

Going Beyond the Sermon



Listen to Jesus: The Sermon on the Plain

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Dr. John Stephens

Listen to Jesus: The Sermon on the Plain

At Chapelwood we want to continue Following Jesus and really work on listening more closely to how he calls us to live our lives. Many of us have heard about the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Fewer of us realized that Jesus had another significant moment of teaching about how we are called to live life that is recorded in the Gospel of Luke. This sermon is called the Sermon on the Plain.

There are some similarities, but in Luke's Gospel, Jesus seems to be preaching about how we are called to **live, act, speak, and model our faith**. Christian formation is critical for those of us who long to follow Jesus and be all he desires. **We must listen**. We will see in Luke 9, at the Transfiguration of Jesus, that Jesus is surrounded by Moses and Elijah – two of the greatest messengers of God. When the clouds clear away, Peter, James, and John see only Jesus remaining and a voice from the cloud declares, "This is my Son, my Chosen; Listen to Him!"

I truly believe if we listen deeply, we will experience a new way of thinking about our lives and a renewed commitment to live the teachings of Jesus every day.

Dr. John Stephens

Going Beyond the Sermon is written by Teresa Rossy, Director of Adult Discipleship Ministries, Chapelwood United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.

Source material is quoted throughout. The sermons are streamed online at www.chapelwood.org/archives.

To get Going Beyond the Sermon in your inbox, e-mail Laura Frost, lfrost@chapelwood.org.



BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 6:27-38

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Our Bible S.W.A.P. study method is simple, plain, and direct -- much like today's Scripture passage. “There are two particularly astonishing things about these instructions,” says N.T. Wright in *Luke for Everyone*. “First, their simplicity: they are obvious, clear, direct and memorable. Second, their scarcity. How many people do you know who really live like this? How many communities do you know where these guidelines are rules of life? What's gone wrong? Has God changed? Or have we forgotten who he really is?”

I think for this passage we need to adapt the question “What Can I Obey?” to “What WILL I Obey?” For example, look at the principle of generosity that Jesus is teaching here. “If anyone takes your coat, give him also your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you and don't ask for anything back.” “God is generous to all people, generous (in the eyes of the stingy) to a fault,” says Wright (p. 74).

Jesus goes on to say, “Love your enemies, do good and lend without expecting any return. Your reward will be great! You will be children of the Most High!” In other words, if we as Jesus's followers, follow these instructions, we will be like God, because God does these things. Jesus proved it himself, explains Wright: “His whole life was one of exuberant generosity, giving all he'd got to give to everyone who needed it. He was speaking of what he knew: the extravagant love of his Father, and the call to live a lavish human life in response. And finally, when they struck him on the cheek and ripped the coat and shirt off his back, he went on loving and forgiving, as Luke will tell us later (See Luke 23: 34, 43).”

Will you and I obey Jesus' teaching and follow his example to be abundantly generous?

A- Apply (Listen)

In this series, John Stephens is encouraging us to *listen* to Jesus. Our Apply section will be a series of Scripture listening prompts. Please use these for a time of prayer and meditation, noting what you *hear* from Jesus. If you have a Bible app with audio, use that to soak in the text in a different way. Here's a link to get you started: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/?recording=esv-laughlin>

Jesus begins speaking to those who will listen: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Is there a person who is like an enemy to you who comes to mind as you hear Jesus speaking directly to you, about your real life? Will you write a blessing for someone who "curses" you? Would you seriously consider speaking that blessing to your enemy?

Jesus says to those who will listen: "Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned."

Who are you judging and condemning at this time in your life? With Jesus listening to you, will you confess that name to him? Will you receive the forgiveness and mercy of God in return?

P-Pray

Jesus, help me listen to you with an open mind and heart to hear more from you about what God is like, what you are like, and what you can do in and through me as I grow more and more like you. With listening ears I pray, Amen.

February 13

Jesus Tells Us How to See Ourselves

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 6:39-45

He also told them a parable: "Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

In these parables, Jesus uses hyperbole to teach his followers to be self-reflective. His “blind leading the blind” and “log in the eye” examples are so outrageous that the listener can chuckle at the images and is therefore invited to look inward. “That’s not me” can quickly turn to “Well, maybe I’ve been like that” as one turns the story over in their mind.

Likewise, fruit comes from specific trees – anyone can see that. So whether we examine our status, position, or other label in society (what kind of tree am I?) or our actions, attitudes, and outcomes (what kind of fruit am I producing?), we are seeing ourselves as we truly are. That is the goal of our Master in this parable.

