

Disastrous Discipleship

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[0 : 00] One of the great encouragements of working with young people is the enthusiasm in which they bring to the Christian faith and to the scriptures. It's a great delight when you go and you speak to a bunch of teenagers and they all pick up the Bible and they're engaging with it.

And what I really love is when you call them to commit their lives as disciples of Jesus and they respond and they respond not just with their words, but with their hearts and with their faces. I remember one moment particularly where there was about 200 teenagers who committed that the rest of their lives they were going to follow the Lord Jesus and tears are coming down their face and really engaged in that moment.

And so that brings a great joy to me, but it also brings an element of apprehension as well. Because presumption is always dangerous for anyone who follows Jesus.

Many have fallen along the way. Many have fallen. In fact, 75% of those who are currently in high school who call themselves Christian will no longer call themselves Christian by the end of first year university.

[1 : 19] 75%. So many have fallen along the way because they, I believe, not understood what it actually means to be a disciple of Jesus. More often than not, in our modern culture, there is a belief that Christianity means that we should work hard to be good people.

We believe that God exists to serve us by helping us to feel happy and good and secure and at peace. And we believe that even though God made the world, he is only active and involved in our lives when we need him to resolve a problem.

And so the rest of the time, it's great if he could kind of just stay out of the way a little bit. And so to be clear on what it means to be a follower of Jesus, we must be clear on who Jesus is and what his mission is.

And so in today's text, we see two models of discipleship, one a beautiful model of discipleship and the other disastrous discipleship. And so Jesus sets the scene for us.

Grab your Bibles, please. It's a long passage and you're not going to remember it all, so you need your Bibles in front of you. Luke, sorry, Mark 14. Jesus sets the scene for us there in chapter 13, right at the very end.

[2 : 35] You'll notice in the last paragraph there the repetitiveness of statements like be on guard, be alert, keep watch, don't sleep. In verses 32 to 37, be ready and alert because as disciples, it's going to get tough.

And in fact, guys, it's about to get really tough. Up until now, it's been fun. You know, they're the guys who have been there with Jesus while he's been doing all this incredible stuff in Mark's chapters 1 to 9, healing people, driving out demons.

And what he says is this is going to be different. So you need to keep watch. You need to be on guard. Don't be afraid when you're persecuted and put on trial for my sake.

And then we notice right at the beginning of chapter 14, the chief priests and the teachers of the law are looking for a way to kill Jesus.

And so Jesus' warning to them is very timely. He says this in verse 1. You see, Jesus was popular with the crowds, but he was on the death list of the power brokers in Israel.

[4 : 00] The battle lines were drawn when Jesus declared judgment on the temple, as we saw a few weeks ago, on the temple and the religious establishment.

And so because one of their major feasts was only two days away, they've got two days to do their dirty work. It's kind of like we need to really hurry up here, guys, so we can wash our hands, change our clothes so that we can turn up for communion.

So Jesus and his mates, they've left the temple and gone to Bethany for a pleasant evening, or so it would seem. And as they're reclining at the table, they witness a remarkable event.

A woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made a pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Now, this is a breathtaking scene.

John 12 verse 3 reveals that the woman was in fact Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Mary unexpectedly approached her reclining lord.

[5 : 07] We know from Mary that she loved to be at the feet of her lord. She's carrying a priceless jar of imported perfume, possibly a family heirloom.

She breaks the neck of the jar. She pours a generous portion on his head. And we also know that she pours the rest on his feet. And John 12 says that she humbly wipes his feet with her hair. It was an intensely fervent expression of devotion. And in fact, I would go as far as to say it is as strong as an act of devotion to Jesus as you'll find anywhere in the Gospels.

This woman takes her greatest treasure on earth. She pours it all over Jesus. And reveals in fact that Jesus is her greatest treasure.

We can assume that she gave no thought to what others would think of her actions. She did it in full view of everyone else. And she even did the most humiliating thing. And took her hair and wiped his feet.

[6 : 25] Although we're not left in the dark as to what others thought about it.

Verse 4. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another. Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages.

And the money given to the poor. And they rebuked her harshly. John also helps us to see that the one who led the charge here was Judas. Judas, a man who knew the price of everything but the value of nothing.

