

July 6th, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 6”

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Matthew 18:1-14, Mark 9:33-50, Luke 9:46-50

“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a big millstone hung around his neck and be sunk in the depths of the sea! What disaster awaits the world for causing someone to sin! It’s inevitable that such offense will occur, but what disaster awaits the one who causes it!

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

In this last year of His ministry, Jesus is philosophically preparing the disciples for their role in service to humanity and their impending leadership role in the Church. Jesus tells the disciples that although they consider themselves the leaders of His organization on earth, the Church, that they most need humility to fulfill the role of leadership to which they are being appointed. Jesus does not intend that the disciples lead by command, but by proxy, as their job is not to make the rules, but to simply transmit and role model the rules given to them by the Lord. **Matthew 18:1-14, Mark 9:33b-50 and Luke 9:46-50** reads:

[Jesus] sat down and called the twelve together and said, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and a servant of all. Then Jesus called a young child to His side and placed him before them. “I tell you the truth,” He said, “unless you change your attitudes and become like little children, you will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. The people who humble themselves as this little child are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever is least among you will be great.”

He took the child in His arms and said to them, “Whoever receives one such little child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but the One who sent Me.”

Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that humility is required for leadership, and the paradigm for leadership is receiving, or welcoming, others. I find it interesting that Jesus, when talking to the disciples, specifies that they ought to receive children.

What is the significance of the child in this pronouncement? I believe that the child represents someone developing maturity, someone who needs guidance, rather than someone that needs help. We should be humble enough to recognize our need for God’s guidance to bring us to maturity, and, as we become more mature, then recognize our responsibility to pass the fruits of our maturation on to someone coming behind us that needs them.

Listen to the words of **John 3:16**, which says:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God's purpose for sending Jesus into the world was not to provide physical healing, although Jesus did so. Healings are simply a physical display of God's power to advertise the change in our relationship with God's kingdom. God has acted in a miraculous manner towards man throughout recorded history, but the miracles themselves were never the purpose for God's actions. God performed miracles to invite us into a relationship with Him, which is that which John terms as everlasting life.

Our next life, our everlasting life is an issue for us although death was not originally part of God's intentional will for man. Man disobeyed God, rejecting God and severing his relationship with Him, and because of this disobedience, God has made this a temporary world, and the temporary things of this world that we find so important hold much less importance for God, **Psalm 90:10-12** tells us:

10 The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

11 Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.

12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

As we are aware of the finite nature of this life and the existence of heaven, it is only reasonable, based upon the emphasis upon wisdom that we see in the Scriptures, to conclude that this life is a series of exercises to prepare us for the next one, the everlasting one. God's objective for us is that we first recognize our need for maturity, then endeavor to obtain maturity by learning to obey His Word, then develop the correct perspective on the results of doing so, and then augment that maturity by passing on the benefit of our maturation to the ones coming behind us so that they can exceed our accomplishments. We cannot learn the complete plan of God and become fully mature in one lifetime, but our goal should be and our responsibility is to learn, to develop, and then to pass on our wisdom to the ones coming behind us.

This being true, one of the most important things that we can learn is other-directedness. The more self-centered that we are, the less mature that we can become. Jesus is telling us in the passages of Scripture that we have already read that we are participants in something that is bigger than ourselves, and as long our thinking revolves around ourselves, we cannot develop the personal characteristics required for maturity. It is certainly more comfortable for us to think of ourselves first and others later if at all, but such thinking leads us into a dead end of selfishness rather than the road to maturity.

Much of wisdom is the humility to recognize that the others with whom we come into contact are in God's plan as well as we are, and that our small contribution to the Kingdom of God, while we are commanded by God to make it, is not really going to tip the scales one way or another.

The best way to see ourselves is as we are cells in a body, the Body of Christ. We perform our function for as long as we are alive, then we pass on, making room for another cell to continue the life function that we performed. As the old folks used to say, one monkey don't stop no show.

Jesus' command to receive others caused John to have a question about something that they had done. **Matthew 18:1-14, Mark 9:33-50, Luke 9:46-50** continues:

John said to [Jesus], "Master, we saw a man casting out demons in Your name, and we made him stop because he doesn't follow with us."

