

DISCIPLES IN TRAINING

Matthew 7:6-12

Intro: The message of the Sermon on the Mount is so familiar to most Christians that we forget how new this teaching was to the disciples. They were hearing teaching that they had never heard before. Although they had been taught by the scribes and Pharisees, the emphasis which the Lord made on every subject He touched upon in His instruction, was truth that they had never heard before. And it behooves us to make sure that we are getting the full impact of what the Lord was saying.

Many expositors in approaching chapter 7 have felt that this was a series of what Martyn Lloyd Jones called, “aphoristic statements with very little internal connection between them” (II, 158). By that he meant that they were short and powerful statements of truth. But a careful examination of these statements shows that they are not unrelated, but very closely related. *They all have to do with the preparation of the disciples for the work of the Lord.* And so in this respect also they would have been new to the disciples.

We have no reason to believe that the Lord was only speaking to the twelve at this point in His ministry. As far as we know, they had not yet been called to the work that the Lord had for them. And so this leads me to say that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, the instruction that our Lord gave here, is not just for those who would eventually be apostles, but this is for all of the Lord’s people.

One tragedy in the work of the Lord today, is that the people of our churches, those who make up the congregations, know so little, and, in some cases, absolutely nothing about how the Lord’s work is to be done. As a result, the professing church is full of positions and methods and teaching that really does not belong in the church. And it is often the case that even in our Christian schools young people are taught much that is not based upon Scripture, but that which is brought in from the world. There is a very great need for all of us to get back to Scripture not only to learn what we are to believe, and what we are to teach, but also how the work of the Lord is to be conducted. We know so little about the kind of a person it is whom the Lord uses. We know so little about waiting upon the Lord. When the Lord closes a door, so often we try to knock it down. We are trained to think about what others need, but are experts in overlooking what the Lord may be seeking to teach us. And so this why I have given my message today the subject, “Disciples in Training.” “Disciples” is one of the first words the New Testament uses for all of the Lord’s people, just as “saints” is a word which was used later. *A disciple*

is a learner, and this should be descriptive of all of us. We all should be learning from the Scriptures until the day that the Lord takes us to heaven. I need to be a learner. Each of you needs to be a learner. None of us ever knows all that there is to learn, and so we need to be disciples as long as we live.

So, although you may never teach a class, or preach a sermon, this Sermon on the Mount is for you. It is for all of us. The only way we as the Lord's people can possibly know what the Lord's work is, and how to do it, is by getting as thorough a knowledge of God's Word as we can. If more of us understood this, perhaps the work of churches would not be as riddled with the ways of the world as it is today. When people just as readily accept human psychology as they do Scripture, and put more emphasis on methods and personalities than they do the work of the Holy Spirit, we know that what we call the Lord's work may not be anything that the Lord would want to claim at all. In these day when the world is so corrupt and in disarray in so many ways, how important it is for us to know passages like Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and by God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, see to it that we are really following the teaching of the Word of God.

Now let me apply what I have been saying to what we learned, or I trust we learned, from the passage we had last week in the first five verses of Matthew 7.

We saw that the Lord was warning His disciples not to have a censorious spirit. That is, they were not to be severely critical of others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. The warning that the Lord sounded has to do not only with ways in which the Lord may presently judge us, but it also has to do with the final judgment. Our purpose is to help people, not to criticize them over every little problem we may see in their lives. Such a spirit can be detrimental to our ability to help people. Besides our awareness of a problem in the life of a brother may be the Lord's way of showing us that we have a beam in our own eye. We need to be very careful that we are not a stumblingblock in our brother's way. So we need to be continually searching our own hearts to be sure that things are right between us and the Lord, and between us and our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Today we come to another lesson in verse 6 that every child of God needs to learn. It has to do with:

I. WISDOM IN THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL (Matt. 6:6).

The Lord was emphasizing the fact that we need to be discerning in the spread of the Gospel.

