

# Jesus

## *“The Teacher”*

Matthew 5:1-2

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Last week I quoted from C.S. Lewis who famously said that Jesus did not come merely to be a moral teacher, but that he came as God in the flesh to seek and to save the lost – and all of us are lost apart from Jesus. That is a powerful statement – but one can go too far with it: it’s true. Jesus didn’t come merely as a teacher. But he did come to teach – it’s just not *all* he came to do. Once we understand his identity as God, then we do need to learn his teachings. They are the key to life.

Jesus was the greatest teacher of all time. He is the ultimate authority on life – what it means and how to live it; on God—who God is and how we relate to Him; on what is good and what is evil. Apart from him and his teaching we would not know what we need for life. The Bible would be incomplete without his teachings.

The verses we read this morning, “His disciples came to him, and, opening his mouth, he taught them, and here is what he said...” show Jesus in his role as the teacher of the world. What follows is the Sermon on the Mount – perhaps the greatest single body of teaching ever heard, read, studied, or lived.

But there are two other verses that tell us even more about Jesus as The Teacher – at the end of the Sermon on the Mount it says... “The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.” *This speaks to the authority of his teachings.*

Then, at the end of the Gospel of Matthew – in the Great Commission, Jesus said this, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me – therefore go and make disciples of all the ethnic groups of the world, *teaching them to keep or to do everything I have commanded you...*” *This speaks of doing what Jesus taught – not merely knowing it.*

In 15 or 20 minutes, we cannot summarize Jesus' teachings. Today I want to point us in the direction of how to learn and apply his teachings in general. Ready?

### **Authority**

We can only learn what Jesus taught by reading, studying and remembering his teachings from the Gospels.

But why would we do that? Because of Jesus' authority. "*He taught as one who had authority... all authority has been given to me...*" This leads me to an important principle:

- **Never try to separate Who Jesus IS from WHAT Jesus taught.** As God in the flesh, his words have a unique authority for all people for all time.
  - If we ever separate who Jesus is from what he taught, we will find ourselves in the quicksand of vague advice – if ever we do that, we will treat Jesus' teachings as nice advice, but hardly anything we **MUST** pay attention to and ignore at our peril and the peril of the world.
    - You and I don't need more vague advice, but a clear word from God – In Jesus' teachings we get that!
  - If we ever separate who Jesus is from what Jesus taught, we will also pick and choose according to our whims what we will take or leave from him – and this is dangerous.
    - Jesus' teachings aren't optional – we can't just set them aside if we find them challenging or if they put an obstacle in the way of our wills or desires.
- **This leads me to another principle – Jesus is the smartest and wisest person who has ever lived –**
  - Dallas Willard, the USC Philosophy professor and follower of Jesus talks about a strange tendency on this point in his book about the Sermon on the Mount, *The Divine Conspiracy*. In it, he speaks of how contemporary Christians can be lulled into the false notion that we are smarter than Jesus – maybe even that Jesus is dumb! After all, since he wasn't modern and scientific, like we are, he would need our help to understand the complexities of the universe and modern life.