"Don't forbid him," Jesus said, "because no one can do a great work in My name and then promptly speak evil of Me. Whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, no one who in My name gives you a cup of water because you belong to Christ will ever lose his reward."

Jesus reinforces the cell theory that I mentioned earlier. He makes it clear to the disciples that the world is not about them, and that others can contribute to the kingdom of God, even if they are doing so differently than they, the disciples, are doing. We may not be influencing people in the same way as are some others, but we must remember that we are all cells in the body, and our job is to do the task that we are appointed. Listen to the explanation given by the Apostle Paul, in **1Corinthians 12:12-27**:

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,

24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,

25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

Self-aggrandizement is not part of God's program, and it is important for us to recognize that we are only cells in the body, that our appearance on the stage of life is brief and temporary, and that our major purpose for being on the stage is to prepare the way for the cells that are

coming after us. As long as we maintain the proper perspective, and recognize the brevity and the purpose of our contribution to the body, our contribution will be in line with that which the Lord has appointed us to do. The proper perspective allows us to successfully contribute to the body. Jesus continues to emphasize our responsibility to prepare for the ones coming after us in our text for today, **Matthew 18:1-14, Mark 9:33-50, Luke 9:46-50** continues:

“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a big millstone hung around his neck and be sunk in the depths of the sea! What disaster awaits the world for causing someone to sin! It’s inevitable that such offense will occur, but what disaster awaits the one who causes it!

“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It would be better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to keep your two hands or feet and be thrown into hell, the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away! It would be better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with both eyes to be thrown into hellfire, where their worm never dies and the flames never go out.

The thing that we often fail to understand is the effect that our sin has on other people. Jesus tells us in this passage of Scripture that the reason for the severity of the punishment for sin is because of the effect that sin has on the body.

If we could sin in isolation, maybe sin would not be so bad. The problem is that we cannot sin in isolation. Every sin that we commit affects someone else negatively.

As Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, The Lord declared His goodness to Moses in these words, in **Exodus 34:5-7**:

5 Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

6 And the LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.”

How is a father’s iniquity visited upon his children? We are so created that we tend to follow in the footsteps of the people that are instrumental in raising us up to maturity, which, in the normative case, are our parents. It is a fact that most males seek the approval of their fathers, and most females are bonded to their mothers. We often do not read the Scriptures to figure out the correct course of action, but we either look at the behavior of someone we consider a role model or consult with someone whose opinion that we respect. There is generally no one, especially in our formative years, that has our respect more than our parents, whether they deserve it or not.

Dave began speaking with his counselor. “I’ve been married seventeen years”, he said, “I’m forty-seven years old and have eight and twelve year old daughters. My wife and I have been together for this entire time, but there hasn’t been much to our marriage for the last six or seven years.”

The counselor asked, “Why have you behaved less lovingly?”

Dave responded, “Lack of reciprocation. It seemed that I was always imposing on her; it seemed as though after she had our second child, she decided to no longer participate in the

marriage in an intimate way. We never fight and we seldom disagree, but we just...the loving is gone. We're committed to the kids, and we're committed to the marriage, so we're staying together. My question to you is; should we try to explain this to the kids?

The counselor replied, "Absolutely not."

Dave queried, "Even if they pick up on things?"

"Well", responded the counselor, "they wouldn't 'pick up on things' if you two stop the phoniness. If you are committed to your daughters, then behave better."

"Alright", Dave said, "That makes sense."

The counselor continued, "That means that in spite of the lack of reciprocation, you are to behave as though you have the best marriage in the western hemisphere. Treat your wife affectionately and speak to her the same way. Come behind her at dinner and give her a little kiss on the head or on the back of the neck. That's it. Do this so that your daughters grow up seeing a husband treat his wife well. Show your daughters the proper husband behavior so that their expectations of how their husbands should treat them will be correct. And don't do this to make your wife change her behavior, because she may not. Do this because you are committed to your daughters. If you are committed to the marriage for the sake of your daughters, then you have to act like it although you're not getting any."

Dave thought, and then responded, "That's good advice, and thank you very much."

The counselor continued, "Because there is no point in staying together if your home is going to be unpleasant and ferociously cold. You need to put in the effort to make the atmosphere pleasant, and you can do that all by yourself. You don't need your wife's cooperation. I doubt, however, that if you come behind her and just stroke her hair or if you're going back to your chair at dinner and you give her a quick peck on the cheek that she is going to resist or get angry."

