

Class 205 How to Engage Culture Without Marrying It: Session 5 Full Notes

Session Five: Until He Comes: The Call to Last Days Living

5.1 Building on the rock of Jesus' sayings

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a 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 a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matt. 7:24-27)

And why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not do the things I say? (Luke 6:46)

How should we live? The question grows more urgent as we look around the world and see the proliferation of signs and circumstances which lead many thinking observers to conclude that we are near the end of the age.

How can we effectively engage culture? As was shared at the outset of this course, God's desire is to use the prophetic voice to neutralize what is toxic in our culture. A generation and a world steeped in rationalism and postmodern (i.e. post-Christian) paganism needs to see the power of the Living God and hear His voice. This will require true reformation of those who have already seen his greatness. God must have a people who are willing to not only speak His Word but reflect His character in everything. In order to reach this generation we must determine in our hearts that we will be such a people.

5.1.1. A people established

Jesus taught that building on His sayings will bring stability to the edifice of our lives. Paul said that God has power to establish us according to the Gospel:

Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ... (Rom. 16:25)

Because we have not obeyed the commands of the Lord, our lives are not established but are marked by the same instabilities and inconsistencies as the lives of the people around us. We are often as easily overthrown by the floods as they are.

5.2.2. A people transformed

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:7)

The Gospel not only brings us inner stability but the transformation of character. Later, at the Last Supper, Jesus told us when His words abide in us, we may ask what we will. There is a total agreement of purpose with His purpose, resulting in our moving together with Him in everything. We become His friends, having been given by Jesus a revelation of everything the Father gives to Him.

How few in the Western World are so transformed, despite professing Christ! We must be willing to obey all that Christ has said and to let Him be the subject of our preaching and our pronouncements.

This calls for a new radicalism. The word "radical" comes from the Latin word *radix*, which means "the root." So originally, a radical was one who was willing to go all the way down to the roots. In our day the Church in the West has conformed to the world instead of displaying the power, life and values of another Kingdom.

5.2.3. A people bringing transformation

If any man desires to do [the Father's] will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matt. 5:16)

Jesus says in John 7 that anyone wanting to do God's Will will see that Christ's doctrine is divine in its origin.

There is great power in simply doing the Words of Jesus. When we do, people will see the truth and glory of His Kingdom. But this will mean, again, a radical commitment to obey His words in any and all circumstances.

5.2 Rely on the Holy Spirit

5.2.1. A word to people from Babylon: refuse the arm of the flesh!

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)

This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit," saith the LORD of hosts. (Zech. 4:6)

Some of God's puns are as good as His more obvious material. The well-known Zechariah 4:6 was an encouragement to a leader, yes, but also a word to us all. The name Zerubbabel means "descended from Babylon" or "born in Babylon." Babylon is a symbol of the world system and its suffocating, antichrist power. This word is also a warning to all of us who come from the world and are accustomed to its ways of doing things.

Indeed, when it comes to outreach and witness, the greatest temptation for the modern Christian is to rely on the arm of the flesh.

In his classic work, *Power Through Prayer*, E. M. Bounds discusses the arm of the flesh. His words, written 100 years ago, ring even more true today than then.

WE are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God's method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men....

What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use--men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men--men of prayer.

The Church must refuse to do things according to man's ways and with man's strength. It must learn to see them as not only helpful but actually harmful to the work of God. Harmful because it will create "Ishmaels," and harmful because the effect of such ministry is to train people to become insensitive to the Spirit, and not to feel the necessity of incorporating Him into the work.

5.2.2. Pursue supernatural empowerment

...Be filled with the Spirit... (Eph. 5:18)

As Christians we must seek the empowering of the Lord until we sense it and know it as a real thing in our lives, able to see its effects and its fruit.

The power of God is not simply something to take by faith (to believe it is there because we asked, although that is true in a sense) but something which can and ought to be known as it operates in our lives. It has an effect which is substantial, not something which simply says, "Well, we'll believe that something has happened." Had this been the faith in the days of the Roman Empire, there Word would not have spread as it did.

And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33)

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:4-5)

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

The consistent NT teaching as we know is that supernatural ministry and hearing the Voice of the Lord is not the province of a few apostles, but is available to all believers who will lay hold of God and cry out to Him to make them useful to Him.

5.2.3. Pay the price for full proclamation

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 15:18-19)

...striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily... (Col. 1:29)

There is a level of faithfulness in our ministry where we can say in truth as Paul did that he had fully preached Christ in the world. The greatest and clearest revelation of the Lord possible was effected through Him. Paul had displayed the fullness of Jesus' character as well as His power. He achieved this not only through pressing in to God for supernatural empowerment, but by willing to do what was required in the body and by way of service. The following passage reveals a level of suffering that not all are called to, but which Paul embrace in order to make Christ fully known:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. (2 Cor. 1:23-30)

5.3 Last Days Living

5.3.1. Called to live as dying men

For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life... (2 Cor. 1:8)

...as dying, and, behold, we live... (2 Cor. 6:9)

An important part of last days living is the call to live as dying men. This is not something morbid, but something very freeing. Ironically, accepting the call to live as one dying actually releases God's life through us.

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. (2 Cor. 2:14-16)

To those who value the very temporary things of this world, the Christian's life may seem to be a sort of needless living death; but those who know God and are coming to know Him will sense His life arising out of our lives like a perfume. This happens as our own, narrow self-interest is lost in a vision given by God of His love for others.

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. (Phil. 2:19-21)

5.3.2. Called to be salt and light

Jesus calls us to be salt and light, telling us that we perform those important functions in the world.

As salt, we enhance the good things of life. We enjoy their taste more, yet at the same time there is a recognition that the salt helps.

As light, we bring revelation of the truth. The light has always been a symbol of the Word and of truth. Wherever the Church has faithfully held up the lamp of truth, evil must play the hypocrite instead of working openly. Darkness has had to flee before the proclamation of Jesus and His salvation.

5.3.3. Called to occupy till He comes

And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. (Luke 19:13)

This particular parable is distinct from some of the others which speak of rewards, for in this parable we notice that each servant receives the same "pound" (*mina*). Therefore we can say with some confidence that this doesn't speak to the varying abilities which God gives us, but to the entire scope of our lives – that sense in which we are all equal before God and must all give an account of our faithfulness.

The word "occupy" is a word that has changed its meaning since the King James Version. Vincent's Word Studies says:

The word *occupy* has lost the sense which it conveyed to the makers of the A. V. - that of *using or laying out what is possessed*. An *occupier* formerly meant a *trader*.

The word means to carry on trade, to busy one's self, to improve, to make a profit.

What is Jesus saying? Christians must live in this world in such a way as to:

1. Increase their own effectiveness (profit)
2. Be busy
3. Not grow faint, but work until the very end