

“Back to School with Jesus: Choose Life”

Scripture: Matthew 7:1-29

Graphics: back to school, paper, books, backpack

Big Truth: The Sermon on the Mount is essential teaching for the Christian life and the promise of blessing that comes through poverty of spirit and mourning which are the key foundation of the sermon. It's great to learn the words of Jesus and even be able to recite them, as we share the good news. However, Jesus calls us to not only know the words and The Word, but to put those words into practice as we love and serve the world in Jesus' name. Let's go back to school with Jesus. Whether you are young or old, there is always something to learn so that you can put it into practice.

Focus Phrase: Choosing the Way of Jesus is life everlasting.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. It's time to get back up that mountain with Jesus for **one final lesson**. This section is known as the Sermon on the Mount and today we'll finish up reading Matthew 7.
- C. If you've been tracking along with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 4, 5, and 6, you've come to realize that this was really hard teaching for the disciples to follow. And for us, for sure.
- D. In fact, we would all admit, along with the disciples, that we fall short of the teachings of Jesus here.
 - i. We don't always act with grace.
 - ii. We don't always find hope and joy now because of the Kingdom that Jesus promised us is coming when He returns.
 - iii. We sometimes get our priorities screwed up and think more about our to-do list than God's will.
 - iv. We DO worry, even though we don't want to.
 - v. Maybe we aren't ready for this thing called discipleship.
- E. Listen, church: you are followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus is **IN YOU** and Jesus is **AROUND YOU** and Jesus is **INVITING US** to keep growing, as we live into the coming Kingdom of God right here on earth. Everything is **NOT YET** made right. You and I are not perfect, but we are being perfected. We get off track sometimes, but the Holy Spirit is the one who gets us back **ON TRACK**. God is in control of it all! So, take a breath and let's keep going.
- F. **SO...**there's tension between the full expression of the Kingdom of God, when Jesus returns. What we experience now, knowing that the Kingdom is still breaking in, is not what will be. That's why **Jesus gave us these lessons**. He wanted (and wants) a full contingent of His followers to rise up for all time until He returns. He's looking for disciples who are willing to be equipped to

love God and love our neighbors. This is the teaching that can help move the ball forward.

- G. And the final lessons are about finding and staying on track personally, and then choosing to do the next right thing, in relation to others.
- H. This morning, we'll be blazing through the final section. The title of the message is **Choose Life**. It's appropriate that we talked about the desire for us to choose life when it comes to options when a mother is pregnant. But it's bigger than that for Jesus. He extends the invitation to choose life every time we make the choice to follow Jesus' next command in our lives.
- I. Let's open our bibles to Matthew 7...starting in verse 1. I'll read this in two sections...and this will come at us with the force of a fire hose, so let's sit up straight and get ready to listen carefully. Choose life...

2. Scripture

A. READ MATTHEW 7:1-12

- i. Let's stop there. Jesus gave four rapid-fire lessons to the disciples.
 - a. #1 - Don't judge others, because you have your own issues.
 - b. #2 - Don't take what God has made holy and allow it to be unholy.
 - c. #3 - Pray. and...
 - d. #4 - Treat others like you want to be treated.
- ii. These are all things you might see posted on the wall of your elementary school. The interesting thing is that all four of these lessons is really about you and me, personally. "It's all about you!" Yet, is it? Actually, these are about you and how you relate to others and to God.
- iii. When Jesus said, "Don't judge others..." he was warning the disciples that before they try to "help someone else" with their sin, they should first be aware of their own sin and ways that they are tempted to stumble. It's a lot easier for any of us to point out someone else's obvious sin (or even the not-so-obvious sin) but completely miss our own junk. Jesus' point is that in our faith community, we CAN (YES) help each other reject sin and walk in holiness. The key is to make sure YOU are, first, aware of your OWN sin first (the log in your OWN eye), and to then repent and receive forgiveness. Then, you MAY (MAY) be called on to help others who struggle in the same ways...yet ALWAYS with humility, knowing that you've been sinful too...and you can relate.
- iv. #2 - "Not throwing your pearls before swine" is an odd phrase. Yet anything that had to do with swine (pigs) would've been repugnant for the Jews. Jesus' point is that God has and is doing something holy in you...and when you choose to think, act, or respond in an unholy way, your rejecting

