

'True Disciples'

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Preacher: Geoff Hall

[0:00] I grew up living next door to a church, not too different to this one. My dad worked there and so I was here all the time.

not just on Sunday but often during the week. and as a result of my familiarity with the place, you know, like the building and the people and the staff, I was probably a little too comfortable around the place.

Yes, probably pretty arrogant, you know, this is my house. I walked around the place like I owned it and as though no one could touch me.

Might sound like a nice feeling in some places but really the reason that I went to church had completely gone over my head. I wasn't there to serve but to be served.

You're in my house. You're coming to me. That's what I thought as a kid. It was a lesson that took me too long to learn.

[1:02] I had lots of maturing to do before I began to learn the true cost of discipleship and what it meant to walk in Jesus' steps. Those early years, maybe you could say, were a bit like Jesus' disciples before he rose again.

Heads full of knowledge, super keen at the same time but lots of misunderstanding, lots of mistakes. In today's passage, when Jesus teaches his disciples again about the true discipleship, he tells them what it really costs.

You remember from last week that Jesus used a rich man's response. Do you remember? How do I inherit eternal life to teach his disciples and the others following him a tough lesson about discipleship and salvation?

Jesus pretty much said that it's impossible for the wealthy to have eternal life if their wealth comes before God, if it is their God.

And that he also said that anyone can be saved if they give up not just their wealth but their lives to follow Jesus.

[2:18] The disciples were surprised because a man like that in that culture seemed to them to be the kind who would be saved.

Look how upstanding he is. Look how much he has. He even claims to have kept the law since he was a child. And this passage begins with how the disciples are feeling about this lesson.

Did you notice it right at the start? Let's look at the start of verse 32 together. They were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way and the disciples, specifically the 12, were astonished while those who followed were afraid.

The 12 on one hand are confused at this teaching. They're sort of struggling to compute.

How can this be true? The others following Jesus because Jesus gained a following outside the 12. Well, they're outright afraid. And this is helpful context, isn't it?

[3:24] Because it shows us that they've heard Jesus and they're really trying to grapple with what he said. If you want to have eternal life, the eternal life that I offer you, that Jesus offers, you must give up your life.

You must give up your wealth. We heard this challenge last week as well. I wonder if you've been wrestling with these implications for your life over the last week.

And before we fall into the trap of saying, oh, well, Jesus is the one who lost his life and so I don't have to, we ought to remember, as we reflect, that giving up our life, while it isn't payment for sin like Jesus' death was, it is like what Jesus did because it's about entrusting oneself to God, isn't it?

Even if it means costly sacrifice. The disciples are wrestling with this challenge. That's why they're astonished.

That's why they're afraid. And so to help them, he reminds them what this is going to cost him. Point one, Jesus takes their shock as another opportunity to teach them.

[4:58] Let's look from verse 32 again. They were on their way up to Jerusalem with Jesus leading the way and the disciples were astonished while those who followed were afraid.

And again, he took the 12 aside and told them what was going to happen to him. We're going up to Jerusalem, he said, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

They will contend him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles who will mock him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later, he will rise.

He's just told them that to have eternal life, they must give up their life and their possessions to follow him, a challenge which is astonishing and even fear-inducing or at least it ought to be.

So Jesus reminds them that that's what he, in fact, came to do, to suffer unjust, evil treatment at the hands of his own people and the Gentiles and then die.

[6:12] Sometimes I wonder if talking about the death of Jesus so much can make us forget a little bit maybe how costly it was for him, how terrible it was for him.

Jesus is God in the flesh. He existed and lived in perfect relationship with the Father and the Spirit before he became human.

Yet he still gave all that up, didn't he? Not only did he suffer by becoming a frail human, but he also trusted God and allowed the frail humans to exercise their power and authority over him and kill him like a criminal.

And so while the disciples are wrestling with the fact that following Jesus and receiving the salvation he offers means sacrificing their own lives, he reminds them that he isn't asking them to do anything that he isn't willing to do himself.

Jesus offers us the same eternal life, doesn't he? Also by trusting God. And I'd be surprised if you also weren't having a hard time following in the footsteps of Jesus, figuring out how or what it looks like to make that ultimate sacrifice, the daily sacrifice of entrusting ourselves to God, giving up this life that we love so much and trusting that the life he has for us even with persecutions is much better than anything we could lose.

