

13. Creativity and Effective Ministry – Part 1

In our last topic, we talked about the relationship between effective listening and creativity. Today, we will be talking about the relationship between creativity and effective ministry. Christ is our example of One who showed tremendous creativity. He also showed us how to develop effective ministry.

In Matthew chapters 5-7, we have the passage known as the Sermon on the Mount. Those three chapters are concluded with the statement in Matthew 7:28-29, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes spent much of their time quoting what others had said about the law, instead of teaching the Word of God. Instead of teaching the Word by letting the Word of God speak for itself, the scribes told what others said they thought the Word meant. Needless to say, just quoting what others have said in the past shows a complete lack of creativity.

Today, many people teach the same way. They spend all of their time quoting what others say, instead of letting the Word of God explain itself. As a result, they teach the opinions and convictions of others to back up their own opinions and convictions. Paul explained to the Corinthians how he taught in 1 Corinthians 2:13. That verse says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” Instead of quoting the opinions and convictions of other people, Paul taught Biblical principles and used the Word of God to illustrate those principles.

We will look at the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and see what made the teaching of Christ so different from the teaching of the scribes. Matthew 5:1-2 says, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying.” Chapter 4 concludes with large crowds of people coming to hear Christ teach because He had been teaching in their synagogues. The first thing we see here is that Christ found a place to teach where He was not limited by the size of the building. Second, we see that Christ went up to a mountain to teach. There, His voice would carry so that all who wanted to listen could hear Him. Third, we see that the concern of Christ was to teach His disciples. If others wanted to listen, they were free to do so.

Matthew 5:3-12 gives us what are known as the Beatitudes. Christ said that the people with the following attitudes are blessed: the poor in spirit; those who mourn; those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peacemakers; and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Instead of quoting anyone, Christ began by challenging His disciples to examine the attitudes of their own hearts. Only as people examine their own hearts will there be changes that transform their lives.

In Matthew 5:13-16, Christ told His disciples that they were salt and light. He helped them to realize that it would not matter what they said if their lives did not agree with the things they were saying. First, Christ pointed out that they had a choice. They could be the salt of the earth or they

could just be useless salt that was worthless. Second, they could be a light that shined out to the world around it or they could be like a light that was hidden. Then, Christ told them how to be a light in Matthew 5:16. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” They could have a purpose in life that would give their lives meaning if they made a choice to be a light to the world by doing good works that brought glory to the Father.

In Matthew 5:17-20, Christ said that He had come to fulfill the law and the prophets, not destroy them. Christ again gave His disciples a choice. They could follow His example, or they could choose to follow the example of the scribes and Pharisees. If they followed His example, they would fulfill the law. If they followed the example of the scribes and Pharisees, by their example, they would be teaching the people to break the law. Matthew 5:19 says, “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” If the disciples wanted to be great in the kingdom, they had to provide an example of obedience to the Word so that they both lived and taught the Word of God.

As Christ went on in the sermon, He took three of the Ten Commandments to illustrate exactly what He was saying. Christ pointed out that, if we have anger in our hearts that causes us to offend others by what we say or do, we have killed. Christ said that we have committed adultery in our hearts if we look on another person with lust. Christ said that we have lied and perjured ourselves if we make an oath by things over which we have no control. Christ then pointed out the fact that the people twisted the meaning of the law to give themselves an excuse to get even. In actual fact, the verses they quoted were out of context and showed the judicial punishment that was to be given to one who broke the law.

Then, Christ went on to explain the true way to fulfill the law as He contrasted what they said with the real meaning of the law. Matthew 5:43-44 says, “‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.’” The scribes and Pharisees said that the law gave them an excuse to hate their enemy. Christ showed that the real meaning of the law was to minister to their enemy in love. They would actually fulfill the law, if they loved their enemies, blessed those who cursed them, did good to those who hated them, and prayed for those who persecuted them. Later, Christ would tell His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to give them the power to love as He loved.

Christ then gave another area where the disciples would have to make a choice. The scribes and Pharisees did the things they did to be seen by people. This was illustrated in three different ways. They gave to the needy, only when everyone was watching, so that people would talk about their generosity. They prayed in the synagogues, and on the street corners, so people would talk about their prayer life. They disfigured their faces to let people know they were fasting so people would praise them. Christ said they got their reward from the praise of men, but they would not get any reward from God. Christ told the disciples that they were to give, to pray, and to fast, but they were to do those things secretly because they were serving the Lord.

Christ also told the disciples that they would have to make a choice about where they wanted their reward. They could have their reward on earth by seeking the riches of the earth or they could have their reward in heaven by serving the Lord. Christ said that the place where they chose to gather their treasure would show the condition of their hearts. Matthew 6:24 says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money).” Christ also promised them seven reasons why they would not need to worry if they chose to focus on heavenly treasures.

Christ began chapter seven by saying, in Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” Again the disciples were given a choice. They could choose to judge others, and they would be judged; or, they could choose to accept others, and they would not be judged. They were also encouraged to talk to God about their needs, because, as a loving heavenly Father, He would provide what they needed. Then, Christ summarized the Old Testament by saying that if we are following the Lord, we will treat others like we want to be treated. That means our heart attitudes and actions will be controlled by love for others, because we have yielded the control of our lives to God.

Christ then told His disciples that they must make a choice. Matthew 7:13-14 says, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” The disciples could choose to follow the example of the scribes and the Pharisees. However, they would find that that way led to destruction. Second, the disciples could choose to follow Christ. Then they would be on the way that leads to life. Christ knew that most people would choose the road to destruction.

Christ said there are false teachers, and there are true teachers. Christ said that there are people who make a false profession of faith, and there are those who make a genuine profession of faith. Christ said that those who made a false profession of faith were people who heard the Word of God and did nothing about it. Christ said that those who had a genuine faith would both hear His Word and also obey. That day, Christ made it very clear that everyone who was listening faced a choice that day. The choice they made that day would have eternal consequences. Many would choose to reject the Word of God and experience judgment. Some would choose to accept and obey the Word of God and receive eternal life.

Creativity will give us an effective ministry of evangelism because we will choose to follow the example of Christ and help people clearly see their choices. We will have an effective ministry of evangelism if we live a life that provides an example and also teaches people how they can have forgiveness of sins and receive eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you yield your life to Christ moment-by-moment so that He can work in and through your words and life to draw others to Himself.