

Sermon on the Mount

Part 1 – “Apprentices” – Matthew 5:1-2

Introduction

[Note: I need ushers to pass out a single puzzle piece to each person entering the sanctuary for service.]

If you’ve been around Trinity any time at all, you’ve heard me say that every person is sick with a disease called sin and that there is nothing we can do to cure ourselves. The only cure is to confess our sin to Christ and trust him as our savior.

There is another sickness that has infected the church. It is an insidious disease that has taken hold of a large portion of the family of God. In fact, it is an epidemic. It is a sickness of our own making. It has left many of us weak, lethargic, ineffective, and incapable as God’s children. It is a disease that few will admit to suffering from themselves.

What is this sickness? It called *biblical illiteracy*.

If you look up the word *literate* on dictionary.com, here is what you will find: [**lit**-er-it]

adjective

1. able to read and write.

2. having or showing knowledge of literature, writing, etc.
3. characterized by skill, lucidity, polish, or the like:
4. having knowledge or skill in a specified field:
5. having an education; educated.

Please note the fourth entry in the definitions, “having knowledge or skill in a specified field.” Using this definition, I submit to you that a large portion of God’s family does not possess the necessary knowledge or skill to consistently and faithfully serve God in all areas of life. I understand that it is a harsh diagnosis, but it is necessary.

As your pastor, I cannot be like the doctor who finally reached his patient by phone and told him he had bad news and worse news. When the patient asked the for the bad news, the doctor said, “You only have three days to live.” When the patient asked what news could possibly be worse than that, the doctor replied, “I’ve been trying to reach you for two days.”

We need to know we are sick and we need to take steps to correct it. Unlike the disease of sin, this is an illness we can reverse ourselves. Before I get into how we can do that, let me give you a little quiz. It is only six questions. Please do not answer out loud or raise your hands. Simply note your answers to yourself. When we’re finished, I’ll show how this quiz points to our sickness.

1. Is the Bible 100% accurate in all it teaches?
2. Is the Bible written for each person to interpret as he or she chooses?
3. Does even the smallest sin deserve eternal damnation?
4. Must people contribute their effort for personal salvation?
5. Do good deeds help people earn a spot in heaven?
6. Are there many ways to get to heaven?

These questions are taken from a LifeWay Research survey of American Christians. Let me share the results¹ of their research and you can figure out where you line up.

1. Is the Bible 100% accurate in all it teaches?

Only 47% of American Christians say yes.

What was your answer?

The correct answer is "yes."

2. Is the Bible written for each person to interpret as he or she chooses?

51% of American Christians say yes.

What was your answer?

The correct answer is "no."

¹ Quoted by Ken Braddy, "Discipling in an Age of Biblical Illiteracy," Facts and Trends, July 10, 2017, <https://factsandtrends.net/2017/07/10/discipling-in-an-age-of-biblical-illiteracy/>. Accessed September 7, 2017.

3. Does even the smallest sin deserve eternal damnation?

74% of American Christians say no.

What was your answer?

The correct answer is yes.

4. Must people contribute their own effort for personal salvation?

77% of American Christians say yes.

What was your answer?

The correct answer is "no."

5. Do good deeds help people earn a spot in heaven?

52% of American Christians say yes.

What was your answer?

The correct answer is "no."

6. Are there many ways to get to heaven?

45% of American Christians say yes.

What was your answer?

The correct answer is "no."

As followers of Christ, we are to be people of this book. It may not always say what I expect it to say or what I want it to say. However, I am not free and you are not free to change what it says. It will not conform to our whims, expectations,

or changing social conventions. All such things are expected to conform to its authority.

One of the biggest reasons we expect Scripture to conform to what we think and want is that we do not fully know and understand what it teaches. Dr. Albert Mohler is president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and his observation about this issue is spot on, "*While America's evangelical Christians are rightly concerned about the secular worldview's rejection of biblical Christianity, we ought to give some urgent attention to a problem much closer to home—biblical illiteracy in the church. This scandalous problem is our own, and it's up to us to fix it.*"²

Now, some folks will take issue with this diagnosis. They will protest that they are biblically educated. But, I don't think most folks are as biblically educated as they suppose.

