

How to be an Excellent Disciple, Part 1

Luke 6:39-49

We're going to be looking at the final section of that sermon that starts in Luke 6:39 and runs all the way to the end of the chapter. This is the third major section of the Sermon on the Mount. In the first section, which ran from verses 20-26, Jesus identified his true disciples as the poor, the weeping, the hungry, the reviled.

After identifying his audience, the targets of his sermon, he turned his attention in the second section, which runs from verses 27 to 38, instructed his true disciples about the extent and endurance of true love. He commanded them to practice that kind of love. And not just with one another and not just with friends and family, but to, as it says there in verse 27, "love your enemies and do good to those who hate you, bless those who persecute you and pray for those who abuse you." That's a love that the world certainly does not know, does not see, does not

practice. This is something that comes only from God, only from heaven.

As we turn our attention to the third section, verses 39 to 49, Jesus really turns a corner here. He's going to press the implications of what he has taught to his disciples. He's going to exhort them. Just looking at this final section as a, as a whole and understanding its connection to the previous sections. So with that in mind, let's read starting in verse 39. "He also told them a parable: 'Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

"'Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye," when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

“Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he’s like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood rose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Having read it, let’s go back to verse 39. Every so often in Luke’s Gospel, the author, Luke, steps in as the narrator. He

usually remains outside of the story just letting you hear the words of Christ or painting the picture without revealing that he's there as the author. But here he steps in, in a most inconspicuous way, just a very brief comment, he adds a word of narration. That's what we see in verse 39, "He also told them a parable."

Luke would not have stepped in to provide that narrative if this had not had been important. Even necessary to help us, his readers, understand the significance of what Jesus was saying here. So his small bit of narrative, when we pay attention to it, when we give it its due, it really does provide us with a very important interpretive clue. We need to pay attention to it.

I wish more commentators had concentrated more on that narrative insertion that Luke added here in verse 39 because, well a few of them did and, and I found that they were helped, and I found them to be in general agreement and helpful to me. Others, though, didn't seem to pay attention to Luke's interpretive tip in this narration. They offered some interesting and often contradictory opinions.

One commentator, he graciously explained his other fellow commentators, he says, "These apparently disparate sayings," that is of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ here. "These apparently disparate sayings have puzzled commentators. How do they function within Jesus' address?" As we read, you could hear that, these different sayings. I think you can sympathize a little bit with the challenge that is inherent in bringing all these different sayings and metaphors and word pictures together into a coherent whole.

How do we bring all this together? That is, how, how do blind men falling into the pits, and disciples becoming like their teachers, and people with impaired vision making judgments, and then trees and fruits and home builders, how do all these sayings and pictures fit together in a cohesive whole? And, secondly, in what way do they connect with what Jesus has just been teaching?

Are we meant to see them as going together, or did Luke just grab a few sayings out of a hat and throw them in here

because he thought they were good? Let's give Luke's interpretive hint its proper due. Let's listen carefully, what did Luke step into the sermon for? Why did he step in and then quickly step out again with that little comment, "He also told them a parable."?

As we get an overview of this section, we're going to ask and answer several questions, starting with a first question: What does Luke mean by a parable? What does he mean by a parable? Usually, we think of a parable as one of the short stories that Jesus told to illustrate a point or a principle of truth. Famously, we think of the parable of the sower, the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the prodigal son. Those are certainly the most memorable and favored of Jesus' parables and there are many others as well.

They're stories told to illustrate a single point of truth. But Jesus also told shorter parables. We might call them short form parables like this one. And they come across more like proverbial sayings. The word, *parable*, *parabole*, comes from the verb *parabolo*, *parabolo*. And *bolo* is the word, to cast or to throw. The prefix, *para*, refers to something that is alongside.

So the verb *parabolo* literally means, to throw something alongside something else, and in teaching, it's for the purpose of making a comparison.

So it's a, a method that a teacher uses to make a comparison, telling a story that compares with some spiritual reality. We call it an illustration. We give illustrations and this is what Jesus is doing by telling parables. So whatever Jesus means by this parable, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" He's throwing out those two rhetorical questions, but he's really teaching something else.

The parable's illustrating a deeper, spiritual principle. There is clearly, on a physical level, there is a danger of somebody who is physically blind, following along behind someone else who is physically blind. The one leading the other. If you were there to watch something like that happen, you would cringe. You'd be dismayed. You'd want to jump in and help that person.

The danger of falling into a pit sustaining serious injury and with a blind person leading a blind person, that's not just a likely event, that's inevitable. Especially if you, if we could transport ourselves back into Palestine, back into the land of Israel and Jesus' day. Because there were pits like this all over the place.

So when Jesus told this little parable, this little saying, oh, everybody immediately got the picture. So what is Jesus warning us about? What is that picture about the blind leading the blind meant to illustrate. Simply this, be careful who you follow as a teacher. Be careful who you follow as a teacher. Make sure, first of all, you're following someone who is not blind, but someone who can see.

