

You know, when some people read the bible, they'll never touch the Old Testament, because they reckon there's way too much judgment and not enough of God's love in there... - And I find myself wondering, if they've actually ever even read the whole of the Old Testament, because as I read it, I read a love story between God and His children, and any judgment, is discipline that is required because of the love of God... but, some people won't read it.

And often, those same people will become very selective, even about what they read in the New Testament – For instance, some folk will hardly ever touch the letters of Paul, because Paul has a fair bit of stuff to say about getting yourself right with God – he has a fair bit to say about how we should live the Christian life, and sometimes, that's a hard word....

And such people, will often claim, that they stick to, 'just the teachings of Jesus', because Jesus never judges or condemns.... Really???.....

Well, I don't think these folk would very often venture into the latter half of Matthew chapter 12...

This is Jesus talking:

V32... whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

V36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

V41 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and look!, something greater than Jonah is here.

V45 the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

There's some harsh words here... Not at all, like the gentle Jesus, meek and mild, that some would like to portray... What's going on – What's Jesus actually talking about?

Well, there's 4 separate stories or illustrations here, all aimed squarely at making the very same point.... – and it's an important point, and that's why He drives it home 4 times, in 4 different ways.... And here it is:

When you are faced with Jesus – when you encounter the activity of God, or the reality of God, each one of us, are **forced** into a position where we **must** make a decision, and we **must** take a stand.... And that decision is, "Am I for Jesus, or am I against Jesus?" (that's the 2 choices – there's no middle ground) "Am I for God, or against God?" – there's no

shades of grey – there's no half-being-a-Christian – it's all in, or all out....

Do I really believe this???? Do I really believe that Jesus died for my sins? Do I really believe that He is coming back to judge the living and the dead? Do I believe that there is a heaven and there is a hell? Do I believe that there is a God who loves me, and I can spend eternity in His glorious presence????? If so, I'm in, boots and all.... You can't sort of be a Christian..... You're either a Christian, or you're not....

Just like, "You can't sort of be alive – you're either alive, or you're dead...."

And the point is, God has made Himself plain.... God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.... And I'm either 'all in for Jesus', or I'm against Jesus..... God has given each of us, everything that we need, to enable us to believe.... But if I'm putting it off, I'm rejecting God... And if I reject God, I will be judged and condemned to Hell.

That's what it's about – Are you with me so far??? I started the lesson by giving you the punch-line....

So, let's see how we come to that punch-line: 1st illustration:

Jesus healed a man who had been oppressed by a demon. Now, to most people who saw it, it was pretty obvious what had happened "Wow, God's done something amazing "Can

this be the Son of David?" “ But not the Pharisees – they said “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons”.... He can only cast out demons, because he’s got a devil himself...

OK, so here we have the obvious activity of God, breaking into the world – the Kingdom of God – breaking into the world in supernatural ways.... God Himself – was right there in their midst – but the religious leaders said - “ahh, he’s the devil....”

I’ve seen that happen today... Some Christians deny that miracles continue to happen. And I’ve got to tell you, it’s sad, when God frees someone from the power of the Devil, and the devil gets the credit....?

And Jesus said:

28 ... if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.
(And of course it had)

But then He said something very pointed:

30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

That’s a pretty confronting statement, isn’t it? And it forces us to ask the question, “Am I gathering with Jesus?” “Am I one of those who are gathering with Jesus???? Because if I’m not, then that means I’m one of those who are working against Him... - even if I’m doing nothing....

The story is told of a chap by the name of Been Putinitoff...

Been Putinitoff knew that disciples of Jesus Christ are called to action, but somehow it didn't seem to apply to Ben. In fact, when it came to serving Jesus, he was quite indifferent. He paid all his bills. He was a nice fellow. He always tried to do the right thing.... But Been Putinitoff had been putting off, active service, for Jesus...

In his indifference to the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ, he dreamed a dream. He dreamed he was arrested and charged with attempting to destroy, Jesus' church... And when he came to his trial, he heard the charges:

"Been Putinitoff, you are charged with attempting to put the church for which Christ died, out of business. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, your Honour". "I didn't do a thing!"

"Guilty as charged," ruled the judge. "By his own words, he has confessed to the most effective way ever devised to terminate the work of the Christ. He confessed that he didn't do a thing."ⁱ

Jesus said: ³⁰ **Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.**

You're either with Jesus, or you're against Him. And it's not only where you place yourself in your mind, – it's what you do.

Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost – He came to gather.... And as disciples of Jesus Christ, you and I, are valuable to Him... As disciples of Jesus, He calls us to gather

with Him... You mightn't feel like you can do much... But you can. You don't have to be the world's greatest speaker or teacher or Bible scholar, to gather with Christ...

Use your words... Jesus said:

V36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

We can use our words that we do have, to gather with Christ, and anyone can do that.