Dave considered. "No, I guess she won't. That's probably true", he said.

The counselor replied, "So behave in the way that you want your daughter's future husbands to behave toward them."

"Alright", said Dave. "Thank you very much."

Once you have children, the focus of a marital relationship should be providing a good role model of a husband or wife for your children because those are probably the roles with which your children will have to deal when they grow up. Most fellows will grow up with some traits that their fathers socialized into them, and most girls will grow up to be like their mothers in some way. Children also pick up traits from adults that they admire. So **Matthew 18:1-14**, **Mark 9:33-50**, **Luke 9:46-50** warns us:

"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a big millstone hung around his neck and be sunk in the depths of the sea!

What disaster awaits the world for causing someone to sin! It's inevitable that such offense will occur, but what disaster awaits the one who causes it!

"If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It would be better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to keep your two hands or feet and be thrown into hell, the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it

away! It would be better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with both eyes to be thrown into hellfire, where their worm never dies and the flames never go out.

Dawn started speaking with her counselor. “I have a wonderful man that I’ve known for six years. We’ve been engaged for five years, and although he’s given me an engagement ring, we have never set a date. We’ve owned two homes together, we’re both educated professionals, I’m thirty-five and he’s forty-one. I’m just wondering, how long do I continue to play house?”

The counselor replied, “I thought you said that you have two different homes. Are you shacking up with him?”

Dawn clarified, “No. No. We’ve owned two different homes. We bought a house together, fixed it up and sold it. We’re fixing up our second house, and it’s like we’re married.”

“No”, the counselor retorted, “it’s not like you’re married. There’s nothing like marriage. Marriage means that you’re committed to one another, and you can only make a marital commitment by marrying. People shack up specifically because they do not want to make a marital commitment, so the decision to shack up is completely different thinking than the decision to marry. And you have been shacking up for five years. Do you any minor children in your shack-up home?”

Dawn replied, “I share joint custody of my thirteen year old daughter who goes back and forth between her dad and me.”

“Well”, said the counselor, disapprovingly, “Your daughter is learning how to live like an unpaid prostitute. That is what your daughter is learning.”

Dawn protested, “Actually, my daughter really likes my fiancé.”

The counselor said, “That doesn’t matter. I’m not talking about what she likes. I’m talking about what she’s learning. She is learning that emotion is more important than commitment. She’s learning that it is not important for a man to commit to her as though she is special to him. She’s learning to give herself to a man who is not willing to give himself to her, to commit his life to her. You’re teaching her that there is no hope that a man will really commit his life to her, and that she should settle for hard carbon on fourteen carat gold instead of commitment.”

Dawn said, “I asked Dave why he...”

The counselor cut Dawn off, saying “I don’t care why. And you shouldn’t care why either. My advice to you is to either get him out or get out yourself, whichever would be more appropriate. Tell your daughter that you made a terrible, embarrassing mistake, and that now you realize that the reason that there are morals, values, principles and ethics is to protect you from allowing your feelings to lead you down the wrong path so that you do the wrong thing and hurt yourself.”

Dawn tried again, “But he thinks that I still have feelings for my ex...”

The counselor replied, “It doesn’t matter what he thinks or whom you do or do not have feelings for. Either way, you shouldn’t be shacking up and teaching your daughter the wrong thing by your behavior. The rest of this is just drama, and it really doesn’t matter. I don’t care what his excuse is for not marrying you, because if what you’re doing it is not bad enough to keep him from enjoying your housekeeping and your body for five years, then it’s not bad enough to keep him from committing to do so on a permanent basis by marrying you. If he can’t marry you, then he shouldn’t sleep with you either”

Dawn laughed nervously. “We don’t make love that much anymore, and I just don’t want to...”

The counselor cut Dawn off again. “I’m sorry. What is there about what I said that you do not understand?”

Dawn stopped talking for a moment, and then she started to cry. “I’m afraid of what leaving is going to do to my daughter.”

The counselor responded, “You’re damaging your daughter by staying. The best thing that you can do is to teach her that what you have been doing is wrong and rectify it, not try to justify it.”

Dawn replied, “I just feel like Dave is the most...her dad is not really emotionally stable...and she gets along so well with Dave that it would be a huge loss for her...”

