

Sunday, August 30, 2020

“The 3 For’s”

Last week we took a little detour from our sermon series dealing with the ministry of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Matthew. So to refresh your minds when it comes to the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew was a brutally honest gospel writer who portrays the disciples, himself included, as being individuals who lacked faith, and in spite of best intentions, often their actions were not what the Lord wanted to see. At the same time Matthew very clearly shows the supremacy of Christ, who is righteous in both word and deed. Matthew also records the urgency of ministry; oftentimes using words like instantly or immediately.

Last week we missed quite a bit that took place in the Gospel of Matthew the 16th chapter and it's very important to understand what happened in the beginning part of chapter 16, to understand what really took place in our gospel reading this morning. You see at the very beginning of chapter 16 Matthew records that the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Jesus saying to Him, ‘show us a sign.’ And Christ's response back to them was, ‘an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.’ I want you to consider it, is that not what we are seeing today oftentimes? People will say, ‘if there's a God then why doesn't he...? I'll let you fill in the blank. What they are really doing is saying God needs to give us a sign. And so, when these Pharisees and the Sadducees come and asked Jesus about a sign, ‘give us a sign,’ He says, ‘it's an evil and adulterous generation that seeks for a sign.’ Then He continues and listen carefully, ‘but no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah.’ Well what is the sign of Jonah? Well as Jonah was in the belly of that large fish for three days and then was spit out; so Jesus would be buried in the belly of the earth, in a tomb, and on the third day He wouldn't be spit out, but He would rise and come out as the resurrected Redeemer and Savior.

Now why is that so important? Because this is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. We find it in Romans 1:17 in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. We find in the Old Testament in Habakkuk 2 verse 4. What do we find? The righteous shall live by faith. Jesus gave the Pharisees, He gave the Sadducees, and He has given you and me a sign. He rose from the dead and either we believe that and put our faith in it, or we are an evil and

adulterous generation because we are rejecting the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After saying this to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the Pharisees and Sadducees left, Jesus then told his disciples and I believe is telling us today, 'watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.' Leaven, yeast what you put in bread dough it permeates the bread, causes it to rise, but it grows, and it takes over the bread. What is Jesus saying? Well watch the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Watch and listen to them because their preaching and their teaching is not truth. When you look at their preaching and their teaching, do they practice what they preach? And again, I want you to consider the implications of that for us today. The righteous shall live by faith. Back then the Pharisees and Sadducees were leading people away. Ask yourself; 'who was leading us away today? Who is teaching something contrary to Scripture and leading people away?

I have heard multiple times in this past week, 'we must follow the science.' I think you would agree with me when it comes to COVID-19, the science keeps changing, almost on a weekly basis. Is science really that reliable? Especially since one of the primary tenets of science today is that the world is billions of years old; which contradicts every law science there is. It also contradicts God's word. Beware! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and anyone who in any way diminishes the word of God.

Then Jesus asked His disciples, 'who do people say that the son of man is?' And notice Jesus uses that term 'son of man.' This comes from Daniel Chapter 7 and this is how Jesus consistently referred to Himself. The disciples responded, 'well some people say that John the Baptist was the son of man; some are saying Elijah will be, or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets will come back and be the promised son of man. That's when Jesus asked them, 'but who do you say that I am? And here we have Peter just standing up and saying, 'you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And that is such a profound answer. He uses that term Christ, which in Greek means 'anointed one,' and it was a political term. For instance, Caesar's were anointed, they were christ's, or anointed ones. But Jesus knows where Peter's heart is at. He said to him, 'blessed are you Simon bar Jonah; that means son of Jonah, 'for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father, who is in heaven.

There's a great doctrine right there for us, who revealed it? It's not that Peter decided it. It's that God first, through the Holy Spirit, who the Father sends, was working faith in Peter's heart. The Spirit is who revealed it and enabled him to say it. Because the Spirit works faith, and faith is one of the gifts of the Spirit. And Jesus comes back and says to Peter; "on this rock," not Peter, but on that faith that the righteous live by. On this rock I will build my church. So, what is the church here built on? It's built on faith. Now listen, because this is the part that is so critical. To understand what Jesus is saying in our gospel today, He, I quote, "strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ." Now, was Jesus telling them, no evangelism, don't tell anyone I'm the Messiah? Absolutely not. He was telling them don't use the term Christ, because everyone sees Christ as a political figure. Teaching that Jesus, the promised Messiah is a political figure is a false teaching. It's leaven of Pharisees, Sadducees and others who are preaching a different gospel than the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Messiah, the Son of man as Daniel says in Daniel Chapter 7, is the one who comes from God, to earth to redeem.

