

TEXT SERMON – Discipleship Series

Message #1

“EXAMINING DISCIPLESHIP”
Luke 14:27**“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”**

The word “disciple” is used more than 265 times in the New Testament. There is a question about discipleship in John chapter 18 that everyone who professes to be a Christian must answer: “Are you one of this man’s disciples?” This question was posed by a young girl to Peter as he warmed by the enemy’s fire. (v. 17)

In New Testament days, followers of Jesus were called disciples and later were called Christians, the word occurring only 3 times. Today many are called Christians but few are referred to as true disciples of the Lord Jesus. All disciples are Christians but not all Christians are disciples. The word “Christian” defines our belief; the word “disciple” defines our behavior. In the book of James we read that “faith (belief) without works (behavior) is dead. (James 2:17)

The word “disciple” in the Greek language means “A taught or trained one; a learner-follower.” That is, the student learned as he literally followed the teacher. It was common in ancient times for teachers to attract followers who were committed exclusively to their teaching. These teachers would train their students as interns are trained today. It was “on the job” training. The word “apprentice” connotes the same meaning. The disciple was expected not only to learn all that his teacher knew, but also to become like him in character. The gospel of Mark says that Jesus appointed twelve that “they might be with him.” (Mark 3:14)

“They were to be with Him at all times and in all places, companions in His travels, witnesses of all His work, students of His doctrines, fellow-laborers in His practical school of experience, and finally to become in reality as now in name, commissioned apostles of His world-wide campaign. They were learning by daily companionship with the Master what they should be, do, believe, and teach, as His witnesses and ambassadors.” (J. W. Shepard, *The Christ Of The Gospels*),

In September of 1999 the First International Consultation on Discipleship was held in England. There were 450 Christian leaders representing 50 countries present. Their focus was upon the decline of emphasis upon “discipleship”. They stressed the fact that Jesus charged the first disciples in Matt. 28 to “make disciples in all nations” – and they underscored the fact that He did not say, “*make converts in all nations*” and there is a vast difference!

Among the speakers was John R.W. Stott – a renowned conservative theologian and writer. In his message he called attention to “the strange and disturbing paradox of enormous statistical church growth without corresponding growth in discipleship.” He went on to say, “God is not pleased with superficial discipleship. Evangelism without discipleship dispenses cheap grace.” Another speaker said, “the church is one mile long, but only one inch deep. Discipleship is not believing information alone, it is character transformation.”

My observation, as I travel and minister, is that the situation has only worsened since 1999. A question that we must ask is this: “Am I a disciple of Jesus Christ by New Testament standards, or only a Christian by current standards?” There is a vast difference. Jesus doesn't invite us to be His casual acquaintances; He invites us to be His fully devoted followers. So let us honestly evaluate our own personal discipleship status by examining the New Testament to see what a true disciple looks like. Three things I want you to notice. First of all...

I. THE TYPES OF FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

There are different kinds and degrees of followers with different motives. In Luke 9 we find three types of followers:

A. The Calloused.

In Luke 9 we read a strange statement. We are told that Herod, of all people, “sought to see Him” – that is, to see Jesus. Here is the entire passage: “Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. And Herod said, ‘John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?’ *So he sought to see Him.*” (Luke 9:7-9)

Herod did not have good intentions - He was a calloused murderer! There have always been those whose hearts are hardened toward Jesus. They are the skeptics, the cynical – looking for an opportunity to criticize. Of this sort were the Pharisees of Jesus day.

There are those who follow the Christian crowd and hang around the fringe just waiting for an opportunity to oppose. They are cynical, censorious, critical infidels. There were the calloused in Jesus' day as well. Then there were the curious.

B. The Curious.

There was always the curious crowd around Christ. Notice in Luke 9 the term “the people”: v. 11 - “the people”; v. 13 - “this people”; v. 18 - “the people.” And in Luke 9:18-19 Jesus asked about this crowd: “And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” So they answered and said, “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.”

This is the curious crowd. They remind me of the audience that came to hear Paul on Mars Hill, of whom it was said they, “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear something new.” (Acts 17:21)

They are yet with us today. The truth makes no impact upon their lives. They come just to be thrilled, tantalized and traumatized but they are not transformed nor do they want to be. Their attitude seems to be, “I'm here for my weekly religious pep rally, don't try to change my lifestyle, I like living with one foot in the church and one in the world.” There is no response to the truth presented and they make no application of it to their lives.

