

Sunday, June 27, 2021

## **May I come in...to the Study?**

**(Message 3; Series: My Heart, Christ's Home)**  
**(Matthew 7:21-27)**

### **Scripture:**

*<sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’*

*<sup>24</sup>“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup>The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup>But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup>The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

### **Message:**

**Two thousand years ago in a remote part of the world, an obscure carpenter turned teacher walked along the shore of a lake (maybe on a lovely day like this).** There were two men fishing, one named Peter, one named Andrew; the teacher said, *“Follow me.”* They dropped their nets and followed him!

The three of them encountered two more fishermen, brothers, named James and John. This teacher looked at them and said, *“Follow me.”* They left their boats and nets and followed him!

The teacher was Jesus. I've always wondered what else Jesus might have said or what these men might have already known. It is hard to imagine a (complete) stranger coming up and saying, *“Doug, follow me”* and I would drop everything - my vocation (life's work), my home (all my possessions), and my wife/family/friends (all my relationships) - to follow a man who is just going around saying, *“Follow me.”*

Those who said “yes” experienced high adventure, transformative learning, poverty, suffering, failure, a new identity, deep meaning, eternal hope,

persecutive and physical death (Truth is everyone is going to die; the question is, "Have you found something worth living and dying for?"). They did!

Others may have said "no" to His invitation – maybe for security reasons, to maintain their comfort level, or for fear of taking a risk - we don't know. If they did, we never heard from or about them.

**A few weeks ago we introduced this series: "My *Heart, Christ's Home*" (based on a little booklet by Robert Munger; make sure you get a copy).** Last week we started in "the nursery" - a room we added (it's not in Munger's book).

This morning, we're in what Munger calls "*The First Room we looked at together...*" This "first room" is the **study** ("Let's call it the *study* of the mind") (Today we might call it our "home office". But Munger calls it the "study" so we'll be using that term) It is a place filled with books, magazines, media and pictures; it is filled with the things that fill and influence our heart, mind, and soul.

Munger says the "study" is "*the **control room** of the house*" because as this room goes, so goes the **whole** house.

**Here is the thing - you decide what books are on your shelf, what magazines are on your table, what media you watch and what pictures you'll place on your walls.** We need to choose these carefully, because not only is our life impacted by our decisions, but our eternity is also determined by them.

This morning, Jesus steps into the study of **our** heart to review **our** choices...

## **DISCIPLE**

**A while ago, this same Rabbi, Jesus, gave a talk on a little mountain, about how one's "study" should be decorated.** He talked about life with God, in the presence of God, in God's favor, in God's care and about God's forgiveness that's available to anybody, to you, to me and to people the world has written off.

He said that if our "study" (i.e., our control room) is properly decorated, we have nothing ultimately to worry about, nothing to be afraid of, and nothing to be embarrassed about when he comes in.

Then Jesus said **everyone** has to decide: are you going to be his **disciple**? Will you take all the material you are reading and looking at that is not "*true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy*" (cf. **Philippians 4:8**) and toss it out? Will you fill your empty shelves "*with the **Scriptures** and meditate on them day and night?*" Will you hang a full-sized portrait of Jesus in the **middle** of the room?

**A lot of people seem to be a bit fuzzy about the word “disciple.”** Some people think the mission of the Church is to make more **Christians** (i.e., people who believe in Jesus, believe certain things about Jesus, and trust Jesus because they believe these things are going to get them into heaven when they die).

But Jesus never asked anyone to “*become a Christian.*” Truth is, calling yourself a Christian is fairly easy; billions of people who know about Jesus have. (The word “Christian” is only found in the Bible only three times - always as a nickname for the disciples or early church members).

The mission of the Church (cf. the Great Commission) is to make **more and better disciples** (learners, students, apprentices, followers). The word “disciple” is used 269 times in the Bible. There is nothing vague, mysterious or fuzzy about it. But it is not easy to be a disciple.

**If you’re a learner, a student, a follower, a disciple - you know it.** If you want to learn to golf, write computer programs, or do brain surgery, you become a student and fill your *study* with appropriate Ted Talks, YouTube videos, magazines, manuals and textbooks to help you reach your goal. You choose someone to **mentor** you, to teach you, to **learn** from, to be your model. And you practice and **practice** and practice.

