

Three Lessons from the Master

✠ **Settle matters quickly.** (vv.21-26)

✠ **Amputate sin from your life.** (vv.27-32)

✠ **Speak simple truth.** (vv.33-37)

In the name of Jesus, **the Master** Teacher from God, dear fellow disciples of our Lord:

One of my neighbors was really upset with his teenager. Usually he's very patient, but his son was driving on his little "donut" spare and got stuck in the snow plow pile at the end of the driveway. "Get a new tire! I told you that!" his dad shouted. The tiny tire was just too low in the snow not to get stuck. I wonder if his dad knew how hard some of the neighbors tried all day to push him out.

Some lessons in life can be learned the hard way. But in our spiritual life, we only have this one time of grace on earth before we face the Almighty Judge. Some people think they can get ready by reading Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. But that's like driving on your "donut" spare. Jesus preached this famous sermon to "**His disciples**" (5:1) not unbelievers. It's not about how to drive yourself to heaven. It's why we need to trust in Jesus as our Savior from sin. Let's learn **Three Lessons from the Master**.

✠ **Settle matters quickly.** (vv.21-26)

Look in the mirror. Are you a murderer? "No way!" we'd say. But our holiness won't hold us any higher than boy's dinky spare. Jesus wants to help us disciples stand tall in His holiness. So first He has to teach us how low we are by nature. In God's eyes, our hearts are guilty of murder even if we never killed anyone. Anger in the heart or calling someone names as far as God is concerned puts Jesus' own disciples in danger of judgment. Calling someone a "*fool*" puts you in the grip of hell.

This is so serious that our Lord Jesus takes us right to the altar where our gifts are given. Do you realize God does not even want unrepentant offerings? If you sinned against your fellow Christian, have you tried to be reconciled? Our Lord and **Master** says, "*If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*" Jesus does not just want our money. He wants our heart. Since this is true of our offerings, can you see why we need to repent before we take Lord's Supper? Don't leave problems hanging out there. **Settle matters quickly.**

Enough trouble comes to Christians without being stubborn and argumentative. God says He will let civil authorities deal with us if we fail our **Lessons from the Master**. Remember how kind Jesus was to His enemies. He yielded everything except God's Word. He'd rather suffer and die than dishonor His heavenly Father. In fact, Jesus preferred to suffer death in our place for all our failures to **Settle matters quickly**. No blood but His could wash our sins away. That cleansing flood has left us so clean that when we die, we will hear Him say as to the dying thief, "*Today you will be with me in paradise.*" (Luke 23:43)

✠ **Amputate sin from your life.** (vv.27-32)

Any farmer raising sons knows that more dangerous than the equipment is the foolishness of youth and the carelessness of age. I remember shop teachers missing fingers from trying to teach safety to us kids. Talking and operating at the same time is dangerous. Likewise this life surrounded by sin.

Jesus says, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" Surrounded by what was once considered pornography, our Lord says it would be better to gouge out an eye or amputate your hand if they lead you into sin. One-eyed in heaven is better than 20-20 in hell.

As far as we know, none of Jesus' disciples ever found it necessary to gouge out an eye or cut off their hand. They understood this second of today's **Lessons from the Master**. **Amputate sin from your life.** Lustful thoughts can destroy a marriage and injure our spouse. The original Greek (v.32), does not victimize the injured wife twice by making her *"to become an adulteress"* (NIV84). A better translation would be, *"Everyone who divorces his wife, except for the fact that she has been sexually unfaithful, causes her to be looked upon as an adulteress, and whoever marries a divorced woman is looked upon as an adulterer."* (NETNT) God wants us to honor our marriage vows as we honor our God.

Sins of the heart are unavoidable. Jesus' kindness to *The Woman Caught In Adultery* helps. Self-righteous religious leaders wanted to make Jesus look bad by condemning or excusing her. But the Righteous Judge is also the friend of sinners. Jesus said to them, *"If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."* The accusers melted away until Jesus was left alone with her. *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir." "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."* (John 8:1-11) God's mercy and forgiveness in Christ give the desire and the courage to **Amputate sin from your life.** God gets at the heart and then in the mouth:

✠ **Speak simple truth.** (vv.33-37)

A woman told me her boyfriend insisted it's okay with God if he swears. Where he got that idea, nobody knows. Jesus says, *"Do not swear at all."* **Speak simple truth.** In court like Jesus or for an oath of office, then God says, *"Keep the oaths you have made to the Lord."* Otherwise, *"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."*

Speak simple truth in prayer. Martin Luther noted: "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair." Temptations come as surely as birds keep flying in the sky. But learning our **Lessons from the Master**, God's grace powers our prayers. If you see a handsome man or a beautiful woman, thank God for His creation. Ask God to bless them with honor in their life. **The Master** Jesus Christ loves to see we've learned our **Lessons** well.

So if you're a passenger on a plane, how many times would you let the pilot scrape the ground? Once, twice, three times? You could have titles and designations like, brush it once, you're "Nicky." Twice, you're "Naughty." You're once, twice, three times a "Laggard." No matter what you call it, it's still a crash. No matter what you call the pilot, he still failed to bring his passengers safely home. When it comes to planes, trains and automobiles, we don't get to leave little engine parts scattered across the landscape. Why do we think little sins are okay with God? That if we just call them something else, God won't mind? But who can help crashing into sin constantly? And who can love God whose Law condemns every misdeed in mind or heart as punishable by death eternal? Where could we run? Where could we hide from God who is *"a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12:29)?

It's hard to imagine here in the "Land of 10,000 (frozen) Lakes," but fire danger will come again to the vast deserts and open prairie out West. A spark from tractor exhaust or lightning can start a grass fire to destroy millions of acres. For people in ranch country there is a way to escape when you can't run and you can't hide. Start a backfire. Burn a place in the grass to stand safely as the fire races by.

God has warned us that on Judgment Day this world will be destroyed by fire. In mercy God has also provided us a place where we can safely stand. Here He has already poured out His white-hot anger over our sin. Here it is safe to kneel near the cross of Jesus Christ. Our Savior has already paid the punishment we deserve. Jesus Christ is our backfire. With Him we stand in safety as the fire of God's wrath passes us by. When Jesus comes again in glory, God's gift of faith will shine in us. Christ won't come as our Judge to destroy us but rather as our Savior, to welcome us home to heaven.¹

Three Lessons from the Master – in His love we gladly learn and live in Him today. Amen.

¹ Adapted from *Preach the Word*, Westendorf, James, ed. Vol. 4, No. 3, January/February 2001, p. 3.