

A Tale of Two Disciples

Part two

Luke 6:46-49

Rick Peterson

The greatest success one can attain in life is to hear Jesus and do what he says. What could be more significant than to hear the voice of the Son of God, and then walk in accord with his voice? No amount of riches, no degree of fame, no temporal pleasure can compare to knowing and hearing and obeying the voice of incarnate Son of God.

Think of what I am saying.

The God of your creation took on human flesh in order to redeem you from death, and to elevate you to a share in his Sonship in the Father, through the Spirit. We who sat in darkness have indeed saw a great light, and into a world of chaos, fear, violence, rampant evil, and death, he has come to redeem us from our own doing. It was not God who introduced sin and death into the world; it was not God who turned his back on us, but we who turned away from him. And now, in the last days, God has spoken in his Son. And his words are spirit and they are life (John 6:63).

In this study of the Lord's *Sermon on the Plain*, we have learned that Jesus came to gather to himself a new people, a new humanity who share his image. He has appointed twelve elders, and lifting up his eyes toward his disciples, he began to give them basic, elementary instruction as to how to live in his kingdom. We have learned of the path of blessing and woe. We have discovered the kingdom of God is not built on violence and retribution, but on love, even for one's enemies. As sons of the Most High we are to do as our Father does in showing mercy to even the unthankful and evil. And in the church, we are to be a people, not of judgment and condemnation, but of forgiveness and generosity for God has given to us his best measure, "pressed down, shaken together, and running over." The kingdom of God is a place of abundance and generosity.

And we are to work as would athletes in training in order to become more and more like our Teacher—Jesus Christ. We are to work on our own faults and obstacles to conformity to

Christ, and not appoint ourselves as experts in other people's faults. Leave the one-up and one-down behavior to the spiritually blind hypocrite. As for you, look to Jesus alone as your measure of progress. There are no superstars in the kingdom of God, no exalted masters, no elitists, as was common among the scribes and Pharisees.

And last week we discovered the way of the anti-disciple, meaning, the one who professes to follow Christ, but whose tongue wounds others as when thorns tear the flesh. These are people who provide no more spiritual nourishment to others than does a bramble bush. The anti-disciple speaks and acts this way because he or she still treasures evil in his or her heart. They may sit next to you in the pew, they may be present at fellowship events, they may even stand in your pulpit, but his or her heart is not right. They have nothing good to offer, and their ways bring blasphemy upon the name of Christ.

By contrast is the good disciple, meaning the one in whom God has created a new heart, a heart that has the kingdom of God as its great treasure. And from this good treasure of their heart, they bring good to others, and just as figs and grapes provide the body nourishment, so also is the good disciple a resource of life-giving nourishment to others. Both the evil heart and the good heart are measured by what comes out of the mouth, for "out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." And this principle continues to be displayed in those who say "Lord, Lord," but do not do what he says.

What "Lord" are you Serving?

This text begins with our Lord asking a sobering question, "But why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Why indeed? Apparently, there was already evidence of this behavior among those who professed to be Christ's disciples. After all, beyond the twelve apostles, there was also large groups who professed to be his disciples. There were those who heard and did what he said, and there were those who heard and did not do what he said. Each claimed to be his followers, but as the good is distinguished from the evil by what came out of their mouths, so also the good is distinguished from the evil by whether they actually obeyed our Lord's teachings.

But here is an important point: It is not as if those who hear and do nothing are idle. They are doing something. They are just not doing what Jesus says. And what is it they are doing? Better yet, who are they obeying? It is entirely possible to hear Jesus' words, and yet be in service to another. "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16). The Bible speaks clearly of those who are slaves to sin (John 8:34; Romans 6:17). And the Bible is equally clear that mankind is under the sway of the evil one (I John 5:19), even "taken captive by him to do his will" (II Timothy 2:26). And therein is the answer to our question. The devil takes captives. Sin enslaves. The world promises life but delivers death. Only the Son of God can free those taken captive, and only then as they continue in his word: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Salvation by grace is realized by doing the work necessary (Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 2:10). Listen to how Paul describes his own experience: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:10). Paul clearly viewed himself as an object of divine grace, but not a passive grace. No, the grace of God to Paul caused him to labor more abundantly than all his associates.

Still, there are many people who have been "converted" by front-door evangelists who are no more Christians than the front door itself. But they think they are on their way to heaven. They may even listen to sermons, but nothing changes in them and for them. They are objects, not of the grace of God, but of deception. Their lives are full of thorns. Their relationships are chaotic and painful. They share the same fears that torment unbelievers. And their speech is abusive and foul like that of any other rank pagan. Yet, they name the name of Christ. If you ask them if they are believers, they will respond, "Oh, yes, I am Christian." And there are those also who are steeped in religious tradition and ethnic family heritage. They, too, remain slaves to sin, but claim to be Christians. Such was the folly of the Jews who also professed belief in Jesus but rejected any need to continue in his word in order to be made free. In the end, they even tried to kill him as he continued teaching them (John 8:59).

