

True Discipleship

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[0 : 00] Look with me at verse 38. John said to him, teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was not following us. Well, long before the church referred to the apostle John as the apostle of love, remember Jesus had nicknamed John one of the sons of thunder. Remember that nickname is not, it wasn't meant by Jesus as a compliment.

It was actually the opposite. James and John, the sons of thunder, this was given to them by Jesus as a representation of their tendency to actually respond to people unkindly. You'll remember, I think it's Luke's gospel that tells us there was a time as it probably around the same time, that Jesus and the disciples are moving toward Jerusalem. They're going through the areas of Samaria. There's a Samaritan village that they wanted to settle in maybe for a night or two, but the Samaritans, because they were Jews, because they had their minds set on Jerusalem, would not allow them to stay. And you remember what John and James came to Jesus saying. They said, Lord, why don't you let us pray that God would send down fire from heaven to consume them? Now, how many of us can identify with James and John in that? Somebody rejects us or they reject somebody that we love, and our first tendency is to be like the sons of thunder. We run to the Lord. Lord, why don't you just rain down fire on them? Remember times with Moses was the same way. There were times where Moses was so frustrated with the children of Israel as they wandered through the desert that he prayed to God, God, why did you do this to me? Why don't you just kill them or kill me, one or the other, and get us out of this mess? Well, that's a long way from understanding the contrast of John, who later in his maturity in the Lord wrote this in 1 John chapter 4, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. That's quite a different, isn't it? It speaks to the wonderful power of the gospel in our lives, that only Jesus, only Jesus can take a man like John and a man like James who want to call down fire from heaven to consume people and change his heart so that later on he writes to a church that's under persecution, that is severe, and says, love people, just love people because love comes from God. Well, that's not just because John grew up.

That's not just because John flipped a switch in his mind that all of a sudden made him love people. No, that's the power of the gospel in our lives, and we see this played out in every one of these disciples. The people that we see them to be in Acts and moving forward is far different than what we see them as in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why? Because the power of the gospel transforms us. It radically transforms us. But then we get here and we see another glimpse of John's youthful personality as he rehearses to Jesus how they had reprimanded another man who was actually doing ministry for the Lord. What's interesting about this passage is it doesn't read like a proud admission.

[3 : 41] It really reads more like a confession, doesn't it? I guess it's possible that this happens sometime after this other conversation, and John thought, man, I'm going to get some brownie points with Jesus if I go and tell him that, hey, there was this guy over here casting out demons, but he wasn't with us, so we stopped him. Just want to let you know we took care of it, Jesus, so you wouldn't have to worry about that. Perhaps, maybe that was what was in his mind. I think the connection with this other passage, verses 33 to 37, is actually Mark showing that this might have actually been a confession on John's part. He's sitting in the house. Jesus has grabbed this little child and put him on his lap and told him how they need to serve everyone, and then that brings to mind for John the conviction of what he had done earlier on their journey when they had stopped this man, and it's interesting. Isn't that what the teaching of the Lord and of the Bible should always do to us? Shouldn't it humble us in that way?

Shouldn't it lead us to confession? Shouldn't it lead us to repentance when we're confronted by God's truth? There's a difference between hearing the words of Christ and reading the words of the scriptures and acknowledging that, yes, we have broken that. There's a difference between admitting what we have done and actually confessing to the Lord in agreement that, yes, we have sinned, Lord. We need your forgiveness, Lord. Please change us, Lord. And it seems to me that that's where John is right here, more of a confession than just a simple admission. Well, what's the situation?

Some point along the way, the disciples interacted with a man casting out demons in the name of Jesus. Now, this does sound very bad, does it? It actually sounds pretty fantastic.

And the implication of this text is that the man was a believer. And he wasn't only a believer, but he was successfully performing mighty works in the name and power of Christ.

