

## August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 10”

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### Luke 10:5-11

**“Whenever you enter a city and they welcome you, eat whatever they place in front of you. Heal the sick there and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near.’ But if you should enter a city that doesn’t welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘As a testimony against you we are wiping off the dust of your city that clings to us. But understand that the kingdom of God has come near you.’**

**I’m telling you that on the judgment day the land of Sodom will be better off than that city.”**

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 our last few lessons, we have examined the teachings of Jesus Christ on interpersonal relations, as He emphasized on our responsibility to forgive one another. The parabolic illustration from our last lesson made the point that our debt to God is so great that there is no sin that anyone could commit against us that we ought not forgive given the repentance of the offender Jesus prayed from the Cross that God would grant repentance to those that were crucifying Him, so, by comparison, we certainly have no reason to hold a grudge against a repentant person. The parable that we discussed concerned a servant that had been forgiven an overwhelming amount by his master, but then refused to forgive his fellow servant a paltry amount. **Matthew 18:32-33** reads:

**32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.**

**33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’**

The parable ends with the verse that I find most chilling in the entire Bible, as I find it to be a warning to me against doing that which I find myself most often wishing to do, that is, being vengeful or unforgiving rather than forbearing. But, according to the Lord, vengeful or unforgiving people are headed to the torturers in hell rather than to heaven, as **Matthew 18:34-35** says:

**34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.**

**35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not**

**forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

The prevailing principle of Christianity is forgiveness. The model prayer, in **Luke 11:4** says:

**4 And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.”**

We are tempted to be unforgiving and vengeful by the evil one, so, we need to pray that God will forgive us of our sins and help us to recognize our responsibility to forgive others. Repentance and forgiveness are the basis of cooperation and reconciliation, the accomplishment of which is the reason for the institution of the Christian Church.

Our learning processes almost always involve some level of error on our part. I postulate that learning is the process of making errors, followed by correcting our errors and then resolving to act according to the correct principles in the future. God calls our errors sin when our errors have to do with moral failure.

So God’s plan is simple. He has provided us with salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that we can receive forgiveness when we sin, but He commands us to learn from our sins by remorsefully acknowledging that we have sinned, repairing the problem caused by our sin and then deciding to behave correctly in the future. This process is called repentance.

Repentance is the crux of Christianity. After Jesus was baptized, the record of Jesus’ ministry on earth begins in **Matthew 4:12-13, 17**, which says:

**12 Now when Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.**

**13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali,**

**17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Jesus’ economy of words was such that He summed up His entire message, the meaning and purpose of His entire ministry, in the first word of the first sentence of His first sermon. **Acts 17:30-31** reiterates the point, telling us:

**30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,**

**31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus Christ] whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”**

So now, hopefully, we understand the message of Christianity. The message is that God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, commands us to repent, and assures that, if we choose to do so, we have no need to fear His wrath, because His wrath against our sins has been satisfied by the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on our behalf. We simply need to choose to take responsibility for our sins, to have remorse for our sins, to make a plan to repair, to the best of our ability, that which we have done sinfully, and to make determined provision to not repeat our sins. To take responsibility, to have remorse, to repair, and to not repeat are the four “R’s” of repentance. The Lord acknowledges, in His Word, that we are not perfect, but also makes it clear that He wants each of us to recognize our sinfulness and personally improve our conduct. He admonishes us, in **2Peter 3:17-18**:

**17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;**

**18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.**

The Lord's commandment that we grow implies that He knows that we need to grow and mature to become more Christ-like. Jesus Christ has made provisions to help us to improve our ability to react to life in a Christian manner by sending us the Holy Spirit to instruct and remind us, and He has provided us with challenging experiences in this life so that we can practice the techniques, those being repentance and forgiveness, in which we have been instructed.

The Lord also has given us His Word, so that we do not have to try to guess or intuit His principles, but rather have an objective set of instructions to which we can refer. He tells us, in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**:

**16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,**

**17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Our first job as Christians is not to win the world, but to win ourselves. Practice of Christian rituals is not enough. Knowledge of Christian principles is not enough. We actually have to commit to changing our lives to conform to the image and likeness of Christ. The wicked ways of the world may seem cool when we are young, but they just do not work in the long run, and we need to take the long view. If we can discipline ourselves to act properly in the concentric circle of contact that God has given us, God can then increase our influence and the size of our circle until we have the sphere of influence that He wants us to have.