God's holiness in you. That path only leads to destruction. So, be careful what you do with your body, what you choose to watch with your eyes, what you believe in your heart. Reject that which is profane or what God's Word prohibits. And remember, this is a process of becoming more and more like Jesus so that you can impact the world for Jesus.

- v. The next one is Jesus' classic call to PRAY... fervently and consistently. God is a good Father who wants to give you the desires of your heart, when they're fully aligned with God's will. Asking, seeking, and knocking are not three levels of prayer but are all phrases the Jewish people used to describe prayer. Jesus is the giver of all good things. He is the one who finds you. He is the one who opens the door. And even when we think that God is not listening to our prayers or we think God is out to get us or punish us, Jesus reminds us here that God is not a trickster. God is not vindictive. God desires to give...so PRAY and PRAY and PRAY. Pray for things in your life and pray for others, as you know what they need. PRAY! We're praying the Lord's Prayer together every day at noon...set an alarm on your phone and join in the fun! It's been GREAT!
- vi. Finally, the Golden rule. It's all about you...and all about others. Simple, right? Well...yes and no. Treating others like you want to be treated presumes that you want to be treated well as a child of God. Jesus was asking the disciples to treat others like God wants to treat them (as a good Father who wants to give them good things). Relating to others is always about seeing them as God sees them...with God's vision and love. Love them like God loves them and like God lives YOU.
- vii. Each of those first four lessons is about us relating to others...and being willing to live the life of a sold-out disciple here and now...while waiting for Jesus to come back.
- viii. Let's go back to the word to wrap this up...look at verse 13...

B. READ MATTHEW 7:13-29

- i. Choose life!
- ii. When there are two choices, choose the one that leads to life...and especially life in Jesus' will and way.
- iii. One pathway in life - the way of the world - is wide and easy, said Jesus. That's the one most people take. That one leads to death. Jesus is calling you to take the path of a disciple as he's been trying to describe throughout these lessons. It's a more difficult road because it means you have to give yourself to the life of Jesus - even to death, which paradoxically leads directly to life! Choose the path that leads to life in Christ!

- iv. Along the way, you'll hear from false prophets - messages and invitations that SEEM like they're good, but are not bearing God's fruit. You'll be able to tell the difference because God's way has good fruit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If whatever message or people or invitation you're hearing is bearing THOSE, then proceed with eyes wide open and keep listening and seeking those fruits. If not, then what you're seeing may not be of God. Choose the voices that are bearing fruit for God because the things that are not bearing God's fruit are destroyed in death. Choose fruit! Choose life!
 - v. AND...Choose to keep building your life on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ...on God's word...on the leading of the Holy Spirit. The world will offer you sand as a foundation...and sand is fine today when it's dry and sunny. In fact, in dry weather, sand and rock are BOTH good. But when the troubles of life come - and they will - sand is unstable (the solutions of the world are unstable at best) and your life-house will crash. Choose life with a foundation in Jesus' will and way.
- C. Choosing the Way of Jesus is choosing life everlasting. And as we said last week, there is nothing more important than to choose everlasting life. If you prioritize anything else over God, then whatever else you choose doesn't matter. Choose life!

