

What Is A Disciple

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[0 : 00] This morning I want to talk to you about discipleship and you remember that we're working through the 16th chapter of the gospel according to Matthew. And if you have your Matthew's gospels there, if they have survived, I'd like you to turn to Matthew chapter 16 verse 24 following.

Remember that we've been talking these last several Sundays about the problems of discipleship. And in verse 24 Christ says, and I'm reading here in the authorized version, Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever will save his life shall lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Now, talking about discipleship is a difficult thing because one of the things that I'm aware of is that you, by being here, are in some measure seeking to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

And basically, to accept this teaching, you have to come to terms with, to what extent do you want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? And if you don't want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, then what I have to say to you may not be very relevant.

[1 : 46] On the other hand, most of you are in positions where, or many of you are in positions where you have disciples. If you're a doctor, you have interns.

And if you're a lawyer, you have clerks. And if you are a businessman, you have junior members of your staff that are learning constantly from you.

So that you may be interested in the pattern of discipleship in order to know what you're doing in a practical way, even if it doesn't describe what you're doing in terms of your relationship to Jesus Christ.

And I only tell you that because I'd like you to be very respectful of what is taught here, whether or not it takes hold of you in terms of your discipleship of Jesus Christ, or whether or not it simply appeals to you because you're in the business of training disciples too.

A disciple is one who attends upon another for the purpose of learning from him. So that basically what happens to you when you become a member of the church is you attend upon Jesus Christ for the purpose of learning from him.

[3 : 01] We went this week to hear Dr. Val Firmount talk about the palliative care unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital. And what they have done there is a remarkable thing in terms of dealing with patients who are terminal patients.

And he talked very much about that period of their life being their final growth period. And growth comes from learning. And instead of it being a total non-kind of situation where nothing is derived from it, the palliative care unit at the Royal Victoria Hospital has made it into a final growth period for people.

And this is by being able to teach them in that situation and them being able to learn in that situation. Now I'm sure that when I grew up and went through university and got married and ordained, I finally decided that I'd learned everything and the rest of my life was to be given to teaching other people what I'd learned.

And I was taught that, I'm sure. I don't think I acquired that idea all by myself. And the most bitter and unhappy thing about the years since then has been to become aware that I hadn't learned everything and I still have an enormous amount to learn.

So now, 25 years later, I'm a little bit worried because I've learned so little and there's not that much time left. So that the process of recognizing that you've got to go on learning all your life is very, very important.

[4 : 39] And that there never comes a time up to the very end when you stop learning. So that one of the important things that you have to do is to decide who you're going to learn from, who you're going to allow to teach you.

And part of that comes from deciding what questions you want answered, what things you want to know about. And so I commend to you very heartily that you become a serious disciple of Jesus Christ and start learning from him, if you haven't already, by attending upon him for the purpose of learning.

But he puts to you a fairly stiff proposition in terms of what it costs to be a disciple. And he says these three things are what it costs.

First, you are to deny yourself. And what that means is that you don't deny yourself chocolates and you don't deny yourself pleasures and you don't deny yourself this indulgence or that indulgence.

You deny yourself. You look at yourself and come to what may be a very startling discovery. And that is that you are not the answer to the world's problems.

[6 : 00] You are probably very much closer to what G.K. Chesterton arrived, and he was a very famous disciple of Jesus Christ. When he came and said, if you want to know what the trouble with the world is, it's me.

Most of us can describe the trouble with the world in terms of that person or that person or that person or that party or that party or that party. But coming to deny yourself is to deny that you are the one thing that the world desperately needs.

And the preservation of you is the most important fact in history, and you're going to devote yourself to it. Coming to recognize that the world does not depend upon you is to deny yourself as being the answer to the world's problems.

And that's what Jesus says is the first condition, to be able to say, I'm not the answer to the world's problems. I am not what the world needs most.

And that's basic, practical denial of yourself. The second thing you're asked to do is to take up your cross. Now this has historically the significance that in the early days of the followers of Jesus Christ, death by crucifixion was a very cruel form of death.

[7 : 26] And many disciples faced it. They faced their own violent death. So that Christ makes to the disciple who wants to follow him, he says, come to terms with this fact, that this can lead you very easily to a violent end.

And once you've come to terms with that fact, you have an enormous amount of freedom. It's that people haven't come to terms with the fact of their own mortality, whether it's violent or in any other form, that makes life so difficult.

Malcolm Muggeridge is very helpful at explaining to people that anybody who's under a sentence of death finds that his mind is wonderfully concentrated as to what he's going to do in the time that remains to him.

So Christ says it's conditional for a disciple that he take up his cross, that he comes to terms with his own death, that it's not something to be avoided at all costs, it's not something to be planned so that you can't escape it at all costs, it's something that you have to come to terms with, and that discipleship will inevitably lead to that and may prove to be extremely costly, even up to the extent of your own life.

So he says, take up your cross, take hold of it with both hands and recognize this fact about your life. The third thing he tells disciples to do is to follow me.

[9 : 04] And this is a highly personal invitation to a totally unpredictable future. He doesn't give you a guidebook, he doesn't tell you what lies in the future, he doesn't give you any map or plan as to where your life is going to go, he simply says, follow me, so that you put yourself in the position of continuing on ending dependence upon your relationship to Jesus as your Lord and Master.

So that in every situation, the one that you have to consult is Jesus Christ. Follow me, he says. So those are the three things that are the basic cost of any kind of serious discipleship.

To deny yourself, to take up your cross, and to follow him. Then he gives the reasons for discipleship of this order, of this totally demanding discipleship.

He says the first reason that if you set out to save your life, you're going to lose it. And if you set out to lose your life, it's possible that you will save it.