A-Apply (Listen)

Listen to the passage read aloud. Use these questions to examine yourself.

In what ways am I blind to what God wants me to see about myself?

Who am I following for spiritual guidance? How well am I learning and growing under their leadership?

Who is following me at this time in my life? Am I leading them in the right direction?

What am I critical of in others?

What are my own biases that are not from God?

Name three key characteristics that describe you.

Do your key relationships reflect your key characteristics?

How would you describe the “abundance of your heart” at this time in your life? What flows from it?

P - Pray

God, help me see myself as I really am. I offer the real me to your love and care. With listening ears I pray, Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 6:46-49

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you? I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Jesus clearly states that what his followers say and do as a result of hearing God’s word is of vital importance. In the Sermon on the Plain, we get the impression that Jesus would rather not be called Lord by anyone who is not willing to obey him. He is speaking from his authority as the Son of God. The same passage in Matthew puts it this way, “Not everyone who *says* to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who *does* the will of my Father in heaven. It is in God’s power and authority to declare who will enter the kingdom of heaven. “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’ (Matt. 7: 21-22).

A similar passage is found in James 1: 22-25. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

Each passage highlights the rabbi Jesus’ deep desire and warning for his followers to be wise, rather than foolish; to be good rather than evil; to be kingdom-seekers rather than glory-seekers, to persevere in godliness rather than settling for self-deception.

A-Apply (Listen)

In both Luke and Matthew’s gospels the story of the man who built his house on the rock and the man who built his house on the sand follows Jesus’ admonition to do what he tells us to do. While many Biblical parables involve cultural references that 21st century readers do not understand, this parable about floods, and houses that stand and fall is relatable to those who live in flood-prone regions. We get it. “When a flood arose” is a very real possibility. We listen to the weather reports when a storm is brewing. We act accordingly – preparing our homes, our food resources, our power back-up plans, our neighborhood support systems, and our family communication strategies. In many communities,

times of flooding or other natural disasters are when the church really acts like the church – caring for the least of these.

If we listen to this parable of Jesus with the level of attention and obedience we give the weather experts during a Texas hurricane, what might our response be?

Do you sense a current “storm warning” that Jesus may be trying to say to you?

What aspect of God’s word and God’s authority in your life are you ignoring?

What is a step you can take to build your spiritual foundation now so that you will be more connected to Jesus when a storm arises?

Is there any form of blasphemy in your life that you need to pay attention to and stop doing?

P-Pray

Jesus, you are my rock and my redeemer. I want to be like the man who built his house on the rock. Help me build my life wisely. With listening ears I pray, Amen.

February 27

Jesus Shows Us the Way

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

Notes:

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

The transfiguration of Jesus is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke's gospels and is followed in each one by the story of a boy so sick that the disciples were unable to cure him. "They seem to be telling us that the two go together: the mountain-top experience and the shrieking, stubborn demon," says Wright (p. 114). "Luke has highlighted . . . transfiguration was preparing Jesus himself not just for one human tragedy but for the greatest threat of all. Moses and Elijah, says Luke, were speaking with Jesus 'about his departure, which he was going to fulfill at Jerusalem'. The word for 'departure' is exodus, and Luke means us to understand that in several senses." Like Moses did for the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt, Jesus will lead all God's people out of slavery to sin and death, and home to their promised inheritance of the new creation through his death.

Peter, James, and John, as sleepy and puzzled as they were during and after this event, got to be part of this amazing spiritual experience because "they had stayed awake." (v. 32) They got to hear the same voice of God that had proclaimed to Jesus alone at his baptism, "This is my son." They heard God say to them, "Listen to him!"

A-Apply (Listen)

"We, too, often find it completely bewildering to know how to understand all that God is doing and saying, both in our times of great joy and our times of great sadness. But the word that comes to us, leading us on to follow Jesus even when we haven't a clue what's going on, is the word that came from the cloud on that strange day in Galilee: 'This is my son, my chosen one. Listen to him.'" (Wright, p. 115)

Describe a mountain top experience with God that you have experienced. What did you sense God saying to you? How has that stayed with you?

When have you sensed God's guidance in an extremely difficult time? How has that experience shaped you?

How do you make space in your daily life to "listen to him?" If this is not part of your spiritual practice, what needs to change?

P-Pray

Lord, thank you for giving us a Savior, Jesus Christ, who speaks with his followers. Open my mind to hear and read God's word and open my heart to receive Jesus' message. With listening ears I pray, Amen.