

Discipleship 101

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to Mark chapter 9. I'm going to begin reading in verse 30.! Mark chapter 9, verse 30.

This is the Word of God. Arise!

But they did not understand this saying and were afraid to ask Him. Verse 33, And they came to Capernaum, and when He was in the house, He asked them, What were you discussing on the way?

But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And He sat down and called the twelve, and He said to them, If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

And He took a child and put Him in the midst of them, and taking Him into His arms, He said to them, Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives not Me, but Him who sent Me.

[1 : 36] 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.

But Jesus says, 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.

For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly I say to you, Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

Verse 42, Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

[2 : 39] And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out.

It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?

Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another. Grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of God remains and abides forever.

Author John Elridge begins one of his books with a haunting story about visiting a remote island and discovering a path used by grizzlies.

[3 : 45] He writes, One of the most haunting experiences I've ever had is a man took place on the early summer day in Alaska. We were, we, my family and I were sea kayaking, and we stopped on the shore of this remote island for lunch.

Now that sounds like a pretty fun gig, doesn't it? Our guide asked us if we wanted to go for a hike into the interior of the island to a clearing where grizzlies were known to feed.

You know, I mean, we were all over that invitation. Love that. After a 20-minute walk, we came into what appeared to be a broad, open meadow with 400 yards, or 400 yards across.

Being midday and being hot, there were no bears to be seen. Their guide said, They're sleeping now through the afternoon. They'll be back tonight. Come here, he says.

I want to show you something. John describes it. The meadow, or Mr. Eldridge describes it. The meadow was actually more of a bog, a jungle-type area with a ground floor of soaked moss and peat.

[4 : 49] A very difficult place to walk. A little bit more like trudging through this. Our guide led us to a trail of what seemed to be massive foot prints with a stride of about two feet between them, pressed down into the bog and making a path through it.

Sounds like Bigfoot to me. It's a marked trail, he said. A path created by the footprints of the bears. This one is probably hundreds of years old.

For as long as the bears have been on this island, they've taken this path. The cubs follow their elders, putting their feet exactly where the older bears walk. That's how they cross this miry bog. I began to walk in the marked trail, stepping onto the firm, deep-worn places where bears had walked for hundreds of years. Not sure how to describe that experience.

It was an ancient and fearful path through a wild and untamed place. A proven way to safety. A proven path, wild and tamed place.

[6 : 03] A marked trail, deeply worn trail where grizzly cubs walk around. Who wouldn't want to go? Upon first glance, our passage this morning seems a bit random.

Perhaps teachings of Jesus that didn't really fit well other places. And so Mark's just kind of strung them together right here. They seem to kind of meander along into different subjects, perhaps because of some closer theme.

But upon closer look, what we're going to see is that Mark is carefully unveiling what it means to follow Christ. Mark is carefully unveiling a little bit more about what this path of following Christ looks like.

As we've already covered in the weeks past, a little bit of a review, chapters 1 through 8 showed us that Jesus is the King. That's why we saw so many miracles and signs and wonders. Jesus is doing the things that only the Lord can do.

And so He is the Messiah. He's the King over all. But beginning at the end of chapter 8, it turned and shifts to show us how the King must take up the cross.

[7 : 09] The rest of the book is about how this King must take up the cross. And here we are in chapter 9 and all the focus now has turned to the cross. Most of the miracles are complete. Much of His healing ministry is concluded.

Jesus has begun to make His way to Jerusalem. In fact, once in chapter 8 and twice in our passage, look in verse 33 and 34, I'm looking at the wrong chapter or something.

When they came to, what were you discussing along the way? But they kept silent for on the way. So Mark threads through these next three chapters this reference to the way because they're on the way to Jerusalem.

They're on the road, the Via Della Rosa that will take them all the way to Jerusalem. Once again, Jesus tells them what will happen to Him. Look at verse 31.

Son of man is going to be delivered in the hands of men. They will kill Him. After three days, He'll rise. Once again, after He tells them all this, the disciples don't get it.

[8 : 16] Jesus knows they don't. They don't understand what walking this road, this path, means for Him. But while they don't understand that yet, Jesus unpacks in the rest of this chapter what walking this path will mean for them and for every follower of Jesus Christ.

If you look closely, tracing through these verses is that path through a wild and untamed place, the strange, mad, and painful world we live in. It's a path that's deeply worn.

used by countless disciples, not only the twelve, but many, many, many more who have followed Him. It's blazed by Jesus Christ and marked out for all who follow Him.

It's the way of the cross. It's the way of the disciple. It's the only way to follow Jesus. In a word, where we're going, the cross before me, the world behind me, there's no turning back for those who follow Christ.

Cross before me, the world behind me, there's no turning back for those who follow Jesus Christ. Break this out in three points. The first one is following Christ is a call to be last.

[9 : 28] Following Christ is a call to be last. Following Christ is a call to be like Him. It's a call not to be first, but to be last. But that's not immediately what the disciples recognize.

You know, after Jesus tells them again that He will be killed in Jerusalem, the disciples begin arguing about who's the greatest. Look at verse 33. Jesus said, what were you discussing along the way?

