not always) harder to make the ethically right decision but that road does lead us to a good conclusion. An example of taking the easy road and having bad consequences is debt. Today we can put off paying for something, far too easily, until a future date. We pile up so many of these “things” that we find ourselves in a cycle of poverty that has the illusion of plenty. To get out of that cycle one has to take another road, one that will be narrow and hard but one that will lead to a good outcome - freedom from debt.

Question: Why do you think we are cautioned about finding things too easy?

Challenge: What are some examples of the wide gate and easy road that leads to destruction?

Scripture: Numbers 13:17-14:23 - this is a great example of picking the easy road. It leads to a whole generation not seeing the Promised Land.

Day 5: Matthew 7:15-20

‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

False prophets are reprehensible people. They are the lowest sort because they give their opinions and claim they come from a divine source. It does not matter if the divine sources are great theories of economics or quotations from the Bible. People that manipulate others for their own benefit and to the detriment of others are ravenous wolves.

Question: Who do you think Jesus was referring to by the term false prophets?

Challenge: What would be the fruit of a false prophet?

Scripture: John 10:1-18

Day 6: Matthew 7:24-27

‘Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!’

Jesus tells us to take the long view in life. By long view I mean multi-generational. We ought not to build a house for just ourselves or tend a plot of land for just ourselves, but for the future generations. God has taken a very long view and steadfastly maintained a plan of salvation that includes us now and those in the future. Too many people make decisions (in both personal life and in national leadership positions) that just look out for the now. If Jesus looked out for the now He would have gotten down off the cross and lived a very full life but then none of the rest of us would have a life. Whenever we decide to think just of ourselves pause a moment to ask – what would Jesus do?

Question: When Jesus says “hears these words of mine” what do you think he is referring to?

Challenge: What principles have you built your life on that have stood firm over the years?

Scripture: Psalms 18:1-7, 95:1-6