

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Why were Jesus and the disciples going through someone else's fields and eating his grain? Isn't that stealing? Under the Law of Moses, it was not. God said in Deuteronomy 23:25: "When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain." Notice that the Pharisees were only angry that Jesus was picking the heads of wheat on the Sabbath.

Like any itinerant preacher or teacher, Jesus repeated Himself from place to place. What we've read today is not the "Sermon on the Mount," but a sermon on a plain (6:17). I suspect that Jesus repeated these same concepts scores of times as He ministered in different places.

Surely Jesus' sermons were relevant to the people to whom He spoke. Thus it is safe to assume that Jesus' followers were suffering some persecution, just as He was. Because He told them that they were blessed when they were hated, ostracized and insulted, it seems logical to conclude that at least some of them were experiencing those very things. Note that Jesus also told them what to do when they were cursed, mistreated and hit on the cheek. He wasn't talking about "those persecuted Christians in other countries." He was talking to His contemporary followers.

His contrast between righteous believers and evil unbelievers, and their ends, seems to underscore this even more. On one side were the rich, well-fed, laughing (mocking?), and popular, while on the other side were the poor, hungry, weeping and despised. Is it possible that Jesus' followers had already found themselves facing economic hardships due to their decisions to follow Him? Certainly it was, as indicated by His instructions to them of what to do in the event that someone would forcibly take their possessions (6:29-30). According to the book of Hebrews, some of the early Christians "accepted joyfully the seizure of their property" (Heb. 10:34).

Although it costs us now to follow Christ, in the end it will be worth it. Those who take the easier path of not following Christ will in the end regret it. God will repay everyone according to his or her deeds. Everyone will ultimately reap what they have sown, positive or negative. Knowing this helps motivate us to love those who hate us during this age of temporary grace, when God is giving sinners an opportunity to repent and be forgiven. We hope that our love will shame them and influence them to turn from their sin, as we did, while they still have a chance. One day God's mercy towards them will cease, and His wrath will begin. As Paul wrote:

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thes. 1:6-9).

Jesus expects His followers to be lenders who aren't concerned if they are paid back, which is more like being a giver than a lender (6:34-35)! Jesus' contemporary followers were not lending money to help people buy luxuries, but necessities, and the borrowers would not have been borrowing had they not been poor. This principle should guide us in our lending as well.

There have always been false believers, even when Jesus was physically on the earth, which is why He asked professing followers, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (6:46). Then, just as now, people called Him their Lord, but by their actions denied Him. Good trees bear good fruit (6:43). The only people who are truly building their lives on the rock are those who hear and obey Jesus' commandments. That is salvation through faith!