

Text: Matthew 22:34-40

Title: "Are We Serious?"

Introduction: As some of you know, I was away from home this week. I got home yesterday from a few days with my Dad down in Florida. If I don't go visit my Dad, I only get to see him for a few hours out of the year. So, that means every once in awhile I have to go down to Florida and eat tangerines in the winter time.

As I was there working on his screened in back porch, I was praying about BMZ Church (Boscobel and Mt. Zion UMCs) and I realized how much I love calling this place 'home'. Taking walks with my Dad and eating meals with Dad and Melba, I found that my conversation always went back to what is happening or what is coming up for BMZ. I talked about the people here and how the people of BMZ had become my brothers and sisters in Christ (remember Jesus answering the people announcing that his mother and brothers had arrived? His response was, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers, but these that I share my faith journey with..." [My paraphrase]).

Okay, brace yourselves everybody. This is going to be the mushy moment of the message ... I realized how much I love and care for you all. I realized how much it affects me when things affect you. It matters to me when things matter to you.

So, here is what I'm getting at. I want nothing more than to celebrate for eternity with you all ... starting today. Now, if we are going to start today, then we need to be striving for "Whole Life"! I desire more than anything that we get to look at each other and wink and know that our joy is 'full'. I want for every one of us to know without a shadow of doubt where we are going when this life ends. I want for every one of us to hear Jesus say—to each of us—"Well done, good and faithful servant! Welcome to Paradise. You have an unrestricted pass to all the attractions."

If that is going to happen, we have to take the God-given steps to experience "**Whole Life**" right now. If you have not heard/read all of the messages from this series, get them. They are available online at www.bmzchurch.org. You can listen to them. You can read my sermon notes/transcript. If you do not have a computer or internet access, you still do not have an excuse. Sarah will be happy to print you off a copy of whatever you missed and if you want to listen to the series, I'm sure we can make that happen too!

Why am I being so adamant about this? Because I love you enough to offer you the steps to REALLY LIVING! This is our last Sunday in this series. Wednesday night at our Ash Wednesday Worship (7:30pm Wednesday), we will wrap up this series and get ready for the next worship series.

Next Sunday we start our journey toward and prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter. Our worship series will be a study of the Lord's Prayer. We pray this prayer every Sunday, but do we listen to the words? We pray this prayer every Sunday, but does it really mean anything to us today? We pray this prayer, but how does it apply to my daily life? Be here to find out. *By the way, we are going to break tradition and actually change the name of the prayer. Want to know why? See you Wednesday night!*

At this time, I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other you will find an outline of how we are going to approach our commitments, complete with fill-in-the-blanks. My hope is that you will take time to write down what you hear and see today and that this will help you remember what you've learned about WHOLE LIFE God's way. Remember the Asian proverb, "The faintest ink is more lasting than the strongest memory." This is important stuff – grab a pen!

Let's get right at our Scripture. We are in the Book of Matthew. Jesus is in Jerusalem. He's already made his grand entrance to the waving of the palm branches and people shouting about the Messiah's arrival. So it is just days now before his crucifixion and Jesus is in the Temple teaching. Before where we pick up today's reading, Jesus has been bantering with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now, the Pharisees and Sadducees are rivals, but once they had a common foe, Jesus, they decided to work together. Now, both groups of religious leaders are trying to trap Jesus into saying something to incriminate himself. They want to get rid of him. He is pressing in on their business (Jesus has already cleared the Temple of the merchants – religious leaders got a cut.). The Sadducees just had a turn and Jesus made them look pretty foolish, now it's the Pharisees turn to try to trap Jesus. Listen:

READ MATTHEW 22:34-40 NOW AND PRAY!

What Jesus just taught the Pharisees is all we really need to know how to be committed to Jesus Christ. So, now the question is, "How committed *are we* to Jesus Christ?" or "How committed *will we be* to Jesus Christ?"

Here's a good test to see how committed we really are? Do you love God with everything you've got? IF YOU DO, you will love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. Remember, the definition of "neighbor" here is, "Whoever moves in next door" or "Whoever you find next to you in life". (Look to your right and your left and say, "Howdy neighbor!") What Jesus says here is, "If you don't love the people I put in your life—no matter how much you don't like how they look, talk or act—you don't love God!"

Get that? Two commandments ... Love God and Love Neighbor ... Your "neighbors" are God's kids. You can't claim to love God if you don't love His kids!

Last week we talked about being committed to Jesus Christ with our finances ... not an option, but a responsibility to handle our money the way God wants us to. You don't; don't expect WHOLE LIFE! This week, we are going to talk about being committed in the way we give gifts...

We are going to talk about *Three Gifts* that we are responsible to give our "neighbors" (to show them LOVE) if we are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord. Only when we are totally committed to Jesus Christ as Lord will we experience WHOLE LIFE!

- I. **Give the Gift of Help** – Four Men
 - A. Remember the story from Mark 2? Jesus is back in Capernaum (HQ) after being out around Galilee teaching and healing. Word has spread about the power of Jesus' teaching about life and the miracles of

healing. Now, he comes back to Capernaum and he is teaching in the home he is staying in. The place is packed! There are people all through the house ‘crushing’ each other. There are rows of people surrounding the house listening to Jesus through the windows and doors.