That is when we see now, a big change in Jesus's ministry. At the beginning of our gospel, we read: 'from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer many things from the elders and chief priest inscribed and be killed and on the third day be raised.' Notice, He was to suffer many things. I believe Jesus was probably quite explicit in that. Matthew didn't list them all, but he says this is what Jesus focused on he showed his disciples that the Messiah must suffer many things. Why must the Messiah suffer many things? Because it was prophesied. What was prophesied? That He would be rejected by His own; that He would be deserted, that He would be whipped and striped, that He would be pierced, that He would die, that He'd been rejected by God, Himself.

These are not things that the disciples wanted to hear. To put it another way it wasn't very Christ-ly. Because how many of you know politicians, or kings of the past, that would be willing to go through all of that for the sake of their people? We don't see that often at all, do you? And that's why Peter, who still hung up on Christ, a political figure says, 'far be it from You Lord.' That's not how kings act, Jesus. That's not how political people act. They don't suffer. their above everyone in your going to be above everyone and be our King and re-established the Kingdom of David right here in Jerusalem, Jesus. And what

does Jesus say to that? “Get behind me Satan, you are a hindrance to me for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.”

Peter wanted, and many people to this day still want, Jesus to be Christ, an earthly political figure. This is why Jesus focused in His ministry and always referred to himself as the Son of Man. Why? This is what Daniel Chapter 7 says; “To Him, the promised Messiah, to Jesus, 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; one that shall not be destroyed. Now I emphasized he said ‘a kingdom’ because it is singular one kingdom that is what the Messiah would rule over, a single kingdom. What are the hallmarks of that kingdom? It is an everlasting kingdom. It will not pass away. What do we call that kingdom? Heaven, not earth. This is not referring to some earthly kingdom of Jesus, here on this earth. Because we know from the Bible the earth will be destroyed. Therefore, this kingdom must be beyond this world. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of Man, not a Christ, an anointed political figure, and beware of any theology or doctrine to this day that wants to make Jesus a King on this earth, re-establishing Himself in Jerusalem, rebuilding the temple. That would be the work of a Christ, a political figure, which Jesus strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ.

And then Jesus gives the big call, “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me.” It is very personal him, himself, his. What are we to personally do? Deny self, give glory to God, not ourselves; take up the personal cross. It is a personal, conscientious decision. It is not, ‘I decided for Christ.’ It's deciding, I will walk in Christ footsteps, in the Messiah's footsteps, in the Son of Man's footsteps and consider, what Jesus did. He walked up a hill, He died on top of it. It's a challenge. It's a demeaning thing, taking up the cross of Jesus will be an uphill battle that people will make fun of you for.

How do we do this? Just like Jesus said to Simon Bar Jonah, to Peter. It is revealed to us and we are strengthened for it through the Holy Spirit. It's not that we decide for Christ, it's that we decide to die to self. That's our role and when we die to self, we then simply are saying, Lord take me, use me, guide me, direct me. You are the one who's in control.

Why should we make this decision? Well this is where the three fours come from. Not FOUR, not the number 4. But FOR. For, Jesus says, whoever would save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it die to self, live to live for Jesus. Second for. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? Very simply, we can't earn Salvation. It's beyond our grasp. Salvation comes through faith in the One who has done it all for us. If we're pursuing anything else, it's of earthly nature and anything of earthly nature, is going to pass away. Christ must be #1 in our lives. There is no #2. We die to everything else. #3 For the Son of Man is going to come, He is going to come in judgment and what will be the basis for that judgment? Faith and a life marked by it. As James says, 'faith without works is dead.' Deeds and a life marked by self works will not save you. Faith in Jesus at His work for you is what saves you. And knowing that He has taken away all of that law from us, should make us bow before Him and say 'thank you my Lord and Savior. Empower me, through Your Spirit to live for You.

And that's where our New Testament reading comes in this morning. Romans 12:9-21 comes in. That life of faith is one marked by love; is one that seeks to live at peace with each other as much as possible. It never seeks our own good, but the good of the gospel of Jesus Christ. My challenge to you this week, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is to look at Romans 12:9-21 and make that the hallmark of how you were living. You are living to the glory of the Son of Man, the Son of God, who reigns in heaven and will come to take us home because heaven is our home. Not for a political figure or anything earthly in any way. May we live up to that challenge. May we be the righteous ones, who live by faith, covered in the righteousness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In His name, Amen