[Have folks look at the puzzle piece they were given before service. Ask them what the puzzle will look like when it is completed. Have them tell someone near them. Tell them this is how we approach the Bible. We get pieces in sermons

² Dr. Albert R. Mohler, "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem," AlbertMohler.com, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-illiteracy-its-our-problem-4/>. Accessed September 1, 2017.

and Sunday school lessons and Bible studies but we do not take the time on our own to figure out how the pieces fit together. Instead, we make assumptions about the entire picture based on the piece or pieces we have.]

This approach, and its resulting sickness, have been centuries in the making.

In his must-read book, *Love Your God with All Your Mind*, J.P. Moreland, traces the sickness in his assessment of the first three American great awakenings. He says that while much good came from the movements, three areas of overemphasis have helped bring us to this place:

1. First, he points out that the awakenings overemphasized personal conversion to Christ instead of a studied period of reflection and conviction.
 - a. Walt Mueller, of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, helps us understand this when he writes: *Are we too focused on getting [people's] hands up that we don't offer a way for the one who raised the hand to learn about the necessity and shape of the changed life that should begin the minute the hand goes down. Or, even more troubling, do we focus only on getting [people's] hands up because*

*our theology of salvation has failed to include a place for what happens after.*³

- b. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the person who comes to Christ is a new creation: the old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).
 - c. If that is true, then why don't our lives look different before and after we say we've trusted Christ as savior?
 - d. This is pointed directly at me. As a pastor, am I so preoccupied with counting hands—so our numbers look good—that I fail to paint an accurate picture of how life should change after one comes to know Christ.
 - e. I'm not talking about adherence to legalistic preferences but about the new creation coming to the surface and working its way into every area of life.
2. Second, Moreland says that the awakenings overemphasized emotional, simple, popular preaching instead of intellectually careful and doctrinally precise sermons.
- a. We might go through some turbulence here, so you may want to buckle up.

³ Walt Mueller, "What is the Goal of Your Youth Ministry This School Year?" Learning My Lines, Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, <https://cpyu.org/2017/08/18/what-is-the-goal-of-your-youth-ministry-this-school-year/>. Accessed August 21, 2017.

- b. It is an uncomfortable fact of pastoral life that folks sometimes compliment you on a “good” sermon.
- c. Why is that an uncomfortable fact of pastoral life?
 - i. One, we never set out to preach a bad sermon.
 - ii. Two, we are not fishing for compliments (though they are greatly appreciated).
 - iii. Three, we are attempting to faithfully present the Word of God in such a way that you can understand it and God can have your attention about what He wants for your life.
 - iv. Four, we would love nothing more than for you to spend the rest of the week thinking about and applying the truth of the Sunday message to your life.
- d. That said, many times I’ve heard folks wish I was more of a preacher than a teacher. Let me comment on that.
 - i. I am who I am; I am striving to be who God wants me to be and I am comfortable with that.
 - ii. I refuse to give credence to spiritual-sounding-yet-wholly-unbiblical points of legalistic dogma which seek to force people to conform to personal expectations more than to the Word and will of God.

- iii. I'm not a yeller and screamer and I don't enjoy heaping condemnation on the heads of those to whom I preach every week. Since God inspired Paul to write that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ, who am I to think I should condemn people with every message?
- iv. Though I'm not interested in condemnation, I am very much interested in conviction – the definite feeling and recognition of responsibility or guilt that can accompany teaching, preaching, prayer, Bible reading, etc. Since Scripture teaches that conviction is the Holy Spirit's job, I'll let Him do it.
- v. I'm content to preach in my own style and let the chips fall where they may. This is born of the conviction that if I do my job to the best of my ability then God will take care of the rest...in his way and in his time.

3. Third, Moreland says the awakenings overemphasized personal feelings and relationship to Christ instead of a deep grasp of the nature of Christian teaching and ideas.

- a. Look at that puzzle piece again.

- b. The final puzzle doesn't care what we think the picture is or should be. It is what it is.
 - c. In the same way, Scripture, and the God who inspired it, don't care what we ***think*** Scripture says or what it should say. It says what it says and it is our responsibility to figure that out and use it (the entirety of it) to put together the pieces of the puzzle the way God intended.
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Now, how can we begin to fight the disease of biblical illiteracy and reverse its effects. Let's turn to Matthew chapter 5 to find out.

While you are finding Matthew 5, let me tell where we're headed.

In May, I started praying and thinking about where we needed to go in the next ministry year. As I thought and prayed, one word kept coming mind – **depth**. As I continued to think and pray, the idea of depth as it related to us began to take shape and come into focus.