Verse 34, they were silent because they were discussing who was the greatest. Now, the disciples have argued about a lot of things in the book of Mark, but now they're arguing about who is the

greatest. It's a foolish argument at any time, but especially foolish right now, right after Jesus announces what will happen to Him in Jerusalem.

David Garland captures the irony of this scene, the tragedy of it. Jesus walks ahead in silence on His way to His sacrificial death while His straggling disciples push and shove, trying to establish the order of the procession behind Him.

It's almost jarring to read. Now, you would think they would know it's not a good time to talk about who's the greatest. Please say that. I mean, Jesus got a lot on His mind.

[10 : 44] He's burned. He's thinking about a lot of things. Even young children know when it's not good to ask for a treat.

But it's not just that their arguing is insensitive or unkind. Their arguing reveals they still don't understand what it means to follow Jesus.

You know, we can be so often like that, jockeying for position and prominence in the family of God. Look at me. Look at my prayer life or something like that.

You know, but Jesus is wonderfully patient. That's a major thing through this section. Jesus is so patient. He doesn't do away with them immediately like any parent helping to resolve a conflict. Jesus turns the argument into a teaching moment. Look at verse 35. He sat down with them and took a posture of teaching. And He called the twelve, just the core disciples that if anyone would be first, he must be last and servant of all.

[11 : 50] Jesus explains to them how leadership in the kingdom is going to look. Leadership in the kingdom is unlike leadership in the world, unlike the leadership they've known. If anyone would be first, he must be last.

If anyone would go up, he must go down. If anyone would climb the ladder, he must move down the ladder. If anyone would be great, he must be a servant. The ones who are great are the ones who serve. Disciples thought nothing about discussing who was the greatest.

They thought nothing about striving for position, but Jesus turns to them and says, you have it all wrong. That's not the way the kingdom works. David Garland again says it. Well, all followers of Christ must learn how God ranks things.

His ranking system is not set to 21st century America. Very different. We often think about leadership like a pyramid where someone is up on top and everyone below them serves them.

But leadership in the kingdom is the exact opposite. Everyone is above the leader and the leader is on the bottom with more and more people to serve.

[12 : 51] In fact, the best leaders in the world know servant leadership is the only leadership that works. On a cultural note, if you haven't tuned in yet, the best thing on TV is Peyton and Eli hosting Monday night football.

Recognizing how well the show is going, one sports writer said, let the Mannings host everything. Football, baseball, basketball, golf, tennis, curling, dog shows, bake-offs, royal weddings, moon landing, not Loch Ness mysteries, New Year's Eve and probably election night.

We watched the other night. My favorite part is watching Peyton break down the game. I mean, he's so clear. He still loves football. He gets so frustrated when guys miss their throw or guys drop a catch. But it's also clear as he breaks down, this guy has spent hours and hours learning the game of football.

Now, Peyton was legendary in his preparation. One wide receiver recalls receiving a text during dinner when Peyton was watching film from that day's practice.

The text just said, middle of the field closed, run a 16-yard in route, not a seam. Wes Welker says he immediately struck in this. It's like Peyton's watching him wherever he goes.

[14 : 13] In fact, last Monday night, this was a highlight, Nick Saban, I think he's a football coach somewhere in the country, was on the show and he said that when he coached against Peyton, he had to switch the defensive front every play because if he ran the same coverage, Peyton would notice and score a touchdown.

That's what he did. That's how he's a student immediately reading the coverage as soon as he takes a snap. For Peyton, leadership did not mean kicking back and giving orders, meant working harder than anyone else.

Leadership didn't mean climbing to a position for others to serve him but preparing to position his teammates to win. That's the way leadership in the kingdom of God works. That's the type of leadership we want around here.

So many ways, I'm so grateful that's the type of leadership we have. You know, four men have really spearheaded all of what you see today and this took a little bit to get it ready but our deacons, Gil and Tim and Dustin and Daniel, they don't lead by pointing.

They lead by bowing down to serve. I'll follow those men anywhere. Hope you will too because they remind me of Jesus Christ.

[15:32] To press home his teaching moment, Jesus makes an object lesson. Who knew it? Jesus is such a great teacher. He makes an object lesson after this teaching moment.

Look at me in verse 36. He took a child and put him in the midst of them and take him into his arms. He said to him, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, whoever receives me receives not me but him who sent me.

Mark wonderfully captures the drama of that scene. They're all disciples around. All the men are around. If you know like an honor shame culture, all the men are around and Jesus calls one of the children into the house.

He takes the child. He puts him right in the middle of all the disciples. Takes him into his arms.

Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. Now what's going on?

Like why is Jesus bringing in this child and making this statement? Another place in the scripture Jesus says you must become like a child in order to enter the kingdom of God. But that's not what he's saying in the drama of this scene and with this statement.

[16:33] In fact, what he's saying is very provoking in the context. Children in the first century were not the apple of their parents' eye. They had, the infant mortality rate was very high and the probability of an infant child making it to adulthood was very low so parents couldn't get all sentimental about the babies.

They might not make it through winter. One small example, the English pastor and author, John Owen, had 11 children, 10 died in infancy.