Illust. I watched 3 men in a church that I pastored over a period of time. They were business men, regular attendees, professing Christians. Regardless of what the message was about or who delivered it they were not moved. These three men dozed from time to time, looked around at the chandeliers, walls, floors, their wives. They were totally indifferent to the speaker. Church was holy hum-drum to them. The only reason I ever detected as to why they attended was that they loved to point out a grammatical mistake or argue about some strange twist they had on some subject. The only time I saw any signs of excitement was when there was some event or sensational personality in the city and they would go to that venue to hear and see the latest. They were curious enough to attend but they were not truth seekers. They were casual Christians and casual Christians become casualties, which they became!

Jesus had that kind also in His audience. Certainly they could not be called disciples in the New Testament sense. There are the Calloused, the Curious and now notice another type:

C. The Committed.

Luke 9:23-26 "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

Here were some who knew who Jesus was and had committed themselves to His disciplines. They had some discernment. Jesus asked them questions. He asked, "Do you know who I really am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." One becomes a disciple in the biblical sense only when that person knows full well Who Christ is and is committed to the person of Jesus Christ for time and eternity, There are those who "follow" Christ to varying degrees and for different reasons. At a minimum there are the calloused, the curious and the committed.

I will sum up this thought by putting it another way:

- *There are the Bread Seekers.*
In John 6:26 Jesus said, "You seek me because of the loaves."
- *There are the Name Wearers.*
They are those who call themselves "Christian" without being "Christlike". Jesus said of the church in Sardis "You have a name that you live but you are dead."
- *There are the Cross Bearers.*
In Luke 9:23 Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Cross bearers are true disciples!

Illust. A missionary was surprised in a prayer meeting to hear a young African convert praying, "O Lord, thread me through your needle, thread me through your needle."

Afterward, the missionary asked him what he meant. The African explained that a few days before he had seen a woman sewing with needle and thread. He noticed that the thread always followed the needle. He said that the Lord showed him by that simple illustration what true discipleship was. Christ was like the eye of the needle and he was like the thread – so he prayed, “Oh, Lord, you are the needle, I am the thread; wherever you go I will go.” Are you willing to let Christ be the needle and you be the thread? That takes commitment!

There are those who want to be committed disciples but when put to the test fail. Let us look at the tests for discipleship:

II. THE TESTS FOR FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

In Luke 14 there are three “cannots.” These three “cannots” comprise the tests for would-be disciples. These tests are:

A. The Relationship Test.

Luke 14:26 “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

What is the meaning of such a strong statement? Scriptures elsewhere plainly tell us that we are to love and cherish our parents, siblings, and children. What does the Lord mean here? Just this: We are to make Jesus Christ preeminent, supreme in relation to anyone else. No one is to have the place in our lives that Jesus Christ has. Our love for all others will be as hatred compared to our love for Him.

The Living Bible transliteration renders the verse as follows: “Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters-yes, more than his own life-otherwise he cannot be my disciple.

Illust. In 1932, Gladys Aylward set out for China as a missionary. As she left home, she put a note on her pillow. Her mother said she found it the next day, Oct. 15, 1932. It read: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Love, Gladys.” Can you pass the relationship test?

B. The Lordship Test.

“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”
(Luke 14:27)

The test here is one to determine who is really in control of my life - self or Christ. Am I going to opt for self-centered satisfaction in life or am going to yield to the Lordship of Christ and live a self-sacrificing life under Christ’s Lordship? He is not Lord at all if He is not Lord of all of my life.

To be disciples of Christ, the would-be disciple must reject every other authority and be solely under the authority of Christ. Unless we are willing to do so, we cannot be Christ’s disciples. Who is in control is the question. The Lordship test addresses this

area of the human will. Am I debating the claims of Christ upon my life or am I surrendering to His claims. That is the Lordship test.

C. The Stewardship Test.

Luke 14:33 “Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

What is your attitude toward possessions? Do you consider them trusts that the Lord has given you to use for Him, or assets that you own to use as you please? The test of stewardship calls into question the matter of ownership. Once the matter of ownership is established, stewardship, for the conscientious and sensitive Christian is settled.