We are here in this world as witnesses of Christ, witnesses of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what is “holy.” There is no other message like it. The truths of the Gospel can be considered as pearl because, in the case of the Gospel, it is a priceless message – and yet at the same time it is “without cost.” It is a gift from God.

Obviously dogs are not going to be interested in that which is “holy.” Neither are swine going to be interested in pearls. So the Lord on the one hand was describing the Gospel, and, on the other, was describing some who can be described as “dogs,” and others who can be described as “swine.”

The “dogs” that roamed through the cities in our Lord’s day were not like the pets which we have today. They were half wild and dangerous, and often terrorized people when they ran in packs. Also, the Law of Moses forbade the eating of swine. The Jews were to have nothing to do with swine. On one occasion you will remember that the Lord drove some demons into a herd of swine, and they ran down a steep place into the lake, and were drowned. Those Jews had no business raising pigs because they were clearly in violation of the Law in doing it.

There clearly are dangers connected with the preaching of the Gospel. People who are otherwise friendly, can become very hostile when the Gospel is preached unto them. We, of course, have to exercise a great deal of discernment in dealing with people, and the Lord was certainly not suggesting that we call people “dogs” or “swine.” But He was saying that you will often run into strong opposition in the preaching of the Gospel. This would come from “dogs.” And there are other people who are totally indifferent to the Gospel, and you will only antagonize them by persisting in preaching when they make it clear that they are not interested. There is no value in continuing to pursue a person who makes it clear in some way that they do not want what we have to offer them. And we run the risk of bringing greater offence upon the Gospel because of our ignorant zeal. There are open doors, and there are closed doors. Sometimes closed doors are opened, but at a given point in dealing with a person we must use great discernment And wisdom.

The nature of verse 6 may indicate why the Lord went on to speak of prayer. In chapter 6 we had some wonderful teaching on prayer, but, as is the case with almost any doctrine, you don’t get everything in one passage of Scripture. So let us go to verse 7 and the verses which follow.

II. MORE OF OUR LORD'S TEACHING ON PRAYER

(Matt. 7:7-11).

I am not suggesting that these verses only have to do with our ministry to others, but that certainly is the primary emphasis when we consider the context. *When people reject us and our message, we do not necessarily forget about them, but their very rejection causes us to turn to the Lord in prayer.* We know that only the Lord can make people receptive of the Gospel message. No one ever has turned to Christ "on his own." We all had to be *drawn* to the Lord. We learn that from John 6:44:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.

And then just a few verses later in the same chapter, John 6, we read these words:

64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

So when men shut the door to us and to the Gospel, our great resource is to our heavenly Father. Of course, this does mean that we do not pray before we witness to people, but it does mean that a rejection does not necessarily put an end to the matter. We may not see a change, but that does not mean that a change will not come. And, as I have said many times before, the Lord was here encouraging importunate, persistent, continuous prayer.

In the margin of the NASB we have this suggested translation, "Keep asking ... keep seeking ... keep knocking." The meaning may even be made stronger if we render these verbs, "Ask, and keep asking ... seek, and keep seeking ... knock, and keep knocking." And it does not just apply to a situation where our message has been rejected, but it means that we must not be discouraged when people let us know that they are not interested in what we have to say about God and/or Christ.

To each of these commands is attached a promise. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." And then, as though the simple promise in each were not enough, the Lord went on to add what we have in verse 8. And note how inclusive this is. (Read v. 8.)

The very fact that we are to ask continuously indicates that the Lord was not saying that when you ask once, you will immediately receive what you ask for. It may be that sometimes He will deal with us that way, but that is

the exception rather than the rule. But behind these words of our Lord is the great burden that was on His heart for the salvation of sinners. Often when we are rebuffed, we find it difficult to approach anyone else, or to introduce the subject of the Gospel to anyone whether he be a friend of a complete stranger. And so the Lord Jesus was here encouraging us to turn to the Father in prayer, asking, seeking, and knocking.

David Brown in the Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown commentary, said this:
We *ask* for what we *wish*; we *seek* for what we *miss*; we *knock* for that from which we feel ourselves *shut out* (Vol. V, p. 47).

