

Sermons on Matthew

What Shall We Have?

Matthew 19:27-30

With Study Questions

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4/29/2007*

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²⁸- So Jesus said to them, “_Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, __you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁻²⁹⁻ __And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother __or wife or children or _lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. ⁻³⁰⁻ __But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.” (Matthew 19:27-30)

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A Cost Benefit Analysis

So the cost benefit analysis goes back at least two thousand years (what do I get for what I’ve done?). Clearly the conversation Jesus just had with the rich young ruler (a conversation exposing the impossibility of man meriting any type of approval before God based upon human effort) left Peter somewhat vexed.

That the apostles left all they had to follow Jesus shouldn’t be thought a light thing; it was a significant commitment. For them to wonder when their ship was going to come in and where it would take them would be natural. Few things are more commonplace than for man to wonder what his commitment to God will yield. Is there a more common question a man will ask (or at least think) when confronted with the gospel than “How does this benefit me?” or “What shall I have?”

If the rich young ruler, who appeared superior to the disciples in numerous categories, had nothing to offer which would benefit him before God, Peter might have been wondering if it followed that the disciples had nothing worthwhile to offer either?

Peter was quick to point out that the disciples, unlike the rich young ruler, did leave everything to follow Jesus (even though there was no indication they sold everything and gave it to the poor—which was the call for the young ruler). Was Jesus not impressed? Would it be accurate to conclude that human commitment means nothing to God? If it is

impossible to please God through human efforts, Peter might have wondered, is there any measurable or concrete benefit to what we're doing?

Perhaps you've asked that question. You're wondering if your obedience will yield some reward from God. You've sought to be faithful, yet you have no spouse, no job, poor health, serenity and tranquility elude you, people don't treat you nicely. You're waiting for your ship to come in and so far it's nothing but a broken dinghy.

False Expectations

One of the greatest evils befalling modern western evangelicalism is false expectations. Getting high on Jesus was not merely a 1960s Jesus Movement phenomenon. Jesus is often presented as an immediate panacea (cure all) for all our problems. And it's not just the obvious word-faith heretics promising that health and wealth will follow your generous donation; it comes much closer to home.

We think that our Christian faith, which promises the abundant life, will produce in us a sensation of peace and contentment. We're not so foolish to believe the televangelist who cannot even get his doctrine correct, let alone heal. But it is common for us to have an expectation of Spirit-infused tranquility—especially if we've been seeking to be obedient; hence the headlong pursuit of the disciplines (prayer, fasting, silence, solitude, vigils, etc.).

I am certainly not criticizing the disciplines; they have their value. But the value of a discipline is not, in a primary sense, that it manufactures a sense of tranquility (at some level it may include that). The value of the disciplines is to come into a greater understanding of God's grace and righteousness. The value of the disciplines is to, in a certain sense, draw us close to Jesus. But drawing close to Jesus (at least while He walked the earth) often produced just the opposite of what those promoting the disciplines are promising.

Nearness to Jesus produced tribulation, peril, distress (*stenochoria* from Romans 8:35 which means narrowness of place—a feeling of being boxed in versus the joy of openness and feeling of freedom). In short, peace with God, which comes by the blood of Christ, does not always produce peace with man or even a feeling of peace with self. A Christian is a person of principle—of conviction, and he measures and governs his life by the word of God, not by outward observations or inward tranquil sentiments.

Unearned Benefits

Yet at the same time, Jesus does not chastise Peter for his question (which He was known to do). There are clearly benefits to following Jesus and Jesus will enumerate them. But it would be a monumental mistake to conclude that these benefits were somehow earned by the process of leaving all you have and following Jesus.

A critically important notion for Christians to grasp is the logical fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after this, therefore because of this). A rich uncle may promise a billion dollar inheritance to his nephew if he graduates from college but that doesn't mean he earned the billion. I may promise my children a trip to Disneyland if they finish their chores but that doesn't mean they've earned admission—all they have to do is try to enter without me to see how true that is.