I have a friend back in Toronto, he's gone now, but to his reward. He was a bookie. And because his income was somewhat illegitimate in those days, he kept it all in a safety deposit box in the bank.

[10 : 39] You know, just raw cash in a safety deposit box. He paid no taxes on it, and he gained no interest on it. And by the time he got to be an old man, it was practically valueless, because when it had been big money, he put it in a safety deposit box, but inflation had eaten up the value of it so that it wasn't worth very much to him when he thought he would have the answer to all life's problems stowed away in that safety deposit box.

And some people are like that with their life. That is, they hide it away, hoping to preserve it against any intrusion. And then they find that that which they've guarded so carefully ultimately proves to be worthless.

And Jesus says, this is something anybody can understand, that if you try to save your life, you're going to lose it. And if you want to lose your life, you might save it.

There was a famous missionary whose wife, Elizabeth Elliot, has written a number of books that are available on the bookstore. And his name was Jim Elliot. And Jim Elliot was committed to go as a missionary from very early in his life.

And he ended up being one of the missionaries to the Yowka Indians in the Amazon River Basin. And I don't know if you remember the very exciting story of how they flew a plane and dropped a pot down on the end of a long rope and flew in a sew circle, so the pot stayed in one place.

[12 : 10] And they began to trade with these aboriginal people down there. And they gradually built up a relationship with them until finally five of them landed down there to begin personal encounters.

And something went wrong and mistrust entered in. And these five men were killed. And Jim Elliot was one of them. But one of the statements he made about life, and it becomes prophetic when you realize how his life came to an end.

He said that ultimately, the ultimate profit in life is to give away what you can't keep in order to possess what you can't lose.

And that's how he regarded his life. And that's how Christ asks disciples of his to use their lives, to give away what you can't keep anyway in order to possess what you can't lose.

And that's what he wants you and I to do with our lives. You see, that life is not measured in terms of possessions. It doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with possessions.

[13 : 19] The only thing wrong with them is when you measure your life by them. What Christ says, it's not what belongs to you that matters, it's who you belong to that matters.

That's the essential point. So when you look at your life, don't ask the question, well, what belongs to me? But rather ask the question, who do I belong to?

And Christ invites you to belong to him. And in that way, the thing which you can't keep, you have given away for that which you can't lose.

The other thing about that statement, which I think is important, is that if you were taken to see, say, the Hope Diamond, or something of really infinite value, and there you would see it sitting on a velvet cushion behind a glass case with a man standing by who's guarding it, and you know what you might think?

You might think that that diamond was the most important thing in your field of vision. But it wasn't. It's the man standing beside it that's the most important thing. The things are not as important as you are.

[14 : 38] And Christ makes this very clear when he says, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? that you are ultimately of more value than anything.

And so, to keep that which is essentially you is the most important thing in your life. And that can only be done as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

So in that way, Jesus convinces, or seeks to convince us, that to be his disciple is the most important use of the life that you've been given.

Finally, let me talk for just one minute about the signs of discipleship. How could we tell if you and I and all of us together were serious disciples of Jesus Christ?

How could we determine that was true for us? And Jesus teaches this about it. This is how we can tell that we're disciples.

[15 : 48] By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another. That's how you tell whether discipleship is real or not.

It's not something which we have to be able to put a microscope down the middle of you to find out what's going on inside of you. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples because you have love one for another.

So that one of the results of taking the invitation to be disciples of Jesus Christ seriously is that we will come to love one another.

And to be honest, that's a place we need to come to, isn't it? in some death. The second way that you can tell disciples is by this my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

In other words, fruit bearing is part of discipleship. The love and the joy and the peace, the things which are the fruits of being disciples of being disciples of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 09] One of the most disappointing things to me in my first spring in Vancouver was when I asked a member of this congregation what they did with all the cherries that came from all the cherry blossoms.

and he said, oh, they're just ornamental. There's no cherries. Well, that may be true of us as Christians too, that we're strictly ornamental.

There's never any fruit. And that could be a kind of warning for us, couldn't it? That we don't want to be ornamental Christians.

We want to be those who are seriously disciples of Jesus Christ. And that will be shown by the fact that we love one another and that we bear much fruit.

It's altogether too simple, isn't it? Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

[18 : 22] We're going to sing hymn 360. Him, God ■■■■, Jesus Christ, He prays of■ sa■■■ cinem, God Ora plaider, God lovij a home in your life.

lbs and glory by God lbs Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

[21 : 32] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. where Dr. Balfour Mount of the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal spoke and spoke brilliantly about the palliative care unit that they've set up down there.

And this is because he said hospitals are always organized to diagnose illness, to treat illness, to cure illness. But he said a lot of people in our hospital got to the point where no more diagnosis was necessary, no more treatment was possible, and the prospect of curing was gone. So what do the hospitals do with them then?

[24 : 24] Well, they ignore them by and large because they're not geared to deal with them. And so the palliative care unit was set up to deal with them. And one of the things that he said is that that period in a person's life is the final growth period. And their purpose is to make even those days of terminal illness a growth situation where people can grow even though their time on earth is coming, in some cases, rapidly to an end. And that, I think, is the spirit of Christian discipleship, that we go on growing. And we go on growing because we grow, we go on learning all the time.

And Christ is there to teach us. So Christ wants disciples. But he doesn't mess around with us, and nor did he with his disciples. And he laid down the conditions of what it means to be a disciple.

A disciple is one who attends upon another for the purpose of learning from him. And all of us are, in that sense, disciples because we're learning in some way, but Christ invites us to learn from him.

And you, by your involvement in this church this morning, are in some major...