

As we continue our journey through the book of Matthew, we start Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." Last week I discussed how significant perception is not only with how we read the scripture, but also how we apply it to our daily lives.

If you recall, we talked about the "Temptation of Christ" and when this occurred during Jesus' life. For so long, many of us had just presumed that the temptations Satan bestowed on Jesus had happened much later in his ministry. But, in actuality the trials were before he had even begun his preaching.

At the time Jesus does his sermon on the mount, he has started his ministry. He knows that John the Baptist has been arrested. And instead of fleeing for his life, he goes to Galilee to continue his ministry. He knows that he will be met with hostility, but he continues his journey anyway.

Along the way, Jesus starts to gather disciples. He has already told Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. Simon and Andrew were on their boat when he found them, and they left everything to follow him. James and John were working on their boat with their dad when Jesus found them. And they gave up everything to follow him. They left the only way of life they had known and they left their family in the process.

Did you notice that I said Jesus found them? I said that he found them, because that is what happened. So many times I've heard people say that they have found Jesus or they say that I must have found Jesus since I'm doing what I'm doing. And I tell them, "No. I didn't find Jesus."

I had that discussion with a man just last week. I've been helping out at a campus bookstore for the past couple of weeks while everyone tries to get settled in for the new semester. One man that I met, introduced himself to me as a devout Christian. At that point, I hadn't even told him my name, let alone that I'm actively working on getting ordained. His faith and beliefs are such a strong part of his self identity and his self perception that he wants everyone to perceive him in that light.

As we got to know each other more, we were discussing his faith journey and mine. And he made the comment that I found Jesus along my journey and he hopes that I continue on my path. I told him that I didn't find Jesus; Jesus found me.

In my perception, Jesus wasn't lost. We didn't send out a search party looking for him. I was lost. I had been looking for answers. I don't know if I actually got the answers that I was looking for. But, I did get a calling. I heard Jesus, through God and the Holy Spirit, telling me that this is where I needed to be and this was what I needed to be doing. I didn't slide into this position and find them. They found me and guided me here.

His perception of the bible and religion are very different from mine. We have been talking about Matthew over the past couple of weeks and I asked him about Matthew's description of Jesus especially at the beginning of the sermon on the mount. He felt that what I should focus on was

the beatitudes and their meaning, not the description of Jesus. Have you ever really thought about Matthew's depiction of Jesus? Not just in this chapter; but in others?

Matthew doesn't just describe Jesus in a concise visual portrayal. No, he gives us his perception about Jesus and how significant a part he plays in our salvation. To Matthew, Jesus isn't simply the son of God and sent to us to simply fill a task. No, he sees Jesus as so much more than that.

Matthew takes the time to show that Jesus found Simon, Andrew, James, and John. He called to them and asked them to follow him. Just as he did for all of us. Jesus could have continued walking past them. They could have seen the crowd and followed to try and figure out what was going on. But, no, Jesus found them and gave them the opportunity to join him and not just follow.

Then Matthew starts to describe Jesus at the beginning of the sermon. Jesus sits down and starts talking to the people. Matthew had grown up a Jew going to temple. In his world, teachers would sit in front and talk to everyone. They teach by sharing stories.

Jesus was sharing a different perspective on reaching the people. So many times, others such as Herod had said do this because I said it. I command you because this is what I want. Do this or else. But, that isn't Jesus' way. He is sharing that the kingdom of heaven is meant for all of us.

In verses 3-11, Jesus gives us the beatitudes for everyone who believes and lives a righteous life. Beatitudes simply means blessings or happiness. So, when they reach the kingdom of heaven, they will not need to worry for they will be blessed with God's love. And remember that righteous doesn't mean living strictly by the laws set forth in the bible. It is doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, not because it is the easy thing to do.

We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In us there is good to help and serve others. Jesus tells us to embrace it and share it otherwise we will lose it and sour. We need to share the light as well. A light hidden does nobody any good. By sharing God's wisdom and hope, others can learn from us and give thanks as well.

The final point from the sermon on the mount today is that Jesus tells us that he is not telling us to ignore the commandments of old or the old prophecies. He is here to fulfill the prophecies. Matthew has drawn many parallels between Jesus and Moses and has taken great pains to show Jesus' journeys coincide with scripture from Isaiah and Kings.

Matthew's perception isn't simply that Jesus came to die for our sins. He came to find us and to teach us. He is trying to bridge a gap between the Jews and Gentiles and share that Jesus' love and teachings are for everyone. Even if we come from different points of view, his love is great and his wisdom will bless us in the kingdom of heaven. Let us pray...

God our deliverer, you walk with the meek and the poor, the compassionate and those who mourn, and you call us to walk humbly with you. When we are foolish, be our wisdom; when we are weak, be our strength; that, as we learn to do justice and to love mercy, your rule may come as a blessing. Amen