

Dealing With Good And Evil In Our Lives

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[0 : 00] What you do is just where you're seated to look at that passage again and just for yourself read it through silently. I'll give you a few moments for that.

When Barbara and I were first married, we saved some of the money we'd been given for a wedding present.

I went shopping with me because we were both students at that time. We were looking for a desk, a desk of a chair.

We had some pretty high hopes for that desk and chair. Of course it had to be solid and provide a good working surface because it was meant to be a working piece of furniture.

But because we were in a small student apartment, that was going to be a living room. It had to be an attractive thing because it was going to be something that if anyone visited our home, they would see right away.

[1 : 23] So we went around and looked and looked. We were intrigued by what was the early 60s, the latest thing, and that was Teex Scandinavian furniture.

We finally found the particular desk and chair that we thought was just right away. The desk had a bookshelf across the front.

It looked attractive, but it looked like it would be a good working piece of furniture as well. So we bought it. Very delighted with our purchase. We took it home, put it in the living room and stuffed stuff in the drawers and put books on that shelf across the front.

We started using it. In fairly short order. About two weeks or so. Barbara's going to tell me how long it really was.

The shelf broke. And for amazement, when the shelf broke, we found that what we had been told was a good teeth test.

[2 : 36] It really, to us, a very new thing in those days, a cardical board, which had a veneer and teeth on the top.

Of course we, being young and naive, felt very disillusioned. It wasn't what it had appeared to be. It wasn't what it had been presented to us to be.

It wasn't solid teeth. So we went back to the place where we bought it, and went back to the salesman we bought it from. We expressed our anger and our indignation.

The salesman was absolutely amazed. We couldn't understand why we would be so upset. Why we would be bothered enough to come to him, just because the desk wasn't as it would appear to us.

Sometimes. Life is full of those sorts of things, but... ..time when something we take to be something turns out to be something else.

[3 : 47] something else. Times when someone we count on for something doesn't do what we had counted on to do it. Those sorts of occurrences in life, in their own way, illustrate what Jesus is talking about in this gospel reading this evening. Because like the story of the death, so the reference to trees and fruit. Now that isn't what Jesus is talking about. He's not talking about good trees or bad trees. He's not talking about good deaths or bad deaths.

He's talking about the essential truth of living. That essential truth is the godliness of a person.

The Christian faith of a person. It could be discernible to others by the quality of life the person. But to say, Lord, Lord, isn't quite enough. The quality of our lives has to be in harmony with what our lips are saying.

I'm not going to take that just one step further, very quickly. It's also a basic truth, but this is also moved on to it, if you think of it.

It's a basic truth. That means those of you who I know, who I know are in some or another form of leadership in the Christian church, your leadership and my leadership are found to be either constructive or destructive, not by how good a job we taught, but by the results of what we do, by the truth of our teaching.

[6 : 24] For me, personally, anyway, taking that next logical step is something that when I stop, when I think about it, I find it difficult, and I indeed find it a frightening statement, one that's hard to measure up to, one that's keen on measuring up the standard.

I find it difficult because when I look at myself, when I look inside myself, what I see is a mixture of good and bad.

I'm not half as good as I'd like everybody else to think I am. When I look inside myself, I can't avoid the fact that I'm not what I'd like to be.

I'm not what I want you to think of. For example, I know it is for my temper. It's quite a ferocious thing.

Sometimes, I can, if you like, harness that temper so that the results of it are constructive.

[7 : 49] You notice I said sometimes. It's your other tie, when it just doesn't work out that way. My temper becomes constructive to me, or constructive to other people.

And, of course, too, like anyone else, I have hopes, and I have ideas, and I have ideals.

They're all jumbled in my heart and my mind. There are times when those hopes, and those ideas, and those ideals are helpful to someone else as they struggle with their faith in Christ, as they struggle with living out that faith.

And other times, those hopes, and ideas, and ideals that are so much a part of me, I'm not sure if you confuse other people.

Confuse them. Even be fun with them. So when I look at what Jesus says in this gospel reading tonight, I find myself saying, where does that put me?

[9 : 07] Where does that put any Christian? And where does that put any Christian leader? Where? Then, I find myself remembering Jesus as he is presented in the gospel.

When I look at the person of Jesus, when I look at the things he did and the things he said, I recognize the fact that Jesus was able to see good in some, what were apparently bad people.

I remember the fact that Jesus came not to destroy us, but to save us.

I may be, as my children call me, somewhat strange, but I'm not unique in that I and all of our lives are a mixture, although for each of us a unique mixture, good and bad.

I put it in different terms, good and evil. When it comes to Christians, every Christian is a mixture of, on the one hand, vivid and intense faith, and on the other hand, a certain amount of infibularity, a certain amount of questioning.

[11 : 03] Whether it's an average human being or it's an average Christian within the human species that you're talking about, those mixtures of good and evil, those mixtures of faith and wondering, it's a very complicated affair.

So when I see something like this passage, and in the teaching of Jesus, it's not me. When I see that, to me, there comes out of this passage a warning.

A warning not to give up when I see bad in myself or in anyone else. Not to give up all hope.

Because my hope should not be in me or that person. It should be in the Christ who came to bring the good out of us, to save us from evil. But also, this is a hard one, I think, to learn.

Also, caution. Caution not to relax. When I see good in myself, when any of us see good in ourselves, those of you who have known me for any length of time recognize quite quickly one of the...

[12 : 41] I wish I could say it was incidental, but it really isn't. One of the battles of my life is with my waistline. I'll switch it out, and then after a while, I have to do something about it and try and get it in a bit.

Back and forth. And, uh... When it's expanded beyond reasonable limits, I have to go on some sort of diet to try and get it back so that I can wear most of my wardrobe.

I'll diet to the point where it looks like things are going good. And once it looks like the diet's coming on and starting to do something, once I see that beginning of good results from what I'm doing, I find it so easy to give up and, uh...

dig out on whatever happens to, uh... feel to my taste buds at the moment. That's often the way we are with all of our lives, isn't it?

When we see that we're starting to accomplish some good, it's so easy to sort of give up the effort, or at least relax, to some extent, the effort.

[14 : 05] And see if Jesus' words we're rewarding them. Maybe I can do that with my God. I can't do that living a Christian life.

Because the essence of Christian faith is not a sort of do it when you need it and don't do it unless it's needed sort of affair. but rather the essence of living a life of Christian faith is the committing of all of me at all moments to follow Jesus Christ, the committing of all of me to cross the door.

That following of Jesus Christ, that every moment following of Jesus Christ means a continuous, a conscious examination of myself.

No way around. Because unless I'm going through that period of continuous examination, I really have no idea often whether my life is as faithful as I would like to think of.

So there's a need for that continuous examination to identify the good that Christ is doing in my life. The evil, the bad, where somewhere or another I'm trying to keep him at arm's length.

[15 : 58] And as a result of that sort of examination that I find myself, and I would hope you would find yourself, driven to prayer, driven to prayer for Christ's work, bring out the good through his saving power, push out the evil that I've identified.

God. Because if you want to have a goal, a definable goal for the Christian life, that goal is to follow Jesus Christ so faithfully every moment of one's life.

That one's life, empowered by Christ, brings forth good results. Results that are not of an ear like the teeth on that desk.

Rather, results that are solid from one side to the other. True and true. I would suggest Christ to you Christ speaks to us with tonight's gospel.

He's holding that to form. Not just as a goal, but he's holding it to form as a standard for our Christian walk with him.

[17 : 40] not close as we began besides. I'd like you again to silently re-read that passage.

Then take a moment or two before the service resumed. May God's Spirit speak to you in that passage.

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