

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The ancient Israelites warned their children about certain types of people. In Deuteronomy Moses warned his followers before entering the Promised Land to avoid certain kinds of persons. He told them to beware of false prophets and rebellious sons. The parents of such a child are instructed to accuse the wayward child and demand justice through stoning him to death.

Similar charges are brought against Jesus, a rebellious son of Israel. He is a drunk, a glutton and he wastes his life in partying. And Jesus found this very frustrating. He had actually led a life of self-denial, but ordinary people found this model for living difficult to embrace. They suspected that he was possessed by a demon. Oddly enough, people resent the challenge of an ascetic life or even the idea that "God's love is breaking into the world" in a new and unexpected way. They didn't want to be turned away from the lives they were leading and the assumptions they were making.

It was especially galling to have Jesus challenge his critics to turn away from the direction of those lives toward the opposite. Thus, some of the strongest warnings from Jesus are reserved for his severest critics who were refusing his teaching. In doing so, Jesus was not calling down a curse upon his neighbors and friends. It was simply because of the path they had chosen that Jesus spoke up. Despite all the wonderful things he had done to prove who he was, these people were bent on following "their own vision of God's kingdom." Jesus knew where that would take them, because they were determined to wage war against their enemies. They wanted to use violence to defeat violence. They wanted to wage war against their occupiers, the unholy warriors of Rome. And Jesus was offering a last chance to embrace a different kingdom-vision. He was actually "living out on the street and in the houses" he visited his alternative vision. He tried to demonstrate through his healing acts just how powerful his brand of action could be. And they were having none of it.

The difference between Jesus and those he encountered along the way was that he knew God the Father in a deeply personal way. And he realized through the reactions of those he encountered along the way that these other people...including the religious leaders, his own disciples and ordinary people "didn't have the same awareness of the father that he did." At the time of today's passage in Matthew, "opposition was mounting." And most of these people were not equipped to study Mosaic law and closely examine scripture in a serious way. But Jesus did not choose to address that concern. Instead, he said that "you just need to be a little child" to understand God's will. They could access God the Father "by living in his presence, listening to his voice, and learning and imitating." And in part for those who were watching closely, Jesus himself was "acting as a window onto the living God." And he offered this by way of an encouraging invitation: "*Come to me, and I'll give you rest.*"

These words do not mean that Jesus was boasting of having attained "some special level of spiritual achievement." What he is really saying is that he will not force them, goad them, drive them to follow

his example. No. He wants them to “recognize who the father really is....and encourage them to come into his loving, welcoming presence.”

Jesus also knew that the people of Israel “were burdened and weighed down with the externalism and the legal do’s and don’ts of the Pharisees” and all of the accompanying feelings of guilt, frustration, and dissatisfaction that were part and parcel of that approach. The Pharisees claimed the authority of Moses as interpreters and teachers of the Law.” This meant that Israel should submit to their position in the same way as his followers had submitted to Moses. Externalism means that the Pharisees had reduced the Law to “365 prohibitions and 250 commandments.” Jesus said, “they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders.” The Pharisees basically said “do as we say, obey our system.” Jesus had an alternative: “come to me.”

The key idea is “to acquire a custom or habit through practice.” Jesus does not mean the acquisition of information. He has in mind “a change of life, a transformed life-style through intimate relationship with Him.” What does this mean? Well, in part, it means that we are to “submit to His person as the one who is gentle and meek, as one who is....caring and concerned for us.” He calls us to serve, for sure, “but we work and serve in the strength which He gives. He is always there beside us pulling the weight for us, if we will only yield our lives to Him.”

In the Old Testament Book of Proverbs the concept of the Wisdom of God is articulated. In today’s reading, Jesus is speaking of himself as the Wisdom of God. In Proverbs, “the guiding presence of God in daily life is personified as a Wise Woman, who invites followers onto the path of wisdom that leads to life.” In other words, Jewish writings of both the Old and New Testaments continue to “reflect on Wisdom as a figure that expresses God’s presence and guidance.” Wisdom was “present at Creation, in which she served as an agent or instrument.” Wisdom later came to earth to “call both Israel and all humankind onto the way of obedience to God.” Through prophets and sages, they were continually reminded of this advice, and frequently they ignored it and had to be reminded again and again. The early Christians pored over the traditional scriptures we know as the Old Testament searching for “images and concepts to help them express the identity of Jesus.” Despite the fact that it is less well known than the terms Son of Man, Son of God, or Suffering Servant, the Wisdom of God “shapes the depiction of Jesus, especially in the gospels of Matthew and John.” Thus, one scholar says that John and Matthew are “twin sons of the same mother(that is, Wisdom).” And in his beautiful Prologue, John basically “borrows Woman’s Wisdom and attributes it to Logos (or the Word).”