

## **Memorize & Ponder**

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church  
July 21, 2013**

### **That's It in a Nutshell**

**Matt 22:37b-40 & Ps 15  
(814, 300, 29, 642)**

I suggested last week that Matthew had a contentious, edgy way of presenting the benefits and features of the Christian faith. His witness to the work and wisdom of Jesus Christ always made it clear that this was a different way of seeing things.

Back in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, in vss 38-48, Matthew records a couple of the "You have heard it said" but "I say to you" sayings of Jesus.

You have heard it said an eye for an eye,  
but I say to you turn the other cheek, give them the coat off your back.  
You have heard it said hate your enemy,  
but I say love them and pray for them.  
And I can't help but get a sense  
that Matthew is only recording a few  
of the many sayings such as this that he and the other disciples heard  
during their travels with Jesus.

Jesus Christ came to inspire people to see God and the world differently. And Matthew captures that theme from the life and work of Jesus powerfully.

So, focusing on that theme in Matthew,  
what do we make of our memorize and ponder verses this morning?

Matthew sets this summary of the law and the prophets  
in the context of Jesus' disputes with the Jewish authorities.  
Jesus was a reformer of the Jewish tradition.

He contended for a different way to see God and faith.  
At the time of Jesus, many leaders within Judaism had become legalistic,  
insisting on a strict obedience to the letter of the Mosaic law as they saw it.

This was especially true of the Sadducees.  
The Pharisees, to whom this summary of the law and prophets is a direct response,  
were less strict in their interpretation of the law.  
Many scholars suggest that Jesus' own education  
was in the Pharisaical tradition.  
Their emphasis was on ethics,  
on the proper ways to be and the proper things to do.

But they, too, had become insistent on their views dominating.  
They had become rigid and defensive in their insistence on their way.

Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees of Jesus' time  
were focused on the conditionality of the Mosaic covenant.

I've talked a bit in recent sermons  
about the contrast that Walter Brueggemann  
draws between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant.  
In Abraham, God says he will be our God **so** we can be his people  
and here's what it means to be my people.

In Moses, God says he will be our God **if** you do this  
and here's all the details.

Abraham's covenant flows from the unconditional love of God  
reaching out to inspire and enlist a people to be a blessing.  
Moses' covenant flows from a desire to discipline a rebellious people  
through threats of dire consequences if the law is not obeyed.

Jesus is reclaiming the heart of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant  
in a time when the details of the conditional Mosaic approach is dominating his tradition.

The Pharisees, in the lead up to this passage,  
want to test Jesus on how well he knows the details,  
then attack him for not observing them all.

Jesus, in response to their test,  
goes to the essence of the tradition,  
to the core chart of what God is all about in the world.

Love God with every dimension of your energy.  
That's the beginning of any form of flourishing,  
of any form of thriving, positive life.

If that is in place,  
then you will love others and yourself.  
You will see them, including yourself,  
as beloved children and friends of God  
who are worthy of your respect and love.

That's it in a nutshell.

If you go through all the details of the law and the prophets,  
both in the written tradition emphasized by the Sadducees  
and in the oral traditions emphasized equally by the Pharisees,  
this is what you will find at their core.  
"Love God with everything you have  
and love your neighbour as yourself."

It's theology and ethics together.  
How you think will affect deeply what you do.  
Jesus is saying, "Focus all your energy on your relationship with God  
and that relationship will guide you into being a blessing  
in every way you use the gifts God has given you."

This is not about following creeds and codes.  
It's about responding to God's unconditional love.  
It's about accepting the freedom of the 'so' in the Abrahamic covenant.  
"I focus my energy on God's love so I can be a blessing."  
You'll need God's help to do that, but it's always there for the accepting.

I found myself thinking about Nelson Mandela and the South African struggle  
during my pondering this week.  
He was a treasure in an earthen vessel,  
far too earthen at times.  
But the treasure shone through in inspiring ways.  
The apartheid system was a modern day version of the conditional Mosaic covenant.  
If you have this colour of skin and conform to this way of thinking and acting,  
you will be privileged.  
An entire political and economic and social system was built on these assumptions.  
A lot of political, economic, and social systems are built on these assumptions,  
though at times they are a bit more subtle and hidden than in South Africa.  
Any sense of superiority attributed to race leads to this kind of system.

Mandela had good reasons to be angry, resentful, and violent.  
Many of his fellow blacks saw that as the only way forward.  
His faith saw things differently and so his actions were different.  
In prison, he reached out to his oppressors and helped them.  
Coming out of prison, he vowed to leave his anger and resentment behind,  
realizing that if he carried them out with him, he would still be in prison.  
He sought to build a different South Africa,  
where race and tribe were not the determining factor.  
It's a work still in progress,  
both in South Africa and in our own country.

At an Easter conference in 1994,  
Mandela urged his audience to follow this kind of God –  
"[a risen Messiah] who chose not one race, who chose not one country, who chose not  
one language, who chose not one tribe, who chose all of humankind!"

Our love of God,  
itself a response to God's love for us  
that infuses every dimension of our energy,  
leads us to love others and ourselves.  
That's the core of Jesus' teaching.

Our love of God,  
itself a response to God's love for us  
that infuses every dimension of our energy,  
leads us to love others and ourselves.  
That's the essence of all the promises in the law and the prophets  
that Jesus came to fulfill.

Our love of God,  
itself a response to God's love for us  
that infuses every dimension of our energy,  
leads us to love others and ourselves.  
That's the key to human flourishing  
in this world of racial, tribal, and national divisions.

It *is* a different way of seeing and doing things.

But it *is* also a better way of seeing and doing things.

*May the Spirit take these ponderings  
and provoke in us all  
love and good deeds.*

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