You can invite people to church. You can have them home for lunch or dinner... Tell them why **you** are a disciple of Jesus... If your only reason is “Because you believe that it’s true”, well tell them that – be a witness for Christ. You don't have to know the 99 points of salvation, or the chapter and verse of the road to salvation... If your only reason for being a Christian, is because you love Jesus and are thankful that He has saved you from sin and death, well tell them that – that’s all it takes to be a witness....

And that’s all it takes to gather with Christ... To use your words for His glory...

You don't need to convert anyone – all you have to be, is a witness for Christ....

We don't convert – God does that, through His Holy Spirit... Which brings us to, a particularly difficult part of Scripture – it's sometimes called, “the unforgivable sin”:

V31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Let me simplify it for you:

If I continue to reject the activity of God in Christ, I cannot be forgiven... It is a statement of fact.

Jesus said, ^{John 14:6} **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

Now, if the only way to be saved is through Jesus, if I continue to reject Jesus, I can never be forgiven. So, when God does something miraculous, by the power of His Holy Spirit, and He does it to get my attention... If I deny that it's the Holy Spirit, well that means I then reject Jesus, and I can't be forgiven. The only way I can be forgiven, is to swallow my pride, accept the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit myself to God.... And until I do that – while ever I continue to deny God – to deny the Holy Spirit – to reject Christ, I can't ever be forgiven....

OK. That's actually covered the first 2 illustrations. Let's move onto the 3rd:

V38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign

from you." (How often have we heard that hey? Just give me a sign and I'll believe... Don't you believe it for a minute...)

³⁹ But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Talking about His death and resurrection) ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

How often have you heard it today??? If God just gives me a personal sign, then I'll believe...

Rubbish. Jesus had already performed **many** miracles, many signs, many wonders, in the midst of these people, and yet they would **not** believe. Even when He rose from the dead, they still didn't believe.

And it's the same today. We all have the same evidence... For some, it's enough and they trust in Jesus, but for others, they claim it's not enough, and they reject Jesus. They will be

condemned, on their own decision – on their own rejection of Christ....

Don't get discouraged if the first 20 people you tell about Jesus, reject Him... Maybe the 21st person, will be the one who repents.... The evidence is there... It's up to the person – whether we accept it or reject it...

So we come to the 4th and final illustration: from **V43** 88 words. The first 79 are the story. The last 9, is the application.

So, here's the story – Jesus tells us a spiritual truth:

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴ Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first.

Alright, so that's the story – it's a spiritual truth... When a demon is cast out, if you don't fill that space up with God, then the demon will come back, with more demons, and the state of the person will be worse than before.

Now, here's the application:

So also will it be with this evil generation."

For some in our community today, the appeal of Christianity, is the moral code. For others, it's to find some kind of meaning in their life. For others, their hope is that a bit of Christianity will help them to get their life in order – or to get their relationships right – or to lessen their anxiety, or their loneliness, or their depression....

Lots of people have lots of different reasons for dipping their toes in the water, to test Christianity....

And for a while, some might find a new order in their life. Some are able to get their relationships back on track. Some can lessen their anxieties or they can get off the bottle, or they find value in a new moral code....

But if that's all you've done – just dipped your toes into the waters of Christianity, you're missing out on its true essence.

The Pharisees, had gotten their lives in order – they had things together – they lived good lives.... But they had not filled themselves up with Christ.

And let me tell you, there are no half-measures of being a Christian.

We've all come across people who have come to church for a little while – it's like they're dipping their toes in the water to see if it's going to satisfy their needs... But it's not very long until they become less regular, or stop coming to church all together...

And that then causes the church leaders to ask the question “What were they looking for that we weren't able to give them?” What can we do differently, to make us more

appealing to them? Maybe we need a councillor on staff, so we can meet their needs. Maybe we need more engaging worship, so they'll want to stay. Maybe we need a more seeker friendly service, so they'll be more engaged....

And yep, you can change a church – we could change this church, so we can give everybody exactly what they want... Or we could preach the Gospel.

Be filled with Christ. Don't just dip your toes into the waters of Christianity and then wonder why it didn't have the answers for you – dive in – be immersed in God.

When our family goes swimming, me and the boys dive straight in, and initially the water shocks you, but within seconds, you're swimming, immersed in this beautiful water... But then there's one other member of our family (who will remain nameless), and well she gets in ever so slowly... and it takes forever... And sometimes she'll go as far as her knees and "No, I can't go any further"

How are you with Jesus? Are you just dipping your toes in the water? Or have you dived into Christ, and totally immersed yourself...

That's what Jesus is teaching us. – 4 ways of driving home the same point:

When you are faced with Jesus – when you encounter the activity of God, or the reality of God, each one of us, are **forced** into a position where we **must** make a decision, and we **must** take a stand.... "Am I for Jesus, or am I against Jesus?" There's no shades of grey – there's no half-becoming-a-Christian – it's all in, or all out....

Where are you at with Jesus? Are you just dipping your toes in? or have you dived in?

I believe, that if we're honest with ourselves, there's probably a lot of us who haven't yet gone 'all in' for Jesus. Is that you?

Are you ready to dive in?

Let's pray.

ⁱ Joe Malone in www.holwick.com