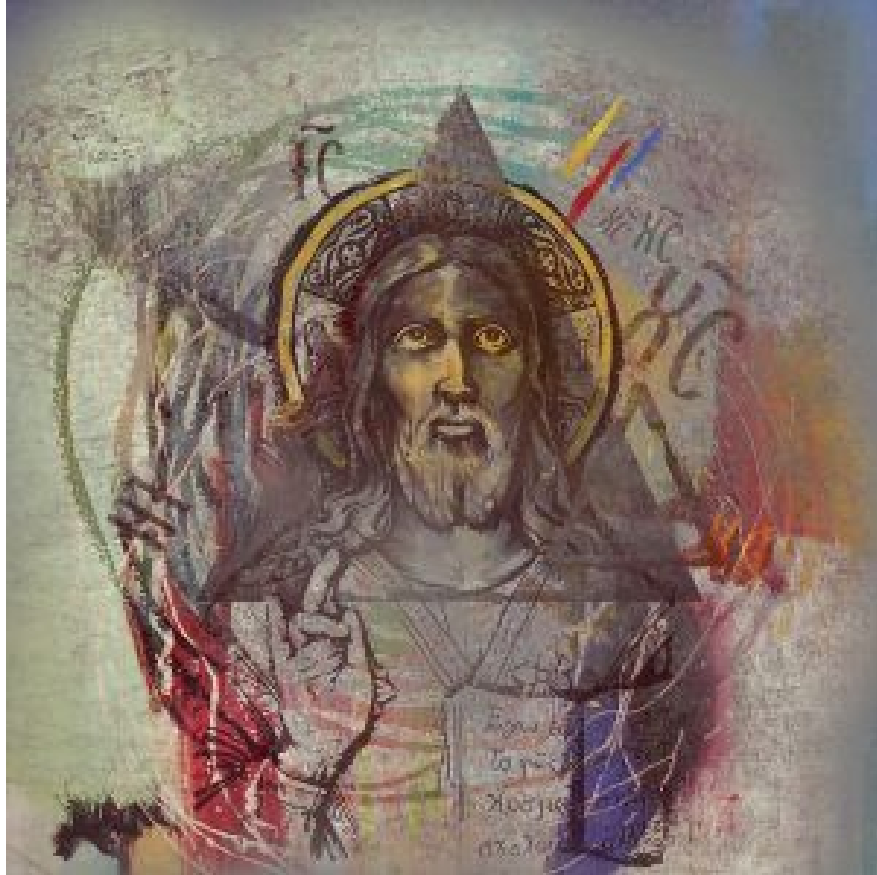


ODB SERIES: “The Sayings of Jesus”



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LESSON V

Matthew 8:

¹⁸Now when Jesus saw great crowds around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. ¹⁹A scribe then approached and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” ²⁰And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” ²¹Another of his disciples said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” ²²But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”¹

Matthew 9:

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often,^[a] but your disciples do not fast?” ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. ¹⁷Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”

³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Matthew 10:

The Mission of the Twelve

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’^[a] ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers,^[a] cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. ⁹Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. ¹²As you enter the house, greet it. ¹³If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Coming Persecutions

¹⁶“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will

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be given to you at that time; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²² and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

Whom to Fear

²⁶ “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Not Peace, but a Sword

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
³⁶ and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Rewards

⁴⁰ “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

COMMENTARY

While the sayings of Jesus are often grouped together without thematic coherence, there is a theme that is seen from several aspects in this section of Jesus' sayings. That theme is the beginnings of Christianity as a distinct denomination, separating from Judaism. So we see teachings about how to act as bearers of the Jesus message. We see consequences of following Jesus in family and synagogue.

Our readings for this lesson begin with an indication of just how human Jesus is. Jesus sees a mob, and, presumably to get away and find some peace, Jesus tells His disciples to go to the other side of the lake. A scribe says that he will follow Jesus wherever Jesus goes. Jesus' response indicates that even Jesus needs time to Himself; He seems to lament His inability to find a place far from the mob. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

This saying is followed with a strange saying, when taken at face value. A man says that he needs to bury his father before he can follow Jesus. To which Jesus replies, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." How are we to read this? Isn't it important to bury one's deceased relatives? And how can a dead person bury another dead person? Can we read this symbolically? Is the man asking to make peace with his past belief systems, past religious leaders, past religious fellows—i.e., his father—before he will be ready to follow Jesus? Is it nothing more than a man making some kind of excuse, and Jesus overcoming his reticence?

The question about fasting raises several points. First, it shows a difference in John the Baptist's religious observance and that of Jesus. John's disciples fast, observing traditional Jewish rituals. Jesus doesn't fast, showing His break with the strictures of Jewish rituals and the religious calendar with days of fasting and feast.

