

## **Introduction**

Not long ago, a friend of mine told me who his favorite author is and why. **"It's A. W. Tozer,"** he said, **"Because we need to learn from the best."** He was absolutely right. We do need to learn from the best and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **Pupils and Teachers**

Jesus tells a mini-parable in verse 39. A blind man attempts to lead another blind man. But the leader blind man, not seeing a pit, falls into it, causing the follower blind man to come tumbling after. That's the parable in verse 39 and Jesus goes on to interpret it in verse 40.

One point of reference is the follower blind man. He stands for a pupil. That refers to all of us of course because all of us are pupils. All of us have learned and continue to learn from others how to live. There are no exceptions to that. Human beings are the kind of creatures who learn and keep on learning from others how to live.

Think about yourself. Little of what you know is the product of your own individual and independent insight into reality. That's true of me at least. I know, for instance, that aging is a process of gaining not losing. I know that as my physical body fades, my resurrection body approaches. That's a vivid truth that's dramatically altered how I experience aging. But I have to admit it. I didn't get it through my own individual and independent insight. I got it from somebody else. That's the case with probably 80% of what I know. I learned it from others.

My point is that all of us are pupils. We have learned and continue to learn from others how to live.

Another point of reference in the parable is the leader blind man. According to Jesus in verse 40, he stands for a teacher. "To teach" means "to cause to learn" and that's what teachers are. They're people who claim or are given the authority to cause others to learn.

Every culture in history has had its teachers, especially ours.

Technologies have made more teachers accessible to us than we can shake a stick at: Joel Osteen, Oprah, Dr. Phil, Tony Robbins, Wayne Dyer, Deepak Chopra, and countless more. They all claim the same thing. They can teach us how to be better persons than we are and how to live better lives than we're living.

Oprah's book *Oprah Winfrey Speaks* illustrates what I mean. The publisher's synopsis describes it simply this way: "***Oprah Winfrey Speaks highlights Oprah's . . . 10 Commandments for lifelong success.***" The book's title and synopsis suggest authority. There's no doubt about it. Oprah isn't just a talk show host. She's a teacher.

Those then are two points of reference and their meaning. All of us are pupils who learn and keep on learning from teachers how to live.

## **Blind**

Now let's look at another point of reference, blindness. Blindness stands for ignorance, the failure to see reality as it is. Ignorance has two aspects. One is lack of information, not knowing things that need to be known. The other is misinformation, thinking things to be true that aren't. To be blind means to be seriously uninformed or misinformed.

According to Jesus in verse 40, that's precisely what many teachers are. I'd quickly say that no teacher is fully informed. But some are too uninformed and/or misinformed to teach about the matters they do.

Oprah, for instance, gives people advice about a range of matters including health, beauty, happiness, relationships, and spiritual life. Listen to these statements of hers about spiritual life: (1) God isn't hung up on what you believe about Him because He doesn't have an ego-problem; (2) If you believe in a rhythm of nature and in love, then you believe in God; (3) Jesus didn't come to teach us how divine He was but to teach that divinity was within us; and (4) One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe that Jesus is the only way to God. Each of those statements is categorically wrong. I don't know about health, beauty, and the rest but when it comes to spiritual life, Oprah is blind.

But she isn't the only one. The fact is that many teachers and leaders today are just like her, seriously uninformed and/or misinformed about the matters in which they claim authority. They're blind.

### **Learn from the Best**

And we shouldn't learn from them because they are. Jesus reveals a fundamental principle in verse 40, "**A pupil is not above his teacher.**" He's saying that pupils don't become better persons and live better lives than the teachers from whom they learn. If I choose to learn from Oprah, for instance, about spiritual life, I'll never be better spiritually than she is. So, don't learn from the blind. Learn from the best instead. Choose the best teachers from whom to learn.

To learn from the best, we have to close the door on mediocre or bad teachers, if we've had or have them, and open the door to new and better ones. In order to do that, we must examine and discover who has taught us and who is teaching us now. We must then evaluate the results of their teaching in our lives and us. Doing those two things is a major transition in life. It can be a harrowing task and we can sometimes hardly bear to do it. But we have to in order to close the door on mediocre or bad teachers and open the door to new and better ones.

Now, there are two factors we should take into account in doing that – the character and competence of our teachers. Character refers to the kind of persons they are or are not. Competence refers to how much they know or don't know. We should evaluate our former and current teachers and choose new ones in light of those two factors. Make sure their character and competence qualify them to teach us.

Someone asked me about a noted Christian speaker and writer. He watches her broadcasts and reads her books and asked me if I thought he should. She's an excellent orator, I replied, but her content is average at best. She's also a materialist who lives extravagantly. So, I told him, I wouldn't choose her to be a teacher of mine.

That illustrates what Jesus' parable challenges us to do. We won't

become better persons and live better lives than our teachers. So let's evaluate their character and competence. Then, on the basis of our evaluation, let's choose and learn from the best.

