



**Ord Sunday 7**

# THE NEW SHOFAR

**Only profess what you can live out**

**Failure in the Church is always a failure in faithfulness**

***Be in the world as Jesus the Christ was in the world***

The overall point of what Jesus is saying is: *because* the Kingdom of God has arrived in the life and ministry of Jesus, God is present among us in a personal and intimate way and oaths were no longer necessary. Those who are disciples of Jesus should be living with each other and within the wider world showing the world how God was living with them – in divine faithfulness, justice, compassion, truthfulness, love and mercy. God alone is enough to determine how to act and to respond. In the light of this background, Jesus is insisting on the integrity of a person's word. Much as disciples may find it difficult, the ethics of the Kingdom of God require a higher standard of living than those of unbelievers! A challenge there!!!

***If you are not living it, do not profess it***

One of the most common criticisms of Christians today and of the Church in general, is that we are hypocrites. The messages that we profess and proclaim are wonderful but while that message can be heard they cannot always be seen to be lived in the life of individual believers and certainly not always in the life and actions of the Church. What Jesus is demanding here is simple: We Christians live lives modelled on Jesus; must profess and teach the faith of the apostles, but only inasmuch as we are willing to give witness to those teachings, live them ourselves so that the world can experience Jesus at work in and through us – our words, deeds, actions in the world and through the depth of our love.

***There are no excuses for disciples not living Gospel faithfulness***

The question of an oath arose at a time when excuses were being made for not fulfilling religious and spiritual promises. People could commit themselves to covenant faithfulness but then find a neatly constructed reasons for failing to live it out. The reality from a heavenly perspective is set down here: there can be no excuses for not fulfilling our faith commitments.

The Rule of God has been inaugurated with the coming of Jesus. The world now lives under God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who reigns not just from heaven but from within us, alongside of us and importantly -through the actions of the faith community gathered together in the name of the same Jesus who is both Son and Messiah. The guarantee of the faith we profess is the God within us. If we are less than honest, if our integrity is easily compromised by the world around us and we live compromised faith

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lives, then it is God who is tarnished in the eyes of the unbelievers. They will not come to faith.

### ***Christian faith is all about a transformation of a fallen world***

The *eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth* custom came from the Old Testament and was considered to be an enlightened law as it limited the possibility of escalating vendettas. The punishment should reflect the crime and go no further than was reasonable and just. Jesus turns this around with his *but I say to you*. What he is saying is how there is to be no getting even, no paying back one action for an equally painful or hurtful action.

The example is one of what to do when someone insults you with an insulting slap. It is not talking about a punch on the jaw. If someone drags down your dignity, your integrity or dishonours your name in the wider community – turn around and give them a chance to further insult you. Let them hurt you, says Jesus, for your true dignity is to be found in God alone and not in what someone else would be thinking. That is a tough, uncompromising demand.

Jews were stunned to hear that the disciple was called upon to carry the bags of an occupying enemy; not just the distance requested but even further than that. It is not that the Roman is worthy of special respect but that the life of a disciple is all about a willingness to act with humility and not with anger, resentment and a kind of racial profiling. They do this because in these actions, the enemies of God come face to face with the loving Christ.

### ***Are we just dreaming the impossible dream?***

These demands of Jesus are impossible! Ideals to which aspire! Not in the eyes of Jesus. What is called for is an entirely new man, new woman, new community and a new way of living. Nothing less than a transformed world is what is being envisioned by Jesus in his teachings here. To live like this will require a miracle on the part of God, as our human weaknesses, human conditioning and the ways of the world are almost completely the opposite.

It is a part of the expectation of Jesus that we will be acting towards others in the same way we would like others to act towards us. This in turn also grows out of our experience of God. We sin against God time and time again and on a daily basis fail to live the level of discipleship demanded by Jesus. Fortunately, God does not respond by slapping us down. He instead reaches out in love and mercy, giving to us what we have not earned or deserved. His faithfulness and persevering love is truly amazing and it is this divine love that we need to have at the forefront of our dealings with others.

Here is a great question: *Why would we “turn the other cheek”?* **Because** it is a command from Jesus. We are to live this way **because** it is what God demands of us. We *turn the other cheek because* we are disciples. However, faith and grace also add another dimension. It is as we turn the other cheek, walk away, resist the temptation to “get even”

and when we give, especially when we know that there is no chance of being repaid, that the Gospel is truly proclaimed through our actions, our deeds. The grace of God is at work in these loving actions. These people abusing us may not change their ways and they may not show any signs of gaining an insight into the way of the Kingdom of Heaven. That is not our responsibility. The apparent lack of impact does not exempt us from this call to evangelistic living. We love and show respect to all peoples and allow God's grace to move in his own mysterious ways.