That's actually amazing. Now, it's not unusual for us to, in modern times, hear people casually or flippantly use the name of Jesus when doing something. But at this point in biblical history, there is no reason for someone to invoke the name of Christ. There was no reason other than a true believer to even think to do that. You understand that? Like at this point, most of the crowds have left Jesus. No one's necessarily wanting to be a follower of Jesus at this point. Very few people are actually staying with them. There wasn't, wouldn't just be an average person that was indifferent to Jesus as actually out there doing works in the name of Jesus. This man had to have been a true believer. And then notice also, John didn't say that the man was attempting to cast out demons, but that he was actually successful in doing so. How else could he have been anything other than a true follower of Christ? Now, some may be quick to say, well, perhaps this was Satan that was using this man to perform these powers in order to deceive others, to deceive others. That doesn't make any sense at all. That would be illogical. Why? He's using Jesus's name. Now, it would be different if he's not using Jesus's name. He's using some other name. And this, this power was being demonstrated in that way, but he's actually using Jesus's name. Why would Satan use Jesus's name to cast out himself?

[7 : 33] That doesn't make any sense. And it would contra, contradict what Jesus had earlier said to the Pharisees. I think it's in Mark chapter three. Remember Jesus was casting out demons. The Pharisees came and he says, they said, he does all of these things by the power of Satan. He's Beelzebul, they said. They said, he's Satan. He's the devil. And Jesus says, yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Satan can't cast out Satan, Jesus says. A house divided against itself can't stand. That doesn't make any sense. There's no other option here. This man had to have been a true believer. He was doing mighty works. He was empowered by God and he was doing them in the name of Christ, which by the way, no one needs to be a person of significance to be used mightily by God. Do you see that in this man's experience? We don't even know his name. We don't even know his name. We have no idea who he is.

We don't know where he's from. We don't know what happened to him after this moment. We know nothing about this man except at some point along the way, he had been impacted by the person and the teaching of Jesus Christ. He had begun to wholly follow Jesus Christ so much so that God empowered him to do works that even the disciples had failed to do. And who is he? He's nobody. He's nobody.

He's nobody. There's sometimes we're talking. I know I'm getting off track maybe a little bit here, but we're talking about missions a little bit this morning and we think, I wonder what we think sometimes when somebody says, I wonder if you've ever prayed if God would desire for you to do something in vocational ministry. What if God wanted you to go to Ukraine? What if God desired for you to serve in this particular way? And how many of us would think, well, I can never do that. I've never been to seminary. I'm nobody. Well, yeah, it's God's good pleasure to use nobodies like me and like you. Remember what Paul said to the Corinthian church? He's at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 at the very end and Paul says, remember your calling brothers. There was nothing significant about you.

[10 : 02] But God uses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. He uses the weak things of the world to restrain the strong. God, in his good pleasure, uses weak vessels, jars of clay to do mighty works.

Why? In order that he may get the glory. That's why. And here's a man that is a prime example of what the vast majority of Christians are. Nameless, no significance, yet empowered by God to do

the things that only God can do. It's amazing, isn't it? So why did the disciples try to stop him? That's the big question, right? Why were they so concerned? Well, John tells us. Notice what he says. Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him. Why? Because he was not following us. Do you see the problem there? We would expect that John might justify his action by saying, we tried to stop him, Lord, because he was not following you. But that's not what John says.

No, we tried to stop him, Lord, because he wasn't following us. The disciples were not concerned with whether or not this man was following Jesus, but with the fact that he wasn't a part of their little group.

So the prideful attitude that had divided them in the earlier section is now overflowing in the way that they interacted with other believers outside of their circle of friendship and influence.

[12:00] And there's clearly a measure of jealousy here, isn't there? It's not hard to see that. It's no coincidence that this man is being used by God to do the very works that the disciples failed embarrassingly to do earlier in the same chapter, isn't it? Remember Jesus is coming off the mountain of the transfiguration. There's a man with a demon-possessed boy that comes and the disciples are arguing at that moment with the scribes. Why? Because they couldn't do the work.