- B. Then, while Jesus is teaching, the roof of the house starts to fall apart. Pieces of the clay and manure and grass start to fall in on the guests. Soon there is a hole in the roof and everyone sees four guys peering down into the house. “Okay, Ralph, we’re good. We are right above Jesus. We are going to lower you in now.” The Scripture says that they lowered a paralyzed man in through the roof to Jesus.
- C. If we are going to give the gift of HELP, we need to learn Four Things from these Four men (v.3):
1. ***Be Aware*** – How many times do we walk past paralyzed people on their mats and we are not even aware that they are there?
 - a. Are we sensitive to the needs of the people around us?
 - b. Are we aware that some people right in front of our faces need to be taken to Jesus?
 2. ***Be Tough*** – I bet those 4 guys had to deal with Ralph first before they took him to Jesus. “Ralph, we’ve come to get you and take you over to the house where Jesus is staying.”
 - a. Can you hear the response? “Oh, don’t go to any bother ... I don’t need you to do that ... I’m fine ... PUT ME DOWN!”
 - b. There are some people who do not know what’s best for them.
 - c. Grab your 2x4 and let them know in no uncertain terms how much they need help, counseling, assistance, and Jesus Christ!
 3. ***Be Tender*** – Even though they were taking Ralph to Jesus whether he liked it or not, they had to be gentle with him and carry him carefully. They had to lower him carefully in front of Jesus.
 - a. We have to learn to strap a pillow to our 2x4!
 - b. As tough as we have to be and as many people that we would think need a 2x4 to get their attention, we have to be loving and kind as well.
 - c. Watch how Jesus did ministry ... tough and tender.
 4. ***Be Intentional*** – If we are going to help people, we can’t have an “oh, well” attitude! We need a determination about us that is undeniable.
 - a. Picture those 4 men hauling Ralph to the house and seeing that the crowd was ‘crushing’ each other and there was no way to get to Jesus. They could have waited until the meeting was over or the crowds cleared, but they didn’t.

- b.* They found a way to get Ralph to Jesus right now! They were determined enough to climb up on that roof and start digging through the manure to get their friend to Jesus! Oh, by the way, our Scripture is polite by calling it a clay roof, but chances are the roof was held together with manure...
- c.* If we Love God, we are going to Love His Children enough to intentionally dig through the crap and get them in front of Jesus Christ.
- d.* Do you know what some of the manure is? It's helping people where they are at. You can't bring someone to church until they trust you and know that you love them... If they have physical (healing, feeding) needs or emotional needs (Samaritan woman at the well), we help with that first. They see we love them and trust us about needing Jesus in their lives.

II. **Give the Gift of Truth** – Bono

- A. You all ever heard of a guy named Bono? For those of you who don't, Bono is the lead man for the rock band, U2. He has been an international figure for almost 30 years and has fans from more than one generation. In an interview with Michka Assayas in 2005, the interviewer asked Bono about his faith. Bono's response was: "I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity."
- B. Remember, this is Bono. He has an image to keep up. BUT, that's not all ... Assayas replied, "The Son of God who takes away the sins of the world. I wish I could believe in that." Bono answered again ... "The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven." (*Bono: In Conversation With Michka Assayas, 2005*)
- C. A world-famous musician just gave a journalist the Gospel. Do you know why? Because he knows I Peter 3:15 ... ¹⁵ *Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.*¹
 - 1. Bono was ready to share at any moment what he knew of Christ as Lord of his life.
 - 2. Some of us struggle to do this, because we think that everyone has a right to figure out their own "truth". What right do we have to share what we believe ... maybe they don't want to hear our truth?

¹*Holy Bible: New Living Translation.* 1997 (1 Pe 3:14). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.

3. Well, if Jesus is Lord in our lives, then we probably need to hear what Jesus has to say about Truth. In John 14, Thomas and the other disciples are confused about Who Jesus really was and Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one goes to the Father except by me.”
4. If we know that, and Jesus is Lord, then we have something to share. BUT STAN, I don’t know what to say!
5. The easiest way to talk about a faith in Jesus is to share your own experience. If Jesus has transformed your life; share that. Example: “My life used to be like this _____, but then I gave my life to Christ and now it’s like this _____.”
6. People will connect to that truth in your life. No one can argue what has happened to you...

III. **Give the Gift of Love** – Love is... Jesus!

- A. It’s hard to love your neighbor if you don’t give the gift of LOVE!
- B. Ever wonder what TRUE LOVE looks like?
- C. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth what Love looked like to him ... he wrote, ⁴*Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud⁵ or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.* ⁶*It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.* ⁷*Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*²
- D. Do you know what Paul was writing? He was writing his observations of Jesus. These things that he writes are characteristics of Jesus Christ ... our part as Christians is to be more like Jesus...
- E. If we are going to make a difference in the lives around us, we have to be patient ... kind ... not conceited ... not proud ... not rude ... not jealous, etc.
- F. “Love does not demand its own way.” It’s not about me!
- G. “Love never gives up ... endures through every circumstance.”

If we are going to impact this world (it needs it!) for Jesus Christ—in other words, if we are going to call ourselves “Christians”—we have to give the gifts of Help, Truth and Love! If we are going to experience WHOLE LIFE, this is what we do.

Don’t you just have a deep desire to see your “neighbors” know the Jesus that you do?

Wednesday night (7:30) = We are changing the name of the Lord’s Prayer...

Let’s Pray!

Special thanks to Kirk Nowery and his book, 360 Degree Stewardship for outlines and ideas.

²*Holy Bible: New Living Translation. 1997 (1 Co 13:3). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.*