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THE CALLING

Have you ever known a truly contrary person? Not just one who disagrees with everything you say. The type that can say something, and you have to disagree even if you know it is true. If he says the sky is blue, you say it is green. If he says it is day, you feel you have to say night, even though you know the sun is shining. There are such people. Fortunately, the Teacher was not one of those. Perhaps some of us didn't realize this quality until a time shortly after we joined his entourage. (Well, we were examples, too, but just didn't realize it.)

One day we went for a walk along the Sea of Galilee. There was nothing unusual about that. When you live in Capernaum, some of the most relaxing walks are along the shore. Besides, the beach tends to be wide enough in most places for a crowd, and when the Teacher was doing just that, we followed as a crowd.

Anyway, we were walking along the beach, and passing a number of fishermen. That's the other thing about Capernaum. Much of the economy involves fishing. Generally, fishing on the sea is done using cast nets. These large, weighted nets are carefully folded, and then cast over the side of a boat. The fishermen can then close the nets and take whatever comes up. Usually they catch and sell tilapia, mullet, barbel, and carp. The sea also has catfish, but we can't eat these bottom dwellers, which may be another reason for using cast nets. Because the nets are so important to their livelihood, fishermen spend much time each day mending their nets.

One more thing should be mentioned about the fishing industry; it was owned by the government. The Romans, through the king, would charge up to fifty percent as a tax for a fishing license. Most of the time this was paid in kind. The fishermen, or fishing cooperatives, could sell the rest locally. If they were really ambitious, they might even get a contract to supply to the Roman government. Most of what was caught in Capernaum would end up in the processing plants in Magadan, a little farther south. There it was sometimes salted, sometimes turned into a sauce. Amphorae containing Galilee fish were sold all over the Roman world, but were especially sold in Jerusalem, where Galilee was the main source of fish products.

As we walked along that day, the Teacher passed a number of fishermen. Suddenly he stopped, and watched

a pair of brothers casting their nets near the shore. This is when we first noticed his power of command. He simply said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." He spoke in a language they understood, but promised something new. And they dropped their nets, came ashore, and followed along with us. These men were the brothers Simon and Andrew.

Farther along the beach, we came upon a fishing cooperative. (Later we found that the first two were part of this group, cousins in fact.) The Zebedee cooperative was apparently very successful, because they were able to hire day-laborers to handle the heavy work. The sons of the firm Zebedee and Sons, were mending their nets, until the Teacher asked them to come. To their father's amazement, they handed the nets to the hirelings and walked away from their source of income. All at a word from the Teacher.

A few days later, we were again on the beach. It was tax day, and the revenueurs were out. This meant the mood on the shore was not pleasant, because the fishermen did not like giving up half of what they had taken. As we walked along, some could hear the Zebedee group complaining about the tax men. "A bunch of cheats. Roman toadies. Traitors to the Jewish people." We were passing one of these men, a certain Levi, son of Alphaeus. The Teacher simply said, "Follow me." Levi turned to one of his assistants and said, "Take over." Then he got up and left the tax table, never to return. James and John might have been ready to object, but the Teacher just looked at them and they hung their heads.

Maybe that is why he called the Zebedee cooperative and passed up other fishermen. They were ready to drop everything to listen to the Teacher.

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YE HAVE HEARD

To those of us raised in the 1960s, authority was often a bad word. “Trust nobody over 30.” Use disrespectful names for the police, the military, and parents. Call politicians by their last name without giving them their proper title (Obama or Bush—or Shrub—for President Obama or President Bush). People could identify more with Pontius Pilate (“What is truth?”—Jn 18:38) than with Jesus (“Thy word is truth.”—Jn 17:17). Maybe that is why that generation pictured Jesus as a long-haired, sandal-toting rebel. In a sense he was a rebel against the established religious authority (and did wear sandals, although we make assumptions about the long hair). His rebellion, though, was against false authority, and he alone had the right to rebel, being the source of true authority. Unlike many who post disrespectful diatribes on Facebook or Twitter, when they really don’t know what they are talking about, Jesus, being the Son of God, knew the mind of God more intimately than the scribes and Pharisees ever could.

