

Coming To Jesus

By David Phillips

When Jesus first started His ministry on the earth He began by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (Mark. 1:15). In the context of this gospel He taught men the truth concerning God and His word, and He showed people how to live a life pleasing to God. He brought teaching to the people such as they had never heard. With this teaching He invited the people saying, “*Come unto Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest*” (Matt. 11:28). The multitude that first came unto Jesus was so great that the disciples of John the Baptist said to John, “*Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified – behold He is baptizing and all are coming to Him* (John 3:26).” It is also written that “*Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John*” (John 4:1; cf. Matt. 3:5-6). In all of His teaching Jesus commanded men to repent or change their heart, to cease living after the world, to live for God, to put others first, to deny self for righteousness’ sake. In His teaching Jesus set a definite standard for right and wrong; a divide between godliness and worldliness. Thus we have the Sermon on the Mount as a sample of this teaching. With these guidelines in mind Jesus commands us to, “*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it*” (Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus Expects Commitment

This is the gospel that Jesus came down from heaven to deliver to us. This is the gospel by which we are sanctified, by which we are commanded, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15). It is with these things in mind that we must follow the King of kings as our Lord and Savior! Therefore Jesus commands us saying, “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me*” (Luke 9:23).

These are the principles that we must imbed into our minds if we are to please God. There are many in the world who teach false doctrines and false gospels which do not require commitment of those who come to heed them. Rather, they focus on physical pleasure (eating, drinking, basket ball, dramatic performances, etc.). But we must understand that **the gospel of Christ is for spiritual renewing and spiritual growth**. Its purpose is to make it possible for men who have denied God and fall short of His glory to return to that glory through faith in the power of God and obedience. Therefore according to the TRUE gospel of Christ all who come to Him are expected to commit their very lives to living for Christ and serving Him! Therefore Jesus instructed men who loved this life to give up all and to follow Him; a command that often resulted in unfavorable responses (Mark 10:21-22; Luke 9:57-62).

In light of these things some might ask, “Why would Jesus make the road so narrow?” The gospel is our prize, it is our good news. It gives us our goal and the ability to achieve that goal through Christ. Therefore, the only way we can fulfill the gospel of Christ is to diligently toil to win that prize. This was Paul’s point in 1 Cor. 9:24-27. The Hebrew writer also affirmed this by saying, “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*” (Heb. 11:6). This is Christ’s goal for those who come to Him. Jesus teaches us that His gospel is not for the hard-hearted, for the impenitent, for the careless, and neither is it for the lazy. It is for people who are diligently seeking after God.

As Faithful Followers

We must also understand that because of the above principles not man can come to Jesus with out first being affected by His teachings. Therefore those who come to Him must be constantly changing and

growing; striving to “*be imitators of God*” (Eph. 5:1). If we are not then something is wrong. Because of this Jesus taught that there would be a separation between the sheep and the goats; the faithful and the unfaithful (Matt. 25:32ff.). In a sense, that separation is taking place here on earth. God is testing men with the gospel to see who will be faithful to Him and who will not. As we noted before there were many who heard of Jesus and desired to follow Him, just as there are today. In John 6 Jesus tested these followers by teaching things that could only be understood by those who diligently sought after truth and righteousness. The day after Jesus fed the five thousand the people searched for Him. When they had found Him He said to them, “*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.*” But those who did not seek Him with all of their heart fell away. For the scriptures say, “*Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying, who can understand it?’ ... ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*” Many of His followers fell away in unbelief because they were not willing to give themselves fully to understanding and obedience. They sought for the prize of a full belly (John 6:26-27) and a false peace of mind rather than the upward call of God in Christ (Phil. 3:14).

But those who passed the test and remained with Him until His resurrection were able to grow into bright lights on the earth because they were tested as the others, but were proven to be faithful (John 6:67-69). These were the ones that truly sought first “*the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*” Because of their commitment we can see the transformation that took place in the apostles through their being tested. Before Jesus’ death Peter was somewhat arrogant, careless, and fickle. But after Jesus rose from the dead Peter had repented and became a new man; a bold ambassador for Christ. By faith Peter used the keys that Jesus gave Him to open the doors of the kingdom to both the Jews and the Gentiles. He boldly preached the gospel in the face of persecution. John, who was once high tempered being one of the “*sons of thunder*” (Mark 3:17), allowed the gospel of Christ to teach him humility and love. Therefore by his writings he is known to us as the apostle of love, full of the compassion of the Lord. James gave his life for Christ in Acts 12. Even Paul, who was the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) became one of the most diligent and productive servants in the kingdom of God. This is what the Holy Spirit meant by “*be transformed by the renewing of our mind*” (Rom. 12:2).

Coming to Jesus Today

Today we have the same teachings of Christ, the same gospel, according to which many have “come to Christ.” But brethren, we must beware. For with the very same testing with which Jesus purged His disciples in the first century, we are being tested today! Just as men were unwilling to accept the words of Christ in John 6:27, many today also refuse to accept them. When persecutions arise against the saints those who fail to “*take up their cross daily*” fall away in despair, while the faithful stand true in their commitment to God. But we must be ever more watchful, for in Jesus’ day when men were unwilling to commit themselves to Him they simply “*walked with Him no more.*” But today there are many who have not taken up their crosses, who have not denied themselves, who love their earthly family more than they love Jesus, and who teach that church should focus on the food which perishes, yet still claim and appear to walk with Christ. They call themselves Christians but do not “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.*” When they hear the truth they are not convicted, but look over it as if it does not exist. They hate instruction or anything that demands change on their part. Why? Because, merely wanting to look and feel righteous, they are unwilling to become slaves of righteousness! This may be the person who assembles with the saints only when it fits into their work or play schedule rather than scheduling other things around the assembly of the saints. This may be the person who calls himself a disciple of Christ (Christian) but spends little to no time studying what Jesus actually taught. This is the person who wants the salvation of Christ, but not the expectation to become better, or to change their present way of life. These are the people who refuse to accept that Jesus will only save those “*who desire to be holy and blameless in love*” (Eph. 1:4).

What is the result of this unfaithfulness? Many churches have become “country clubs” because people do not want to grow; they just want to feel good. Member of a congregation become angry when they see a disobedient member being withdrawn from. No longer is growth the concern of the churches, “but how good can the preacher make me feel today.” Fellowship is no longer laboring together in the gospel, but working together to make dinner. Brethren, those who have fallen into this trap are the same as those who failed the test in Jesus day!

Have You Truly Come To Jesus

Are you among those who are failing the test, or are you striving to grow and change like Peter, John, and Paul? Will you do anything to remain faithful to Christ? Are you willing to forsake everything for Christ who did that very thing for you? This is what “coming to Jesus” is really about. Anything else is a deluded lie. Therefore when we answer the call of Jesus, “*come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden*” (Matt. 11:28), let us also learn to take His yoke upon us, to be like Him, and to strive to grow to the fullness of His image. Those who are willing to do this are those whom Jesus is seeking. Will you come?

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