[8:11] Jesus willingly walked the path to Jerusalem and to death. Are we willing? Are you willing to walk that path?

To make great sacrifices? To not hold on to your treasures? To live without worldly comfort? Without our securities? Or even maybe some friendships? Or even maybe love? It's a big sacrifice. But if it means not losing the life which is far better, wouldn't you give yours? It's a difficult challenge, isn't it?

And while the twelve and the other disciples are mulling it over, James and John come up to Jesus with a bold request. Usually Peter's the one who's got foot and mouth disease, but tonight it's James and John.

[9:28] And in this moment they show that Jesus' challenge has not hit them right here, it has completely gone over their head. Jesus has said that having eternal life means giving up your lives, so how did they respond?

By asking for greatness. Let's have a look from verse 35 together. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.

What do you want me to do for you? He asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory. You don't know what you are asking, Jesus said.

Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.

These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared. Wow. Talk about bold, hey? And yes, it's bold because they just come up and ask for seats of honor, but isn't it extra bold or maybe just idiotic because of what Jesus has just said?

[10:57] True disciples give up their lives. They give up their wealth. They put nothing before God. But they respond to this by asking Jesus for a special seat in glory with him.

Why? Why would they ask this? Well, I suspect it's not just because they want to be close to Jesus. I think more likely it's that they just missed Jesus' point. He said that he was going to rise again and so they thought, well, maybe we can get in on this action.

But why the right and left seat? I reckon this suggests even more that they don't know what they're asking. Firstly, because there is a person who sits at the right hand of God in glory.

You know who that is. It's Jesus. The seat of honour is reserved for him. What kind of special honour are they expecting if the person who sits at God's right hand is the Son of God?

[12:12] But Jesus takes their request in stride, doesn't he? He asks them, can you drink the cup I drink?

Can you be baptised with the baptism I'm baptised with? And they say, yeah, we can do that. And surprisingly, Jesus says they will. What I don't think this means is that they will suffer in the way Jesus does because they're special in some particular way.

Rather, it means that they'll drink his cup and receive his baptism because that's simply the cost of following Jesus. Didn't we hear this in the previous passage?

Whoever loses their life won't fail to receive as much in this age along with persecutions and then eternal life.

James and John don't realise that their desire or commitment even to drink Jesus cup and receive his baptism isn't like a resume so they can receive greatness.

[13:28] They're simply saying whether or not they realise it will follow you. There aren't two levels of discipleship are there?

If you follow in Jesus' steps, if you take the challenge that he offers in this seriously and go after him then you will drink his cup.

You will be baptised with the baptism that he's baptised with. As for those positions they requested, the left and the right, well either there are two people who will receive special seats of honour who will be at Jesus' right and left hand in glory, who are already decided.

destroyed. Or, maybe Jesus is referring to his glory, which we see him in at the destruction of sin. And there are two people on his right and his left when he destroys sin, aren't there? Two criminals who are crucified with him?

[14:54] Is that what James and John are asking? Either way, they got it wrong and they are going to suffer. But not because they got it wrong, because they followed Jesus.

James and John wanted to become great, but they weren't sure of the correct pathway to get there. And so Jesus told them. This is point three. verse 41 tells us that the rest of the disciples were upset with James and John.

I can imagine being annoyed as well. Can you? So Jesus takes the opportunity to teach them about the pathway to greatness. Look from verse 42. Jesus called them together and said, you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. Whoever wants to be the first must be slave of all.

Jesus gives an example about how Gentile rulers use their authority and he says they lord their authority over them, which is a bit of a strange phrase I know.

[16:29] Essentially it means they use their authority to throw their weight around. Like they boss around or they abuse. Maybe you know someone like that.

Sounds like pretty unkind behaviour. Though despite what I just said, I wonder if sometimes we're attracted to being like that.

Like you know, if you had the opportunity. I'm not saying that everyone will always abuse the power that they have, but isn't there something attractive about having authority over others?