Why did Jesus say they couldn't do the work? They had a weak faith. They didn't even stop to pray. They failed miserably. They're embarrassed. And then maybe perhaps it wasn't long after that, that they're on their journey back to Galilee. And that's when they come across this man who's a nobody who isn't a part of their group. And they couldn't care less that he's actually doing things in the name of Jesus. They couldn't care less that God was actually empowering him to do the thing. They just couldn't stand the fact that somebody not in their group was being successful. and they get jealous and they try to stop him, not because he's not following Christ, but because he's not following them. And so they have this elitist mentality.

Couldn't stand for someone outside of their group to succeed where they had failed. And it's not the only time that we see something like this recorded in the scripture. Pride routinely reveals itself in envy. Pride routinely reveals itself in envy.

In fact, turn with me, would you to the Old Testament to Numbers chapter 11. Numbers chapter 11. Since we're only covering a few verses, I'm going to let you turn a few times to the rest of the day. Okay. Numbers chapter 11.

[13:49] The children of Israel have been in the wilderness for some time now. And God has provided manna to them, but they're tired of the manna.

They don't like what God has provided. They want meat. They want some quail, something more substantial than what God had provided. And so they're complaining to Moses again, and they're telling Moses, we were better off in Egypt.

You know, when they were slaves and they were beaten every day and that they were, they thought that that would be better. And so here they are, they're with Moses. They're complaining. Moses goes to God again. He says, God, you got to do something about these people.

And God ends up judging them. But in the midst of that, God tells Moses to take 70 elders, take them to the temple, and he's going to establish some leadership. But I want you to notice what happens in the midst of this story.

Look at verse 26. Now, two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those who were registered.

[14:50] I think that probably means of the 70 people that God had instructed Moses to set aside as leaders. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent of meeting, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.

And Joshua, the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth said, My Lord Moses, stop them. Now, hang on a second. Why would Joshua not want them to do that? What's he upset about here? Hang on. These guys aren't where they're supposed to be. They're not with us. They're not with the rest of the group. What does Moses say? Verse 29, but Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake?

Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them. What a wise response of Moses in this moment.

Here's his assistant, who one day is going to be a fantastic leader over the nation of Israel after Moses' death. And he runs, and he's a little jealous. He's like, these guys are in the camp. People

are noticing them because they're in the camp.

[16:09] And maybe they had a gathering coming around them at that particular moment. Here we are, Moses. We're at the tent of meeting. We're outside the camp. Nobody's really out here. You got to go stop those guys. They're going to get all the credit for this.

Moses says, Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that every one of God's people would be endowed with the power of God's Spirit in the way that Eldad and Medad have just been empowered. You see Joshua's weakness there?

It wasn't about noticing what God was doing. It was the fact that they weren't really a part of his group. He didn't like that. He wanted Moses to stop that.

Turn to John chapter 3 back in the New Testament. John chapter 3, you might would be more familiar with this particular case. The purpose in all of this is really just to show how easy it is for us to fall into this particular sin.

John chapter 3. Look with me at verse 25. John 3, 25. Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification.

[17:16] And they came to John, this is John the Baptist, and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, that's Jesus, look, he's baptizing and everybody's going to him.

Now remember what they're used to seeing happen with John's ministry. What is it the Bible tells us? Everyone in Jerusalem, everyone in Judea were traveling to the desert to see John.

And these disciples were a part of that. It's fantastic. But now Jesus has come. And all of those people who were coming to John and his disciples are now leaving them. And they're going to Jesus and Jesus's disciples.

And the disciples of John are a little jealous about that. But look how John responds in verse 27. A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

[18:27] Therefore, this joy of mine is complete. He must increase, but I must decrease. And so the same thing is going on with Joshua and Moses.

The disciples of John, they're a little jealous. They don't like that Jesus is getting all the attention.

And what is it that John says? With great wisdom, he says, listen, this is not about me. This is about him. My whole purpose was to send people to him.

And now I have so much more joy because people aren't following me. They're following Christ instead. He must increase. I must decrease.

But when we get back to Mark chapter 9, Jesus' own disciples haven't learned that lesson yet. They still think a little bit of this is about them.

And they're bothered by the fact that someone outside of their group is doing these things, that people are paying attention to what they're doing, and he is succeeding in a way that they failed.

