

Explore the Bible: If I reject Jesus

March 15, 2017

- The **Explore the Bible** lesson for **April 2** focuses on Matthew 21:33-45

An older friend told me recently of his involvement in helping lead a friend of his to faith in Christ. The experience began with his own conversion, some 30 years before.

As roommates in college, his friend witnessed the radical change in his life when he became a Christian and wanted to know what had happened. My friend answered this question and following questions as honestly as he could, explaining how he had turned from unbelief to life-changing faith in Jesus—his own, personal experience of salvation. Nothing my friend said seemed to make any difference.

For one thing, his friend couldn't understand how a loving God could allow so much suffering, especially of innocent people. It was an intellectual roadblock to his ability to believe in Jesus.

To his credit, my friend didn't get sidetracked. He told his friend that, once the larger question of faith in Jesus was settled, all he needed to know about the other unanswered questions would come into clearer view. He already knew all he needed to know intellectually to become a follower of Jesus.

Life-changing experience

Later, his friend encountered a terrible, life-changing experience, one from which no one was sure he would survive. As he miraculously recovered and returned home from hospitalization, he wrote my friend a letter and

inquired as to whether he could become a Christian, too.

My friend drove several hours to meet his friend in his home and rehearsed again what faith in Christ meant to him. After more than an hour, his friend disappeared into the darkness of his own backyard. A few minutes later, he returned, and my friend said he could see him “glowing in the dark.” Somewhere in the night, he’d given his heart to Jesus.

With tears in his eyes, my friend said all of this came about after he had prayed for the man 30 years! He never stopped praying until, somewhere in the privacy of his own heart, his friend finally surrendered all that he was to all that Jesus had to give, forgiveness of sin and a new life—nothing short of a new reason for living, even with his questions still unanswered.

Heart, then mind

Very few people reject Jesus because they don’t have enough evidence to believe he is the Savior of all mankind. In the parable recorded in this text, Jesus more than implied faith transforms one’s heart first and then one’s mind. Faith is, as Jesus teaches, a moral choice before it is an intellectual conviction.

We don’t become Christians, or shouldn’t, because faith in God answers all our questions about God. Faith gives us Someone to trust, even though all our questions may forever remain unanswered. Faith is trust in what cannot be seen or explained, not answers as to their existence.

As an extreme example, we cannot fully understand how the sun works. That doesn’t stop anyone from living in its light or enjoying its benefits.

Chief priests and Pharisees sat in Jesus’ audience. These were, by far, the most highly educated people of Jesus’ day. No one would dare presume to question their faith in God. In fact, Jesus does not do so directly.

Instead, he tells them a story about a fictional event that indicates the scribes and Pharisees were rejecting the most solid evidence they'd ever receive describing the authority of God over their lives.

Resisting God's authority

So, again, the scribes and Pharisees weren't resisting the presence of God. What they were resisting was the authority of God in their lives. Whatever else salvation may mean, it first means surrendering to the authority, the power, even the love of God.

Sometimes, surrendering to the love of God is the most difficult aspect of trusting God. Accepting the fact our lives are incomplete without the presence of God's love is the single-most challenging aspect for anyone who believes their lives already are complete.

At this point in Jesus' ministry, the scribes and Pharisees not only rejected the lordship of Jesus. They believed that by ridding the world of Jesus, they would be doing God a favor. They apparently also believed ridding the world of Jesus would position them more favorably with God.

Repentance, by its very nature, is not first our willingness and ability to stop sinning. Repentance is, first, our choice to stop running from God's love and surrender to it. Only in releasing our perceived ability to live life apart from God will we ever know the power to live in a way that truly honors God.

Glen Schmucker is a hospice chaplain in Fort Worth.