

69. Playing church

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In the early 20th century, merchant ships did not have good radar systems, let alone satellite GPS systems like now. So it was not uncommon for ships to shipwreck themselves on shallow rocky areas around Cape Cod, MA.

A group of good hearted local people set up a rescue station on one rocky area with a small shed where the ocean water soaked sailors from the destroyed ship could warm themselves up after being rescued. Within a year, this small rescue station saved hundreds of sailors from the cold Atlantic Ocean water and allowed them to be reunited with their families.

One of Boston Herald Newspaper reporters visited this rescue station and ran a story in the newspaper front page the next day. Soon many other newspapers across America also picked up the story.

The small rescue station was no longer holding a few people. Tourists were coming by, senators and congressmen coming by for photo opps. Some wealthy people formed a governing board for this station and decided that it was not sufficient to do rescue work in that condition, so money was starting to pour in.

Now it became a true local attraction. Souvenir shops were popping up left and right, the wealthy board members decided that the original small shed was an eyesore and needed to be removed. But they kept some rescue items as decorations for the newly built mammoth three story station.

Shipwreck still happened from time to time. The board member came to a conclusion that a bunk house with beds and shower facilities should be built, but away from the beautiful new rescue station building. They didn't want to have some water soaked sailors drench the beautifully waxed hardwood floor and expensive rugs of the rescue station.

Gradually they no longer participated in rescuing the sailors who are shipwrecked altogether. The rescue station became a high society people's hang out and a place to go to meet important people. The rescue station lost its original purpose.

Another group of good hearted people started to resume their rescue effort for the shipwrecked victims a couple miles down the rocky area. It eventually got famous for its rescue stories and people started to flock around it. And you can tell how it goes.

One of the most dangerous games we can play against our own spirits is playing church. You may say, "Nobody does that." You will be surprised how many Christians go to church, because it is something they've been doing on Sundays, or making network for future businesses, or for cliques, like social clubs. The Lord is not their focal point; they are not one bit concerned about the lost souls outside of the four walls of their churches. As long as they get their church thingies done, they feel that they've done their spiritual duty to God and He should be grateful that they could give Him some help. We should never forget the purpose of being Christ's church.

Newsflash! Jesus did not put up with that kind of mentality of the Pharisees before, He certainly would not wink at our hypocritical attitude and religious mentality. Let's open our hearts to hear from the Lord Jesus.

A. PLAYING CHURCH WITHOUT REPENTANCE

Luke 13:1-5 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Before the start of the 3 years of the earthly ministry of Jesus, Roman Governor Pontius Pilate wanted to build an aqueduct from the Pools of Solomon which was located southwest of Bethlehem, to the city of Jerusalem. To pay for it, he took money out of the temple treasury – the money that had been dedicated to God. And this outraged the Jews. When the Jewish leaders sent a delegation to ask for their money back, Pilate sent the crowd of soldiers dressed as common people into them, and at a certain signal they took out daggers and attacked the people asking for the money. Jesus graphically explained it by saying, "*blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices*".

In another incident, a tower fell on eighteen people in Siloam and they were killed.

Jesus cites two examples of disasters that were well known in His day. One was an evil done by the hands of men, and the other was seemingly a natural disaster.

We are often asked by unbelievers, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?" The great evangelist of yesteryear D.L. Moody said, "Why not?" What he meant is that there is not one good person to compare to God's righteousness and holiness.

Our standard of comparison is subjective – depending on whom we consider good or bad. In the mind of Ted Bundy who was a serial rapist and murderer of at least 29 victims, he would consider himself as a better person than Adolf Hitler who killed six million Jews. But to compare to God's standard, they are both equally murderers like anyone of us, because in our hearts we, too, murdered others.

Jesus is making it clear to us that human tragedies are not always divine punishments and that it is wrong for us to "play God" and pass judgment.

Jesus went on to show the logical conclusion of their argument: The question is not, "Why did these people die?" rather, "What right do we have to live?" None of us is sinless, so we'd all better get right with the Lord with sincere repentance.

B. PLAYING CHURCH WITHOUT FRUITS

Luke 13:6-9 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.' "

Of course, the fig tree represents the nation of Israel. This parable reminds us of God's special goodness to Israel and His patience with them. God waited three

years during our Lord's earthly ministry, but Israel did not produce the fruits of repentance and obedience. He then waited about forty more years before He allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. Finally, the tree was cut down.