Illust. Have you seen the bumper sticker that says, “I owe, I owe, so off to work I go”? When it comes to stewardship a good bumper sticker would be “I owe, I owe, so off to a life of stewardship I go!”

The Apostle Peter is typical of so many of us. He did not start out as the most perfect disciple but he did grow into a dedicated disciple, didn't he? At one stage in his development, he still had not passed the stewardship test. I want you to see this in Matthew 19:27, "Then answered Peter and said unto him, behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have?"

Isn't that like us? Give up everything? What will we have? Notice Jesus' answer: “Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold.” (Matt 19:28-30)

To pass the stewardship test we must look beyond time to eternity and live here and now on earth with eternities values in view. The three tests of discipleship in Luke 14 give rise to these three questions:

- #1 – Do we love others more than Jesus?
- #2 – Do we love self more than Jesus?
- #3 – Do we love things more than Jesus?

Again, the question that I asked earlier: “Am I a disciple by New Testament standards or merely a Christian by 21st century standards?”

Illust. I met Mickey Mantle and Bobby Richardson , famous New York Yankee baseball players at a Detroit Tiger vs. New York Yankees baseball game. I knew Bobby's pastor and through him met Bobby. I also knew that Bobby was a committed Christian so I was not surprised that once when He was asked to close a church service in prayer, this is what he prayed: “Dear Lord, Your will, nothing more, nothing else, nothing less. Amen.” Can you pray that prayer?

We have looked at Types of Followers of Jesus and Tests for Followers of Jesus.

As we conclude it would be profitable to get a brief look at True Followers of Jesus From Luke 9.

III. TRUE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

There are five hallmarks of a true follower of Jesus in Luke chapter nine. I will only mention them and encourage you to meditate upon them. A True follower:

A. Fellowships with Christ in worship. Luke 9:18

“Once when Jesus was praying in private *and his disciples were with him...*”

B. Faithful to Christ in his witness. Luke 9:20

“He said to them, “But who do you say that I am? *“Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.”*”

C. Follows Christ in His Walk. Luke 9:23

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and *take up his cross daily, and follow me*”

D. Forsakes Not Christ but the World. Luke 9:24-25

“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but *whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.* For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”

E. Is A Friend of Christ and His Words. Luke 9:26

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory.” And, John 8:31 - *“If you continue in my words, then are you my disciples indeed.”*

The Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is central to the life of a true disciple. Christ is not on the circumference but at the center of the life of discipleship. Christianity without a personal, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ is a form of religion without discipleship. Religion without discipleship is a religion with Christ relegated to the circumference. That was the situation with the church at Laodicea where Jesus is seen standing outside the church seeking to gain entrance. He said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” (Rev.3:20) Is He peripheral or central to your life?

CONCLUSION

I conclude this introductory message on Discipleship by asking a question: “Who is the Standard for a disciple? Jesus gave the answer in Matt. 10:25, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master.” The standard of a true disciple is his Master, his Mentor, his Pattern! Who is your standard?

Have you ever said, “This is enough”! I am faithful enough, humble enough, loving enough, caring enough. This is as far as I am going with Christ?” It is enough only as we are like Him. He is our standard. How well we are doing in any given area depends upon who our standard is. In high school I ran the mile on the track team. Compared to an elderly lady, I did pretty

well. Dare we compare ourselves to our Master? We should for He is the Model for would-be disciples!

Illust. When Cortez landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1519 to begin his conquest of Mexico with a small force of 700 men, he purposely set fire to his fleet of 11 ships. His men on the shore watched their only means of retreat sinking to the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico. With no means of retreat, there was only one direction to move. They turned their faces to Cortez and marched forward following him into the Mexican interior to meet whatever might come their way.

If we are to be one of Christ's disciples, we too must purposefully turn our backs to alternative lifestyles, focus upon our Master and follow Him. At the beginning of this message I read the question that the young woman asked Peter:

"Are you one of this man's disciples?" (Jn.18:17)

There is another Bible question with which I conclude:

"Will you also be his disciples?" (John 9:27)

JdonJ