[19:27] And Jesus is so gracious with John here. He always is. He stands ready to love and forgive and help any person who comes to him in a spirit of repentance.

And I really think that's what John's doing here. And so Jesus responds with such gentleness, graciousness. He didn't scold the men. He gave them three reasons why they shouldn't have hindered the man in his ministry.

Three reasons, okay? I'm going to give them to you quickly. Each one is a verse, and then we're going to be finished, okay? Verse 39. Verse 39. But Jesus said, Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

No one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. The first reason Jesus gave for not stopping the man was that he presented no immediate danger to leading people away from Christ.

He was actually doing the opposite. Aside from being outside of the group of 12. This man's ministry was really no other people's ministry. He was going in the power of Christ, in the name of Christ, and God was using him to do things that only Christ can do.

[20:47] There's no danger there. There's no danger there. There. There. He's not leading people away from Christ. He's actually leading them toward Christ. The power of Jesus is evident in his life.

Everything's done in the name of Jesus. He's pointing people toward him. How could they possibly consider this man an enemy of the gospel?

Now, Jesus didn't say that the man had all of his theology right. That wasn't the point. Jesus didn't say that this man would never have a moment in his life where he would potentially speak evil of the Lord.

That's not what he's saying at all. He's saying that no one demonstrating the power of God in the name of Christ can quickly turn people against Jesus. Even if he wanted to, it'd be really hard for the man to do it, wouldn't it?

Because he's just come to somebody that doesn't have a few sniffles from a cold. He's coming to people who are being tortured by demons. And through the power of Christ, they are being freed and their life is being transformed.

[21 : 57] None of those people are very quickly going to turn around and think evil of Jesus. Why? Because Jesus, the name of Jesus, has just radically transformed their lives.

And Jesus is telling his disciples, don't stop him. This man poses no threat. He's pushing people towards me, not away from me. Look at what he's doing. Secondly, verse 40.

Jesus says, the one who is not against us is for us. The one who is not against us is for us.

So Jesus teaches the disciples here to have proper judgment when discerning who or what is an enemy of Christ. Now, it sounds like Jesus is being a little contradictory here, doesn't it?

Because it was at the end of chapter 8 that Jesus says, if anyone will truly follow me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Anyone who saves his life will lose it.

[22 : 57] But anyone who will lose his life for my sake and the gospels, the same will save it. That was a strong call to discipleship, to salvation there. So is Jesus now saying here that all that really matters is that they're not blatantly against us and everything's okay?

No, that's not what he's saying. This isn't a reference to some people that maybe you and I know who are not necessarily followers of Christ, but would maybe say, well, I don't really have a problem with Christ.

I don't really have a problem. In fact, Christianity has done so much good for the world. How could I be against it? I'm just not personally a follower of Jesus. There are millions of people that fit that description. That's not what Jesus is talking about.

Those people are deceived. Those people are deceived. Jesus isn't talking about that here. He actually uses a similar statement in Matthew chapter 12 that I think will help us understand it.

Here's what he said there. He said actually the opposite. Matthew chapter 12 and verse 30.

Whoever is not with me is against me.

[24 : 04] And whoever does not gather with me scatters. Whoever is not with me is against me.

Whoever does not gather with me scatters. This is the same statement from the opposite perspective.

In chapter 9, he's saying, whoever is not against us is for us. Now, here's what Jesus is getting at. You cannot have a neutral position when it comes to Christ.

You cannot be indifferent when it comes to the person and the work of Christ. You cannot have a position of neutrality to the gospel. You are either for Christ or you are against Christ.

You are either for the gospel or you are against the gospel. And this man that Jesus was using to cast out demons was clearly not against the gospel.

He's clearly not against Christ because God is using him in the name of Christ. And he tells his disciples, you guys got to, you got to stop drawing your lines in places that aren't the gospel.

[25 : 10] This man is one of us. He's not against us. He was clearly a believer. He may not have been a part of their group.

But that didn't mean he was an enemy. Right? In fact, the very lesson that Jesus was teaching is that the disciples in their pride were drawing lines in the wrong places.

