

“HIGH COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS”

by Rom A. Pegram - 7/7/19

Folks, between now and the end of this series is about 40 days. We're going to spend the next 40 days talking about the most powerful teachings of Jesus. On the back of your Connection Card today—under 'Next Steps' (look at it right now), I'm asking for as many of you as will to read Matthew 5-7 in preparation for the rest of this series. These are the powerful teachings I'm speaking of—known as the Sermon on the Mount. For your information, it's not a long sermon—about 20 minutes at most. You can read it through initially, then you're probably going to want to read it over and over as this series moves forward. This is the Spiritual Adventure I'm inviting you on today—for the rest of the summer. Are you going with me? There's the question...

If we look to the beginning of this section of scripture, Matthew 5:1-2, here's what it says: “One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, ² and he began to teach them.” So, what we're going to cover in this series is what Jesus began to teach them on this particular day. He went up the mountainside, sat down on a rock or something, and started to teach. (In their culture, the teacher or rabbi always sat.)

Webster's dictionary, by the way, describes a sermon in two ways I found interesting: 1) a religious discourse. Now, when your friends ask you what you did this weekend ... and you tell them “Oh, I went to a religious discourse!” and you say that with enthusiasm, they're going to look at you like you've lost your marbles, aren't they? Here's a second definition of a sermon: 2) any long tedious speech. Now, that sounds exciting, doesn't it? If you've ever experienced a sermon that matches this last definition ... I'm sorry! They should never be too long, or tedious. Jesus' sermons weren't! Folks, again, the Sermon on the Mount lasted less than 20 minutes, from beginning to end ... and was about as informal as you can get, considering the big crowd of people who followed Jesus up the mountainside. He sits down on a rock or something and just starts teaching—some of the most simple, practical advice ever given on the most common problems we have like ... anger, greed, lust, selfishness, worry, judgment, etc. ‘You don't know how to pray? It's in there. You don't understand all that Law stuff from the Old Testament? He explains it. You want to know the absolute secret to finding peace forever? It's in there too! And jokes... (You tell me someone walking around with a tree sticking out of your head while you try and take a speck out of someone else's eye isn't funny!) It's got it all...

The Sermon on the Mount begins with eight extraordinary statements. And these statements have a name you'd probably recognize. They're called 'The Beatitudes.' The way I remember that name is like this: BE-attitudes. These are the attitudes or mind-sets we need to have if we want to experience the blessings of God! And, folks, these are KEY to unlocking Jesus' teachings on the Christian life—a life that blesses God...

Do you want to be blessed by God? God wants to bless YOU! God stands on the edge of heaven, ready to pour out his blessings on your life. But, living according to the teachings of Jesus will help us receive the maximum number of blessings from God. Are you ready? Here's what Jesus teaches, from Matthew 5:3...

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.” – Matthew 5:3 (NLT)

For ... being a part of the ‘family of God’ is theirs! I know, Jesus uses the term ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’ I’m translating it this morning as ‘family of God.’ Do you want to be a part of a spiritual family where Christ is the head of the family, where God—the very essence of love—is present with us wherever we go? That’s what Jesus is speaking about here. Being a part of a spiritual or church family like this is a true blessing from God! It’s one of the ways we are blessed by God. But the first step to becoming a part of this blessing—this family of God—is to realize our deep need for God in every part of our lives. We need to make Jesus ‘LORD’ of our lives, not just lip service, but with our very lives. How do we do that? I’m glad you asked ... and I’m going to share with you now ‘4 commitments of first-place living’ (God in first place): How do we not only say God is in first place in our lives but then show God he’s in first place in our lives? Here you go ... and let the adventure begin...

I WILL GIVE GOD THE FIRST PART OF MY DAY. Folks, we’ve heard Jesus’ first words in this very famous sermon, or teaching. Now, I think it’s important before we go one step further to hear his last words. Fast forward with me right now, would you? Here’s Matthew 7:24 (NLT): “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock.” He goes on to say the storms and winds and rain will come (flash floods), but that house that stands on the firm foundation—on the rock of God’s word—will stand (unlike the house built on sand).

So, we heed Jesus’ final words too, as we look at this first ‘commitment of first-place living.’ Considering those last words, let me share another with you (Psalm 5:3, NLT): “Listen to my voice in the morning, LORD. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly.” And that’s exactly what I’m asking each of you to consider, as we begin this 40 Days with Jesus today...

The number one and most important way to build your life on Jesus is to spend time with Jesus every day, reading his Word and being in conversation with him. Just so we’re clear today, it’s *easy* to NOT spend time with God... You could sleep a little later, watch some morning T.V., get some projects started you’ve been meaning to get at, pick lint out of your belly button—all kinds of excuses! It’s easy to procrastinate and do those things that seem urgent, more important, or more enjoyable...

But spending time with God—giving God the first part of your day—is where you become more like God—more like Christ; it’s where you gain strength to get through the day and whatever you’re facing. When I say ‘give God the first part of your day’—for those who are not morning people, I mean ‘give God the best part of your day’—not just the leftovers (which we tend to do)!

It’s like the time in an early pastoral appointment of my father’s—with 5 kids at home and not much of a salary from the churches, a man came by the parsonage one day with a box of rotten potatoes; and he told my dad ‘they were rotting, but they were good

enough for the preacher and his family.’ My father politely said ‘thank you’ ... and walked them right out the back door.

