

Week Seven - Give An Answer: Who's Responsible for My Oil?

Readings: Psalm 78:1-7 // Amos 5:18-24 // Matthew 25:1-13

Series based on 1 Peter 3:15 NIV "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

What is Apologetics?

Apologetics is worshipping God with our minds as we defend the Christian faith with logic and evidence that may remove barriers to belief.

From Joshua Johnson: What Apologetics IS and is NOT

Apologetics IS: Worshipping God with our minds, defends the Christian faith with logic and evidence, removes barriers to belief (some call pre-evangelism), ...the science and art of Christian persuasion, any reason why a person believes in Jesus, equips believers to engage hard questions they will face in life, ...connecting faith with science, history, philosophy without sacrificing one or the other, bridges faith with experience, gives believers and unbelievers space to ask questions, investigate holistic discipleship.

Apologetics is NOT: saying "I'm sorry," ...arguing or bullying people into faith, ...possessing absolute certainty in all theological beliefs, ...debating with people on a stage, ...eliminating the mysterious or the spiritual, ...about winning, ignoring the heart, the spirit, or experiences, ...a purely mental exercise, providing a bubble that prevents questions of the Christian faith, ...cookie cutter explanations.

Five Reasons We Need to be Equipped for Apologetics (from Joshua Johnson);

1. It is biblical, historical, and Jesus and John Wesley used it.
2. It is part of the holiness journey.
3. It is a multi-purpose tool.
4. It demands integrity. [Questions are not accusations; they are opportunities to respond with gentleness and respect. Both require integrity.]
5. It engages the next generation and changing world.

How does Jesus teach us to go about explaining the reasons for what we believe?

Matthew 10:16 – NASB 16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so [a]be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves."

The Message: 16 "Stay alert. This is hazardous work I'm assigning you. You're going to be like sheep running through a wolf pack, so don't call attention to yourselves. Be as shrewd as a snake, inoffensive as a dove."

What do the Psalm and passage from Amos have to say?

The Psalmist invites us to a challenge; learn from God's works AND keep his commands. We might be better at one or the other but both are necessary. Complacency can cause us to forget to keep God's commands because we feel so good about ourselves and the world that we fail to acknowledge God's hand. The passage from Amos should take you to Jesus' parable about the Wedding Banquet. If you recall the parable, the King throws a banquet for his son and invites the ones on his list, who refuse the invitation, twice. Then the King tells his servants (us) to go invite everyone and anyone to the banquet. Many will be invited, few will be chosen. But it's our job to invite, God's authority to thin the crowd getting into the Kingdom of God. Amos talks about accepting the invitation and participate according to God's will, not our own. That we cannot dress up a lack of surrender to God and get in. Even the most expensive gifts given in Jesus' name, yet without a repentant heart, is performative. It has no value to God, and no eternal value for the giver. There is no sacrificial love in it. A Christian's primary relationship is with God. We must be attentive to it.

Jesus' story about the ladies not sharing their oil doesn't sound very nice?

When we take parables too literally, we miss the spiritual lesson. Jesus is teaching on preparation. Traditionally, on the evening of a wedding, the bride and the bridesmaids would wait at the bride's parents' home; the groom would then come with his entourage to escort the bride and her entourage with music and dancing to the site of the wedding. Because the exact timing was unpredictable, given the many preparations, the bridesmaids needed to stay ready. This groom was delayed more than usual, but the groom would normally come after dark to escort the bride to the wedding. It's been dark for a while and the lamps they would carry are small, holding a small amount of oil at a time. The bridesmaids were typically virgins who wanted to perform their duties as bridesmaids very well, hoping to find husbands for themselves. To be seen as foolish in the eyes of a potential husband would be terrible!

Today's takeaway: Anyone who says they'll worry about Jesus' return when it happens does not understand what Jesus taught. We are to be ready every day. It begins by accepting Jesus as our Teacher and Example, repenting of our sin and turning to God for leading, and to stay in love with God living the life of a disciple; love God, love yourself, love your neighbor.

Meditations for the Week:

1. "Never do for the poor (including the poor in spirit) what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves." – Robert Lupton, Oath for Compassionate Service
2. Examine your own heart and preparation for Jesus' return; am I living "in the Word", which means reading the Bible (in a translation I can understand) and being transformed by what I learn? Do I need a study Bible with additional notes to help me understand?
3. Do I take responsibility where I can? Do I ever want others to step in and do for me what I should do myself, including giving an answer for my hope with others?