“Dawn”, said the counselor, “It would be a big gain for your daughter to see her mother treat herself with respect. She would learn a valuable lesson that would serve her well for the rest of her life.”

Dawn asked, “Do you think that we can move apart and still have a relationship? I mean...”

The counselor replied, “It doesn’t matter to me whether you can or not. What matters to me is what you are doing to your daughter.”

Dawn pleaded, “Moving would mean taking away the dog, the house, and...”

The counselor cut her off once again. “Dawn, I think that I’ve said my piece. You’re living the life of an unpaid whore, and you’re teaching your daughter everything that you don’t want her to know about love, marriage and commitment. You have a million excuses for what you are doing, but what you are doing is still wrong, and it makes your daughter more likely to get knocked up at fifteen. After all, you’re teaching her that morals, values, principles and ethics don’t matter if your emotions do. And, you’re teaching her that if you like a guy a lot, it’s okay to shack-up with him. And you’re teaching her that if you like a guy a lot, it’s okay to have sex with him. It doesn’t matter that there’s no commitment, no safety, no security, no intense bond. Is that really what you want her to believe? Is this the most you want her to hope for? Is this the legacy that you want her to have from you? My mother is not a wife, but is a just a shack-up honey that sleeps with a guy that won’t marry her. Is this what you want her to say?”

Dawn finally gave in. “No”, she said, “Of course not.”

The counselor replied, “Then you have to get out of that house. Today.”

Dawn finally capitulated. “Okay. Thank you.”

Jesus makes it clear that the morals, values, principles and ethics that we glean from the Bible need to supersede, meaning to be more important to us than, our feelings and emotions, or we make mistakes that damage our children, and the children that are looking up to us as role models. **Matthew 18:1-14, Mark 9:33-50, Luke 9:46-50** reiterates:

“But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a big millstone hung around his neck and be sunk in the depths of the sea! What disaster awaits the world for causing someone to sin! It’s inevitable that such offense will occur, but what disaster awaits the one who causes it!

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thrown into hell, the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away! It would be better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with both eyes to be thrown into hellfire, where their worm never dies and the flames never go out.

Jesus continues:

“Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it regain its flavor? Have salt in yourselves and live in peace with each other.

In the first part of this verse, **“Everyone will be salted with fire”**, both salt and fire are referred to as agents of purification. Jesus is reiterating, as He spoke in the earlier part of the passage, that we need to purify ourselves and our behaviors voluntarily in order to avoid the place where the worms never die and the flames never go out, which is an allusion to hell, in which those that go there will be everlastingly eaten by worms, as dead bodies are, and in eternal torment in the flames. In the second part of the verse, **‘Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how can it regain its flavor? Have salt in yourselves and live in peace with each other.’**, Jesus tells us that if we have salt in ourselves, that is, purify ourselves voluntarily, that we will not have to deal with the consequences of causing one another to sin, which will, in fact, cause us to live in peace with one another.

Jesus goes on to say:

“Make sure you don’t despise one of these little ones, because I’m telling you that their angels in heaven constantly gaze on the face of My heavenly Father. For the Son of Man came to save what was lost.

We are responsible for our behavior, for our example, for that which we show those that are looking at our lives as a guidepost of how we should live. Jesus, our example, tells us, in **Matthew 10:38-39:**

38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

The point remains that we are not living for ourselves, but as a beacon for those who are watching us live. Many people don’t want the responsibility for caring for the next generation, for children, but would rather just be left alone to live their own lives and enjoy their own selfish pleasures.

But God’s prime directive, given in the “a” portion of **Genesis 1:28**, is:

28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply.

The blessing of God goes hand in hand with the directive to multiply. Remember the parallel of the cell. We are here to live for a short while and then to die, but first to multiply, that we might leave the body in position to flourish after our individual death. If we fail to fulfill the function of multiplication in this life, of what value will we be to God in the next life? Jesus gives us the parable, in **Matthew 25:14-30:**

14 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.

15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

17 And likewise he who had received two gained two more also.

- 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.**
- 19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.**
- 20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.'**
- 21 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'**
- 22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.'**
- 23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'**
- 24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.**
- 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'**
- 26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.**
- 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.**
- 28 So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.**
- 29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.**
- 30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'**

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