And then the Lord added those very obvious truths which He brought out in verses 9 through 11. (Read.)

As I have said, I feel certain that we do not have to limit these commands and promises to the subject the Lord was treating here in His Sermon on the Mount, but it has a general application to any need or burden that might be upon our hearts. But this was one major lesson that the Lord was teaching His disciples, and that is the constant need we all have to pray – to pray in faith, to pray according to the will of God, and to pray with importunity. To pray like Jacob prayed when He told the Lord, “I will not let Thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26).

This is where it is so easy for us to miss blessings which we need. And every child of God needs to learn to pray. When we can’t do anything else, we can pray. Through prayer closed doors are opened. We don’t work for God, but God works through us – and there is a great difference between the two. Many things are impossible for us, but there is nothing that is impossible for God. God is the only One Who can make people see their need of salvation, and God is the only One Who can save people. Even the faith that we exercise for salvation, is a gift from God. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The Lord Jesus Christ is “the Author and Finisher of our faith,” and through prayer people understand that Jesus Christ is the only Savior.

Our city, our state, our whole nation is in dire need of Christ. The future is dark indeed unless God has mercy upon us. But it seems that as time goes on we as a nation get more hardened in our sins, and God is not in all our thoughts. But we must believe that by prayer we can see lives changed in these days. I am not an authority on revivals, but from what I do know about them, I don’t know of any true revivals in the past where prayer has not played a major role. By God’s grace let us be asking and seeking and knocking by prayer until the doors of heaven are opened and blessing are poured out upon us so that there will hardly be room to

receive it all.

But I have one more verse, verse 12, and as long as I have known this verse, it has been called, “The Golden Rule.”

III. “THE GOLDEN RULE” (Matt. 7:12).

The problem about this verse is that people who don’t know the Lord try to live by this verse, but it is a verse, a promise, that the Lord gave to His disciples “in training.”

This is really the opposite of what we had in verses 1 and 2, isn’t it? If we are harsh in our dealings with people, we can expect that we will receive the same kind of treatment from others. But if we treat other people the way we would like to be treated, we will find that great blessings will come our way.

The Lord said, “This is the Law and the Prophets.” This is as though He said, “This is what the whole of the OT teaches us.” This doesn’t mean that this is all that the OT teaches, but on these matters our Lord has been discussing, this is what the OT teaches. The Lord was not talking about satisfying the selfish desires that we all have in our hearts, but the desires that we have which are God-given, which make us long for acceptance that we might glorify God in a fruitful ministry to lost sinners who know nothing about the grace of God in salvation.

G. Campbell Morgan pointed out the positive nature of what the Lord said in this Golden Rule. Let me read to you what he said:

It is not merely that you are to refrain from harming [another]; you are to do him good. It is not that you are not to rob him; you are to give to him. It is not that you are not to murder him; you are to love him... We might, out of a selfish self-respect, decline to harm our neighbor, but we cannot do this higher thing without power. We cannot do continuously what we would our neighbor should do to us save as we ask, seek, and knock, and know that our Father is pledged to us in power” (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 76).

The Lord was making it very clear here that if we want His blessing, and if we want to see evidence of His working in the hearts of people we have contact with, then we must live according to the Word of God.

Concl: What are we to conclude from all of this as it relates to the ministry that the Lord has given to us as His disciples and as His ser-

vants. It is this: The key to the blessing we hope to experience in serving the Lord, will be seen in the extent to which we are yielded to what the Lord is doing in our hearts. In the Lord's work, the emphasis is always upon the person the Lord is using. "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

So this means, as Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointed out so well years ago when he was preaching on this great text, If we want things to be right between man and man, then we all have to start with God. If we don't love Him first, and show our love by doing His will, then human relationships can never be right. But if we love God first (which also means loving His Son), then we will find that our attitude toward people will undergo a great transformation, and we will begin to love our neighbor with the same desires which we have for ourselves. May the Lord make us what He wants us to be so that we can be His instruments in reaching others with the transforming power of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.