- Not true! Though we seldom think about it. There are a lot of things Jesus didn't teach anything about – like the subatomic structure of reality, or the second law of thermodynamics; the strong force and the weak force, gravity, or the BCS formula for determining the national collegiate football championship game...
  - But Jesus – as the creator, the second person of the trinity, knew more than anyone who has ever lived. He's the smartest person who ever lived.
  - Do we believe that?
- **All this leads me to ANOTHER principle! – Jesus' teaching is MORAL knowledge** – it is information from God about the moral nature of the universe and life and, as such, is crucial to life. Which should prevent us from saying the thing about Jesus' teachings that many try to say—that it is *helpful* knowledge. No. It is *not* helpful it is *crucial*.
  - **Again, I quote Dallas Willard** – This from a lecture he gave at George Fox University a few years ago. “The moral area is the most important area of knowledge in life because it deals with what is good and what is evil; what is right and what is wrong; and how to be aligned with what is good.
  - **He went on to say that**, when you don't have moral knowledge, all sorts of other things will run your life – *but the most common will be desire*. Here's the way it sounds when desire runs life...
    - “We want *what* we want *when* we want it, and because *we* want it, it must be *good* – because WE determine what good and evil are, not some ancient teacher who didn't know the complexities of modern life!
    - When this point is reached in an individual or a society, we're in trouble – because the only thing left is power between competing groups with different desires. All we seem to be left with is the tyranny of desires – either ours or somebody else's
    - And it sounds lot like where we are today. By the way, one of the things Jesus taught about desire is that it isn't wrong to have desires, but that they must be subordinated to what is good and what is good is determined by God—not you or me! This is what love is, according to Jesus – *Love seeks what is good*.

- Let me just underscore this point with some of Jesus' teaching about it, from John chapter 8:31-32. "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'"
  - This means that truth is only true when it is aligned with Jesus' teachings – it is moral truth, and it frees us for life.
- **Who Jesus is and what he taught are to be help together, this means he teaches with *authority*, and his teachings have *moral* authority.**

### Practice

**One last point. And it's the most important. As you learn, study, and reflect on what Jesus taught, you don't really *know it* until you *do it*.**

Let me repeat what Jesus said in the Great commission – "*Go and make disciples of all people groups, teaching them to DO everything I have commanded you...*" This is often missed... Jesus didn't tell us to teach people what he said – he told us to teach people to DO what he said.

It's important to emphasize that we don't do what Jesus said in order to become a believer in Christ. We are saved by grace. But grace is not the opposite of *effort*. Grace is the opposite of *earning* anything from God. We are given salvation as a gift. But that gift leads us to strenuous effort to do what Jesus said.

When we do what he said to do, we live out the grace we've been given. This may be one of the most important principles we can grab hold of in our time. There are far too many of us who call themselves 'Christians' who are content to leave it as a matter of *assent* to certain *beliefs* – but leave out Christian practice, or action. We do not *practice* the faith. BELIEVE in order to DO.

It is in the *doing* of what he taught that we know Jesus himself. John 14:21 "*Whoever has my commands and does them is the one who loves me, and the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love that one and will show myself to him or her.*"

When people struggle to know Christ, I always tell them – "Do what he said, then you will see him and know him."

Eugene Peterson pastored one church for 29 years. That's why I think his translation of the Bible is so powerful, it came out of his time with real people dealing with real faith issues.

He was counseling a young graduate student who struggled with faith, but even more with life. The student was pretty messed up – sleeping around, partying, had a series of abusive relationships. Things never seemed to go anywhere in this young person's life.

Then, one day Peterson asked a simple question, “Why don't you just try living Jesus' way? Why do you HAVE to do all these other things you know are bad for you? Why don't you take Jesus' teachings and just do THEM for a while? Maybe that would be a better life...”

The student didn't believe in Jesus it was explained to Peterson. “Yeah, I know, but why don't you just try to do what he said as an experiment?” But, it was put back to him, “I'm not sure I AGREE with Jesus!” “I know... but it couldn't be worse than the way you're living now, could it?” No, the student agreed, it couldn't.

So it was tried. And life came. Not just a better life, but life itself. And Jesus became real to one more.

We don't know Jesus until we do what he said. We don't know what he said to do until we read and study it. May I issue us a gentle challenge? Over the summer, we will be learning and studying and preaching on prayer. For the whole summer.

I want to challenge us to read the Gospel of Matthew carefully all summer as we do so, in order to put feet to our prayers and do what Jesus said. If the only input you have from scripture is what we read here on Sunday mornings and the words of the sermons from the pastors, it is not enough. You must read, reflect, and do what Jesus said in your daily life.

It is called *practicing the faith*. Could we try that together?