Now, Jesus' disciples did not start out very well. Even though Jesus taught pointedly about forgiveness, the disciples' first impulse was still vengeful. The next episode starts in **Luke 9:51**. Cheney's rendition of the episode, from his book, [Jesus Christ The Greatest Life](#), is as follows:

**As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, [Jesus] made a firm decision to go to Jerusalem.**

For the rest of His time on earth, Jesus will be preparing to go back to heaven. He knows that this is His last teaching tour with His disciples. Jesus has given the disciples a most pointed parable with a most authoritarian admonishment concerning the crux of his communication of remission and reconciliation, At the risk of being redundant, let me say once again that the message of reconciliation is the message of Christianity. The reason for Jesus' coming to this planet was to teach us about repentance, forgiveness and restoration of relationships. If, as a Christian, you miss this message, you miss the point of Christianity. But somehow, the disciples did. The episode continues, in **Luke 9:52-54**:

**[Jesus] sent messengers ahead of Him, and they entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for Him. But the people there would not welcome [Jesus] because it was clear He was heading for Jerusalem.**

**When His disciples James and John saw what was happening, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven and burn them up?"**

Do you remember the instructions that Jesus gave us to lead people to repentance? First, we have to go to the person that sins against us and tell them their fault. Then we take a

delegation of one or two others with us to tell them again, and finally we bring the situation before the Church. Of course, these are the guidelines for errant individuals, and it would be difficult to follow them for a whole town, but the last stage of the guideline is to shake the dust off of your feet as a testimony against the recalcitrant person, and burning up the town is hardly a parallel reaction to shaking the dust off of your feet, not burning them up.

Since the ultimate goal of Christianity is cooperation and reconciliation, it is generally important that we differentiate problems that are personal from those that are not. We have a more visceral emotional reaction to personal affronts than we do to problems that are structural. Personal and structural problems generally require different solutions. Personal problems require personal resolutions, while structural problems require system changes. If go into a store and the salesperson won't wait on you, a situation in which the salesperson refuses to wait on you because they don't like you personally requires a much different resolution than the salesperson being busy with another customer and simply asking you to wait.

James and John took the Samaritans' snub of Jesus Christ personally. They wanted to burn up the Samaritan town for their inhospitable treatment of Jesus as He was on His way to Jerusalem. But the Samaritans generally had no dealings with the Jews, and Jesus Christ did not just present Himself as a Jew, but as a Jew that was on His way to celebrate one of the most Jewish ceremonies of the year, the Passover Feast at Jerusalem, which obviously marked Jesus as a Hebrew of the Hebrews. The rejection of Jesus by the Samaritans was not personal and should not have been unexpected, but was simply a function the mutual ethnic discrimination between the Jews and the Samaritans. Generally speaking, the two groups did not like each other and discriminated against each other whenever they came into contact.

Discrimination is an interesting subject. Discrimination is generally not personal. It is a simple fact that our minds naturally categorize things. Our minds place each object, either person, place or thing, with which we come into contact into a drawer in our mental file cabinet, and we naturally try to bulk like items into a category, We then designate a particular set of characteristics to all members of the category.

It came up for me this week in a discussion with the lady that runs the Christian cable television station in Lansing. She is an extremely conservative individual and she also knows that I am a conservative as well. As I was training her on the blogging software that I installed on her website, she decided to ask me a political question. "Reverend Curtis", she asked, "whom do you plan to support in November for President? I don't like either one of the choices. I'm not sure that McCain is even a Christian, because he was hanging out with the Dalai Lama this week."

"Well", I said, mischievously, smiling to myself. "I guess you must be supporting Obama. Everybody knows that he is a Christian, after all of the reports in the press about the comments about race that the former pastor of the church that he attends made. As a matter of fact, the church that Obama attended in Chicago is a big United Church of Christ right down the street from the house where I grew up. So if McCain is not a Christian and Obama is, I guess that makes your mind up right there."

"Obama's not a Christian", she replied, "He's a Muslim."

"What?" I asked, "where in the world did you get that from? Muslims don't have pastors, so what are you talking about."

“No”, she replied, “but I’m sure that he is a Muslim. Didn’t he go to a Muslim school when he was a kid?”

“Yeah”, I replied, “He lived in Indonesia from age six to ten. For two years he went to a Muslim school, and for the other two years he went to a Catholic school. But now, he is neither a Muslim nor a Catholic. He belongs to the United Church of Christ.”

“Well, I don’t think so”, she replied, “I’m sure that I read that he is a Muslim.”

“Sister”, I said, “I’m sure that you did read it, but simply because you read it doesn’t make it so.”

About that time the other blog users came into the station and our conversation was interrupted as I went back to work building them into the system. After I left the station, I found a CNN news article debunking the myth that Obama is a Muslim, and sent it to her. I’m sure that we’ll have an interesting conversation when we meet again.

I doubt seriously, however, that the people that started the rumor that Obama is a Muslim have anything against Obama personally, because, since they lost in the primary, they have decided to support Obama. But when they were trying to win in the primary, they decided to use Obama’s name against him to gain a political advantage. Even if he had attended Muslim school for his entire elementary school career, they probably would not have been accused of being a Muslim now if his name was Henry Smith.