It does not follow that because Jesus promises untold blessings to those who follow Him, that they have somehow earned those blessings. His language will reveal the folly of drawing that conclusion.

__And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother __or wife or children or _lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

Jesus is teaching that our contribution (if it can even be called such a thing) is nothing compared to what we receive. If I hand the man a dollar and he hands me a house, a car and a billion dollar bank account, it would be wise for me to draw the conclusion that I didn't actually buy those things. The comparison makes the whole idea of this being a transaction between man and God absurd. Paul will write,

For I consider that _the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

A Three-Fold Expectation

Although false expectations are a great sin in today's church, I think no expectation is inaccurate as well. Jesus gives a three-fold answer to Peter's question with a little addendum.

The first answer is in verse 28:

So Jesus said to them, “_Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, __you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

Even though this event is recorded in Mark and Luke, this portion of the answer is not found in the other synoptic¹ gospels. Matthew was a gospel written with a Jewish audience in mind, making this comment of judgment very timely and significant. But what is Jesus talking about?

1. The Regeneration and Judgment

Regeneration (*palingenesia*: *palin*—again; *genesis*—genesis, birth or beginning) meaning regeneration or rebirth can have very personal applications.

Jesus answered and said to him, “_Most assuredly, I say to you, _unless one is born __again (or, from above (*anothen*)), he cannot see the kingdom of God_.” (John 3:3, parentheses mine).

Or (and notice Paul’s emphasis on our lack of contribution to our salvation),

But when __the kindness and the love of _God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁻⁵⁻ _not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through __the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁻⁶⁻ __whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁻⁷⁻ that having been justified by His grace _we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

So in the same way we contributed nothing but pain to our first birth, we contribute nothing to our second; God graciously grants life where there was none.

¹ Matthew, Mark and Luke are called synoptic gospels because they are much more similar to each other than they are to the gospel of John.

But when Jesus uses the definite article “the regeneration” He appears to be addressing a point in history—a point in history when He sits on the throne. When would that be? Peter taught in Acts 2:

Therefore, being a prophet, __and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, __according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ⁻³¹⁻ he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ... (Acts 2:30, 31b)

Jesus took the throne at the resurrection² and ascension. The regeneration can be understood with what the author of Hebrews calls the time of reformation (not to be confused with the Reformation of the 16th century).

It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered __which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— ⁻¹⁰⁻ concerned only with __foods and drinks, __various __washings, __and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation (Hebrews 9:9, 10).

The regeneration can be understood as the beginning of the New Covenant (A.D.).

But how are the apostles judging the twelve tribes of Israel?

Jesus will soon launch into a clear proclamation of the judgment of Israel: The parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14); the conflict with the Pharisees over taxes (Matthew 22:15-22); the conflict with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33); the “woes” to the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23, how they “devour widows” and how they “travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won...(he is) twice as much a son of hell as (they). Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees, prophesies,

Therefore I say to you, __the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. ⁻⁴⁴⁻

² Certainly Jesus can be spoken of as taking the throne whenever He might judge, including the final judgment (Matthew 25:31). But that, at very least, includes taking the throne at His ascension.

And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, __it will grind him to powder (Matthew 21:43).

In chapter 24 Jesus will speak of the destruction of the Temple (which was the nucleus of their religion) but had become a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13). Judgment was coming.

But in what respect are the apostles the ones doing the judging? The apostles, as the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20) were the mouthpiece of Christ. The Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance all things that Jesus taught them (John 14:26) and they would speak with His authority. And the words of Christ are sufficient to judge (John 12:48).

In short, the continual testimony of the apostles would serve as a witness against the continual rebellion of Israel thus incurring the judgment of God and the destruction of the Temple.

The testimony of the apostles concerning Jesus would cataclysmically bring the Old Covenant to an end and bring us to the establishment of the New Covenant—the kingdom of God expressed in Christ’s church (which Jesus had just taught in Matthew 16:18, 19; 18:17, 18).