One of the passages used to show his rebellion against authority is Matthew 5. In reality, though, this passage shows his loyalty to the ultimate authority figure, God. “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he

Murder is a symptom of anger, and anger is a symptom of “a failure to communicate.”

taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Matt 7:28-29)

This last passage proves that Jesus was more authoritative than rebellious. It also tells us something about the scribes. About 200 years after Jesus, the scribes compiled the Talmuds. (Plural because there is actually more than one.) A common phrasing in the Talmud (either one), which has come down to halachic scholars even today, is “Rabbi X said, in the name of Rabbi Y, ...” That is, a rabbi would call upon the authority of an earlier scholar, most often his teacher, to give credence to the interpretation he was about to introduce. Considering that this formula was put in print within a couple of hundred years, it is entirely possible that it was in vogue when Jesus taught. Thus, when he compares “ye have heard it said” to “but I say,” it is no wonder that the people

considered him to be the one speaking with authority. The scribes were always giving the authority to someone else, usually someone dead who could not debate whether he truly said something or not. Jesus was speaking in his own name. Let us look at some of these “revolutionary” statements.

Murder

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matt 5:21-22)

A previous article in *Minutes With Messiah (A Higher Court, September 2014)* discussed in detail the various levels of punishment that Jesus mentions. Regardless of those legal distinctions, Jesus is pointing out the authoritative reason murder is wrong. Now, murder *is* wrong, but most of the time there is a more basic problem. Except, perhaps, in the cases of true psychopaths, murder is a symptom of anger, and anger is a symptom of “a failure to communicate” (to quote “the Captain” in *Cool Hand Luke*).

What Jesus says they had heard is no doubt true. One who commits murder is liable to punishment. The reason, though, is that by the time one commits murder, he has ignored a number of warnings that might have prevented it.

1,509. The number of women murdered by men they knew in 2011. Of the 1,509 women, 926 were killed by an intimate partner and 264 of those were killed by an intimate partner during an argument. (Huffingtonpost.com, 10/23/14, updated 2/13/15)

That same source says that between 2001 and 2012 the number of women murdered by current or ex male partners was almost double the number of American troops killed in Iraq or Afghanistan. Domestic abuse murders are only a portion of the total murders in the United States, but this shows a large percentage that likely were the end result of a long-standing anger issue. Granted there are other reasons for murder, such as drug-related violence. The point is that the sin of murder is usually not the root sin. To simply lay murder at the door of justice is like saying that a cancer death is only the result of the heart stopping beating.

Adultery

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (Matt 5:27-28)

Again Jesus says that the old authority is simply insufficient to the problem. As shown by the case of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8), some Jewish leaders held a double standard as regards this law. Prostitution was overlooked, because that was a choice by a man to commit adultery; but if a woman committed the same sin, she was prosecuted. Obviously they even ignored the law that said both participants were liable to the same punishment.

Today people ask, “Can I get a scriptural divorce based on ‘adultery in the heart?’” Besides showing the same legalistic double standard, this question shows a misunderstanding of what Jesus had to say about the sin. It is the same misunderstanding that was perpetrated by President Carter in his famous interview for *Playboy* magazine. While there may be other reasons pornography is wrong, the common statement based on this passage is probably inaccurate.

Jesus says adultery is wrong, just as they have heard. Looking on a woman “to lust after her” (which some Greek scholars say is equivalent to rape: desiring her to the point that one must consummate the desire) is wrong. Possibly even looking at pornography is wrong, but not directly addressed. The root problem, though, is that the thought is the master of the action. If one does not conceive of the possibility of adultery, one will never commit adultery. If one keeps control of one’s thoughts, the sins will not follow. Paul said the same thing in Philippians 4:8.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

When Jesus said that the greatest command was to love God and the second was to love your neighbor, he was saying the same thing. On these two hang all the law and the prophets because the thought is master of the action. Love trumps legalism every time.

Divorce

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry

her that is divorced committeth adultery. (Matt 5:31-32)

There has been much debate in recent months about marriage, and some have pointed out the apparent hypocrisy of objecting to some marriages and yet remaining silent about divorce. Some even point out that with a broader view of marriage, it follows that there will be more divorces. It is a controversial topic. Nor is it one that Minutes With Messiah has shied away from. (See www.minuteswithmessiah.com/minutes/divorce.html; online version only.)