Just as the people that started the rumor about Obama had nothing against him personally, the Samaritans had nothing against Jesus Christ personally. Their rejection was not personal; they didn’t allow any Jews on their way to the Passover to lodge in their city. So, although James and John took their rejection personally, Jesus did not. **Luke 9:55-56** records:

**[Jesus] turned and rebuked them, saying, “You don’t realize what spirit you are reflecting. For the Son of Man came not to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” So they went to another village.**

Jesus Christ recognized that He was going to come face to face with both bigotry and ignorance everywhere that He went. He lived in a multiethnic culture in which each ethnicity had its’ own religion, and each ethnicity thought that they had the inside track on how to please whatever god they believed in, whether they believed in the God of Heaven, or in some idol. As Jesus Christ approached this polyglot of cultures, He had the key to converting all of them. He gives it to us, in **Luke 9:56**:

**For the Son of Man came not to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”**

Jesus’ focus is on the salvation of mankind, regardless of religious or ethnic persuasion. That is why it is so important that churches in general and Christians in particular have a lifetime focus on forgiveness. Think about it. How could Jesus Christ have ever convinced the Samaritans that He is their Savior had He destroyed them for holding the wrong opinion about His identity? Keep in mind that Jesus Christ had not risen from the dead when this episode occurred. Of course, He had done many wonderful works, but doing miracles of healing is not the thing that set Jesus Christ apart from all of the other men that God endued with power from on high.

The attributes that set Jesus Christ apart from the other from the great prophets through which God did miracles, like Moses and Elijah, is the fact that Jesus rose, both spontaneously and physically, from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection is the single validating and defining act of His

ministry to mankind, and Jesus wants to give every person the opportunity to learn of His resurrection and to choose to join His church. **2Peter 3:9** tells us:

**9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

Jesus' predominant preoccupation is to save everyone possible, and He allowed Himself to be crucified to give everyone the opportunity to be saved. He was certainly willing to suffer rejection to give the Samaritans the opportunity to repent of their sins. Jesus coped with rejection because He was not at all self-centered and had no reluctance to bear personal pain in order to achieve His objective, which was to make provisions for the salvation of the world.

So, now we are aware of two attributes that every Christian needs to fulfill his or her part in the plan of God. We must have forgiving hearts to bring about reconciliation, and we must be able to allow ourselves to be rejected and persecuted for our faith without retaliation, taking the persecution calmly. Although we have access to the power of God, He calls us to use the power for beneficial purposes rather than to destructively retaliate.

Once Jesus calmed James and John down and re-taught the lesson on forgiveness, Jesus found Himself conversing with three other potential disciples. **Luke 9:57-58** tells us:

**As they were on their way, a teacher of the law approached and said, "Teacher, I'll follow You wherever You go."**

**"The foxes have holes and the birds have nests," Jesus replied, "but the Son of Man has no place to rest His head."**

Teachers of the law are the lawyers, and they are presented in the Scripture, as are all the religious leaders, as men that use their ecclesiastical offices as a conduit to a good living. Now, Jesus expected that the disciples that He sent out to preach would be supported ad hoc by those to whom they preached. **Matthew 10:1-10** tells us:

**Then Jesus travelled through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues and continuing to proclaim the good news of the kingdom and healing every sickness and affliction among the people. When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to His disciples, "The harvest is bountiful, but there are few workers. So then, pray to the Lord of the harvest that He will send out workers into His harvest fields."**

He then called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority to cast out demons and to heal all kinds of sickness and affliction. Jesus sent them out two by two to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He gave them this command: **"Don't go into Gentile neighborhoods and don't visit any Samaritan city. Go instead to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, say, 'The kingdom of heaven has arrived!' 'Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Don't take anything for the trip except a staff. Don't take along gold or silver or copper in your money belt. Don't take any bread or a bag for provisions. Neither should you take an extra tunic or pair of sandals or staff, but do wear sandals. For the worker deserves his wages.**

**"Whenever you enter a city or village, find out who in it is worthy. Remain in whatever home you enter until you leave that place. When you enter the home, say a**

**greeting. If the home is indeed worthy, allow your blessing to rest on it. If it isn't worthy, allow your blessing to return to you.**

Jesus told the disciples to not take a bag or either money, provisions or extra clothes so that they would obtain lodging and food from the person in the city who had both something to share and a willingness to share it. Jesus gave the disciples no expectation of being paid, as they had nothing in which to carry wages.

Jesus told the disciples to preach **'The kingdom of heaven has arrived!'**, and I have no evidence that there will be either money or avarice in heaven.