If one asks, “*Are you learning to golf?*” you don’t say, “*I’m not sure*” You know! You may not be a *good* student, but you do know if you’re a student.

The “study” question is: Will you follow Jesus? Will you be his disciple? Will you choose above everything else to follow Jesus; will you identify with him; will you do what he says; will you live as he would live?

Being a disciple doesn't necessarily mean you are immediately a good disciple; truth is you can be a really bad disciple - many of us are. Half the time we see Jesus with his disciples, he is telling them what bad disciples they are: “*Oh you of little faith. Could you not stay awake and pray with me for an hour? Get behind me, Satan. How long must I put up with you? I’ve been with you a long time and you still don’t know who I am!*”

But that doesn't seem to matter that so much to Jesus. Jesus is usually focused on our growing (i.e., our studying).

Teachers may put students into different reading groups based on their ability and sometimes even name the groups after birds hoping to hide that fact. But you tell: There are eagles, robins, orioles, pigeons - *don’t brag about being a pigeon!*

The goal is to learn! The goal is to **grow!** To make **progress.** It doesn’t even matter how long it takes. All the disciples started in the “pigeon” group. It’s okay. The main thing is disciples have **intentionally chosen** to be with Jesus,

to be dedicated student, and to learn from him how to be more like him, and to do what he says to do.

**If you're an intentional learner, a follower, a disciple - you want to learn, you want to do what the teacher says, you want to "obey."**

**Obedience** is a bad word today; it is less and less a compliment to be called *obedient*. Today it's considered a compliment if the teacher tells you, "*Your child is a leader, a risk taker, gifted, talented...*" but *obedience* today is for dogs. Obedience suggests being compliant, robotic, or a weak-willed conformist (Jesus had none of these things in mind).

A disciple seeks to **obey** Jesus with creativity, imagination, initiative, discernment, boldness, passion and joy as God begins to **transform** their heart - beginning in the study. When our study gets cleaned and redecorated, obedience actually begins to flow quite naturally, quite freely. When we are totally focused on Jesus, we can withstand the world's great pressures and walk boldly side-by-side with the most magnificent person to ever live.

**At the end of his mountain talk, Jesus again says we have to decide** to choose the narrow gate (his way) or the broad gate (any way you want to go); be a good tree (bearing fruit of grace, love, and generosity) or a fruitless tree (left with pride, bitterness and greed).

As Jesus looks around our study, he knows no reason why we wouldn't do what he said to do - because he knows what he says is best for us. He expects an obedience that is not rote **compliance**, mechanical, or robotically follows the letter of the law. Obedience to Christ, requires a close relationship with him, conscious and continuous spiritual **discernment**, and a commitment to obedience and perseverance. Truth is, there is no good reason not to do what he asks us to do.

Imagine standing in your *study* with Jesus trying to explain why you didn't want to redecorate; "books" aren't on your shelf and reading list and why you never really intend to change or do what he asks. Jesus is not one to accept selective obedience, half-heartedness, or good intentions. There's a line in the *Big Book of AA* that says, "*Half measures avail us nothing!*"

To underscore the **urgency** of this decision, Jesus ends his mountain message with a story.

## **DISCIPLESHIP**

**Jesus actually tells two little stories designed to be told side by side** (we'll look at the similarities and find where they differ. Where they differ is where Jesus provides the teaching.

First, everyone builds a **house**. Everyone lives their **life**. (This is not a variable). Everyone is forming their **character**; everyone is nurturing (feeding) their **soul** - intentionally or by accident, with or without God's Word and help.

We do this by the choices we have and the **decisions** we make, by how we spend our time and with whom; by what we think, say, do, read and watch. We often try to put these things off - "Should I care for my body? Should I work on my marriage? Should I address my anger or my drinking? Should I get involved in ministry at my church?" Often our "**non-deciding**" becomes our decision. That's just how it works.

Everyone has a study (center of their life). You can't abdicate your responsibility to furnish it.

Second, everyone faces **storms**. This is not about **storm-avoidance**. Storms are everywhere. You can't avoid storms if you have money, if you're really smart, or if you're famous. Even if you have a lot of faith in God and pray boldly, storms will come. We all face them: Heart attack, cancer, automobile accident, bankruptcy, divorce, infertility or the death of a child.