The first of whom is Jesus. Consider this about Him during His earthly life. In terms of character, He possessed every positive quality to the greatest possible degree and no negative quality to any degree. And in terms of competence, He was the smartest and most informed person who has ever lived. Now do the math. Perfect person + smartest person = the best teacher who ever lived. So learn from Him first of all. We can have other teachers. But learn from Him first of all.

That's our call and we answer it by doing three things.

### **Respect Jesus as Teacher**

First, as Jesus implies in verse 40, respect Him as teacher.

I'm going to make a statement and then ask you two questions about it. Statement: Jesus was the foremost expert in economics, literature, calculus, physics, psychology, marriage, and spirituality. Questions: (1) Have you ever thought of Him in those terms; and (2) Does it seem strange to you to think of Him in those terms? Most Christians, if they were honest, would answer "no" and "yes" respectively.

A Christian once asked me how he could get his wife to quit being so critical of their adult children. I began to explain what Jesus teaches about that in Matthew 7:1-11 when he stopped me and said, "**I need practical advice not theology to get this problem solved.**"

Many Christians, like that one, show an astonishing disregard for Jesus as a person of intelligence and ability. They may think of Oprah or Dr. Phil that way but certainly not Him. His teachings are irrelevant - don't apply to the things that matter to us. Or they're relevant and apply but don't work. He was a goodhearted but out of touch figure whose "pretty words" only make life more difficult than it already is.

That kind of thinking has to change. We must come to see Jesus as He was, *the* teacher. When He was on earth, He knew more about the

universe and life in it than anyone ever has. He knew far more about psychology than Dr. Phil, far more about physics than Stephen Hawking, far more about business than Donald Trump, and so on. What He says in the Bible is the best possible information about the most important matters in human life. Recognize that and respect Jesus as teacher.

### **Study All that Jesus Says**

Now look at verse 47. Jesus talks about he who **“hears His words.”** Jesus lived in an oral culture. We live in a typographic one. The equivalent of **“hear”** therefore is **“study.”** That’s the second thing we do to learn from Jesus first of all. Study all that He says.

Notice I said, **“study”**, not **“read.”** We can read and get a general grasp of what Jesus says. Or we can study and get a detailed grasp of it. The latter is far more valuable and life transforming than the former is. Studying enables us to do what just reading doesn’t – interpret what Jesus says and apply it to our lives. Take verses 41-42 and verses 43-45 as examples of what I mean.

Let’s study not just read verses 41-42. Jesus addresses the common practice of you and I condemning (criticizing) others. The log or board in our eye is one or both of two things: the anger and/or self-righteous pride with which we almost always condemn. Jesus points out the irony of it all. Our anger or pride is usually worse than the fault we’re condemning. What we have here then is a specific guideline to follow in deciding whether to condemn or not. If we’re angry or self-righteous about it, don’t. That includes with our spouses and children.

Now let’s study not just read verses 43-45. Jesus observes that fruit trees bear the fruit that it’s their nature to bear. In the same way, he says, people act how it’s their nature to act. That is a profound psychological insight. People do what it’s in them to do and we shouldn’t expect otherwise. Which means we have to change what people are in order to change what they do, including us.

That illustrates the second thing we do to learn from Jesus first of

all. Study all that He says.

### **Do All that Jesus Says**

The third thing is found in the words **“do”** and **“act on”** in verses 46-49. Act on the teachings of Jesus. Nike has a slogan that captures the gist of this. Just do it! Just do all that He says!

Verses 46-49 are about intention. In his classic book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, William Law discusses what he calls **“intending our best.”** He writes about that: **“We cannot obey him (Jesus) as if we were in a state of perfection. But fallen men can do their best, and this is the perfection that is required of us.”**

That is a million dollar insight. We aren't able to *always* do *all* that Jesus says. But we are able to *always* do our best to do *all* that Jesus says. We aren't able to be perfect in our obedience. But we are able to be perfect in our intention, which is what verses 46-49 teach us to be.

Intention is about trying and training. 80% of what Jesus says is a direct freedom. We can do it now by trying our best. So, we try our best. The other 20%, like receiving criticism with joy not anger, is an indirect freedom. We can't do it now but we can do it later by training our best now (practicing spiritual disciplines). So, we train our best.

Because I respect Jesus as teacher, I studied verses 41-42 and know what He says. Never condemn with anger or self-righteous pride. I also try my best to do that. I never condemn with anger or self-righteous pride. That illustrates what it means to learn from Jesus: respect Him as teacher, study all that He says, and do all that He says.

### **Conclusion**

Verses 48-49 reveal what happens if we do and don't learn from Jesus. If we do, we're like a house built on rock, indestructible. Nothing will rob us of our love, joy, and peace. If we don't, we're like a house built on sand, destructible. Many things will rob us of our love, peace, and joy. Build your house on rock. Learn from the best, Jesus.