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*The Gospel According to
Matthew*

*No Favorites in Christ's
Kingdom*

November 17, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 20:1-16

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 2

I am going to begin this morning with an important subject and then we will get right into this 20th chapter of Matthew, which will of course return us to this same subject! The Gospel! Here we go:

The most important message for the church today is, you must be born again.

That really has been the core message of these past months' Sunday School classes, has it not? To be in Christ, to

be in His kingdom, to know Him and to be a member of His New Covenant, to be saved – *you must be born again.*

Why is this the most important message for the church today? Because it always has been. And because Christ's words to Nicodemus are being so widely ignored today in the visible church. Let me give you an example.

Repeatedly, we are seeing celebrity styled "Christians" promoting their wares, and pastors and churches are running up to these elixir sales wagons to buy their product. What are they selling? Programs. Methods. All promising to be cure all fix-its for sin. Here is this problem in the churches. There are pedophiles and abusers, drunkards and addicts, people suffering from all kinds of ills and phobias (many because they have been victimized by the wicked hypocrites in the pews), so here come the books, the dvd series, the conferences, all insisting that if they are implemented in the churches the problems and evils

will be fixed. So the books are bought and read, the conferences are held, the procedure books are written and approved, and everyone goes home quite satisfied with themselves, imagining that all is well.

It isn't.

Nothing has changed.

Evil is in fact about to return with 7 more of its comrades.

Why? Because the real problem is that the pews and pulpits of sooooo many local churches are filled with people who are unconverted. They do not know Christ and He does not know them. How can we say this? Let me show you. Consider the nature of *every Christian without exception. All of the following is true of each one, or the person is in fact not saved:*

- Has died with Christ and been raised with Christ
- Is now dead to sin and alive to Christ
- Has been forgiven their sins and is now blessed by God as one of His children
- Indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit
- Loves righteousness, hates wickedness
- Loves his brother
- Does not love the world

- Denies himself and follows Christ
- Loves God's truth, and hates the lie

Now, I want to ask you. *Are these things true of the majority of people today who claim to be Christians, who are members of local churches, who are even standing in pulpits and preaching to others, speaking to thousands at conferences, publishing book after book...are these things true of them?* Pastor – if you are genuinely born again, I ask you – are these things true of the people who are members of your church, who sit on leadership boards, who lead in worship each Sunday?

Let me answer the question for you:
No!

And THIS is the reason for all the evil and wickedness we are seeing in such abundance in the churches today. They are not born again. They do not know Christ. His Spirit is not in them. They are worldlings and hypocrites.

What is the remedy? *You must be born again!* How are we to send the child molesters, the domestic abusers, the thieves and purveyors of false doctrine out from among us? How do we in our local churches become a place where evil cannot remain? Where the light is too bright for the darkness to hide?

Answer: by knowing Christ ourselves, by pleading with Him to convert us and come and dwell among us and give us hearts to love Him and His Word, and by announcing over and over and over again....*you must be born again!*

Do you understand? Why is it that over and over and over again we see pastors and church members totally blind to evil among them? Why do we see them actually enabling and allying with evil? Why do we meet with such resistance from them when we point out the wickedness that is in their pews? Why? One of our blog readers gave the answer last week: *because such things are spiritually discerned.* And unconverted people, devoid of the Holy Spirit, have no eyes to see Christ's truth. NO man-made program is going to correct this. And yet we see the churches flocking after these things voraciously.

See it? *You must be born again. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only real answer to these things.* And it is a most excellent answer!

Here are the opening words to an introduction to John Owen's great work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, the intro being written by J.I. Packer. Listen carefully [highlighting is my own] -

The Death of Death in the Death of Christ (Owen Works, X:139:148) is a polemical [ie, "a critical disputation] piece, designed to show among other things, that the doctrine of universal redemption [ie, "Christ died for all men] is unscriptural and destructive of the gospel. There are many, therefore, to whom it is not likely to be of interest.

Those who see no need for doctrinal exactness and have no time for theological debates which show up divisions between so-called evangelicals may well regret its reappearance. Some may find the very sound of Owen's thesis so shocking that they will refuse to read his book at all, so passionate a thing is prejudice, and so proud are we of our theological shibboleths. But it is hoped that this classic may find itself readers of a different spirit. There are signs today of a new upsurge of interest in the theology of the Bible: a new readiness to test traditions, to search the Scriptures and to think through the faith. It is to those who share this readiness that Owen's treatise is now offered, in the belief that it will help us in one of the most urgent tasks facing evangelical Christendom today - the recovery of the gospel.

This last remark may cause some raising of eyebrows, but it seems to be warranted by the facts.

