

January 11th, 2009 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 29”

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Luke 17:20-21

20 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, **“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”**

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 lesson, I advanced the idea that marriage is the relationship in which we can most practice the mandate to be like Christ, as He tells us, in **John 13:34-35:**

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Real love is not that which we do in social circles by acting politely to one another. Real love is being involved with another person to the point that we will literally give ourselves for the other person’s welfare, as **John 3:16-17** tells us:

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.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

I wish the best for all that participate in the worship services that we hold here and will try to assist you however I can with whatever problem that you present me, but, even so, the relationship that we have with one another as members of the same fellowship will undoubtedly not be as deep and intense as the one that I have with my wife.

When we marry one another, we take on the responsibility to give ourselves to and for one another even as Christ gave Himself for us. And Christ gave Himself for us, not just on Calvary, but in His daily life, for four up close and personal years that He mentored twelve individuals He taught them personally, individually, by precept, example and experience to live the type of life that He and His Father found pleasing, and to preach the Good News that this type of Godly, intimate life with Him is available to those of us that choose to have such a relationship.

But, whether or not to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ is a personal choice, just as is an intimate relationship with a spouse. In our text for today, Jesus makes the point, in response to a question by those who were peripherally religious, that a relationship with God is not a matter of external location or position, but of internal commitment. **Luke 17:20-21** says:

20 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

After the World Trade Center disaster on September 11th, 2001, the United States of America decided to depose the Iraqi dictator Sadaam Hussein. After a short period of warfare, the Iraqi capitol city of Baghdad fell to the U.S. offensive, and our military took on the job of stabilizing the country and establishing a new government. Were you to visit Iraq now, you would find an area of Baghdad that is an outpost of United States, one in which American culture is the norm rather than that of the indigenous people of Iraq. Our enemies in the region find this area a reason for great frustration, as it reminds them that they are being policed, if not virtually governed, by a foreign power with a vastly different culture. And our most irritating cultural difference to our enemies in the region is our difference in religion. They see Muhammad as a prophet of God, and we disagree with their assessment. We see Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and they disagree with our assessment. These two disagreements have caused a fairly straightforward military action with a defined goal that should have lasted a few weeks or months at most to become a quagmire in which we have been entangled going into the seventh year.

Jesus had a similar problem. Just as we brought an extraordinary military presence into Iraq, Jesus brought an extraordinary healing presence into the Palestine. In a matter of weeks, Jesus changed the religious landscape by His displays of the power of God. An interesting case of His doing so is found in the passage of Scripture just before our text describing Jesus’ healing of ten men that had the dreaded disease of leprosy. **Luke 17:11-14** says:

11 Now it happened as [Jesus] went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off.

13 And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”

14 So when [Jesus] saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

When Jesus told the lepers to show themselves to the priests, He was instructing them to follow the Law of Moses, recorded in **Leviticus 14:1-5**:

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 “This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest.

3 And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper,

4 then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean

birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop.

5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water.

Leviticus goes on for the next few verses to describe the ceremony that is to be performed by the priest to ceremonially cleanse a physically healed leper. The Bible does not make the priest responsible for physically healing lepers. The priest's job is to verify that the physical healing has occurred and then perform a ceremony of cleansing.

The episode of the interaction of the lepers with Jesus continues, in **Luke 17:15-16:**

15 And one of [the lepers], when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God,

16 and fell down on his face at [Jesus'] feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

Generally, the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, but during Bible days, lepers of whatever background stuck together because their highly communicable and generally fatal disease made them outcasts from all societies. It is often true that when tragedy strikes, the social barriers of race, color, national origin and religion between the effected people are erased and they work together to alleviate their mutual misery.

So the ten lepers, one of them being a Samaritan, called upon Jesus Christ and received the benefit of His healing ministry. Nine of the ten immediately followed Jesus' instructions to show themselves to the priests in accordance with Jewish law to regain their status as members of the Jewish covenant community. The tenth leper was a Samaritan with no such status with which to be restored, so, rather than going to the Jewish priest, he came to Jesus to thank him. In **Luke 17:17-18:**

17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"

18 Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

The nine left Jesus without giving Him thanks in order have their status restored as members of the Jewish covenant community. But, let's think about this for a minute.