We know storms come into every life and yet, they still surprise us. We also think we should be able to handle whatever comes our way. Storms reveal the strength of the **foundation** of one's home (i.e., one's heart).

Jesus isn't talking about "**storms**" in general; he has a specific storm in mind; "storms" in the Bible refers to God's **judgment**. God doesn't want his world or our life (i.e., our study) to go on being messed up. He wants to remodel it - gut it, and redo things right.

Maybe you remember the story of Noah and the storm he faced. It was an expression of God's judgment on a messed-up world. That's the idea behind these stories.

The Bible says we are "*appointed*" to live once, and we are "*appointed*" to die once. We didn't get here because we chose to be here; we were *appointed* to live and die, and we will be held accountable for how we live our life in-between.

The variable in this story is the **foundation** you decide to build your life on. Either you build your life as a disciple of Jesus (seeking to do what Jesus says) or you build on your own attitudes, actions, relationships and resources.

What are you going to do with your study? What are you going to put on your shelves and wall?

We like variety - a little of this and a little of that. A little surrender, a little devotion, a little generosity, a little spiritual stuff, a little secular stuff and a

little off-color stuff (on a hidden shelf) and a little help now and then from God. The problem is - that's like living in half a house; it doesn't work.

**Jesus describes the options as wise and foolish (rather than good or bad).** Jesus knows us; he knows most people don't usually intentionally **choose** to be bad; they just make foolish decisions that turn out **bad**.

Parents know this - yet they persist in asking their children the "why" question. Why did you shove Flintstone's vitamins up your brother's nose? Why did you stick a light bulb in your mouth so big you can't get it out? Why did you cut your sister's hair until she's bald just to make a bird's nest? Kids always respond the same: *"I don't know. I just did!"* (Foolish - not evil)

Why do you build your house on the sand? *"I don't know. I just did!"* Why did you have an affair? Watch pornography? Get greedy? Gossip about your neighbor? Make that racist comment? Gamble your money away?

No one getting married plans on getting divorced. No one plans on going to hell. It just happens. Rock or sand? **Follow** him or not? What's in your **Study**?

## DECISION

**As important as this decision is, it shouldn't be made hastily or emotionally. We should consciously count the cost. There are two costs we all need to count...**

First, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, count the **cost** of **discipleship**. There will be a cost to following Jesus. Do you know what it means to surrender, to renovate your study, to turn your heart and life over to Jesus? Usually, it means **giving up** some things; usually, it means **adding** some other things.

It's not about just grudgingly following a tighter set of rules and restrictions. It's about identifying closer with Jesus; about **re-arranging** our practices, relationships, and rhythms that bring me **closer** to him; it's about digging into his Word: memorizing, studying, meditating...and doing it...

Like in marriage and parenting, you don't always know the cost until you jump in.

Second, count the cost of **non-discipleship**. What will it cost not to surrender to Jesus? Going it alone often brings aloneness, isolation, enslavement to ego, fear, followed by a meaningless and eternal death.

The cost of discipleship is quite **small** when compared to the cost of non-discipleship.

**So now, as Munger writes, "Jesus walks in with a "full sized portrait of himself. 'Hang this centrally,' he says." So will you?**

Would you rather have this **Jesus** and give up everything else in the **world** or have everything in this **world** and give up this **Jesus**? Would you rather be cleansed and forgiven or live with the guilt and regret of all the foolish stuff you've done in your life? Would you rather live free in obedience to Jesus or be a slave to your desires for money, sex, safety, success or reputation? Would you rather be a small part of God's great plan for his world or be king of your own one-member kingdom?

Have you decided - not just to be a Christian or have your ticket punched to heaven, but to be a follower, a fully devoted disciple of Jesus? Are you willing to clean up your study? To throw out **everything** that is not "**true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy**"?

Are you willing to fill your study with God's Word - with the **Scripture**, hiding his Word in your heart? Are you willing to hang his **picture** in the middle of your heart and **center** your **whole** life around Him?

**Prayer/Song: "Into my heart, into my Heart, come into my heart..."**

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