Jesus, by saying **'the Son of Man has no place to lay his head'** is warning the lawyer that He does not intend that the disciples use their good offices to get rich. The Gospel ministry is intended to be a benevolent one in which the focus is on the benefit of those needing help rather than the building of large financial enterprises. Of all of the things that Jesus had when He died, a will was not one of them. The lawyer was not the only potential follower that Jesus rebuked. **Luke 9:59-62** records:

**Jesus said to one of His disciples, "Follow Me."**

**"Lord," the man said, "allow me first to go bury my father."**

**"Let the dead bury their own dead," Jesus answered. "But you go out and announce the kingdom of God!"**

**Another man said, "I'll follow You, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to my family."**

**Jesus said to him, "No one who has started to plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."**

Jesus puts primacy on the job of those assigned to the spreading of the Gospel. Those that Jesus calls to win the world cannot do so successfully if they consider mundane pedestrian pursuits more important than the task to which Jesus assigns them. **Romans 12:1-2** describes:

**1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**

**2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

The commitment that Jesus calls for is one of a living sacrifice. Webster defines sacrifice as the destruction or surrender of something for the sake of something else, and for those called by Jesus Christ, the something is their very lives and the something else is the gospel. Jesus calls men to give their all to the task at hand, even unto death. The commitment is huge for those who choose to take up the task, so much so that those with the call are not even allowed by the Lord to look back.

Jesus specifies the commitment required because he is about to send the disciples out to preach. They have received the gospel message, and understand the principles that they are to teach the people, and so it is time to go. **Luke 10:1-12** records:

**Afterward the Lord commissioned seventy others and sent them out in pairs to go ahead of Him into every city and place He intended to visit.**

**"The harvest indeed is plentiful," He said, "but the workers are few. Therefore earnestly ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.**

**“Go on your way. Look, I am sending you out like lambs among a pack of wolves. Don’t carry a purse or a bag or sandals, and don’t greet anyone on the way. Whenever you enter a home, first say, ‘Peace to this home.’ If a person of peace really lives there, your peace will rest on him. If not, your peace will return to you. Remain in that home, eating and drinking whatever they provide for you, because the worker deserves his wages. Don’t move from home to home.**

**“Whenever you enter a city and they welcome you, eat whatever they place in front of you. Heal the sick there and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near.’ But if you should enter a city that doesn’t welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘As a testimony against you we are wiping off the dust of your city that clings to us. But understand that the kingdom of God has come near you.’**

**I’m telling you that on the judgment day the land of Sodom will be better off than that city.”**

So the gospel message is clear, and it is to be spread by those whom Jesus appoints. Those who hear the gospel message are called to spontaneously receive it. Those who choose not to hear are not to be destroyed, but to be left with a warning that they need to recognize the Kingdom of God.

God does not grant repentance lightly, but at a great cost. The cost of repentance is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. To be saved from hell, we have to acknowledge the payment for our sins that Jesus Christ made, along with the level of commitment that His sacrifice demands. However, **Matthew 25:21** tells us:

**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.’**

Far greater than all of the trials a ministering Christian may encounter...and above and beyond all of the disappointments he may face...and far more than all of the many heartaches he may suffer...and outnumbering the many difficulties he must handle...and far weightier than all of the problems he must deal with...and much bigger than all those obligations he must fulfill...and more spectacular than all of the complications he experiences...are the innumerable JOYS...and...REWARDS with which God blesses him...!

First of all, there is JOY...  
...in knowing for sure there is a God in heaven...  
...in reaching out and touching the hand of God...  
...in having fellowship with this almighty God...  
...in standing upon the eternal Word of God...  
...in observing the glorious handiwork of God...  
...in seeing people respond to the Spirit of God...  
and there is also JOY...  
...in being part of the church of God...!

There is also JOY, tremendous JOY, in realizing...  
...that God's love is eternal...  
...that God's mercy is everlasting...  
...that God's grace is sufficient...



...that God's goodness is overflowing...  
...that God's power is omnipotent...  
...that God's Word is accurate...  
and there is also JOY in realizing...  
...that God's presence can be felt anytime, anywhere,  
everywhere...!

And what a JOY it is to realize...  
...that the promises of the Lord are dependable...  
...that the comfort of the Spirit is genuine...  
...that the redeeming blood of Calvary is powerful...  
...that the blessed assurance is for real...  
...that the glories of heaven are awaiting the saints...  
...that the end of time is near at hand...  
and what JOY it is to realize...  
...that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming soon...!

Jesus Christ died that our sins might be forgiven. He calls us as witness to the fact of His life, death, burial and resurrection. He gives us the Holy Spirit to assure us that He is still in control, and is coming to reward those of us that are steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, for we know, that our labor is not in vain, in the Lord, Let us hold fast to our Christian commitment, and participate faithfully in the further extension of the great work of building the Kingdom of God.

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