James and John seem to be attracted to it. I mean who has more authority than the Son of God? What if I can hitch my wagon to his? But Jesus says no, you must not do this.

Instead he says in verse 43, whoever wants to become great must be your servant whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. Jesus subverts the expectation and the desire doesn't he?

[17:43] You want to be great then become slave of all. James and John wanted to share in Jesus glory by being given seats of honor but Jesus receives glory and becomes great because he serves.

In fact we know and remember and love him not simply because of his teaching and authority but because of his humble service. Yes Jesus was always great because he did great things and people followed him but his true greatness didn't come from his teaching and authority didn't it come from his humility it's what we focus on most when we talk about him verse 45 says even the son of man that's Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many he teaches here that no one is above service no person no position no power though some people do consider themselves above others don't they perhaps James and John did but Jesus says even the son of man didn't come to be served even the son of man even the Messiah even the promised king the god man the Christ it seems like an upside down view of kingship doesn't it king we heard about earlier Nebuchadnezzar he was a great king and he had won himself a great grand kingdom and his power and authority extended very far yet when he tried to exercise his authority over god's faithful servants god showed him how much power he really had didn't he our god with unlimited power over even the greatest king or the toughest bully this same god this powerful god came not to be served but to serve and in his humble service he saves us and so he challenges his followers to follow his pathway to greatness not by leaving our mark on the human world to be remembered for generations not by building a kingdom for ourselves but by trusting him by walking the path he walked even to the extent of losing our lives in service of others so what should we do i hope it's obvious we should give up our desire for human and worldly! greatness and follow in jesus steps even to death in service of others like last week it's a big challenge and i hope you'll be wrestling with it in the days ahead how do i give up my life how do i trust god like that what if we consider the other characters in the daniel passage shadrach meshach and abednego no they didn't specifically serve anyone but what did they do didn't they completely entrust themselves to god who they knew could save them they trusted that their god even though they couldn't see him unlike james and john that he could rescue them even if they lost their lives trust like that allowed them to stand firm before that powerful and intimidating human king and say in daniel 3 17 if we are thrown into the blazing furnace the god we serve is able to deliver us from it and he will deliver us from your majesty's hand but even if he does not we want you to know your majesty that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up what does this kind of trust look like for us how might we attain the greatness that

Jesus challenges I wonder if one of the first things that we should do is consider our opinion of ourselves! Jesus is the son of God and even he didn't expect to be served but gave his life up in service how do you think of yourself as someone who serves or as someone who is served God the examples of trusting and serving that we've seen can be tricky because they Jesus and the guys in Daniel they committed to literally giving up their lives giving up your life without literally losing it could be hard because often it means hardship doesn't it it means pain today and pain tomorrow and then pain the next day and then pain the day after that and we do sing how long oh

[23:59] Lord but we also give up our life on Thursday and on Friday and on Saturday without ever saying today is my day off today is the day that I'm going to be served that's a challenge isn't it what might it look like for us at church losing your life might mean giving up what you might often desire when you come here maybe giving up all of your time to one conversation with a new person or to someone sitting alone even though your friends are all over there maybe it means being late to dinner so that you can help clean up maybe it means leaving whatever you're doing before church like 30 minutes earlier than usual so that you can be here ready to talk and welcome even if you're not a welcomer maybe it means having a bit less money giving that extra 26 dollars even if you think you're in the category of those who can't maybe it means washing up at home even if it's not your turn even if you cooked tonight maybe it means being kind to the first year grads at work even if there's a clear pecking order maybe it means giving up a day of work and taking a

volunteer position or doing some extra ministry maybe it means extending your degree doing less units not to work more but to spend more time at CU or power to change maybe it means giving up your job and your parents expectations and doing ministry as a job these might sound like funny examples when we're talking about losing our life but aren't they subverting the expectation and the desire aren't they entrusting ourselves to God that even if we suffer serving like Jesus is the pathway to greatness and to life with him Jesus said to James and John can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with we can they answered can you how about

I pray that we do our father we thank you that even the son of man didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many help us father to understand the true pathway to greatness to entrust our lives to Jesus and to walk in his steps and be willing and ready to lose our lives in service of others so that we might share in his glory amen amen Thank you.