Do you get the point? The credibility of one's faith is not measured by hearing, but by what you do after you hear. Faith comes by hearing, to be sure, but once heard, saving faith will also produce works. Here is a simple truth: There really is no way to know one loves Jesus apart from doing what he says. Salvation is not secured by mere mental assent or emotional experience, salvation is secured by hearing and doing. This is by far the biblical witness, and the teaching of the church throughout her history. We do and then we feel, not the other way around.

Be Doers of the Word

We have been reminded that Jesus says those who continue in his word are his disciples. This means those who hear and do not continue in his word, are not disciples. Simple, clear teaching. And by "continue" or "abide" in his word, he does not simply mean Bible study, but doing what the Bible says. Only those who continue in his word come to know freedom from sin.

The Son sets us free, and he prescribes the means: hearing and obeying. Nowhere does Jesus commend anyone for simply hearing him, and doing nothing.

As Dallas Willard so wisely stated, "We can do nothing without him, but if we do nothing, it will be without him."

And this is the apostolic witness as well. James exhorts his readers, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (see James 1:21-25). James adds later, and within the context of showing mercy, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" (2:14 NASB). And within the greater context of sacrifice and service, he adds, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (2:26). In James' illustrations, to hear and do is to be merciful to those in need; it is to trust the Lord with the outcome of one's children as did Abraham when he offered Isaac; and it is to act in accord with the people of God over the people of one's ethnic or national origin as did Rahab the harlot. We are not saved by our own works, but by a faith that produces works (Ephesians 2:8-10).

In other words, to be a doer of the word means to display the character of the Father and to walk as Jesus walked (Luke 6: 36; I John 2:6). Contrary to popular American religion, Christianity is a religion of action. As the word “follow” implies, we are to move and do something. There is something for us to do. Righteousness imputed must produce righteous deeds or it is no righteousness at all; this is James’ point in the above texts. It is a false teaching to say we are declared righteous but not also made righteous.

Listen please, Christianity is not a legal system for judging or acquitting guilty criminals; rather, Christianity is an adoption center where souls are rescued from the devil and adopted into the household of God, through union with Christ. But how can one claim to be in union with Christ and yet be unchanged by that union? Such a claim is a religious fantasy, a spiritual delusion, and a dangerous deception. John says it this way, “Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (I John 3:7, KJV).

A Sober Warning

Our Lord is not calling here for revival. His teaching is not designed to incite you to action that will later fizzle out. No, the Lord is giving us basic, foundational instruction in how to live day-to-day in his kingdom. Neither is he giving us a new set of religious rules and regulations; rather, he is calling us into a new and living way—a new reality. We are called to hear and be healed, but the healing comes only as we do what he says. There is a Day coming. God is patient and the riches of his goodness, forbearance, longsuffering, and kindness is meant to lead all to repentance (Romans 2:4). But there is a Day coming. That Day is already on the divine calendar. It is set. Paul told the very religious Athenians, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

The Day is set, and the standard by which all people will be judged is established, and that standard is not a set of rules or precepts; instead, that standard by which all humanity will be judged is man, Jesus Christ—he himself is the standard. He has overcome death, and in doing so he has overcome for all who place their faith in him alone; these are being conformed

into his image in thought, word, and yes, his deeds as well. We can say it this way: A Day is set, and only those who hear and do as he himself does, will escape. Jesus calls you to hear and do; to live as he lives, to love as he loves, to obey as he obeys.

And hear Peter's sobering words: "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now, 'If the righteous are scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?' Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (I Peter 4:17-19). It is easy to assume God has become passive about the state of his creation, but he has not become passive. And we must never misinterpret God's patience as being divine apathy. Jesus closes this sermon with sobering words, "And the ruin of that house was great." Which house? The house of those who proved they do not hear because they do not do as he teaches. Those who profess Christ, but then obey another are building on ground without a foundation, and the day of ruin will come.

Summary

It is not those who merely hear the Lord's words who will inherit the kingdom of God, but those who hear and do what he says, who are true followers and heirs of salvation. The great deception of our time is that one need only profess belief in Jesus to be assured of heaven. But heaven is not the point of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Heaven is an outcome—indeed, a new heaven and a new earth. But the point of the gospel is the adoption of sons into the Father's house. The point of the gospel is the restoration of all things in Christ Jesus. To be in Christ, is to think, act, and live as he did—to do as he does, even today. The Christian life is about bringing the entirety of one's life into conformity to Christ. And by necessity, this means hearing and doing what he says, and doing as he does. This is the point of the indwelling Holy Spirit, that is, to continue the work of the incarnation in the world, and to bring many sons and daughters into glory. The alternative is a religion of deception, which may be able to even maintain outward appearances, but lacks the goodness and power of God to transform. And in the end, such a powerless, empty form of religion leads one only to great ruin. May God have mercy on us and lead us instead into the path of life everlasting. **AMEN.**

© Rick Peterson. 2019.