

Priorities In Our Lives

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[0 : 00] Father, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.

Jesus, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.

Still, I adore you. Lay my life before you. How I love you.

Matthew 11, chapter 20. He began to upvraise the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

Woke you, Forrest and Woke you, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

[1 : 39] But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. Now, this is a very stern picture of Gideon.

And it's a picture of judgment simply on the basis that Christ had taught them, Christ had performed mighty works in them, but basically they had rejected him and rejected what he had done.

And the significance of who he was had escaped them. So, though we have the record of some of his works in those cities, they weren't particularly impressed.

The whole thing was a picture really of judgment, and a very strong picture of judgment, too. Sodom and Gomorrah, the two sort of horror cities of the Old Testament in terms of their gross immorality, were reckoned to be better off than those cities which had experienced the teaching and ministry of Jesus and had rejected him.

And the same thing is true for us as a parish. It's harder to think. It's hard to think of a parish which among us as the congregation have been given more.

[3 : 45] It would just be almost impossible to imagine. And what has this brought us to?

Has it brought us to pride and to self-sufficiency and arrogance? Or has it brought us, in some measure, to repentance?

Well, I don't know. I think that's, in a sense, the ninth edge, the razor's edge that we're on as to what we've done with all that we've been given as a parent.

And you see, good old Gene Thomas has been telling us really good things. good things. But there is always the fact that we are responsible for what we do with them.

And, you see, what happened to Chorazin and to these places was that they were in a place of real responsibility because of Christ's ministry to them.

[4 : 55] And I think there is an element in this story of what you might call depression and discouragement, if it's imaginable, on the part of Jesus Christ.

He said, if this had been done in any other city, at any other place, that city would have turned in sackcloth and ashes and in repentance to do the will of God.

But you've ignored it, and you haven't paid any attention at all. And so, it's a very strong picture of Deceme. But it's also a beautiful picture because Christ understands, and I think he's teaching us to understand, that in the midst of our proud cities and in the midst of all the things that men boast about and men rely upon, there is something else happening.

And it's that other thing that's happening that really makes life at St. John's very exciting indeed.

Because I think it's happening there.

My impression is what it is in a good way. So let me go on. You've had the bed and it seems to go. Verse 25.

[6 : 23] At that time, Jesus declared, I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to the children, to the little ones, to the baby.

That this is the purpose of God. That somehow the reality of the kingdom escapes the wise and the understanding people of the world and goes right home to the children so that they see and

acknowledge the kingdom.

They recognize. and I just think that this is important. This is how God has chosen to make his kingdom known.

Things that are hidden from the wise and understanding are revealed to the children, to the little ones. He goes on to say how all this happens.

He says, Father, all things have been delivered to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

[8 : 01] So the only way we can really know the person of the Lord Jesus is as the Father makes him known to us. And no one can really know the Father except as Jesus makes him known to us.

So that really in a sense is the secret of how God reveals himself to us, how he reveals Jesus Christ to us.

That this is, if you want, a supernatural work of God which he is able to do in our hearts by his grace, that he's able to, Jesus is able to reveal the Father to us and the Father is able to reveal Jesus to us and we come to know him.

And somehow it's the thing that Dean has been talking about so much that this happens to people, that it's a kind of, it's something which happens in a person's life and it's, it's quite inexplicable in a way.

You suddenly see, you suddenly understand, yeah, that's what it's all about. That's how it works. That's what I'm involved in. That's what it means.

[9 : 35] That's what I've always known but never really understood. And that this is the experience of the wise and the understanding of the world in a sense beat their brains out and they can make no sense whatever of this person Jesus.

And then suddenly the Father reveals the Son and the Son reveals the Father and you begin to understand what it's all about and you suddenly say, oh, so that's what life's all about.

That's where the meaning starts. that's what makes sense of this aeons.

You know that fellow H.L. Mencken who was a very satirical fellow and said that life is like being a fly going on a fly who's on a fly wheel that's going around at 10,000 revolutions per minute and that that it goes faster and faster and faster and you're in it.

Finally, you're just thrown off. He said that's what life's about. You know, that there just isn't any meaning and a lot of people sense that kind of reality in life and that's the wise and understanding people not understanding the reality of the kingdom.

[11 : 06] And so Jesus says in a very practical invitation to people like you and me he says come unto me and this is you see this comes at the end of this if you want to get involved in it.

He says come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly and heartfelt and you will find rest for your soul for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

And it's it's that very gracious invitation of Jesus Christ to us to come to him and learn from him because he desires to be able to teach us.

Now what led me to thinking about these verses is that all of you have your private agenda and you have laid your private agenda aside for the week and for the weekend but by this afternoon or this evening you will be opening it up again and seeing what you have to do this week and what's going to claim priority in your life and where you have to be and what you have to see and who you have to see and what you have to do and suddenly the private agenda of your life will begin to take over and by the time you're back in Vancouver you'll be up tight again ready to go and the agenda of this weekend will just be a happy memory now somehow I think of that in terms of perhaps what we are as a parish and I want just to illustrate this to you by showing you some of the books in my life

