

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

December 13, 2009

*The Adoration
of the
Shepherds*
Rembrandt
Harmensz van
Rijn
1606-1669



Advent 2009: Real Christianity

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven...”

This week we conclude our series on the Sermon on the Mount as we also enter our third week of Advent. One commentator, referring to the Sermon of the Mount teachings, called the Bible a very “dangerous book” and what he meant was this: you come to Scripture like this and you are confronted. You are confronted with both the realities of Scripture and self. So what do we do with all this? Jesus would not want us to come away from this time believing that we’ve received a new set of ethics by which to live. Nor does he seek to constrain us. On the contrary with this teaching he seeks to set us free. That freedom, contrary to our modern sensibilities, is not experienced by serving ourselves but rather by serving him. In this final section, Matthew 7:21-29, Jesus summarizes two things; what a Christian is not and what a Christian is.

First, Jesus points out what a Christian is not by showing us two ways in which we

are self-deceived. One way we deceive ourselves is by professing God only without doing his will. Here, Christ was thinking of the religious leaders of his day who would in fact confess “Lord, Lord”. They said all the right things, but acted very differently. James 2:14-19 express well a contemporary saying, “actions speak louder than words.” It is not enough to profess our love, but naturally our actions must follow. The second way we deceive ourselves is when we hear the word of God, but don’t put it into practice. This is illustrated in verses 24-27 where Jesus describes two men who built houses on very different foundations. The first man built his house on a rock and thereby endured the deluge. But the second man built his house on the sand and was consequently swept away. When our life is built on the shifting sands of power, success, and approval the resultant fruit will be despair. But when grounded in the solid rock of Christ we should observe the fruit of Christ’s spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. Which reflects your life?

Secondly, Jesus tells us here what a Christian is. The temptation of this text is to think “I just need to do more!”, but this would be contrary to the nature of the gospel. A Christian is someone who knows God and does his will by practicing the presence of God. As with any relationship this involves seeking to foster intimacy with the Lord so that when we do face the storms of life we come out on the other side perhaps wounded and disappointed, but not crushed. Additionally, if we seek the will of God simply because we believe Christ was a profound teacher, we’ve missed the person of Christ and the mission of God. The uniqueness of the Christian faith is that Jesus wasn’t the greatest prophet, but the fulfillment of everything the prophets spoke of. His incomparable sacrifice made salvation not a matter of our effort, but of his. As a result we seek to do the will of God because we’re gripped by his love and grace. When Christ becomes our solid foundation and greatest affection we long for his will, not ours. May we cherish God and his will in the week to come. Amen.

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Matthew 7:21-29

1. Joe, an Eastside resident, recently picked up a book entitled, "Top Ten Ways to Make You a Better You in 2010". How would you differentiate this work from the Sermon on the Mount?
2. As you personally reflect on our time in the Sermon on the Mount what did you find most meaningful and transformative?
3. Why is Jesus something more than a wise teacher or a great leader that we should emulate?
4. Paraphrase the parable of the man who built a house on two different foundations. What is this parable ultimately saying? Why is Christ described as the solid ground and other things sinking ground?
5. Describe a situation where you've put your trust in something that in the end felt like sinking sand. How could trust in Christ created a different result?
6. When you read the Sermon on the Mount and begin to apply it, how do you avoid a "I just need to try harder mentality?"
7. What does it mean to "practice the presence of God" and how does this ultimately lead to a Christian faith that is uniquely counter-cultural? Give an example of how cherishing God could lead to counter-cultural action.



Advent Reflections: The Shepherd's Adoration

The hustle and bustle of the holiday season leaves many Christians wondering how they can celebrate the Advent season with meaning and intentionality. Over the next two weeks this column will be dedicated to helping you do just that. The column will have three focal points during the advent season; daily Scripture readings, reflective works of art, and Advent carols (see page 3). Use each of these components to foster a sense of anticipation of the birth and for us, the return, of Christ. Any of these elements would be great to use either individually or with your family.

Scripture Readings for This Week:

Monday: Ps. 41, 52; Ps. 44; Zech. 1:7-17; Rev. 3:7-13; Matt. 24:15-31

Tuesday: Ps. 45; Ps. 47, 48; Zech. 2:1-13; Rev. 3:14-22; Matt. 24:32-44

Wednesday: Ps. 119:49-72; Ps. 49, [53]; Zech. 3:1-10; Rev. 4:1-8; Matt. 24:45-51

Thursday: Ps. 50; Ps. [59, 60] or 33; Zech. 4:1-14; Rev. 4:9-5:5; Matt. 25:1-13

Friday: Ps. 40, 54; Ps. 51; Zech. 7:8-8:8; Rev. 5:6-14; Matt. 25:14-30

Saturday: Ps. 55; Ps. 138, 139:1-17(18-23); Zech. 8:9-17; Rev. 6:1-17; Matt. 25:31-46

Sunday: Ps. 24, 29; Ps. 8, 84; Gen. 3:8-15; Rev. 12:1-10; John 3:16-21

Works for Art for Advent Reflection

Consider the central panel of Rembrandt's "The Adoration of the Shepherds" on page one of the worship guide. The scene depicts various people's reactions to the birth of Christ, including the Shepherds. As you observe consider these questions:

- How does Rembrandt use the contrast between light and darkness?
- What is the posture of the Shepherds (those closest to the manger)? How does this influence your own posture during the Christmas season?
- What is the response of the people on the periphery. As a viewer what could this portion of the painting mean?

The only alternative is to take Jesus at his word, and his claims at their face value. In this case, we must respond to His Sermon on the Mount with deadly seriousness. For here is the picture of God's alternative society. These are the standards, the values and the priorities of the kingdom of God... Only when the Christian community lives by Christ's manifesto will the world be attracted and God be glorified. So when Jesus calls us to himself, it is to this that he calls us. For he is the Lord of the counter-culture.

John Stott
Counter Cultural
Christianity

1. Daily Scriptures take from the Book of Common Prayers, Daily Lectionary.

2. Information & artwork gathered at www.artbible.info

3. Hymns copied from the original Trinity Hymnal, all rights reserved.

Carols of Advent: Week III

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

Edmund H. Sears, 1849

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold;
“Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From Heaven’s all gracious King,”
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O’er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever over its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.

And ye, beneath life’s crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing!

For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophet-bards foretold,
When with the ever circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Silent Night! Holy Night!

Josef Mohr, 1816-1818

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love’s pure light;
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Silent night, holy night
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing,
Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born,
Christ the Savior is born!