Instantly calculates the waste. A year's wages. Probably \$35,000 to \$40,000 in today's term. What a waste. And so they rebuke her harshly.

In fact, the original language means that they snorted. They disgusted her like angry horses. That is how distasteful they thought Mary's actions were.

[7 : 34] But Jesus comes to her defense. Leave her alone. Verse 6. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. You see, Jesus was fully aware of her motive.

It was love. It was simply done to and for Jesus with no thought given to whether it was practical or whether it was sensible. Jesus defends Mary's action because it placed him before everything else. And you see that in verse 7. The poor you will always have with you. And you can help them with any time you want. But you will not always have me. Now, he's not saying that you are not to do ministry to the poor.

Far from it, in fact. But what he is commending her for is that Christ is first. Totally first. And she gave it all. Her act of worship was insightful as well.

Verse 8. She did what she could. I'd love to unpack those five words. She did what she could.

[8 : 42] She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. You see, one of the prerequisites of resurrection is a death.

One of the other prerequisites of resurrection is, in fact, not just a death, but a public burial. The guy's dead. So he put him in a tomb. Jesus had repeatedly talked about his death.

But it seems that the disciples had just passed it off. The concept of a suffering Messiah did not meet their expectations. Mary, on the other hand, yielded to his teaching and accept what was about to happen to him.

And therefore, she did what she could in devotion to Christ. Not what other people could do. She did what she could in devotion to Christ.

And verse 9 tells us that she is a model of devotion to Christ. I tell you the truth. Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.

[9 : 50] And so in 2012, in Sydney, Australia, we hear of it again. A model of devotion to the Lord Jesus.

A life that has been touched by Christ's love. And she doesn't do what Charles Spurgeon did. She doesn't do what Adoniram Judson did.

She did what she could in devotion to Christ. Of course, the stark opposite to Mary's devotion is revealed in verse 10.

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the 12, went to the chief priest to betray Jesus to them. And they were delighted to hear this. Excellent. And they promised to give him money.

So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. You see, all this talk about Christ dying and glory coming through serving, it's not the sort of kingdom that Judas is looking for.

[10:55] And so he goes to the chief priest and he makes a deal to betray Jesus. Now, it's very, very important for us here to see that Jesus is not a victim of his circumstances.

He is in complete control of everything that's happening here. His mission is on target and he's being fulfilled. And you see that in controlling the environment of the Passover meal in verses 12 to 16 and onwards.

Especially note verse 16. The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. And so they prepared the Passover.

Jesus was in control of everything. This meal was possibly the most important meal eaten in the history of the world. It identified Jesus as the Passover lamb who would deliver God's people.

This meal would graphically explain the centrality of Jesus to the salvation of humanity. This is the meal and the night that devout Jews were filled with hope of God's intervention once again.

[12:07] And Jesus was not a victim of bad circumstances. In fact, his words in the last supper, take, eat, this is my body.

And this is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for many. Make no sense at all if Jesus was not master of his own death.

Jesus' mission is clear. It is glory by way of the humiliation of the cross.

It is what Mary understood but the rest are still coming to terms with. Jesus breaks a piece of bread and says in verse 22, this is what's going to happen to my body.

And then he passes the wine and he says, here's my blood poured out for many. The Lord's Supper is so familiar to us as we will enjoy in just a moment.

[13:11] So try to imagine it if you were sitting with Jesus around this table for the first time. It is eerie to hear these words coming out of his mouth.

In fact, it is frightening for them to hear these words coming out of his mouth. To hear that the one who you have pledged your life to is talking about his body being broken and his blood being shed. Jesus, we have left our nets. We have left our families and followed you. And you're saying you're about to die? Well, what of us? Judas sees the chance to slip away and betray his Lord.

But did you notice the conversation on the way to Mount of Olives? Jesus points out that it's not just Judas who's going to let him down. They all will. Now, Peter, as he usually is, is good at talking tough.

And he says, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And all the others said, yeah, yeah, we're with Peter. I'm with you, Jesus.

[14:34] But brave talk doesn't translate into the Garden of Gethsemane, does it? All this brave talk, we will stand with you, Jesus, in your moment of trial. And Jesus says, wait here for a while, I'm going to go and pray.

