

KEEPING PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 Text vs. 16 *“Whoever listens to you listens to Me; whoever rejects you rejects Me; but whoever rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”*

Norman Cates, best known for his work on *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, shared this story about a fella’ who prayed every morning *“Lord, if you want me to witness to someone today, please give me a sign. Show me who it is”*. . . . One day he was on a city bus. A big, burly man got on and sat down next to him. The bus was nearly empty. But this big guy sat right next to our praying friend who became nervous sitting next to such a big man. He waited anxiously for the next stop so he could get off the bus. But before he could, the big guy next to him burst into tears. He began to cry. And with a loud voice he shouted, *“I need to be saved. I’m a lost sinner. I need the Lord. Somebody, please tell me how to be saved?”* He turned to the Christian man seated next to him and pleaded, *“Can you show me how to be saved?”* As soon as the man said that, he bowed his head and prayed *“Lord, is this a sign?”* . . . And our text today answers that question. *“If you’re looking for a sign to tell someone about Jesus - Ta Dah! Here it is!”*

Yet, a lot of Christians struggle with this. Throughout the years of my ministry, I’ve heard people say, *“No one wants to hear what I have to say”*. Or *“they won’t like me if I get all religious on them”*. Remember the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible? Cain and Abel were the first and second sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was a farmer. Abel was a shepherd and took care of the family’s animals. Well, one day Cain and Abel decided to make sacrifices and worship the Lord. Cain brought some of the produce from the land. Abel brought the firstborn of his sheep. But God showed favor upon Abel’s sacrifice because it was an offering that came from the best Abel had to give, which made Cain very angry. He became so jealous he lured his brother Abel out into the fields and killed him with a rock. And when *“the Lord asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother? He said, I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”*

Now, you can’t hear that kind of an answer without assuming something. And assumptions can be dangerous! An assumption is something you accept as true. Or it’s something that’s going to happen without proof. It’s like the photographer for a national magazine who was sent to get photos of a huge California forest fire. Smoke was so bad he called back to his home office and asked them to hire a plane for him. They did! They told him to hurry over to a nearby airport and a plane would be ready and waiting for him. He arrived at the airport. A plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in the plane with all his equipment and yelled, *“Let’s go! Let’s go!”* The pilot swung the plane into the wind, rolled down the runway, and soon they were in the air. *“Fly over the north side of the fire,”* the photographer yelled over the engine noise. *“Make three or four low level passes.”* *“Why?”* the pilot yelled back. *“Because I’m going to take pictures. I’m a photographer. Photographers take pictures!”* The pilot looked kinda’ funny at him and said, *“You mean . . . you’re not my instructor?”* Now, *that* was an assumption!

And when Jesus had selected twelve men to be His disciples – His students – He focused on developing them. That doesn’t mean others were excluded from becoming His disciples. There were the Seventy. (Lk.10:1) There were the women disciples. (Lk.8:1-3). But Jesus spent most of His time with those twelve. And He had a deeper relationship with Peter, James and John. On three occasions He took them aside. Now let’s stop there! It’s a fundamental principle of teaching. The smaller the size of a group being taught, the greater the opportunity for effective teaching. And that’s how it all began! Jesus made sure those three disciples would keep their priorities straight: *“Whoever listens to you, listens to Me. Whoever rejects you, rejects Me. But whoever rejects Me, rejects Him who sent Me.”* In other words, if no one listened to them, or they were rejected, then they weren’t only rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting God!

