

ðDoing God's Willö
 Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28 Matthew 7:21-29
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What an incredible passage this is from Matthew! It comes at the end of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, which lays out in practical terms the basics of Jesus's teachings. As with so many passages of Scripture, we have read them or heard them so many times that we can slide over them without really registering what they are saying to us. But, I am convinced that if we are to be followers of Jesus, we must listen clearly to what he says to us:

(Jesus is speaking) - Not everyone who says to me, ðLord, Lord,ö will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of our Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ðLord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?ö Then I will be clear to them, ðI never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.ö

How many times do we hear ourselves and other people giving credit to God for all sorts of things: essentially saying ðLord, Lordí ö? How many times do we hear Christian preachers and teachers say that they have received a message from God telling us what is going to happen next? How many times do we pray for healing and for miracles to take place through the name of Jesus Christ? We, and others, do these things all the time. We even pat ourselves on the back for being so faithful.

This list covers quite a lot of the life of the Christian. But, isn't it enough to do these things in order to secure favor from God? Apparently not. What seems to be necessary according to Jesus is that is to say, what apparently is missing from this list of good deeds is doing the will of God. Our job, then, must be to figure out exactly what constitutes the will of God and what it takes to do it.

Jesus gives us a clue to help us understand what is required. He wants us to be like the wise man who built his house on rock, not on sand. I take this to mean that all those good deeds enumerated above are of no value unless they rest upon the proper solid foundation. What then is that foundation?

Well, if we put this passage in context, we discover that Jesus has just answered the question. As I said earlier what we just read from Matthew comes at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:28). The Sermon on the Mount gives us a concise way to understand the spiritual and behavioral foundation that makes it possible to do the will of God. Here is the shorthand version:

The Sermon begins with the beatitudes. Jesus tells us that the ones who really are blessed are not the ones you would expect to be blessed. Rather the blessed ones are the poor, the hungry, the weeping ones (see Luke 6:20-23 for an alternate version of the beatitudes). After identifying the blessed Ones, Jesus then confronts the law and expands it so much that he turns it on its head. For example, in addition to avoiding murder he tells us to avoid hating. In addition to being

generous to others in need, he tells us to become reconciled with those very people we would help. He goes further to say that not only is adultery sinful, but that we sin any time we treat people as objects. Rather than looking for the justice of retribution when we are wronged, Jesus calls us to distribute God's justice by loving and praying for our enemies.

In the next section of the Sermon on the Mount, he then goes on to teach us how to pray. In response, we recite the Lord's Prayer every week. As those of you who took the Lord's Prayer class discovered, this prayer is an incredibly compact and rich articulation of the foundations of the faithful life. In the next section, Jesus goes on to make it clear that forgiveness is among the most important values we can hold. He then invites us not to store up treasure, but rather to trust God (and we will talk in a moment about what that looks like). Jesus makes it crystal clear that we cannot serve money and serve God at the same time. Given the fact that we have inherited a particular economic system, perhaps we will have to change that system in order to return to serving God. Jesus then tells us not to worry about the things we need. Instead, we are invited to seek the Realm of God. Most recently, in the sermons since Easter, we have been considering what the Realm of God might look like in practice. We have discovered that it can be a particular kind of loving and caring community. Jesus says that when we create that community whatever we and others need will be adequately met. Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by teaching us not to judge. Rather we must learn to remove the log from our own eyes before we presume to identify or try to remove the speck from the eyes of others.

In even shorter terms, the Sermon on the Mount lays the foundation for doing the Will of God: Value the poor; don't rely on stuff; create communities known as the Realm of God; don't get caught up in judging others; and exercise forgiveness. Do these things and you will surely get what you need.

Next, Jesus gives us a warning about false prophets. Essentially, false prophets don't love you-- They only want to devour you. He identifies himself as the one who brings the loving word from God.

Now, it is fair to say that we cannot do these things easily in our present culture. From our earliest years, we are taught to hate, to judge, to compete, to rely on money, to hold grudges, and to respond to conflict with violence, even while we are also taught to say "Lord, Lord". Jesus tells us in Matthew that those words are empty without the deeds that are built on that rock foundation.

Furthermore, we are taught to make learned pronouncements about God, but these are empty words without the earthly embodiment of the Realm of God. We are taught to cast demons out of individuals but at the same time we support the system that spawns those very demons. We are even taught to do mighty works in science, medicine, and technology to show the world how great we are. We respond to the crises of the poor with charity, perhaps to demonstrate how generous we are, but by continuing to support unfair systems we ensure that they will remain poor!

The wise man's rock foundation is nothing less than the Realm of God, not as an afterlife experience in heaven, but as a present life experience ó here in the midst of us. The Realm of

God calls us to be in loving relationships, to exercise mutuality, and to serve God rather than money. Without the Realm of God and despite all our prophecies, good works, charity, and pietistic language, the existing system will eventually crash and we will all be destroyed.

This is not a new message I am preaching. It is the same message that was preached by the Old Testament Prophets. It is the same message that was preached by Jesus. It is the same message that was demonstrated by the egalitarian communities of the early church. And it is the very message that we must hear and act on if we are to be faithful. As Jesus says, everyone who hears these words and acts on them will participate in the kin-dom of heaven.

You might be wondering how we can go about making these changes? Well, the first thing to do is to exercise radical hospitality and welcome. This congregation has already taken significant steps in that direction. Along with that we must talk with each other and listen to each other ó rich and poor alike ó to love one another into the body of Christ. Our individual lives, and perhaps the existence of our entire planet, depends on whether or not we heed these words from Jesus.

We can pray all we want. We can invoke the name of God until our voices give out. But it is clear that God is not the one who will save us from economic collapse, the effects of climate change or even from nuclear war. We are the ones who must hear the message and we are the ones who must act on it.

But this is too hard, we might say. Our communities and our governments will not allow us to make these changes. Frankly, we have used that excuse for too long. The social conditions are no more repressive now than they were at the time of Jesus or at the time of the early church community. They made the change and it was a change so radical and so successful that it caught the attention of the Roman Empire. If they did it, we can do it. They did it in the name of Jesus, because they took his message seriously. We too can do it if we take Jesusø message seriously.

It can never be enough for you to use your experience of Christianity simply to make yourselves feel better. It will not be enough to exercise a rigid personal morality, demanding that others do the same. It will not be enough to know the right words or the right songs. It will not be enough to build the most beautiful, useful, and accessible buildings. It will only be enough to the degree that we find ways to manifest the Realm of God.

I call upon you to think about this possibility, to consider it deeply, to pray on it, and to pay close attention to the answer you receive in response to your prayer. I call upon you to take seriously the vision that Jesus taught and lived so that together we might build our community on solid rock. This is the will of God.