- I thought about the need for depth of character, knowledge, know how, relationship, and reach.
- I thought about some of the things we need to learn:
 - How to live deeply in a shallow world

- How to respond in a reactionary culture
- How to take our time in a right-now world
- How to think things through in a heat-of-the-moment world
- I thought that before going deep, we sometimes need to revisit the basics:
 - A basic understanding Scripture's story
 - A basic understanding of Scripture's teaching
 - A basic understanding of Scripture's application
 - A basic understanding of living biblically in a post-Christian culture

As I thought and prayed about these things, a few passages of Scripture came to mind, Romans 12:2, Hebrews 5:11-6:2 and Matthew 5-7. This morning, we are beginning a series through Matthew 5-7. It is one of Jesus' teaching sessions with his disciples and is known as the Sermon on Mount. Our text this morning comes from Matthew 5:1-2

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

You are probably thinking, "how in the world is that that is going to help us battle the disease of biblical illiteracy and what does it have to do with depth?"

To answer your questions, let's look at the same passage in The Message version of the Bible: *When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions.*

I love the imagery here! Let me use it to help you understand how we are going to battle biblical illiteracy and pursue depth.

The **first** thing we see here is that Jesus gave precedence to the inner life over the outer life. What do I mean?

Did you notice that Jesus left the huge crowds to spend time with his closest followers? He didn't allow the crowds or the expectations they brought with them to distract him from his mission. At that moment, his mission was not to impress the crowds, but to invest in his closest followers—those who would ultimately take up the mantle of his mission.

Second, we see that Jesus' closest followers paid a price to receive his investment. They too left the crowds. They left the crowds so they could spend time with him. I love Eugene Peterson's words here: *Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him.*

Have any of you ever been part of an apprenticeship? The Washington DC government website explains apprenticeships this way: “*Apprenticeships combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction, teaching workers the practical and theoretical aspects of highly skilled occupations.*”⁴

An apprenticeship is step one on a path that leads to journeyman and eventually to master status. The apprentice/journeyman/master model traces its history back to the merchant and craftsmen guilds of the middle ages. I think it's an excellent picture of what it means to follow Jesus.

Think of it this way: when I am apprenticed to Jesus, I grow through instruction and on-the-job training so that I might fully understand both the theory and practice of what it means to be a Christian. Also, included is the realization that I am no longer the master and I will never be the master.

If you don't remember anything else from this message, I want you to remember this sentence: ***An apprentice follows the way of the master.*** Are you willing to do that? Are you willing to submit yourself to the Master's instruction and guidance? Are you willing to leave the crowds and pay the price to have Jesus invest in your life? Are you willing to submit to instruction and on-the-job training

⁴ “Apprenticeships,” DC.gov, <https://does.dc.gov/service/apprenticeships>, accessed September 6, 201

so that you can understand, both in theory and practice, what it means to live as a fully devoted follower of Christ? Are you willing to follow Jesus to a quiet place where you can talk to him and read and meditate on his word so that you can put it into practice?

What will that take?

1. It will take leaving behind the attention and expectations of others to pursue the expectations of the master.
2. It will take focused determination and cooperation with the master to nurture the inner life and allow the outward life to flow from it.
3. It will take humility to admit you need the master to teach you because you don't know it all and you're not always right.
4. It will take obedience to submit yourself to the master's will when both your sinful nature and culture are fighting against it.
5. It will take discipline to not simply read but also study and memorize God's word so that you can better know the master, his will, and his ways.
6. It will take commitment as you commit yourself to the master's family rather than choosing to walk this journey alone.

7. It will take willingness to pay whatever price the master asked you to pay so that you might know him, serve him, and bring the appropriate attention to him

If you are willing, I want you to offer up this prayer: *Jesus, I want to be your apprentice and I want you to be my Master.*

If you're not sure if you're willing, I'd like you to offer up this prayer: *Jesus, please reveal yourself to me.*

Either way, I would like to ask all of you to do one other thing. Please start reading Matthew 5-7 at least one time each day. Think about what you were reading and how it should apply to your life. Ask God to help you be sensitive to what his word is teaching you.

Just imagine what it would mean if each and everyone of us committed ourselves to being an apprentice to the master.

- Imagine what we might learn.
- Imagine how we might live.
- Imagine how we might love each another.
- Imagine how we might love our neighbor.

- Imagine the value of a faith that is both biblically literate and deep.
- Imagine what God might do in us and through us if we commit to being apprentices who follow the way of the master.

Prayer