Years ago, there was a Toyota commercial that said, *“You asked for it, you got it. . . . Toyota.”* And it seems as if America has been asking God to *leave us alone!* And we’ve got it! God is honoring our wishes. But we don’t understand! There are consequences...horrible, catastrophic consequences! On this 4th of July let’s be grateful for our God given freedom. For being God believing American citizens, as these last 60 years there have been those who have been steadily pushing God out of our lives. No prayers in schools. No prayers with football players after games. Just this last week, the Supreme Court ruled that Joseph Kennedy, a former high school football coach in Bremerton, Wash., had a constitutional right to pray on the field after his team’s games. They don’t want us to say, *“Under God”* in the Pledge of Allegiance. Don’t even say the Pledge of Allegiance in the classroom! Don’t display the *Ten Commandments* in government buildings. Yet, America is still claiming to be a Christian nation. In fewer numbers. But there’s an evil that’s forcing anti-Christian laws upon us. It’s an attempt to silence us. Particularly when it comes to issues such as marriage. Human sexuality. Abortion. Teaching radical gender ideology to kids before they end the fifth grade. Our nation is destroying itself from within.

A poor sharecropping family in Georgia had a little money left over after their harvest. So, they got out their old Sears and Roebuck catalog and tried to pick out something everyone in the family would enjoy. After much discussion, they decided to get a mirror. It arrived. Each one took turns looking into it. The father frowned. Mother smiled. The baby giggled. Young Willie. . . he was the last to look in the mirror. And when he looked in the mirror, he was taken aback by what he

saw! It was the first time he had ever really seen himself. He didn't know whether to frown, or cry. When he was a tiny baby, Willie had been kicked by a mule. His face became twisted. Scarred. And deformed. Willie asked his mom, in a shaky voice, "Did you know I looked like this?" "Yes, Willie I knew." "And you still loved me?" "Yes, Willie. I still love you. Your face don't make no difference. I love you 'cause you're mine!"

And God's love is exactly like that! He loves you because no matter how you are as an individual, or we are as a nation, He still loves you and me! It's the same way we are to love our neighbors. Through God, we're all related. We're all brothers and sisters in Christ. Regardless of race, color, or creed! It's His bond of love which holds us to Him! And as His children, we should hold to one another in Christ. But it isn't working! There's a big problem today! It's called racism! Discrimination! Critical race theory. Call it what you will, as a nation we're having a difficult time answering God's question to Cain when Cain answered, "*Am I my brothers, keeper?*" The answer is, "Yes, we are!"

A barber lived in a small town. He had been the only barber in that town for years. Everyone, men, women, and children went to him to get their hair cut. Then, one day a big franchise hair salon came to town and opened up shop. It advertised, "*All Haircuts only \$3.00*" Slowly, the old barber's business began to decline. He just couldn't compete against \$3.00 haircuts! So, in an effort to save his business, he hired a business consultant who spent a day pouring over the barber's books. Finally, the old barber asked, "So, what do you think? Should I close up shop?" "Not yet. I'll be back tomorrow." The next day the consultant showed up with a big banner. He unrolled it. Hung in front of the barber shop. It said, "*We Fix \$3.00 Haircuts!*" The moral of that story is, *the competition doesn't always win!* And in closing our lesson today remember, those competing gods the disciples faced didn't win either! The disciples had great joy and success in casting out demons. Healing the sick. Preaching the Gospel. It's as if they were overcoming *\$3.00 false gods!* Jesus told the disciples that while they were out there evangelizing, He "*saw Satan falling from Heaven like lightning.*" Then, He warned those evangelists not to be impressed with all their accomplishments. Instead, they were to give thanks that their names were written in heaven.

. . . . And after hearing this story of Jesus sending out those disciples, you can't help but ask yourself, "*What is missionary work? What is evangelism? Why must I do it ?*" Jesus told you why! To those Seventy newly commissioned evangelists He told them, take the gift of peace to those they visit. Heal the sick. Preach the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near them. That's it! Teach, preach and heal. That's what Jesus did when He entered a village. And that's what you are supposed to do as a follower of Jesus! Keep your priorities straight! When people are listening to you as you witness to them, they're not only listening to you, they're listening to Jesus. They're listening to God! "*Whoever listens to you, listens to Me.*" As Jesus told Mary His mother after she had left Him behind in Jerusalem at the Temple, "*Didn't you know? I must be about my Father's business!*" And so should you be about your Father's business, by keeping your priorities straight. Let' get to work! AMEN