I wonder how God feels when that’s our attitude with our time each day—not being intentional in our time with God, but just giving what’s ‘good enough’ for God... Here, by the way, is a picture of my ‘quiet space’ at the parsonage (show table). It’s a struggle, folks, to find that place, the time, etc., to be intentional about our relationship with God, but it’s the pathway to blessing, I will guarantee you.

Do you want to be a better person tomorrow than you are today? Do you want to have less worry and anxiety at the end of this 40 days? Do you want to be a happier, more fulfilled person, worker, co-worker, boss, student, friend; do you want to have a greater purpose in your life? If the answer’s ‘yes,’ the first step is to commit to give God the first part of every day; commit to spend time with him every day. I challenge you to do that and see what happens... Here’s the next ‘commitment of first-place living’:

I WILL GIVE GOD THE FIRST PART OF MY WEEK. I will give God the first part of my week ... which is what we’re doing today!

Today is Sunday. In America, it’s the first day of the week, and typically it’s been a day to worship God because it’s the day Jesus rose from the dead. So, we are giving this time to God today ... and I’m going to ask you to take this one step further. During these 40 days with Jesus, I want each of you to make a commitment to be a part of the weekly worship service. Do you want to be blessed? Acknowledge your need for God, spiritually, and make this a part of your weekly habits...

Here’s the deal: The Sermon on the Mount is all about the Kingdom of Heaven. It’s God’s kingdom—a public kingdom. It’s not a private kingdom. So, as Christ-followers, this is what we do! We join together publicly and declare our allegiance to God by our presence with other believers. Billy Graham once said, “Christians who are not actively involved in the life of a local church remind me of what happens when a burning coal is removed from the fire. Once the coal is removed from the bed of glowing coals, it gradually cools ... and it’s flame dies.”

That’s the importance of what we’re doing together. A public worship. It’s no wonder the Bible warns us like this in Hebrews 10:25, “And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.” (In Acts 2:42, you can review how important giving God the first part of the week was in the Early Church—studying the Bible corporately ... and fellowship.) Here’s the 3rd ‘commitment to first-place living’:

I WILL GIVE GOD FIRST PLACE IN MY FINANCES. Bluntly, what we’re talking about here is ‘tithing’—giving biblically out of obedience to God, that we might know God’s blessings in a deeper way. Do you want to know ‘true freedom?’ Make sure you let God in on how you manage your finances ... and you can know FREEDOM—God’s way!

Some people don’t know there’s a biblical way of handling our finances, but there is: we’ve heard about ‘tithing’, but do we really understand it? Without time to cover this

completely today, let me just give you a couple of tidbits from God's (Jesus') word. This is from Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT) - "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be." It's not like God doesn't know where the allegiance of our hearts are already; how we handle our money simply brings it to light. We need to invest in something that's more than temporal; we need to invest in what's of God (the eternal) and God's word shows us—starting with 'giving God first place in our finances' (more later).

Here's my challenge for you during these weeks of Spiritual Adventure: I'm calling it the \$40/40 Day Challenge. Consider this, just to move ahead in this area of our life with God. Consider—during these 40 days—giving \$40 more than you usually would during these 40 days. For some, that'll not be a big deal; for others, it may be just right; for some, it will be a stretch—a real sacrifice (and maybe your \$40 will need to be \$14 for now). My point is, let's move ahead together in this area. Let's give maybe like we've never given before—showing God that we're giving him first place in our finances ... and trusting God with them. There's my challenge: *do something to move ahead in the area of giving back to God.*

Why do this? Trust God like others have? Moses tells us back in Deuteronomy 14:23 (NLT) - "Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored—and eat it there in his presence. This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn males of your flocks and herds. Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God." So, there it is... Finally (our 4th and final 'commitment to first-place living')...

I WILL GIVE GOD THE FIRST PART OF MY RELATIONSHIPS. And there are 2 aspects to giving God first place in your relationships: First, your relationships with *other Christians*. That's what happens here ... as we worship and fellowship together. Second, your relationships with *non-Christians* (1 Peter 3:15b). Sometimes this is called 'witnessing' and, as followers of Christ, that's our responsibility, too—either by words or actions. Both things come from what Jesus called 'the second greatest commandment.' He said you can sum up all the law and prophets (scriptures) in this commandment (Galatians 5:14): "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In these 40 days we're intentionally spending with Jesus (how cool is that!), let's consider Jesus' words to us here. Who is our neighbor (whoever God places in your path)? And how can we love them, if that's what Jesus says is so central to all he's about?

Folks, when you're giving God the first part of your day, ask Him: "Lord, how can I love my neighbors in a way that would (eternally) benefit them most during these 40 days with you?" When you're giving God the first part of your week, worshiping God with many of those neighbors (Christian friends), don't forget to ask God weekly "How can I love my neighbors more—even those who are sitting around me in this worship

service—during these 40 days?” And when you’re considering allowing God first place in your finances, ask the same question: “How can I love my neighbors in a very tangible way during these 40 days—that will really make a difference in their lives?” Then, when you’re thinking about giving God the first part of your relationships, the prayer will come easy...

Folks, will you join me today ... in spending 40 incredible days with the most famous person I know—Jesus? Will you make these 4 commitments to give God first place in your day, your week, your finances, and your relationships? If you’re still questioning whether this is all that important or not, check out Jesus’ conclusion in Matthew 7:21-27 when you get home...