

"Learning Christ's Word"

Matthew 7:24-29

Discipleship Sermon Series Week 6

This is a copy of my great-grandfather Thomas Benton Upchurch's autobiography appropriately titled "The Story of My Life." This little book was a visible fixture in our home when I was a kid. I loved reading it because it provided in print details about the life of a man I heard so much about growing up. In fact, I still love reading it because the words always remind me of my family's unique southern heritage. And even though he died many years before I was born, this book continues to serve as a connection not only to him but to the entire extended family. It's kind of cool to have such documentation about my great-grandfather's life. I can read about his boyhood days growing up in "a dark corner of Wake County." I can read about his memories of his father, who after only two years of being discharged from the Army after fighting in the Civil War, died when young Thomas was 7 years old. Through his words, I can imagine how it must have been for a 17 year old with nothing but "the little bundle of clothes" under his arms-stepping out into the world to make a place for himself. And I can picture the life in which the rest of the book documents in detail -the life he established, beginning around 1899, in the small town of Raeford, NC- the same town in which I grew up.

And every time I open the book, I can't help but read the forward. Here's what it says: "With love and devotion, I dedicate this little book to my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, hoping that some word or thought contained herein may be of benefit to them in their every-day battle through life, and accomplish the purpose for which it was intended." How cool is that? He wrote this little book with me, my sisters, and our first cousins in mind.

And yes, there are definitely some words and thoughts contained in this little green book that have been of great benefit to me in my every-day battle through life. Thoughts like, "when you accept a job, do your best and don't consider a little over-time out of the question." His words of advice on managing money, borrowing money, spending money, and lending money are

spot-on. Of course there is one thought about money that I kind of laugh at now considering my own situation. He says, "the money a man makes after he passes middle age doesn't do him so much good, as his family should be educated and off his hands by the time he is middle-aged." I guess the possibility one of his middle-aged great-children having a baby never crossed his mind!

In all seriousness, this little book is truly a piece of treasured history for my family. Now my kids and their kids will be able to get a true and detailed glimpse into the life of a prominent Upchurch family member. Hopefully the words in this book from the man himself- the man who built and left such a legacy- will survive for years to come.

The reason I bring this book up today is because we are moving to a new theme in our continuing sermon Series on what it means to be a disciple of Christ and this one is especially important. It is the core discipleship aspect of "learning Christ's Word."

My great-father Thomas gave some sage advice in his book regarding many aspects of life and I'm thankful for it. This is good and helpful information to know, at least for me, because it's connects me to his life. It makes a connection between the past and the present. It provides not only history but context in regards to who I am as an "Upchurch."

So let me ask you something. If you had such a book in your possession, I'm sure you would cherish it but would you read it? Would you actually open the pages and read the words with the hope of gaining a little more insight into your own life and identity? Or would you just skim it every once in a while when you're bored never really truly grasping what it's all about?

Here's the thing.

All of us who confess our faith in Christ have a book way better than this one in our possession. In fact it's way better than any book. It wasn't written by our great-grandfathers or even our grand-fathers. It was written by God our Father. Now I know to some of you, that might sound kind of silly. People wrote these

words right? True enough but God is the author who made it not only happen but made it survive so that we all have access to them today.

You see, he knew that if his children were to know him and believe in him, they would first have to hear him. And that is what happens when we read this book. We don't have to go searching trying to figure out who he is because we have all we need to know about him right here. But these aren't just words about God..These words are alive pointing us to the Messiah, Jesus Christ and he wants us to learn them and do them.

He makes this abundantly clear in our Gospel reading from Matthew. Our reading begins at the conclusion of His well-known *Sermon on the Mount*. These are words all of us need to prayerfully contemplate because what he is telling his disciples and you and me today is critically important if we are to really answer Christ's call to follow him.

Jesus said "everyone who hears these words- his words- and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. He explains that "the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house, but the house did not fall because it has been founded on the rock" (Matt. 7:24-25). Disciples who build their lives on the bedrock of Jesus and his words are secure. But those who hear his words and do not do them? Jesus says they will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand where, "the rain and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell" (vs. 27).

Now when Jesus says a house fell, he means forever. He means eternal separation from God. HELL. These are stern words from Jesus and actually kind of scary words aren't they? Those who hear his words but don't learn and do them will be swept away.

Jesus is drawing a dividing line here and speaking with authority. Either you are with him or you're not. For the disciples, it was Jesus or the religious establishment of the day. For us it is the secure future we are guaranteed as one's who hear his words, learn them and do them no matter what is happening in our lives or in this world. We stand firm in his word as the ultimate authority.

Or, we can take our chances in the shifting sands of the world. A lot of people hear the words of Jesus but "build their houses" on everything but his words. Jesus warns us what will happen when we do that. That house will fall. You know people who have fallen from the faith don't you? I know I do and it pains me. It pains Jesus too.

That's why we as his disciples need to learn his word. Because our saving faith in Jesus has to be alive and eager in order to do what he says. But we can't do what he says until we learn what he says. And how do we learn Jesus' words? Right here in this book. Here is where he teaches us and here is where his words strengthen our faith to the point we actually follow him no matter what.

Many of you know that. For many of you out there not a day goes by when you aren't opening your Bibles and allowing Christ's words to really penetrate your hearts. For others, you might not do it regularly but you are here in worship hearing his words in the liturgy, in the readings, and in the sermon. That's good. Keep it up. But for all of us who confess CHRIST as savior, in order to truly follow Him and protect ourselves from the shifting sands, we must open this book more and more each day. This is the living Word of the God. This is the story of our God who broke into his own creation and lived as a man. And this is story of that man who suffered and died for the sins of the world so that all would have access to the free and eternal gift of life. That's not sand; that's rock solid. And that's what makes this our story as well.

It's all recorded right here and he wants us to learn them because they are the only words that will keep us in the true faith .

If you haven't picked up this book in a while, commit yourselves to doing it today. If you need a starting place, begin with one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Read one completely and then read another until you've read them all. Ask God to guide you along. Trust me, you won't understand everything. I still don't. But over time you will see that this whole book points to our Lord and Savior. And even when the rains fall and floods come and the winds blow and beat on us, we will not fall because our house is built on The rock, Jesus Christ!

Do it on your own; do it as a couple, as a family, with a friend, or with a group of friends but do it! Open the story not only of Christ's life but of your life. Learn Christ's Word and follow him to life eternal. **Amen.**