

The scribes were source-citers; you know...according to so-and-so this is what we know. They were honored for the knowledge they carried around in their heads—they were like walking, talking dictionaries; but they did not think up the “stuff” themselves. Jesus was different. He carried on as one who was the authority; as if he was the “source;” and the crowds were astonished by what he was able to say.

As presented here in Matthew, he had been saying a lot...beginning back at chapter 5 with what we call the Sermon on the Mount and continuing on through our text today, where Jesus’ teaching-speechifying winds down and ends in that particular setting. If you go back and look over the material that is covered, you will get a richer, deeper sense of the climax we are faced with here today.

Jesus spread the life of discipleship before the people; the life of one drawn to the will and the way of God; that life a response, as they seek to know God’s will and live the way God would have them live. But he doesn’t just teach and leave the room. He pushes for a reaction; for decision; in other words, don’t just listen and do nothing; there’s more in the balance here than just the satisfaction of hearing a good lecture—gaining good knowledge. The sheep will be separated from the goats. God’s kingdom will be served; God’s will, becoming the service of those who come to decision by actually *doing* God’s will in this world. Don’t just listen. Don’t listen and talk about what you heard. Get off the couch; out of the arm chair; up out of the pew, and get going!

Now I think we all pretty much understand that. We know what we think about someone saying one thing and doing another. If you’ve had your head anywhere near the news these past few days, you’ve watched Scott McClellan toasted on the hot seat of public opinion; defending himself over what boils right down to doing one thing and saying another. We talked about trusting God last week; counting on God to “do” what God promises to; to be there with us; to be there for us. We rely on that in each other as well—rely on being able to trust one another. We look around this room this morning and we should be able to trust that each one of us will behave in particular ways that affirm our trust in God; our loyalty to Christ. Now that does not mean that we will all be the same as if each were a clone of the other. Thank God that our particular personalities keep the mix of life together a lot more interesting and lively than that! But it does mean that we all have an expectation of one another, based upon our allegiance to God; upon the love of Christ that dwells within each one of us. And it is love that is translated into life. It’s more than a word; more than a noun. It is love as what we do—how we act towards one another; love guided by the words of Christ—words recorded in the Bible—here specifically in Matthew’s Gospel; and more specifically from this particular section that serves as a handbook for disciples.

Jesus says that if we say we are God’s people; if we say we love God; then we will do the will of God. And before each one of us steps forward to announce that they know what God’s will is, Jesus turns our attention to the Bible. God’s will is made known to God’s people in this book—in the Old and in the New Testaments. Jesus taught what he knew from the Hebrew Bible—our Old Testament; here in Matthew as he expounded on the Torah—on the teachings ascribed to Moses in the first 5 books of the Bible. It is in the Torah that the Ten Commandments are recorded—in Exodus and in Deuteronomy. It is in the Torah that the principles of the Ten Commandments were given practical application to life. They were to be more than those sacred words written on the doorposts of your home or upon your forehead. They were to be the guiding

principles of day-in-day-out living; principles of every relationship; principles that kept the community *in* community.

The words of the Torah—God’s word to God’s people, were the marrow—the life-building, life-giving essence of their activity in this world. Jesus took those words and brought them to life there with that 1st Century audience; urged them to choose the way they would live. He was forcing a decision—just as Moses had centuries before as the Hebrew people were poised to enter the Land of Canaan. Moses reminded the people that God set before them life and death. He urged them to *choose life*; urged them to follow God’s way and will for them as they began their new lives in the land God was giving to them.

Jesus made the same offer to the crowds gathered around him. There as the whole world was poised and ready to enter into new territory—a new relationship with God offered to all; an intimate, personal relationship made known through Christ himself as Christ walked this earth among us; as the power of the Holy Spirit opens our blind eyes and unstops our deaf ears; there we all are on the banks of the new Jordan ready to step foot into our Canaan; there we are urged to decision; to choose life that is solid—that endures—that makes a difference in this world; or choose life that is not—that is torn and chaotic; that is as unstable as sifting sand; that will be washed away and never leave a mark—not even a breath of God’s love; not even a thumbprint of God’s mercy seen or known in its passing.

Life that is solid—as enduring as rock—is life built with God—God our *rock*—the one we *take refuge in*. The Psalmist knew. Christ knew. Every disciple—child of God is called to know, that life built with God—following God’s way—that way preserved right here in these words given for guidance; that way available to us as the Holy Spirit within guides and leads us; it is life that will endure; life that will make a difference as it is lived; as we live out the years that are given to us.

Take some time on this day—this Sabbath day—with your Bibles. Read Matthew 5, 6, & 7. Hear Jesus’ bring the Torah right into our present-day circumstance. We have every opportunity to bring those words of righteousness and of mercy and of compassion; of love and trust; of choosing the right thing even if it is the harder thing; of bringing justice to empower those who have no voice; we have those opportunities every day—sometimes in small, quiet ways; and sometimes in greater, louder ways—but each as *enduring* as the other in God’s eyes; the outcry over a little girl with poor medical coverage; a chance to stand up for that quality in life that is loyalty; choices to make that respect others...choices that might demand more of us than of another yet we’re ready to go that 2nd mile and make them.

Everything we “do” as we honor the words we profess about our relationship with God, makes a lasting impact in this world. Everyday we will be asked to “choose life;” to stand on the rock—with the rock—guided by the rock that is our relationship with God Almighty; a relationship brought near to us all through Christ. Every day as we do, we are choosing life for others—others whose lives will be touched by the love of God—the everlasting mercy of God, by what we do. Again, *choose life* in all you do. You’re choosing for yourself. You’re choosing for others. You’re choosing for God’s way in life—enduring for all time. Amen!

“Choose life!” Matthew 7:21-29 060108 Mkh