What good did their Jewish background do them when they needed healing? The Jewish priests would not even come in contact with the lepers, but followed the commandment of the Scripture to instruct the lepers to isolate themselves, to cover their sore with cloths and to audibly pronounce themselves unclean so that no one would accidentally contract leprosy from them. Membership in the Jewish covenant community was of no practical value to them as long as they were lepers, because the Jewish covenant community had no help for them, did not want to be contaminated by them, and excluded them.

Religious organizations facilitate the reinforcement of religious values in our lives by providing an environment in which we can associate with others that share those values. But, although organizations reinforce values, organizations do not determine values. All people that are members of an organization do not necessarily accept the values that the organization espouses. Although coming to church generally influences people positively as they decide to make a commitment to Jesus Christ, coming to church does not make you a Christian any more than going into a garage makes you a car.

Organized religion is a wonderful thing, and the Christian Church, as an organization, has done much to transform the world. In reality, however, the church is nothing more than the sum

of its members. That which makes the church viable in the further extension of the great work of building the Kingdom of God is the work of the individual members of it.

So, the required commitment is personal. The one leper determined that his personal allegiance should be to Jesus Christ rather than to the Jewish organization. And Jesus explains that to the Pharisees in the text for today, as they question Him, in the “a” portion of **Luke 17:20**:

20 When [Jesus] was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come,

The Pharisees held the concept that the Kingdom of God is an organization of which they could be influential members, even as they were the leaders of the Jewish religion. The Pharisees were looking forward to the day in which God would allow the Nation of Israel to cast off the oppression of the Roman government, and regain the influence in the world that the Nation had during the glory days of Solomon. But Jesus told them something that their cognitive dissonance did not allow them to understand. The “b” portion of **Luke 17:20-21** says:

20 [Jesus] answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’

According to Jesus, when the Kingdom of God comes, you will not be able to see it. It won’t be a political upheaval or a change in institutional worship. There won’t be a new ruler, or a new form of government, or even a new way of doing business. The plan of God is not to incrementally change our corrupt circumstances so that we end up doing the same old thing in a new way under new leadership.

God is not dealing with organizations, but with individuals, as Jesus clarifies in the “b” portion of **Luke 17:21**:

21 For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”

The Kingdom of God is personal. We each have to individually decide to become members of it. That is why the forerunner of the Kingdom, John the Baptist, did not go to Jerusalem to become influential with the Jewish hierarchy, but went into the wilderness and called men to follow him there and submit to baptism as the sign of a personal commitment to God. You can go back to **Leviticus 14** and read the ritual that is to be done to certify the cleansing of a leper, and if you have the time, you can read the rest of the book of Leviticus and see all of the various rituals to signify things that the Jewish priests were to perform for the nation. There are dozens of them. But in the Christian church, there are only three sacraments, baptism, communion and marriage, and each of them is personal.

You cannot become a Christian by association. Being brought up in a home in which the parents are Christian does not make the children Christian. Good Christian parents bring up children that become pagans all the time, because Christianity is a personal commitment. It is more likely that individuals will catch Christianity by repeated exposure to the Christian lifestyle, but it is by no means a certainty. Every one of these little heads in here has to make their own decision about Christianity, and although we as parents and leaders have influence, we do not have say. Yes, make them all come to church every Sunday, but even so, they still have to choose Jesus Christ for themselves.

Of the three sacraments, baptism, communion and marriage, the most life changing sacrament is marriage. Baptism and communion are rituals that we perform to signify our commitment, but marriage is the laboratory in which we can really grow in grace and in the

knowledge of Jesus Christ. When Jesus received thanks from the Samaritan leper, Jesus told him, in **Luke 17:19**:

19 And [Jesus] said to [the Samaritan], “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

Jesus said, Arise, go your way. Live your life. Do that which you are going to do in the world. You can't spend your life following me around, but you have to go into the world and live. Jesus is instructing the leper to remember this healing and his faith in God as he lives day by day, and to live a life that will exhibit the fact that he has been with Jesus.

What does Jesus mean by “your way”? Our way is our daily life. But our exhibit of having been with Jesus to the world is neither our success in the workplace, nor the material possessions that we obtain. Unsaved people can do well in business and acquire possessions, but the way of which Jesus speaks is the love that we show for one another in our personal relationships, most specifically, our marriages.