And what they ended up doing was treating someone who was a child of God as an enemy of God. Does that sound familiar to us? I know where I'm going somewhere with all of this.

Have you ever looked at another Christian as if they were your enemy? Not because they deny Christ. Not because they deny the gospel.

But because they're not a part of your group. You ever drawn lines in places other than the gospel? Instead of trying to stop this man, the disciples should have rejoiced in the work that God was doing through him.

[26 : 20] But there was no rejoicing. They weren't rejoicing with those who rejoice. They were condemning one who was doing mighty works in the power of Christ.

Paul made a similar point in Philippians chapter 1. Remember, he's in prison. And he says that there's some people that are preaching Christ out of envy and jealousy. And what does Paul say? So what? Let God deal with them the way that God wants to deal with them. As long as they're preaching the gospel, I'm in favor of them. I want the gospel to go out.

If they're not against us, they're for us. Verse 41, the third reason. For truly I say to you, Jesus says, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

So finally, Jesus appeals to them on the basis of spiritual rewards. Now, it could be that he was meaning to reference the man as an illustration here.

[27 : 29] That because the man was doing the work of God, that he would be rewarded by God. That's possible. But this man was doing so much more than giving people cups of cold water.

This man was being used by God in really an amazing way, a fantastic way, that we've really only seen Jesus and the 12 do. Right? So I don't think that he's referring to the man here.

I think what he's referring to is his disciples. That what they should have done was serve the man. They should have served the man. It would have been a spiritually rewarding experience had they humbly served him a refreshing drink, Jesus is saying.

But because of their pride, they dismissed him, tried to hinder his work for the Lord. What could have been a rewarding gesture of humility was for the disciples a sinful act of pride.

Why? Because he wasn't in their group. Now, I think the application here is clear and we'll close with this. Jesus wasn't teaching a form of ecumenism that diminishes the gospel.

[28 : 41] I hope you don't misunderstand what I'm trying to say. Jesus wasn't doing that. What he's doing is he's calling those who are followers of him, those who have truly been saved, those who are true disciples of Christ.

He is calling us to a radical unity with all who believe and preach the gospel. It's not about which group we're in.

It's about the gospel first. It starts there. And it would be wrong for us to consider another believer whom Jesus has saved as an enemy.

Rather, they are a brother, a sister in Christ, whom we should humbly serve, not condemn for the way that God is using them.

It doesn't mean that our differences are unimportant. They are actually very important. But we can't consider someone an enemy of the gospel simply because they're not a part of our group.

[29 : 47] Listen, I'm a Baptist by conviction. I believe that's what the Bible teaches as far as believer's baptism. I would be a fool to think that only Baptists know Christ.

To think that our Presbyterian friends down the road who do not follow baptism in the same way that we do are an enemy. They're not our enemy. They're not against us. They are for us.

Our differences are unimportant. There's a reason we have a Baptist church and they have a Presbyterian church. But that is secondary to the gospel. And we don't go condemning them.

We don't go castigating them. We don't consider them an enemy of the gospel. No, they are a friend of the gospel. I'm a cessationist.

I believe that there are certain gifts in the New Testament of the Holy Spirit that ceased at the end of the apostolic age, at the conclusion of the foundation that Paul says God was building on the apostles and the prophets and the word of God.

[30 : 56] Some of those things, I believe, have ceased. But I'd be foolish to say that every person who disagrees with me on that is such a heretic that they've gone against the gospel, that they've turned their back on Christ, and that God is not using them.

I have some pretty strongly held convictions about the local church, what God desires for it, what our responsibility is in it.

And there's many people that don't draw the lines in the same way. That doesn't mean they're our enemy. I am happy, rejoicing, in any church in Cornelius and Davidson and Huntersville.

They may not look like us in every way. If they're preaching the gospel, praise the Lord. If God is using them to reach people for eternity's sake and the gospel and for Christ, praise the Lord for that.

They're not our enemy. Instead of condemning them, we should serve them. We should pray for them. We should encourage them.