In spiritual terms, you want to follow a regenerate teacher at the very least. And folks, I'm sad to say, that in our day, pulpits are filled with unregenerate men and women teaching things they ought not to teach. Make sure you are following someone who's not only not blind, but someone who can see and see clearly. In fact, this meaning that this is what Jesus is pointing to is absolutely inescapable when you look at verse 40.

Jesus lays down a principle. It's not a parable; it's a principle. It's a principle of discipleship.

Look at it there in verse 40, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." It's just a, a maxim, a general truth. You become like your teachers. And the longer you're with them, the more you become like them. Now depending on the teacher you're following, that's either good news, or it's really bad news. Evaluating the worth and the value of the teacher you're following, that becomes a major issue in discipleship, doesn't it? So that's what a parable is. That's what this parable is.

Let's ask a second question, just, again, getting a, an overview of this section. What is the unifying theme of Jesus' conclusion? What is the unifying theme of this section from verses 39 to 49? What is the unifying theme of Jesus' conclusion? We get a strong clue about the unifying theme, what brings all of this together, the principle of this section by looking at just one statement in this whole thing, which is not an illustration or a metaphor. It's the rather confrontational question that Jesus asks in verse 46. Look at it there, "Why do

you call me, 'Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?'"
That's what brings all of this together.

That's what brings it all together and unifies. This is the theme. The theme. The concern here is for those who profess faith, but they really don't possess it. It's for those who talk the talk, but they really don't walk the walk. It's for those who, who hear, they may even come to church every single Sunday and listen, but they really don't go out and do anything about it. That's the unifying theme that brings this whole section together.

It's the issue of vital importance, the issue of obedience. How do you actually live your life? What does your week-by-week look like? What is your daily habit? What are your daily actions? He began this section, Jesus did, with a parable, verse 39 and then the principle in verse 40. And after that, his illustrations start to expand a bit, don't they? They get a little longer. The first in verses 41 to 42 and then another, which stretches for three verses 43 to 45.

And then he finishes with the longest word picture of all, verses 47 to 49 and all of these are parabolic sayings. They're all unified, though, with this one single truth. They're all illustrating the same thing. We must be obedient to what we hear Jesus tell us to do. We have to be obedient. In the main body of the sermon, Jesus laid down the foundational element of a Christian. The essence of who a Christian is, what a disciple looks like.

He's talking in the main body of the sermon, verses 27 to 38, he's talking about the character of his disciples. What do they look like? Discipleship to Jesus Christ is defined by love. It's not a self-defined love. It's not a love that's better than that love or in comparison with the culture. It is a love that is defined and given by God. It's a love that's characteristic of God and how he loves even the unjust, the ungrateful, the evil.

It's a love that characterizes Jesus Christ in his atoning sacrifice on the cross; his whole life lived in perpetual sacrifice for us. And it's a love that will be, must be, inevitably is the characteristic, distinguishing, defining

feature of all true Christian disciples. If you are a disciple, you do love like this. If you're not a disciple, you don't. You can't because God has not changed you from the inside out.

So having transitioned from the main body of the sermon to this section of the sermon as he brings this to a close, he's getting in our kitchen, isn't he? He's exhorting. He's pressing the issue. He's making us feel uncomfortable. He's emphasizing here the necessary connection that must exist between our character and our conduct. Christian character is known by Christian conduct. Just as a tree is known by its fruit.

Folks, this is so important for us to hear. In our modern world, we have, most of us, grown up being so accustomed to the spirit of the modern age, which privatizes our religion and it tells us that we must keep our religious convictions private. Practice your religion in your place of worship. That's totally fine, they tell us, but don't bring it here. Don't bring it into the workplace. Don't bring it into the classroom. Don't be too religious, okay.

Many today believe that religion is a very good way to remember and preserve our cultural heritage. But it really has a fracturing effect on society at large. The only way to unify society in our modern world is to set aside all our religious differences and to secularize, to accommodate in places of learning, places of commerce, places of business for the sake of harmony. So that we can all get along. So that we can all bring everything together and be productive together as a whole unit.

Listen, what Jesus teaches us here leaves no room for that point of view. In fact, Jesus says exactly the opposite. If your professed Christian character does not match your actual conduct, your profession is a sham. By God's design we human beings are wired in such a way that our conduct reveals our true character. We cannot help it. Our actions reveal our true convictions. Our behaviors reveal our beliefs. In the imagery Jesus uses here, our fruit reveals what kind of tree we are.

I like how one commentator put it when he said this, "Jesus, Jesus is concerned about the true nature of a person, the heart, but such a concern does not lead to what today we might call psychological evaluation. In Luke's pre-Freudian

world, a" person, "person's inside is accessible not through his or her psychology, but through his or her social interactions. People, like trees, are known through what they produce." End quote.