[13 : 27] I think one of the fundamental problems of St. John's is that we've created this as the most important book in the parish and in the life of the parishioners and if we can get at this book then our problems are all solved and we spend a lot of time on it and we have a vast periphery of people in the parish who would probably never come to Parksville or at least not in their present state of mind and who regard St. John's as a magical kind of society that can guarantee them certain indefinable benefits which benefits accrue to them in response to the number they write and this slot right here now that works two ways you know one is that it gives them a kind of false sense of security and it creates a problem for me as a minister because I don't make it my business to know what they wrote there and they make it their business to think that I know what's there and

that I should be able to respond to them accordingly since the contract has been drawn and they've signed their name to it and they have certain expectations that arise of it so this kind of basis for life in the parish is an extremely difficult one and it destroys people because it creates an illusion and it creates an unreality and it creates entirely the false kind of parent so that let me say of course there is a place there is another kind of book and probably we sign away more of ourselves in this book than we even do in this book and this is the book which keeps the time that's left to you and how you're going to use it now I don't want to advertise this particular type of diary but it does have over each day which I'm only paying a little bit of attention to sometimes but it has at the top of the column before the day begins it has dominant in other words what is the dominant time commitment for that day what's the one thing around which everything else is going to happen and so you're supposed to write down in the diary of the commitment of your time and say well now this is the dominant thing for today and it probably is important now again as Gene illustrated well to us that for a lot of people the church is asking for time that they haven't got and the church is so organized and so structured that serious involvement in Christian life demands a time commitment for next to useless activities which nevertheless produce some kind of spiritual benefit and so you are encouraged to waste your time in a godly and spiritual way on the grounds

that some way that will again benefit you in the long run it's pretending that time is entirely made up of eternity and that you just give yourself to useless and foolish activities for a lot of the time and somehow that works out and of course everybody in a sense pays lip service to that concept but in the hard reality of their lives they go away saying well if that kind of time commitment is required then there is no place in my life for the church because I simply haven't got that kind of time and so people see the church so often and I think that we really have to see renewal in our church in terms of helping people to understand that that's not the book on which the church runs and basically this isn't the book on which the church runs they have their place but the book on which the church runs is this one and for them to understand what

Christian life and the church is all about what the kingdom of God is all about then this is the book that we need to share with the whole of the parish and if we get our priorities wrong so that they suspect we're asking them to look at this book or to look at this book and not to become seriously involved in this book then the whole thing comes out backwards and you get into quite a lot of trouble and you see at the heart of this book is that verse in which Christ said these words come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will refresh you take my yoke upon you and learn of me and you will find renewal and refreshment now what

I think it means is that this book will show you how to use this book and how to use this book so that it doesn't so that it makes some sense so that it's part of something that is significant in your life and that what needs to happen for us as a parish is that we really need to gather people around that invitation and as Jean has been so eloquently expressing it that's what needs to happen in the circumstances of our lives that somehow this book can become more central this is the book by which we learn about one another this is the book by which we learn about God this is the book by which we learn about the kingdom this is the book that establishes what is to be dominant in our lives from day to day so that we are constantly caught up in the basic contract which Jesus offers to us in these verses that we can learn from him so that as we are working together with one another as we are involved in the private agenda of our lives we are in a unending learning situation so that every person we encounter every situation we encounter everything we do has to it the dimension of being taught by the word how to cope with it how to understand it how to come to grips with it and that every situation in our lives is not just the dull unrolling of the day by day of our lives but becomes an exciting encounter whereby

Christ says I thank you that you haven't revealed it to the wise and understanding but that you've revealed it to babes those who are willing to be taught by you in every situation and I tell you that only because I just think it's so it's so desperately important because what we have to do is to bring into the private and personal agenda of our lives the teaching of Jesus Christ and there is as you know there's a whole lot of things that we're anxious to learn and anxious to understand and anxious to come to grips with about ourselves and who we are and where we're going and why we react the way we do and why we're the kind of person we are and why we're in the position we are and what we do with the privileges we have but in all those situations there has got to be the dominance of

[23 : 11] Christ's commitment to be teaching and for us to take upon ourselves the yoke of learning from him in that situation and if this is the dominant book and if this process of being in a learning situation is true for us then we have a lot we can do for one another by helping one another to come to terms with what it is that Jesus wants to teach us from the book and that this is the in a sense the essential book out of which the church takes its shape and finds its ministry and fulfills its purpose within the kingdom I have a special burden which I want to relate to because it gets up it's a kind of spiritual symptom

I had a neighbor of the church you know how Christianity is strong on your neighbor loving your neighbor and doing unto your neighbor and all those things well I have discovered that there is a whole series of neighbors around St.

John's Church who have the most active hostility towards us as a congregation than you can imagine now mostly they don't say anything and if you behave I guess we're alright but basically there's a lot of hostility and that says to me that we're somehow we're it's kind of that some of the problems that we have are fairly close to home and that we really need to look at those kinds of things and there isn't any solution for those kinds of problems except that we can move into that situation and be willing to be taught how to handle it and in the life of the parents there's a lot of healing to be done and there's a lot of renewing and rebuilding relationships there's a lot of understanding to share with one another and as you know you people will go back to the congregation at

St. John's and I hope you'll say what a tremendous weekend we had at Park they will say yeah we were here praying for you and keeping things going while you were off there having a good time and it would be hard for them to understand what relationship this has to the reality of the parents so that how do you communicate that to them how do you how do we as a parish communicate to our neighbors the people who live on Nanton Street and Carchet Street and Devonshire Preston and so that these are the kinds of things where I think in a really practical way we need to be thinking about what we're doing as a parish and that we've got to be careful that this isn't the commitment we want from people and this isn't the primary commitment we want from people but that somehow this is the commitment we want that people will be in terms of our agenda as a parish and in terms of our personal agenda we will be being taught by

Jesus Christ who says that this is what he longs most to do and that we need most to bring ourselves into the place where laboring and being heavy burdened we recognize that we very much need the refreshment and the renewal of being taught by him how to handle what for most of us I think is the very burdensome private agenda of our lives in these times I think the invitation is clear and I think the reality that for the sort of central activity of our church is terribly important if you do ah