Why is marriage so important? Well, let's look at **John 3:16-17**, 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.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

When we look at the ministry of God's Son with the world, we see a very personal interaction. Jesus came with a ministry of personal, individual healing. Jesus did not come as a political or social leader with a grandiose plan to reform the society, but He came with a ministry of individual interaction. His mandate to His disciples is recorded in **John 13:34-35**, which says:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The commandment of Jesus Christ is not one to love our country or to live such lives of virtue that all will recognize that we are fastidious keepers of the law. The commandment of Jesus Christ is for us to love one another. Jesus commanded His disciples to love one another “**as I have loved you.**” That is personal.

To the Jews, from the days of the writing of the Book of Leviticus until the time of Jesus, God was a divine abstraction, appearing as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. The only regular interaction between God and the Jewish nation in those days occurred once each year on the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest purified himself and approached the glory of God in the Most Holy Place in the Temple, and offered a sacrifice on the Holy of Holies. Interestingly, the Jewish leadership took the precaution of tying a rope around the waist of the High Priest before he entered the Most Holy Place so that if God found that the High Priest had not purified himself sufficiently and struck him dead, the other priests could extract his body from the Most Holy Place without entering it themselves and being struck dead as well.

The coming of Jesus Christ changed the situation so that God is no longer defined ceremonially, but is manifested as a person, Jesus Christ, so that we have a person to love rather than a concept to fear. Jesus Christ, the sinless son of God, was warm, human and real. He not only cared for the hurts of humanity, but He used the power of God to do something about them. He instructed those of us that follow Him that the abiding virtues of life are faith, hope and love,

and that the greatest of these is love. He changed the perception that God is in the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire to that which **1John 4:8** tells us:

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

The way that we exercise our Christianity is to increase the amount of love that we show for one another. It will be difficult for you to increase the amount of love that you show for me, because of our limited contact with one another, so the real gymnasium of love, the place in which you can really work your love muscles to their fullest, is at home with your spouse. It's a perfect setup, as Paul instructs us, in **Ephesians 5:25-32**:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Marriage is the first institution created by God in the Bible. Marriage was created during a period of time in which man was still perfect, in that he had not sinned. Ephesians 5 tells us that a marriage in which both partners agree to sacrifice themselves for one another is the environment designed by God to mirror the love that Christ has for the Church. Yes, you come here to church, but each of us has our church in our homes. We are each the temple of the Holy Spirit. That's why we are to keep our marital unions sacred, as **1Corinthians 6:15-20** tells us:

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot [meaning a woman to whom you are not married that will agree to have sex with you]? Certainly not!

16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh."

17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

18 Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

So the teaching that we are to have a self-sacrificial love for our spouses is found in **Ephesians 5**, and the teaching that we are to have an exclusive sexual relationship with our spouses is found in **1Corinthians 6**. Both of these teachings fly in the face of modern thinking, because, in our society and in our mass media, divorce is considered a rite of passage rather than

a sin, and sexual immorality is considered good clean fun rather than an affront to the Holy Spirit.

I talked a few weeks ago about intelligent decision making, and made the point that the only intelligent decisions are those that are in accordance with the Word of God. The reason that the moral law of God exists is that God knows the best way for us to live.

Now, let me ask you: can you seriously challenge that assertion? Do you think that, considering your mental acuity and the number of years of experience that you have, that you have developed the wisdom to successfully rearrange the moral value of sex in the world? Do you really think that you have that which it takes to successfully show God that His instructions are, shall we say, somewhat flawed? The Almighty God says that sexual activity should be reserved for marriage, but can you actually say to God, based upon your great intellect and experience, that after considering all the factors, you have come to the conclusion, that God's assertion might not be exactly accurate?

Eighteen year old Erin wrote this, with which you can read along in your bulletin if you wish:

I'm finishing my senior year in high school. I constantly hear conversations about birth control, sex, partying, and just wanting to have fun. I'm around peers who have no idea what the words "commitment" or "respect" mean as they pertain to a relationship. Peers who cringe at the word "children", and think that it is beneath them to be a parent or a housewife.

Sometime I feel that I am living in a different world, because everything my peers don't want is exactly what I want out of life. Even though I don't plan to get married until I graduate from college, I believe that it is never too early to learn how to live your life the right way.

I cannot wait to become a dedicated wife that treats her husband with affection and appreciation, and I cannot wait to have children and extend the love that my spouse and I will share with one another to them. To me, that is what life is all about.

I currently have a boyfriend whom I have been dating for a little over a year. I can honestly say that I love him because I respect and honor the person that he is. I love that he believes that we should save ourselves for marriage and do things in the order that God ordains. I love the values that he stands for although they are different from those of all my other girl and guy friends.