3. Application

- A. As we wrap up this series, we've had a lot of application and calls for increased discipleship throughout this time spent sitting with Jesus on the mountainside. But NONE of that matters if you and I are unwilling to take one aspect of our lives at a time and re-orient that to the teachings of Jesus.
- B. We've heard LOTS of teaching from Jesus and we aren't quite sure we are up to the task. But going back to school is not about thinking we have it all figured out. Going back to school means that we have more to learn and more to apply to our lives.
- C. So, where has God been tugging at your heart or opening your eyes in this series?
 - i. Are you working on your life priorities? Asking the Holy Spirit to set some things right that have gotten a little out of sync with God? God will give you the courage to make one change at a time and He will bless that.
 - ii. Do you need to get back to the basics of giving, prayer, and fasting? Have you made being a follower of Jesus too complicated? Ask the Holy Spirit to increase your simple devotion to the One who died for your salvation and new life in Him?

- iii. Are you struggling with responding to the world just like the world wants? Are you frustrated that it's not working? Ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart's response to be humble, gracious, loving, and counter-cultural. People will think you're weird...but that's OK because they thought Jesus was weird, so you're in good company!
 - iv. Are you too focused on today, and the worries of today, so much so that you can't see the promise of the future blessing and vindication coming when Jesus returns? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you eyes that stay focused on the future, while using your pre-blessed-ness to shine the light of Jesus to the world around you.
 - v. Are you unsure that Jesus has the authority to rule over your life at all? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you who He is...for a fresh encounter with the One who lived, died, and then walked out of His own grave for you.
- D. Well...I think it's time for our QUIZ. :) I mean, when we go back to school, the expectation is that we'll have a quiz or two, right?
 - E. When you came in, you had a piece of paper on your seat. Find that piece of paper and get ready. If you're worshiping at home, take a second and grab a blank sheet of paper.
 - F. This exam has three questions. This is probably the easiest and yet the most difficult quiz you'll ever take. The answers are one word each, so that's a clue for you.
 - G. Number your paper 1, 2, and 3 along the lefthand side. When you're ready, look up here so I know we're all on the same page.
 - H. The first question is this: Who taught the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples? Go ahead and write your answer on the page. No cheating. JESUS is watching (wink wink)
 - I. The second question is this: Who died and rose again and is coming back to make all things right for all people so that I can have everlasting life? Go ahead and answer that question.
 - J. Easy so far, right? The final question is this: Given the answer to questions 1 and 2, who is calling me to live fully in Him today, giving all I am and have for the sake of the Kingdom that is coming? Got it? GREAT!
 - K. Let's see how you did. The answer to question 1 is? Jesus! The answer to the second question is? Jesus! Right! And, the answer to the third question is? Jesus! WOW! 100%
 - L. BUT...there's a bonus question! For extra credit! I LOVE extra credit!
 - M. This one is fill in the blank! Here it is (READY?) Think back now to everything Jesus has taught us in this back to school series: Because Jesus

teaches us, and died and rose for us, is coming back for us, and is calling me to love God and love others, I will _____ (fill in the blank).

- N. Your answer to that question may be the most important answer of your entire life. It may be something simple like keep praying or keep reading my bible or get my priorities in line with God. It may be something more profound like give my life to Him and get baptized.
- O. What is your response TODAY to Jesus' life, teaching, death, resurrection, and promised return? It's honestly the most important question you can answer.
- P. The world is pulling every one of us towards death and destruction. Jesus is inviting you to choose life in Him and to bear the full fruit of the Kingdom.
- Q. Choosing the Way of Jesus is choosing life everlasting.

4. Conclusion

- A. When Joshua was getting ready to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land, after God brought them out of slavery in Egypt and sustained them throughout the wilderness, he gave a powerful speech to the people. Joshua asked the people to choose...to choose death and destruction OR choose life and God's future. Here's what he said (Joshua 24:14-15) "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."
- B. The teachings that Jesus gave us in the Sermon on the Mount are not set of rules or items to be checked off. Those teachings are an invitation to live completely for God, in the here and now, as we wait for the promised Kingdom to come when He returns.
- C. Choose this day whom you will serve...the answer is Jesus.
- D. Let's DO THIS! Class dismissed! Let's pray...