It's very true, folks. You're known by your social interactions. No matter what you think modern psychology has taught you, it's not true. You're not one thing and another thing out here. We are a composite whole and our immaterial self is revealed by what our material self actually does, by the commitments we keep, by the people we relate with or chose not to relate with, by the meetings we keep on our calendar and the meetings we don't.

Anyone who makes a practice of professing one thing and living another thing, well, we have a word for that, don't we? Jesus calls them, verse 42, "You hypocrite. You hypocrite." And he asks that rhetorical, penetrating, very uncomfortable incisive question in verse 46 to expose that hypocrisy. "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and you do not do what I tell you to do?" Love your enemies. Love those you don't get along with.

Bring near to you those you don't agree with, those you don't clique with.

That's a saying we use today. Well I don't clique with that person, so I really don't hang out with them. Is that allowed as a Christian? No. Christian character is known by Christian conduct. Just as non-Christian character is known by non-Christian conduct. Notice I didn't say that Christian character is known by moral conduct. Religion is about producing morality and morality, alone, by itself damns people to hell.

You don't get to heaven by morality. You can see the antithesis of true piety, true Christianity in the illustrations Jesus uses. First, in verses 39-40, religionists, morality preachers, like, we could say, the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day, like the moral teachers in the Gentile world, religionist, morality preachers, they are blind; they're the blind leading the blind. Those who follow them are like them. They follow them because they're blind. They become like them. They share in their fate. It's the blind leading the blind and all of them together are falling into the pit of destruction and hell.

Notice the blind people here, they're not non-religious people. They're not the atheists. They're not the secularists. They're not, let's put it in modern day sin terms, they're not the homosexuals and those who are parading sexual immorality. It's not them he's talking about. The blind here are the religious people. The blind here are those who occupy pews, occupy pulpits. Folks, this should be very uncomfortable for us here.

Second illustration Jesus uses to show this antithesis between true piety, true Christianity, and any false form. Look at verses 41-42. Religionists, morality preachers are ultimately hypocritical because they think they really can fulfill the demands of the law externally. But God's law makes demands of the external conduct and of the internal thoughts and the attitudes and the motivations of the heart. What is inside you, what is your thinking, that's what Jesus is driving after.

The same God who gave the Ten Commandments, you know all the "thou shalt" and the "thou shalt not," in Exodus 20. He is

the same God who commanded, Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." He is the same God who commanded, Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That very command that Jesus has expanded upon and expounded upon here in Luke 6.

Get this: Love God, love your neighbor, here's the Ten Commandments to show you how you love God and love your neighbor, the thou shalt and thou shalt not. Hypocrites actually believe they can do all of that. They believe they actually are doing all that. They have no question. You ask them, evaluate your life, evaluate yourself. What do they say? I'm good. I'm fine. What do you? What? What? They see no fault in themselves. They see no fault in their thoughts or their actions, which is incredible. If you just have an ounce of humility, you'll realize you do not love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You do not love your neighbor as yourself.

If you can get to Romans quickly, I'll just show you a couple of things in the book of Romans. Very short point of

illustration. As you can see Paul's confrontation of the hypocrite as he condemns the entire world, Jew and Gentile alike, Romans 1 through 3. You can see his confrontation and condemnation of the hypocrite in two places. Start in Romans 2, verse 1 and following. He condemns these judgmental, morally superior pagans. You know, pagans, the philosophers, you know the Socrates, the Plato, the Aristotle, and all those who trusted that that moral philosophy, that ethical philosophy was the highest point that man could reach and they looked down on all those, all those pagan sinners, you know, all those people who were base and pursued base things.

And Paul says this in Romans 2:1 and following. "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges," those other pagans. "For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things." But "do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?" Oooh. That stung a bit.

Just skip ahead to verse 17. Paul moves his attention from the morally superior pagans, and he turns his attention to the Jews, and he condemns them, as well. Because they were privileged as God's people. Listen, we, evangelicals, we professing Christians, this is our text right here. This is what we fall into. We need to take a warning from this because we hold the same Scriptures in our hands as they did. We've experienced many of these same privileges.

Look at Romans 2:17 and following. "But if you call yourself a Jew," or we could say, if you call yourself an evangelical, if you call yourself a Christian. "And rely on the law, boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that your yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those are in darkness, an instructor the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You know who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law."

That's penetrating. If we apply, "You who preach against stealing, do you steal?" Do you download stuff off the internet that was robbed by somebody else? Don't pay it? Do you commit adultery, pornography is today's adultery? Adultery of the heart. Listen, all this stuff goes to the heart. It goes to the thinking. It goes to the, the mind. Having right judgments, even God-revealed judgments, this does you no good unless you judge yourself first. Judge yourself accurately, precisely before you turn around and look at other people. Anything else is intolerable, shameful, and damning hypocrisy.