I don't know what will happen to us in the future as we go through college, but I am just satisfied to know that there are guys that actually exist with the same values and morals that I hold for marriage, family, God, and life in general.

Jesus Christ came into the world with the same type of straightforward goal with which we entered the war in Iraq.

His goal was to depose the tyranny of our defective thinking so that we would recognize, first and foremost, that our most important task in life is to develop a love relationship with our

spouse and children in which we could give ourselves sacrificially. Jesus manifested this straightforward goal by giving Himself to us in the way that He commands husbands to love their wives. He so loved us that He touched our lepers, who were the untouchable outcasts of society, and He healed them physically and restored them to their former status in the society. Jesus did not come as a conquering King or a domineering commander, but He came as a servant, sacrificing Himself to take the tragedy out of life and replace it with joy. Jesus' greatest miracle was to raise Lazarus from the dead and restore him to his family, but Jesus' first miracle was to go to a wedding in which they were short of wine for celebration, and change the water that was there for purification into the best wine that had ever been tasted so that the celebration could continue.

The key to the Christianity is not found in high, holy celebrations of the historical events of the Bible. Many churches, at Christmastime, put on elaborate productions to exalt the birth of the Savior, and at Easter, will put on similar productions to exalt the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. While I have nothing against those that wish to remind us, ceremonially, of the events in the life of the Christ and encourage us to remember them, I am also aware that the most important thing that we can do in our lives to show our allegiance to the Lord is to live in love with the one that we have personally chosen to be the object of our affections. The most elaborate, elegant production in the world will not exhibit our Christianity in the way that following Jesus' admonition in **John 13:34-35** would:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus Christ chose His disciples to love just as we choose our spouses to love. The Scripture makes it clear that we have the obligation to love our spouses just as Jesus loved His disciples. Jesus makes the family the focal point of the faith, as **1 Timothy 5:8** tells us:

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Jesus tells us, in the "b" portion of our text, **Luke 17:21**:

21 For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

Now, there is no question that I want each of you to come to our church meeting anytime that we have it. I want you to come and listen to my presentations, take them in, participate during the discussion period, bring your cares and concerns to our prayer period, and partake of the Lord's Supper with me. I want you to visit our website to read and listen to the presentations and grow by your study of them. Yes, and I want you to bring others to the fellowship that I may have more questions to answer. There is no doubt about that. But I also want you to understand that the church meeting is like the player's meeting in the locker room before the football games that I am going home to watch this afternoon.

Regardless of how inspirational and motivating that the coach is in his pre-game speech, the game will not be won by the team that hears the best speech, but by the team that scores the most points on the field. The game will be won by the team that has spent the most time in the weight room becoming strong and in the film room watching the other team's tendencies and becoming prepared to counter them. The game will be won by the team whose quarterback has prepared to throw the most accurately and whose running backs and receivers have prepared to

advance the ball the greatest distance and whose line has prepared to block and tackle most ferociously, and, most importantly, who actually executes the game plan on the field.

The game will be won by the team with the players that give themselves, sacrificially, to the game plan.

That is the way that marriage is. Every time you decide to selfishly treat your spouse with disrespect or a lack of love because you don't feel like giving yourself, you are failing the team. Every time that you decide that your personal needs and comforts are more important than those of your spouse, you are failing the team. Every time that you decide to pout and punish your spouse for some feeling that you have, you are sitting on the sidelines as the coach is calling for you to get in the game.

Jesus Christ gave Himself sacrificially, meaning that He put His personal feelings aside and did that which was necessary so that He could accomplish that which God gave Him to do, regardless of the pain that it caused Him. His experience in the Garden of Gethsemane was recorded in the Scripture so that we would know that He felt the pain of very part of His sacrifice. His skin was tender, His feelings were human, His suffering was total. He was humiliated, He was physically abused to a point past pain, and His heart was broken by the betrayal of those with whom He has shared His very life. There is no human experience that we could possibly have that is more painful, physically, mentally, and emotionally, than that which the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords endured during His sacrifice on the Cross. And He is our example.

We are to make our marriages that which they should be by giving ourselves, totally, even as Jesus Christ gave Himself for us. And that is the way that we exhibit the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit to the world. The reason that God has given us husbands, wives and children is to have a laboratory in which to develop our ability to give ourselves even as Jesus Christ gave Himself for us. The Kingdom of God is within you.

And what God has joined together, let not man separate.

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