There is no doubt that evangelicalism today is in a state of perplexity and unsettlement. In such matters as the practice of evangelism, the teaching of

holiness, the building up of local church life, the pastor's dealing with souls and the exercise of discipline, there is evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with things as they are and or equally widespread uncertainty as to the road ahead.

This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are *all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel*. Without realizing it, we have during the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing. Hence our troubles; for the substitute product does not answer the ends for which the authentic gospel has in past days proved itself so mighty. Why?

We would suggest that the reason lies in its [this substitute gospel's] own character and content. It fails to make men God-centered in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts because this is not primarily what it is trying to do.

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The old gospel was 'helpful', too - more so, indeed, than is the new - but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its center of reference was unambiguously God.

But in the new gospel the center of reference is man. This is just to say that the old gospel was religious in a way that the new gospel is not. *Whereas the chief aim of the old was to teach people to worship God, the concern of the new seems limited to making them feel better. The subject of the old gospel was God and his ways with men; the subject of the new is man and the help God gives him.* There is a world of difference. The whole perspective and emphasis of gospel preaching has changed.

From this change of interest has sprung a change of content, for the new gospel has in effect reformulated the biblical message in the supposed interests of 'helpfulness'. Accordingly, the themes of man's natural inability to believe, of God's free election being the ultimate cause of salvation, and of Christ dying specifically for his sheep are not preached. These doctrines, it would be said, are not 'helpful'; they would drive

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(The possibility that such despair might be salutary is not considered: it is taken for granted that it cannot be, because it is so shattering to our self-esteem.)

However this may be (and we shall say more about it later), the result of these omissions is that part of the biblical gospel is now preached as if it were the whole of that gospel; and a half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth.

Thus, we appeal to men as if they all had the ability to receive Christ at any time; we speak of his redeeming work as if he had made it possible for us to save ourselves by believing; we speak of God's love as if it were no more than a general willingness to receive any who will turn and trust; and we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves, but as waiting in quiet impotence 'at the door of our hearts' for us to let them in.

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It is undeniable that this is how we preach; perhaps this is what we really believe. But it needs to be said with emphasis that this set of twisted half-truths is something other than the biblical gospel. The Bible is against us when we preach in this way; and the fact that such preaching has become almost standard practice among us only shows how urgent it is that we should review this matter. To recover the old, authentic, biblical gospel, and to bring our preaching and practice back into line with it, is perhaps our most pressing present need. And it is at this point that Owen's treatise on redemption can give us help. [Banner of Truth, London]

I say again. THIS is why evil is abounding in the churches, and that no work of our own hands is going to remedy it. No "altar" built with human imaginations will suffice. We must recover the old gospel and if others are unwilling to do so, we press on without them ready to be counted as fools in their eyes.

You must be born again.

No Favorites in Christ's Kingdom

And so we have that old gospel set out right in front of us this morning here in Matthew's 20th chapter. We will just introduce these words of Jesus now and plan to return to them next time:

Mat 20:1-16 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out **early in the morning** to hire laborers for his vineyard. (2) After agreeing with the laborers for a **denarius a day**, he sent them into his vineyard.

(3) And going out about **the third hour** he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, (4) and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' (5) So they went. **Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour**, he did the same. (6) And about **the eleventh hour** he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' (7) They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

(8) And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' (9) And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. (10) Now when those hired

first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

(11) And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, (12) saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' (13) But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' (14) Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. (15) Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' (16) So the last will be first, and the first last."

We know that Jesus is here elaborating upon Peter's question which we considered earlier:

Mat 19:27-30 Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (28) Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, 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 children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (30) But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

We know this because of the repeated main point, “the first will be last and the last first.” Also, it is connected with Peter’s question because the subject is the same as what Peter asked: *What will we have?*

Jesus’ point in this is: *all our rewards are of the grace of God alone. They are not based upon our merit or works.* Or rather, perhaps to put it more accurately, *there is no seniority system in the kingdom of God.*

If you have ever worked in a place where a seniority system operates, you know how frustrating it can be. Often those who work the hardest are at the bottom of the rung when it comes to days off, schedules, perks and vacations, etc. And those who are the least productive can end up being rewarded the most simply because they have been there the longest.

But it is not so in Christ’s kingdom. Paul knew this and was encouraged by it, as we can be also:

1Co 15:3-9 For I delivered to you as

of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, (5) and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (6) Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (7) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (8) Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (9) For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Understand? The chief of sinners can become by God’s grace “first” in the kingdom. The person who comes to faith in Christ at 7 years of age is not going to be exalted over the sinner who is saved at 70 years. The Apostles, who in a way were first to come into the kingdom, will certainly receive 100 fold more than the loss they suffered, *but so will we* who came in centuries later.

In other words, the gospel’s grace is entirely opposite to the way this world works. This is why people are all the time trying to change the gospel so that it leaves room for man to boast. We must never do so. All glory and boasting goes to Christ alone.