REVD. DR. D. J. AJITH KUMAR

Responding to God’s invitation with righteous living

CNI · 4 October 2026

KEY VERSE

“The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12)

READINGS

Isaiah 5:1–7; Psalm 34; 1 Corinthians 9:6–16; Matthew 23:1–12

19 Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

Life is full of invitations - to celebrations, jobs, roles, and relationships. But none is more important than the invitation of God to live a life of righteousness, humility, and service. This divine call is not merely to enter God’s vineyard but to live faithfully in it. The Scriptures for today emphasize the urgency and the integrity with which we must respond to God’s invitation. From the vineyard parable in Isaiah to Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees in Matthew, we are reminded that God desires fruit-bearing lives that mirror His justice, compassion, and truth. In this sermon, we will reflect on four key biblical portions that guide us in responding rightly to God’s invitation:

Bearing Fruit in God’s Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7)

Living a Life of Praise and Righteousness (Psalm 34)

Proclaiming the Gospel with Integrity (1 Corinthians 9:6-16)

Walking in Humility and Authenticity (Matthew 23:1-12)

Bearing Fruit in God’s Vineyard - (Isaiah 5:1-7)

Isaiah’s song of the vineyard presents a powerful image of God’s care and expectations. The vineyard represents Israel, and by extension, all those whom God has called. The Lord prepared the vineyard with great love, expecting it to yield good grapes, but it yielded wild ones instead. This passage is a wake-up call. God’s grace is not to be taken for granted. Just as a gardener expects harvest, God expects His people to bear fruits of justice, righteousness, and mercy. The passage condemns exploitation, greed, and bloodshed. In our modern context, we can ask: What fruit does God find in our homes, churches, and communities? Are we practicing justice in our dealings? Are we merciful and honest? One family once owned a garden patch but never cared for it. Weeds took over. One day they decided to tend it, but the soil had hardened. Like that garden, our lives, if ignored, can become fruitless. Responding to God’s invitation involves cultivating righteousness with consistency and care.

Living a Life of Praise and Righteousness - (Psalm 34)

Psalm 34 is a beautiful reflection on what it means to live a life in awe of God, filled with thanksgiving and righteous conduct. The psalmist calls us to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” encouraging us to seek the Lord continually. Righteous living flows from a grateful and humble heart that fears the Lord, turns away from evil, and seeks peace. Verse 14 says, “Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” This is practical righteousness: not only avoiding sin but actively pursuing what is good. Responding to God’s invitation means making a lifestyle out of doing good, even when no one is watching. A pastor once said, “Holiness is not a badge we wear; it is a light we live by.” Families that worship together, speak kindly to one another, and help their neighbours become a living testimony to God’s goodness. When our worship is real, it overflows into our actions. True praise does not end with the benediction; it continues through righteous living.

Proclaiming the Gospel with Integrity - (1 Cor. 9:6-16)

In this passage, Paul reminds the Corinthian believers of his call to preach the Gospel, not for personal gain but as a divine obligation. He did not insist on rights or rewards; his joy was in preaching Christ freely. This shows us what it means to respond to God’s call with integrity, sacrifice, and commitment. Verse 16 says, “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” Paul saw ministry not as a privilege but as a sacred duty. We too are called to witness - through our words, our service, and our lives. There was a woman in a small village who could not read or write, but she taught children about Jesus through songs and stories. Her life drew people to Christ. Responding to God’s call does not require a pulpit; it requires a sincere heart willing to serve. Like Paul, our Christian life must be marked by faithfulness over fame, mission over personal comfort, and service over self-interest. Such living honours the God who called us.

Walking in Humility and Authenticity - (Matthew 23:1-12)

Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who burden others with rules but do not practice what they preach. They seek honour, titles, and public admiration, but neglect justice, mercy, and humility. Christ calls us to a different way: humble service and sincere discipleship. Verse 11 reminds us: “The greatest among you will be your servant.” In a world that values status and recognition, Jesus upholds servanthood as the true path to greatness. A church elder once cleaned the toilets of the church quietly before service every Sunday. When asked why, he said, “Because Jesus washed feet.” That is the essence of humility. Our response to God’s invitation should not be self-promotion but selfless living, not in show but in service. The Church must be known not for its buildings or banners, but for the love, humility, and authenticity of its people.

Conclusion

God’s invitation comes to us daily - in Scripture, in worship, in the cry of the needy, and in the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit. How do we respond?

Like the vineyard, we must bear fruit.

Like the psalmist, we must live with reverent praise and righteousness.

Like Paul, we must proclaim Christ with integrity.

Like Jesus taught, we must walk in humility.

Righteous living is the only true response to God’s gracious call. Let us commit to lives that reflect God’s justice, mercy, and truth.

Prayer

Gracious and Holy God, Thank You for the divine invitation to walk in Your ways. Forgive us when we fall short and fail to bear good fruit. Teach us to live righteously, to seek peace, and to walk humbly with You. May our worship overflow into loving deeds. May our service reflect the heart of Christ. Let our lives proclaim Your Gospel with integrity and humility. Strengthen us, Lord, to be faithful stewards of Your call. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.