And he takes Peter, James and John with him a little bit further. And it says in verse 34 that he was deeply distressed and troubled, even to the point of death.

Now, we must not minimize what Jesus went through. See, if you've got a very high view of Jesus, we sort of tend to think, well, he could cope. I mean, he's God, you know, so you kind of cope with it.

We know what's going to happen and he knows what's going to happen. And we know it all works out in the end. But the fact is, let us not downplay this. Jesus is in deep distress, which for him felt exactly what it feels like for you when you are in deep distress.

In fact, I want to suggest it's more. This is an anguish greater than any human has ever faced. You see, he saw the full terror of what lay ahead.

[15:52] He was most likely in sight of the other three. And they could see his prostate body convulsing. And they could see his tears.

And they could see the sweat of blood pouring out of his forehead. The terror he felt was not so much the pain of the cross, but what it meant.

He saw the cup. He saw the cup of human sin. He saw the brutality of a thousand holocausts over humanity's history.

All the prostituting, all the idolatry of human civilizations, the blasphemy, the profanity. He saw a cup full to the brim with jealousy and hatred and bitterness and greed and anger. And it was his job to drink it. And he doesn't want to. He falls to the ground and he prays. [16:56] He pleads. It's impossible that this hour might pass. Father, if there's any other way to do this. The hour he's about to face is the cup of God's anger against all of humanity for their rebellion. Where he takes the punishment due to Israel for their rebellion. Where he soaks up the punishment of the sins of the world. Where all of God's anger is focused on him. But the answer to his prayer is that there's no way. There's no way it can pass from you. And in the greatest display of obedience that will ever be known, Jesus took the cup full to the brim of human sin and God's anger. And he looked shuddering deep into its death. And in a steely act of his will, he drank it all. And here in the garden, it is but hours away. [18:09] And Jesus says to his disciples, Be ready.

Keep watch. It's about to get really tough. Verse 37. Then he returned to the disciples and found them sleeping. Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak. Once more he went away and he prayed the same thing. And when he came back, he again found them sleeping. Because their eyes were heavy. And they did not know what to say to him. And he said to them, Are you still sleeping and resting? On the night where you could imagine it would be good for his disciples to comfort and support him, Jesus is quite clearly all alone. [19:26] Three times he goes back to them and three times they're asleep. It's hardly the picture of worship and devotion that we saw in Mary. These men can't even stay awake.

And here's the climax in verse 41. Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough. The hour has come. Look. The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise. Let us go because here comes my betrayer. You see, the time of betrayal had arrived. It's all about to get really ugly. And so take a look at verse 43. Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, appeared. And with him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs sent from the chief priests, the teacher of the law and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with him. The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him and lead him under guard. And going at once to Jesus, Judas said, Rabbi, and kissed him. [20:34] And the men seized Jesus and arrest him. The betrayer had come with a crowd armed with swords and clubs.

Why? Because that's the sort of kingship they thought Jesus was leading. That's the sort of kingdom they thought Jesus was on about. But he wasn't the only one. They weren't the only one. Verse 37. 47. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. That's one of Jesus' boys. Pulling out his sword. Jesus had earlier predicted that they would all scatter on the way to Gethsemane. That they would all scatter when the going got tough. But it hasn't happened yet. Moments ago when Jesus was praying, these guys are all asleep. [21:44] Now the mob is here with their swords and their clubs and their machine guns and their camo gear. And they've got it all there, ready to come and arrest Jesus. And what do the disciples do?

They pull out their sword ready for battle. They don't scatter. They are a long way from abandoning Jesus until that is, he says in verse 48. Am I leading a rebellion that you would come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you teaching in the temple courts and you did not arrest me. But the scriptures must be fulfilled. Jesus says here, have you not heard a single thing that I've said? Do you not understand what my mission is? It is not to be fighting this war. And it would seem that that was the moment the penny dropped for the disciples. [22:59] All this talk of coming not to be served but to serve and to give your life as a ransom for many. All this talk of the first will be last and the last will be first.

All this talk of his blood being poured out for many. It would appear that that is when the penny dropped. Verse 50.

Then everyone deserted him and fled. So total was the fleeing from Jesus that even one of them fled naked.