However, this also applies to our individual lives. God is gracious and patient toward people and does more than enough to encourage us to repent and bear spiritual fruit. He has every right to cut us down, but in His mercy, He has spared us. Yet we must not presume upon the kindness and patience of the Lord, because the day of judgment will finally come.

I can tell you this much: The judgement ax of God is against the bottom of the tree of America. She has denied His presence in our country since June of 1963 when the Supreme Court upheld the argument of the atheist Madelyn Murray O'Hare and had God and prayer outlawed. He will judge this country severely.

Ask yourself: Am I just filling the space in the pew when I come to church or am I actively seeking God's instruction for the rest of the week? Am I doing what God is telling me to do from this Book, the Bible? Am I concerned about what others think about my faith in Christ more than what my God thinks about me? Am I thinking that God would give me more chances later? As I've said before, we should not presume that the world will continuously go on as is. It WILL NOT.

C. PLAYING CHURCH WITHOUT LOVE FOR OTHERS

Luke 13:10-17 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. 12 But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." 13 And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. 14 But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." 15 The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? 16 So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" 17 And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

For 18 long years, she was bound by a demonic spirit in this bent position. We must note in our hearts that not every sickness is controlled by demons, though in some cases, they are.

Instead of rejoicing and giving God the glory, the ruler of the synagogue became very angry. He did not even have the courage to express his anger to Jesus, so he scolded the women and the congregation.

Actually the bondage of the ruler of the synagogue was worse than that of the woman. Her bondage affected only her body, but his bondage shackled his mind and heart. He was so bound and blinded by religious tradition that he ended up opposing the Son of God. Not a wise thing!

D. PLAYING CHURCH WITHOUT GOD

Luke 13:18-21 Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches." 20 And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

A mustard seed produces a shrub, not a great tree. Jesus describes an abnormal, even monstrous growth of the church. According to World Christian Encyclopedia, there are 33,000 denominations within the self-proclaimed Christianity. That's including the Mormons and the Seventh Day Adventists, since they claim that they are Christians. Within the Protestants, there are 9000 denominations. Just because someone or some church claims to be Christians, it doesn't mean that they are. If they don't accept the Word of God, the Bible as the absolute truth and the final authority and Jesus as God Himself, they are NOT Christians or Christian churches.

When we study the parables of Jesus in context, birds are consistently evil, the enemy of Jesus and the leaven represents sin. While I was preparing this sermon, I checked out the 50 biggest protestant churches in America. Many of them might as well be nice social clubs.

History abundantly proves the dangerous influence that false doctrines have had on the church. It has been shown in political intrigue, lust for power, intolerance, vain superstition, immorality, and greed.

It all starts at the departure from the sound doctrines of the Bible. One compromise leads to the next. Soon, you cannot tell the difference between their way of thinking and the secular way.

E. THE NARROW IS THE WAY

Luke 13:22-30 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' 26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

The ancient Israel scribes often discussed the question of how many people would be saved, and somebody asked Jesus to give His thoughts on the issue. Rather than being sucked into the endless argument, Jesus immediately made the matter personal. "The question is not how many will be saved, but whether or not you will be saved! Get that settled first, and then we can discuss what you can do to help get others saved."

Unbelievers often asked us about the salvation of others – people in Africa or in Mongolia, when they were asked about their salvation. But we should point out the real problem – their own salvation, “Are you saved?”

The salvation way is narrow and there is only one door. Jesus declared, “*I am the Way,*” in John 14:6. He also claimed that He is the door we need to enter in.

John 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

Just about everybody I know wants to go to heaven. But many of them don’t want to go through Jesus, because it requires the acceptance of the facts that we are sinners and we cannot go to heaven without Jesus. Some even go through the motions of religious experience and claiming that they are Christians.

But unless that person has an individual encounter with Jesus Christ, all the religion in the world means nothing to God. God will not recognize anyone’s religious work as worth anything without Jesus in the person’s heart. The bottom line is “Repent or perish.”

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Stop playing church as of now. The Lord is not impressed by it. You are only fooling yourself.

2) God is seeking spiritual fruit in our lives. Ask yourself, “Do I have it?”