Although the end of the Old Covenant was a unique historical event, the people of God, who still have the word of God committed to them, should not abdicate their responsibility of proclaiming the judgments of God (both eternally and in history) which will fall upon those who ignore or reject His word and His Son; to do so should be thought of as grossly irresponsible.

2. A Redeemed World

The second promise has to do with the kind of effect the gospel will have in this world. Jesus teaches,

__And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother __or wife or children or _lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold (Matthew 19:29a).

Our natural inclination would be to think that this “hundredfold³” relates to heaven. But Jesus is going to add at the end of this verse “and

³ Although “hundredfold” is not in some manuscripts of Matthew, it is found in Mark 10:28.

inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29b) It would, therefore, be a mistake to think that Jesus is merely being redundant.

Luke makes it clearer in the parallel account:

...who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life_” (Luke 18:30 NASB).

Mark not only gives the time text as something that will happen in history (by history I mean it is not talking about the eternal estate in heaven), but also indicates that the benefits of the New Covenant include the mundane.

Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, –there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, _³⁰⁻ but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in –the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in –the age to come, eternal life. _³¹⁻ “But –many *who are* first, will be last; and the last, first” (Mark 10:29-31 NASB).

Jesus includes houses, brothers, sisters, children, farms, etc. That seems a little problematic. Especially when you consider that the historical record indicates that all the apostles (except for maybe John) suffered and died on account of their faith. In fact, any type of material prosperity associated with Christianity would not happen until the fourth century. Yet there is one little phrase which should get our attention: **“along with persecutions.”**

I would sum it up thus: It is wrong to think there are immediate personal, material, or even psychological benefits to be associated with Christianity. But it would also be wrong to think the Christian faith is so other-worldly that it will have little or no effect upon the world in which we live at all. It does make sense, however, to understand that when the ungodly are initially presented with the true gospel, the immediate response (as we see with many missionary enterprises) is one of persecution, but the long-term response (as we also see) will be one of a redeemed and prosperous culture **“in the present age.”**

To put it simply, when a people come to faith in Christ and begin to govern themselves according to His law the results are good.

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3. And Eternal Life

Jesus finishes His answer with a brief “...and inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29b) The brevity of this allusion should in no way diminish the glory of it. The rich young ruler sought eternal life by appealing to his ability and willingness to do “good things”; he went away in sorrow. Yet Jesus promises eternal life—new life—to all who follow Him, to all who call upon His name “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy” (Titus 3:5).

The Last First

And lest we begin to think that the success of the gospel and its power to redeem the world and everything in it is a result of the wit and innovations of man rather than the “zeal of the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 9:7), Jesus adds the reasonable attribute of humility which is fitting to those who understand our utter dependence upon the grace of God for any good thing to take place. Jesus teaches,

__But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first (Matthew 19:30).

Unlike the dynasties of the Pharaohs, Cyrus, Artaxerxes, Alexander or Caesar, which seized the world through power and force, the dynasty of Christ and the power and advancement of His kingdom would come through the subduing of man’s heart through the word and sacrament of Christ. It would come through those who are willing to humble themselves before God and serve, love and forgive one another in Christ.

**I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *_One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.
¹⁴ *_Then* to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all *_peoples, nations, and languages* should serve Him. His dominion *is* *_an* everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom *the one* which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13, 14).**

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Questions for Study

1. How was Peter doing a cost benefit analysis (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some common false expectations we see attached to modern evangelicalism? Why are these dangerous (pages 3, 4)?
3. Do the benefits of Christianity come by people earning them? Explain (pages 4, 5).
4. What, according to this passage, are the benefits of following Jesus (pages 5-9)?
5. What is meant by “the regeneration” (pages 5, 6)?
6. In what respect did the apostles judge Israel (pages 7, 8)?
7. Are all the promises of redemption in the eternal estate (heaven) (pages 8, 9)?
8. How does one enter into eternal life (page 9)?
9. Why does Jesus end this conversation by stating the first will be last and vice-versa (pages 9, 10)?