

So what lesson does Jesus, the teacher par excellent have in store for us today?

These words of preacher Billy Graham will help clarify the lesson plan:

Tragically, many people are the victims of their own bad decisions. Faced with choices every day, they turn their backs on what is right or what is best and decide instead on what is wrong or what will bring them, or others, harm. Only afterward do they realize that bad decisions always result in bad consequences.

Life is filled with decisions – some minor, but some life changing. How will you make them? The most important thing I can tell you is this: Seek God’s will in every decision. Pray. Turn to the Scriptures. Seek the advice of godly friends. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. God loves you, and God’s way is *always* best. [Hope For Each Day, pg 196]

Jesus’ lesson for today is that our choices – define us. Our choices --- reveal our values. Our choices – determine our character.

Sirach in the first reading sets the bar:

“If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and they will save you.”

And then Jesus provides the method:

“Your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees.” Remember – they were the know-it-alls. They, the scribes and Pharisees – knew the law, all the rules and regulations of Judaism – in and out. They were experts on the law --- and yet their hearts remained far from God.

So our righteousness, our standards of what is right or wrong – must go beyond merely the rules and regulations – because that’s what the scribes and Pharisees were good at.

So, like a good teacher, Jesus gives us some examples for “going beyond”:

Don’t just avoid killing, which is forbidden by the law – but choose not to get angry – for anger can eventually lead to words and actions that slay.

Don’t just avoid adultery, which is forbidden by the law – but choose to not even entertain lustful thoughts within your mind and heart – for lustful thoughts can lead to lustful actions.

Don’t just avoid taking false oaths, which is forbidden by the law – but choose to not swear at all.

The master teacher’s lesson for today is that our choices define us. Our choices reveal our values. Our choices determine our character.

So choose to love. . . rather than hate.

Choose to smile. . . rather than frown.

Choose to build. . . rather than destroy.

Choose to persevere. . . rather than quit.

Choose to praise. . . rather than gossip.

Choose to heal. . . rather than wound.

Choose to give. . . rather than grasp.

Choose to act. . . rather than delay.

Choose to forgive. . . rather than curse.

Choose to pray. . . rather than despair.

[Found in Lists to live By, pg 215]

Bob and Emilie Barnes in their book, The 15-minute money manager, say:

Who you will be five years from now --- depends on three things:

The books you read.

*The people you meet.
The Choices you make.
Choose today to live a transformed life.*