

November 2, 2014

Matthew 5:1-12

Applying Christ's Word

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Driving down a local road recently, I had to slam on my brakes to avoid an accident. A driver stopped his car right in the middle of the road. He sat there looking at his phone, confused apparently over the directions he was trying to follow from his GPS.

One of the great dangers we face in our modern world are drivers trying to follow their GPS directions. Am I right? How many times have you had a driver suddenly swerve in front of you, or cut you off abruptly, to make a surprise turn? Then, when you pass by, you see that driver looking at a screen. The GPS may be giving good directions, but some drivers aren't very good at following directions.

The same is true for Christians. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us excellent directions for living, but some of his followers – some of us – aren't very good at following his directions.

Jesus expects his disciples to not only learn his words, but to apply them. The Lord wants you and me to live by his words, follow his words, and put them into practice. Applying Christ's word is what his true disciples and followers do.

So when Jesus says things like we read in our Gospel Lesson, "Blessed are the merciful" (vs.7), "Blessed are the pure in heart" (vs. 8), and "Blessed are the peacemakers" (vs. 9), you know what? He wants us to actually do those things! Jesus wants you to be merciful to others. Christ wants me to be pure in heart. Jesus wants us to be peacemakers whenever there's a problem.

Learn his words, then apply them. Practice them. Follow Christ's words. Do them. Simple, right? Obvious!

But the older I get, and the longer that I am a Christian, I find I need to keep reminding myself of this simple, obvious discipleship truth. Maybe you need this reminder, too. We're not supposed to be just reading or hearing these words of Jesus. Our Lord wants us to live them out, to apply them, every single day.

For our own good. These aren't just archaic laws and esoteric theological principles that Jesus is dumping on us. His words, when we live by them, make our lives better, make our families stronger, make our spirits healthier. Christ's words, when applied by disciples like us, bring us joy. They lead us to a sense of purposeful living. These words of Christ can help get our day-to-day living in harmony with our Maker and God – but only when we apply them.

Read with me, please, Jesus' words in Matthew 5:4: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." These words apply to me. In the past week, I've been mourning. One of my uncles died, and I flew out to Illinois to be with my aunt and cousins, and my mom and brothers. We grieved, we lamented, and many tears were shed. But, at the same time, the family was also glad, filled with hope, and confident that our loved one is with the Lord. We cling to that hope not because we wish it to be so. We believe Christ's word about it, as my uncle believed Christ's word. We take Christ's word to heart; and, more important, we are now able to apply Christ's word of comfort to our pain.

Many of you, too, have lost loved ones recently. And most of you, certainly, know how it hurts to let go, how painful it is to see a family member die. Death is a fearsome foe, and mourning is a heavy burden to bear. And I cannot for the life of me imagine how so many people out there face up to it,

those who do not know or trust Christ's words about forgiveness and love, about resurrection and heaven, about eternal life.

There are times in our lives when we absolutely need to apply Christ's words ... times in our lives when nothing else, but Christ's words, can help us. A funeral is one such time. A season of grief and mourning is one such time. "Blessed are those who mourn," says the Lord, "for they shall be comforted."

Oh, how I love those words! Oh, how thankful I am for those words! Oh, how precious to my heart are those words today, for they apply to me! And they do apply, these words of Jesus Christ (*Gospel Lesson*) – and all these words of God (*Bible*) -- to you, too. All of them.

What about this one? What about this word of Christ, from Matthew 5:11, the last one of Christ's Beatitudes? Read it with me slowly, and soak it in. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Blessed are you, he says? Yikes! How do these words apply?

Well, I know that there are Christians in the world today being persecuted, threatened, bullied. In certain countries, especially in the Middle East these days, Christians are an extreme minority, and Christians are under extreme pressure. I'm sure that Jesus' words of blessing are sweet and precious today to the persecuted, and are absolutely applicable.

But not just to those people. Some of you know what it's like to be discriminated against because of your faith, to be excluded because of your morals, to be laughed at or put down when you try to live as a faithful disciple of Christ. It happens in our workplaces. It happens in our schools

sometimes, and in our colleges. It can happen in our social settings, too. Jesus says, "Blessed are you," when that happens to you. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven," Christ tells us.

Friends, all these words of Christ apply to our lives. So learn them. Re-learn them. Keep learning them, and keep applying them. Don't give up.

Today, All Saints Day, we're remembering the saints of God who've gone before us. They're in heaven, and they're holy, not because they were perfect; but because Jesus Christ made them perfect. Saints are forgiven sinners. None of them applied God's Word perfectly. None of them had any secret method for following Christ's directions flawlessly. All of them struggled, all of them failed, all of them made some wrong turns, just like us; but that's where Christ's forgiveness comes in. Saints are forgiven sinners, following in the footsteps of Jesus, learning his word and applying his word.

Just like the saints, Christ's word – our divine GPS -- will get you to heaven. Let's keep learning to follow his directions, and apply his word. Amen.