

Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist

Sunday, August 9, 2020

Luke 7:13-29: Christianity?

Today we are starting a series that is part of what I call Basics 101. For some the content of the series will be new, and for others it will be a refresher in the foundations of our who we are and why we do what we do!

During the summer of 1996 I checked an item off of my bucket-list by going to Florida and working at Walt Disney World. After a fairly lengthy employment process, I was hired as a “cast-member” to work at “Tony’s Town Square” – the Lady and the Tramp themed restaurant located immediately inside the main gate of the Magic Kingdom park.

Before anyone can work at Disney, they must go through a three-day process called Disney University where you are instilled with the Magic of Disney! A major part of the program was learning about handling money – especially for those of us who worked in an area where we were responsible for selling things.

One of the interesting facts we learned was that Walt Disney World was the number 1 place to pass counterfeit bills. It was also held the number 1 spot for catching the bills and the people who passed them. They credited their success by teaching all the cast members to know what to look for. The key for catching counterfeit bills was not to know what “fake” looks like, but rather to know what the “real” thing is!

As we begin our series today, we are starting with the basics: **“WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?”** My thanks to my father David Smith for allowing me to generously use the information from his book “Joining Jesus: A Manual for New Believers.” Available on all the most discriminating Amazon sites everywhere.

So let's begin with our scripture today - Luke 7:13-29.

The Narrow Gate

¹³ "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. ¹⁴ But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

The Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. ¹⁶ You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ¹⁹ So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

True Disciples

²¹ "Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³ But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

Building on a Solid Foundation

²⁴ "Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. ²⁵ Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that

house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. ²⁶ But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. ²⁷ When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

POPULAR CHRISTIANITY

Did you know that it is still popular to be a Christian? Sadly, that is not a particularly good thing. The term "Christian" has become a somewhat watered-down term. In the Middle East, generally, if you are not a Muslim, you are considered a "Christian" – regardless of belief system. According to 2020 statistics, 63% of Belleville claims to be "Christian." Out of our 50,000 or so population, that would be 31,500 people. I am pretty sure, many of those claiming to be "Christian" do not know the true, biblical definition of what that means.

It is so important, in our world today, that we can answer the question: "What is a Christian?"

We read in Acts 11:26 that "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." By that statement alone, a biblical definition of "Christian" begins with being a disciple.

What does it mean to be a disciple? We need to understand the term from Jesus' day. In Jesus' day, the religious teacher and leaders or the rabbis, would look for the crème de la crème of society and would call them to be followers or learners of what they taught. The student had an intense loyalty to the master and lived with them, learning the ways of the master, often for many years.

Jesus did the same thing...he went through the countryside and called men to leave their jobs and their families and follow him. Only Jesus' choice would have

seemed strange by the standards of the day. Many were blue collar workers who would have had the basic religious training of the day as children. They were fishermen and political activists, a tax collector the general population would have scorned, and those who were family members. Not an elite group. Jesus settled on twelve men we know as the “disciples.”

The Great Commission gives us more insight in becoming a “disciple” thus a “Christian.” Matthew 28:19-20 has Jesus’ command for those who are following him:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

GO, MAKE, BAPTIZE, TEACH... the work that a disciple does. In the story of the wise and foolish builder in our scripture lesson today, Jesus was fairly straight forward with the qualities of a “Christian.”

24“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The flip side of those who aren’t true followers would be:

26 But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand.

The true test of a “Christian” is in the ***doing*** – the putting into practice all that Jesus has taught us. It is fine to learn many facts about Jesus, but all that head knowledge won’t get you into the Kingdom of God. It is easy to know facts! James 2:19 tells us that the demons know and believe in who Jesus is...and they are smart enough to tremble at that knowledge.

What a Christian isn’t:

1. A Christian is not someone who attends or belongs to a certain group or denomination that claims to be Christian... but is not obedient to the teachings of Jesus. Did you know that the Knight of the Ku Klux Klan claim to be a Christian organization? This would fall under those who say “Lord, Lord...” and Jesus says “...I have no idea who you are.”
2. Going through the process of officially joining a “Christian” church does not make you a disciple of Jesus. There have been many who “join” but never participate. They give money in the hopes that their “fire insurance” will be paid. They consider the church a social organization and base attendance on what is provided for them. You might say that they look for a church like one would decide on a grocery store. They love rituals and traditions, but when it comes to following the ways of the Master...let’s not get too crazy!
3. Being a Christian is more than just being a really good, wonderfully moral, highly ethical person.

WHAT IS A “CHRISTIAN”?

A Christian is one who answers a call by God to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. A relationship is established with Christ as Mentor or Master Teacher and the person as student, learner, apprentice, and practitioner of the life and wisdom Christ sets out. This relationship is entered through baptism (which is to the Christian life of discipleship what the wedding ceremony is to the married life as a spouse.)

WHERE ARE YOU TODAY?

Our scripture lesson was Jesus’ warning to his disciples at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, to check their hearts and see if they were truly disciples. Jesus taught us that the road we follow as disciples is very narrow – the danger is that our road is found right in the middle of the broad road of the world. The broad road tells us that anyone who believes in their own beliefs – regardless of what that may be will get to heaven...after all...all road lead to the same place. Jesus comes to us and tells us that believe that nonsense will get us condemned.

A disciple, a “Christian” is one who puts Jesus at the center of all they do. They believe that he is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and they dedicate their loyalty to following the path he sets out. How do we know a true “Christian.” They are the ones who are producing fruit. Jesus can be seen in all they say and they do...every action points to who their master is. May we not fall to the lies of the world and one day, as we say “Lord, Lord...”, hear from Jesus...

‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Let’s pray....