

10. The Pharisees Pattern of Separation or Christ's Pattern of Dwelling Among Us

A very significant statement is made in John 1:14, where we read: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The word that is translated "dwelt" is only used five times in the New Testament. The other four times are all in the book of Revelation and talk about heaven. The basic thought is for a person to place his tent (human body or tabernacle) among us and live with us. This is one of many differences between Christ and the religious leaders of His day.

In contrast, the Pharisees, and other religious leaders, were very careful to keep themselves separate from the people around them who needed to know about spiritual life. The reason the Pharisees and other religious leaders kept themselves separate was because they had no spiritual life to give. They were trying to show that they were better than others by this very separation, because they had a religion rather than being followers of Christ. Today, we will see the contrast between Christ and the religious leaders.

In Matthew 9:10-12, we read, "Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, 'Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard that, He said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'" The Pharisees kept themselves separate from the tax collectors and sinners, because they had no concern for them. Christ chose to sit down and eat with the tax collectors and sinners, because He loved them and wanted them to know how to have their sins forgiven.

This same thing happened many other times. Luke 15:1-2 says, "Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'" Here, we see that the tax collectors and sinners were eager to hear Christ, because He accepted them and helped them to understand how to have forgiveness of sins. The Pharisees and scribes just murmured. Christ responded with three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost sons.

The older son who refused to accept his sinful brother, showed the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes. We never read that he came into the feast the Father had prepared. These parables were spoken very soon after the parable of the Great Supper, in Luke 14:15-24. Luke 14:25 begins with "and" which shows that immediately after the parable of the Great Supper, Christ gave three parables about the cost of becoming His disciples. Luke 15:1 begins with the word "then" showing that these two chapters are connected. The tax collectors and sinners counted the cost and drew near to Christ. The Pharisees and scribes also counted the cost but murmured against Christ. That is why Christ gave three parables about three things that were lost and then found, in Luke 15, to show the response of the tax collectors and sinners. Then, in the third parable, Christ showed the rejection of the Pharisees and scribes by the refusal of the older son to enter into the celebration dinner.

Christ gave another parable in the book of Luke to show how the Pharisees refused to accept the tax collectors. Luke 18:9-14 says, “Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Through this parable, Christ showed that the Pharisees despised others and so, separated themselves from them.

In the very next verses, Christ showed the disciples, by His example, the importance of accepting young children, not separating Himself from them. Luke 18:15-17 says, “Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’” Christ was teaching the disciples, by His example, the importance of dwelling among the children.

A few verses later, Christ showed the importance of dwelling among those with physical infirmities. Luke 18:38-43 tells about a blind man, “And he cried out, saying, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, saying, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, that I may receive my sight.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.’ And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.” Christ took time to spend time with this man, and meet his need, after others rejected him.

Within minutes after Christ spent time dwelling with the blind man and healing him, Christ chose to dwell with Zacchaeus, the head tax collector in Jericho. Luke 19:5-7 says, “And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’ So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, ‘He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner.’” Christ chose to spend time in the house of Zacchaeus. Many others murmured, because they wanted to keep themselves separate from Zacchaeus.

Christ chose to dwell among sinners where they lived, worked, and spent their free time. As a result, their lives were transformed. Luke 19:8-10 says, “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.’” Christ provided many examples of why we must choose to go to people where

they live, work, or spend their free time, so they can hear how to have salvation and forgiveness of sins.

Today, many Christians have become like the Pharisees and other religious leaders. They have separated themselves from the very people Christ called us to reach. Such Christians will invite people to come to a church meeting that is held within the building where the church meets. However, they will not go to people where they live, work, and spend their free time and dwell with them in a situation where those who are not Christians feel comfortable. After His resurrection, one of the things Christ told His disciples, in John 20:21 was, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” John 1:14 shows that the Father sent Christ to dwell among us. Now, Christ has sent us to dwell among those who need to know how to have forgiveness of sins.

In fact, Christ said this same thing in several different ways after His resurrection. Mark 16:15 says, “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’” Luke 24:45-48 says, “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.’” Matthew 28:18-20 says, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Our commission is to go to others, not just tell them to come to us.

The final recorded words of Christ, before He returned to heaven, are given in Acts 1:8-9, where we read: “‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”

Even persecution did not stop the disciples from dwelling among the people and sharing the Gospel. Acts 5:40-42 says, “And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” When persecution scattered the new disciples, they also were dwelling among the people sharing the Gospel. Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” May the Lord richly bless you as you show others how to dwell among those who do not know Christ, by your example, as you dwell among those without Christ and share the Gospel with them.