So total was the desertion of Jesus at that moment. Here's the point. They didn't desert Jesus because they were afraid.

They weren't afraid to take on this mob. They didn't desert Jesus because of fear. They were in fact prepared to die with Jesus. I think Peter was right.

[24 : 05] I will not abandon you. I will die with you Jesus. They didn't desert Jesus because they were afraid. They deserted Jesus because of ideological disillusionment.

The kingdom they thought Jesus was actually leading was not the kingdom that Jesus was leading. They were going to be with Jesus.

They would give their lives for Jesus. Providing Jesus' kingdom meant that they were marching into Jerusalem and that they were going to take the throne and the palace and the temple.

And they had glory and honor at the right hand of the left hand of Jesus. Remember chapter 10? One on your left and one on your right?

They're thinking when we get to Jerusalem. When your kingdom is established Jesus. We are happy for you to be the king.

[25 : 10] As long as I'm the prime minister and he's the foreign minister. You get the glory. As long as we get to shine in the glory as well.

As long as we get to be the people there when the press conference is on. Sitting beside you and waving at the camera behind you. So that everyone can see that we're with you Jesus.

We're on the winning side. But when your king surrenders himself to death and calls you to do the same. Well that's not what we were signing up for.

I've got to say friends. This has got something really to say about our consumeristic culture and the way it bears on church. A consumeristic culture says what's in it for me.

The core of such a culture is me, my agenda. It's me getting something out of it. And so it is possible to be with Jesus and yet not be with Jesus.

[26 : 11] It is possible to come to church and sing songs of praise and pray and nod your head when the sermon is preached. And yet make decisions that pursue your agenda. That makes much of me rather than making much of Christ.

I think it's often a subtlety for Christians. Rather than a blatantly obvious. Too often we are happy to pursue God's glory. So long in the process, he makes much of me in the process.

We can be involved in church activities that look like we're doing it for the glory of Christ. But secretly harboring a hope that some of his glory will radiate on me.

In such a way that other people will see it. And notice it. Let's be honest. It is so much easier taking up your cross and following Christ when other people are applauding you for it.

It's a struggle for church leaders. It's a struggle for me. What are my motives in wanting God to be glorified at St. Paul's?

[27 : 26] And the vision that we have? Let me be honest with you. The reality is that if we only achieve half of what we hope to here at St. Paul's, much will be made of St. Paul's in church circles.

That is the consumeristic culture in which we live. People won't automatically look to God and be amazed at his goodness to a bunch of ordinary people.

They will look to us and praise us. And want us to help them do the same thing for them. Jesus didn't say, take up your sword.

He said, take up your cross and follow me. And my guess is that if we search our hearts, we'll discover that it's so much easier, as I said, to take up our cross and follow Jesus and be a servant when other people are watching and applauding it.

So that we at least get some glory out of it. If the way to be glorious really is to make Jesus look glorious by being a servant, do you really want to be glorious that way?

[28 : 39] So friends, every decision you make, every choice that you're faced with, you are there with this option.

Make much of Christ or make much of me. The subtlety is, I'll make much of Christ if he makes much of me at the same time. And that's the struggle that we have with our motives all the time.

And if we're not clear on those motives, then we may well abandon Jesus when the going gets tough.

The great news is in this passage, and this is a message of hope here as well, Jesus knew his suffering and death wasn't going to be the end of the story. He knew that his disciples weren't going to take the heat.

He knew that they were going to abandon him. And yet for Jesus, there was still plenty of room for putting things right. I love this bit in verses 27 and 28.

[29 : 49] Even for someone like Peter, there's an opportunity to put things right. Where Peter talks big, I'm not going to abandon you, Jesus. And then Jesus says this, See that.

Galilee. See that? The resurrection changes everything. There's hope even for a Peter. After the resurrection, there is a new start. Jesus says, I'm going to go ahead of you into Galilee. That is, I will meet you on the other side and I will gather you to myself. That's what the resurrection does. And with the coming of the Holy Spirit, these weak and disastrous disciples are courageous and bold for Christ to the point where they actually do give their lives for Christ and for his kingdom. Their failures are forgiven, washed over, cleansed.

And so there is always hope here for disastrous disciples, for weak disciples. And that is the good news of this passage. Amen.