But there is a deeper aspect to this statement. Jesus compares His presence on earth as a bridegroom at a wedding banquet. This metaphor suggests a deep Christian mystery. The relationship between Jesus and the church is seen as a marriage relationship. There are passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that also suggest this,

"The days are coming," declares the LORD,
 "when I will make a new covenant
 with the people of Israel . . .
 because they broke my covenant,
 though I was a husband to them,"
 declares the LORD (JEREMIAH 31:31).

¹⁶"In that day," declares the LORD,
 "you will call me 'my husband'; . . .
¹⁹I will betroth you to me forever;
 I will betroth you in¹⁹ righteousness and justice,
 in¹⁹ love and compassion.
²⁰I will betroth you in¹⁹ faithfulness,
 and you will acknowledge the LORD (Hosea 2:16, 19-20).

The metaphor of Jesus as bridegroom and church as bride is scattered throughout the Gospels and is particularly present in Revelation,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready;
⁸to her it has been granted to be clothed
with fine linen, bright and pure” —
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7-9).

This way of understanding God-human relations is also found in Hindu and Buddhist tantra. In Hinduism, Shiva and Shakti are in perpetual ecstatic union. Devotees of Shakti, the Goddess, see themselves as Shiva’s consort and merge with Shive through Shakta Yoga. This is also in alchemy, and Kundalini Yoga, which uses the idea of the Chakras.

Swedenborgians see this symbolism as the actual source of love between husband and wife. The marriage of Jesus and the church is in each person as each person is joined to Jesus spiritually. We have a wisdom and love aspect to our personality, which is one way the husband-wife symbolism is internalized. Being joined to Jesus means being filled with God’s love and wisdom. When we have God’s love and wisdom in us, we love our fellows, and husbands love their wives in particular. All these loves flow from the mystical marriage of Jesus and the church.

Catholics take this symbolism rather literally. They teach that marriages cannot be broken, because Jesus’ mystical marriage to the church is eternal. So, since Jesus and the church are eternally bound, so Christian marriage—which is an earthly representation of the mystical marriage—must be for life. Now, Catholics allow annulment, but not divorce. Annulment means that the couple did not have the sufficient knowledge to give an informed consent, so there was never a marriage after all.

It is shocking to hear the Prince of Peace declare, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Jesus’ sword will divide father from son, mother from daughter, and one’s enemies will be those of his or her own family. Jesus goes on to say that if one loves family more than Him, one is not worthy of Him. While historically, followers of Jesus may well have broken with their family, from Swedenborg’s symbolism, there is more to the passage. There is a technical term called “*proprium*,” which means self-driven self, or ego-driven behaviors, thoughts and feelings. Father and mother symbolize *proprium*. And in Swedenborg’s theology, we need to turn from ego, *proprium*, selfishness, and let God’s love and wisdom flow into and through us. That is what is symbolized by the line, “One’s foes will be members of one’s own household.” Also, the cryptic line, “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” If we lose ego-driven life, we find spiritual life, which is eternal.

The Great Commission to the Twelve Apostles is relevant today. Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. This indicates that there are people hungering for Jesus message of love, but few who carry it. Jesus sends out the 12 into the world to bring the Jesus message. That message is “The Kingdom of Heaven has come near.” Was the Kingdom Jesus Himself? Or was Jesus announcing a new order in the universe? In any event, Swedenborgians see the spiritual world as everywhere near, present, around us, and in us. We are spirits in the material world. Our souls are in the spiritual world, while we are here in the material world. We are susceptible to influences from

angels and demons. We choose which we will allow into our consciousness, as we build our spiritual home.

In Jesus' day, there were no ordained clergy, no priests, no ministers, no divinity schools, no pope. The twelve disciples Jesus sent out were His intimate followers. We, too, carry the message. We carry it in our relationships with other people, in our own hearts and thoughts, in our application to work and service.

This church does not participate in missionary efforts or attempts to bring in converts. Personally, I resent other religions attempting to tell me to worship their way, believe their doctrines. We are open to everyone, we welcome everyone, but we leave each individual to their own best lights.

Matthew was probably written 80-90 CE. This was when Christianity was just beginning to assume its own identity and to break from Judaism. Matthew contains historical information about this. It mentions persecution Christians would face from the Jews in synagogues. It also mentions being hauled before Roman courts, which indeed happened. Christians would not worship the emperor-god, so they were seen as treasonous. The punishment for treason was death, and Christians were executed, sometimes terribly. Matthew prepares the early Christians for these consequences offering consolation, too, "you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."