There is a famous debate between rabbis about divorce in which Rabbi Hillel took the position that the law, in saying “she does not please him because he has found something offensive in her,” allows divorce if she spoiled his dinner. Obviously Rabbi Shimei argued that this meant unseemly conduct. Even though Jesus often seems to have sided with Rabbi Hillel (who died about ten

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years before he was born), in this case he clearly disagrees with the esteemed scholar.

Although here Jesus acknowledges the fact of divorce, in another place (Matt 19:8) he says that from the creation that was not God’s intent. What he does say here is that the concept of “no-fault” divorce is wrong. The modern excuse of “irreconcilable differences” is no different than spoiling the dinner. While there is debate what is meant by “fornications,” which in the original is in the plural—that is, whether it means before or after the marriage—he is clearly destroying the double standard applied to adultery.

Jesus goes on to talk about other things in the same way: tradition says one thing, my authority says another. Space does not allow a treatment of those in this issue. Whether it concerns the issues addressed in Matthew 5 or not, ultimately the point is that Jesus had authority. Even though what he said was less important than what he did, after the resurrection he began the commission to teach the gospel with the statement, “All authority has been given me, in heaven and in earth.” (Matt 28:18-19) It is on the basis of his authority that we must teach others that he died and rose again to reconcile man to God.

JESUS IN CHICAGO

When I was in the Navy, I spent a few years in the Chicago area. Winters there can be very interesting. One Sunday the church assembly was delayed until 2:00 p.m. because of the cold, which worked out well since only one car from the naval base could start. (We packed about fifteen people into one station wagon to get to church.) Once I rode my bicycle a mile and a half to work in a raging blizzard, and somehow ended up on a sidewalk although I had started in the street. Chicagoland winters even help a person to understand some of what Jesus taught, although I doubt that he had them in mind.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matt 5:13-16)

Anyone who has spent a considerable time in the American Midwest knows what Jesus was talking about when he refers to salt and light. More specifically, they know the negative aspects to which he referred.

Salt is good. Most people know the flavoring and preservative natures of salt. Some know the medicinal nature of salt. When I did some body surfing in Hawaii and cut my foot on some coral, I never felt the pain until I was out of the salt water, and never got an infection in the wound. Observant Jews know several other uses of salt. Many of the animal sacrifices in Leviticus had to be offered with salt. Additionally, salt is vital to *koshering*. Animals must be killed in a kosher manner and then salted

to remove as much blood as possible. (This is an oversimplification of the process.) Salt is used because of its absorbent properties. But sometimes salt loses any or all of these properties. It loses its flavor, and is good for nothing but “to be trodden under foot of men.” This is where Chicago comes into play. Ice is a major problem on winter roads. Some places sand the roads. Albuquerque uses crushed volcanic rock. Chicago and other places use salt. Anyone who has tasted the salt they use on the roads would not put it in their stew. It is only good for putting on roads and sidewalks. Thus it still has a use, but the use is primarily to be trodden under foot of man.

Another frequent problem in North Chicago, mostly during tornado season, was power outages. Lightning or tornados would cause electricity to go out in certain areas. When that happened, some people scrambled to find a flashlight or a battery powered camp lantern. Some of us knew where we kept an oil-filled hurricane lamp. It is amazing how much light a hurricane lamp provides, especially if placed in front of a mirror. Nobody I knew, however, would find a flashlight, turn it on, and put it back in the drawer. Nobody would light a hurricane lamp and put it in a cabinet. (Not only would it not light the room; it would go out for lack of air.) No, emergency lighting was placed where it would cast the most light. Similarly, you don't go hiking in the woods at night and keep the flashlight pointed at the treetops; you will miss the path, possibly with disastrous consequences.

You are the salt of the earth. Are you providing flavor and preservation to the people you meet? Or are you only melting ice on the roadway of life? You are the light of the world. In the tornadoes of life, do you light up the room or the path? Or do you hide in the cupboard, or shine only on the treetops? Are you good, or, in Jesus' words, “good for nothing?”

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123