

## Finding treasure in heaven

We don't ever want to forget that Jesus intended His disciples to DO what He taught. He closes His Sermon on the Mount with these words: "Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon the rock." (Mt 7:24) We recall also Jesus' last words in His Great Commission: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I COMMANDED YOU: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Mt 28:19)

The disciple is one who is learning from Jesus how to do the things He taught. The New Testament was written by disciples, for disciples. It was never meant to provide a religious framework for a major new world religion in which people claimed membership, but did not purpose in themselves to be followers of Jesus.

Have you decided to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? This is a decision only you can make—but it is a choice. No one accidentally becomes a disciple of Jesus. Compare it, if you will, to becoming the disciple of a certain piano teacher. In other words, you sign-up to take piano lessons. You place your time at the teacher's disposal. You learn directly from the teacher. And you practice and practice and practice. You intend to learn how to play the piano. The disciple of Jesus INTENDS to become like Him. We place ourselves and our little kingdom, those portions of our life we have direct sway over, such as how we spend money, what we do with our time, how we entertain ourselves, how we do our job at work, how we relate to our family, under His kingdom. We submit ourselves and our kingdom to Jesus with the expectation that He will now be calling the shots for us and that we will cooperate fully with Him in this endeavor. This process involves the "death" of our self-will, that insistent, demanding person within that must have its own way.

Yet in this death to self, we find a glorious release into joy. When Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls," (Mt 11:28) we find with relief the truth of those words—we really do have



inner peace and rest as we allow Jesus to be in charge, directing even the small details of our lives.

Let us be clear. Our Lord is probably not concerned about whether we wear brown socks or blue socks, whether we fix meatloaf or chicken for supper, whether we buy a Ford or a Honda. But, the disciple of Jesus learns to allow place for the Lord to adjust us in even minor decisions, if He should so choose. We endeavor to keep a listening inner ear open in all our daily tasks. Love will guide us. Love will keep us. Love will transcend our tendency to sin. We discover it is no longer satisfying to just "be in the right," or to be able to say, "I didn't do anything wrong." The righteousness of God, imputed to us and being infused in us by Jesus Christ is a righteousness formed in divine love. It is a love that enjoys going the second mile, enjoys forgiving, enjoys doing good to those who mistreat us. This love is not interested in credit or glory; it is interested in merging with the presence of the Spirit of God and living enfolded in His kind and gentle actions.

The Spirit of God is a Spirit of divine love. When we are filled with the Spirit, permeated with His presence, and learn to walk in tandem with Him in our daily routines, we will find the inner release from all sorts of crud that in the past has hurt us and other people. Much of Jesus' teaching that He urges us to learn to obey has to do with things we turn loose from. Living under the impulse of divine love allows us to let go of anger. We learn not just how to manage anger; we learn, in the confidence that God is the unseen hand guiding our lives, how to not be angry. We find in the realization of the preciousness of the human being in God's sight, the ability to let go of contempt and lust, meanness in marriage, and trying to force others to do our will. Trusting in God's protection and justice, we find freedom to not retaliate when injured, but instead to forgive

and even to bless our enemies. We are also able to begin to let go of the insecurity that leads us to try and impress others, whether it is with our beauty, intelligence, skills, worldly success, or with our spirituality.

And finding our heart's true home in God, we begin to let go of the idols of greed and acquisitiveness. The disciple of Jesus turns loose of hoarding, not because of the virtue of the simple life, nor because of a pursuit for justice and fairness (as good as those ideals are), but because it becomes simply stupid. Jesus has become the "pearl of great price" to us. All other interests and value are in a far-distant second place. Who would collect "paint by number" artwork when one could have an original Rembrandt? Who would collect Rembrandts when one could have Jesus?

Jesus' way of teaching is to state a command which in His kingdom, then becomes a promise. When He taught His disciples, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break through and steal," He is directing them away from hoarding, but by implication is making a statement-promise, "You will not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth." In other words, His disciples, as they learn to appropriate the present life of the kingdom, will in fact become people who do not hoard. Greed for things will have simply lost interest for them. Instead, their hearts will upon set upon the things of God and Jesus and heaven. Laying up "treasures in heaven" will become their natural desire and direction in life. Jesus' disciples, through habitual practice, learn to do all things for the notice of their heavenly Father, their precious God who "sees what is done in secret," and will, of course, reward them, now and in heaven.

Our goal is to become the kind of people who can "naturally" and easily do the things Jesus taught. What can we do so as to facilitate these inward changes? We embrace the Holy Spirit and we embrace appropriate spiritual disciplines. Solitude, silence, fasting, worship, study of Scripture, and contemplative prayer becomes a way of life. We learn from our failures and sins. We rejoice in the forgiveness and righteousness Jesus has purchased for us. First and foremost though, we appeal to Jesus. We ask Him to teach us how to live life in His kingdom.

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