One made it to adulthood but died of tuberculosis after getting married. And that was in the 1600s. But in addition, and perhaps more importantly, contextually, children were without honor in the ancient world. They had no power, no status, very few rights.

They weren't exactly the ancient world's power brokers or the soothsayers, the sages. They were insignificant. They were lowest on the totem pole. They weren't served first like they are around here.

[17:40] They were served last. And Jesus says, whoever receives them receives me. Jesus is driving home a very important point.

The most insignificant of society are significant to me. Stanley Hauerwas captures this scene. Well, interestingly, Jesus put a child in the center of the disciples in the midst of them in order to help them pay attention.

Just like any object lesson does, the child was a last-dish effort by God to help the disciples pay attention to the odd nature of God's kingdom. Few acts of Jesus are more radical, countercultural than his blessing of children.

What Jesus is saying, the ones you look right past are significant to me. I place them in the center of my attention. That's how unlike his ranking system is from ours.

The most insignificant are deeply significant to him. And we love children around here. If you haven't noticed, we got lots. We're their babies. They're everywhere. They're not a distraction or inconvenience.

[18:44] Some of our greatest gifts. So if your child's squirming a little bit, most people don't notice because we're parents and we don't hear anything anymore. And the ones that do are smiling because they probably wish they could cuddle with that baby that they don't have anymore.

On the other hand, Jesus is also saying to all who follow him, the most insignificant of society must be significant to you. It matters very little how you, well you treat the rich and famous.

It matters very little how you welcome and receive the powerful, the popular, and the prominent. The true test of whether you're my disciples, how you treat those who can do nothing for you. the children, the poor, the needy, the lost.

Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me. The cross for me, the world behind me, there's no turning back for those who follow Jesus Christ.

No turning back for those who follow Jesus Christ. Point two, following Christ is a call to be liberal with love. Liberal with love.

[19 : 52] That's a little bit of a clunky point, but we'll see how it goes. Fallen Christ called to be liberal with love. After the previous teaching about who is first, who's last, and how the kingdom of God works, John, one of the sons of Zebedee, asked Jesus a question.

Now, Jesus already told us, or Peter Mark already told us, that Jesus has nicknamed him one of the sons of thunder. And that's not because he's a meteorologist, but because he's a troublemaker. Peter, he's always rearing for a fight.

And this encounter helps us understand why he got that nickname. Look in verse 38. He says, Jesus, teach us. We saw someone casting out demons in your name. We tried to stop him because he was not following us.

John had already called down, or offered to call down fire on some unbelieving Samaritans, but now he's angry because some guy they don't know is casting out demons in the name of Jesus.

Now, we don't know a lot about this guy. We just know he had some power, you know, the Lord was with him and we just know that he's not one of the disciples and in the first century people practicing casting out demons would cast out, or they would use, utter all sorts of names and formulas and chants and things like that and so perhaps this guy, he found, he started uttering this name that he heard about and he saw that it worked.

[21 : 10] He discovered the name of Jesus. Whatever way he stumbled into proclaiming the name of Jesus, he discovered there's power in the name of Jesus and we can say amen and he started unleashing that power even though he doesn't know Jesus or the disciples of Jesus.

This is a quandary, a problem for the disciples and for our Lord. When disciples see him, John gets angry and confronts them. Now, we have to pause and see the irony of this scene.

Two weeks ago, the previous section, the disciples were trying to cast out a little boy with an unclean spirit and they couldn't do it and then now they come upon another guy that's casting out a demon or I mean casting out an unclean spirit and they get mad.

I mean, shouldn't they rejoice? This guy's doing what we can't do. Shouldn't they be excited cheering him on? Yes.

But John's angry. If I can't have cake, you can't have cake either. There's no sin that feels so good like anger feels so good because we believe we're right and everyone else is wrong and so John comes to Jesus.

[22 : 21] I think in a lot of ways he's coming to Jesus like he wants to alert Jesus to the good thing that they did. Want to tell Jesus that they tried to stop this guy.

Assumes Jesus would say, well done, good and faithful servant. Thanks for hunting him down. Not on our team. But Jesus doesn't pat him on the back. Look at verse 39. He says, do not stop him as a command for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me for the one who is not against us is for us.

Now what is Jesus doing? Now if this guy doesn't know Jesus, isn't one of their disciples, should he really be working in the name of Jesus? I mean, isn't that a franchise you want to shut down?

You know, does Jesus not care who follows him? Does Jesus not care about discipleship? Not care this guy is in the know?

Jesus cares about all those things but in his infinite wisdom he's making a very important point to disciples. Essentially he says, do not stop this man because no one who does a mighty work in my name will cause people to dishonor me.

[23 : 32] That's what that phrase, no one who does a mighty work in my name will cause people to dishonor me or put it positively, every mighty work done in my name will cause people to glorify me.

Sounds a lot like the apostle Paul in Philippians 1. I don't care if the gospel is preached with rivalry or selfish ambition as long as the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached.

Jesus doesn't care who's speaking or who's casting out demons. Jesus only cares if name is lifted up so that when people are delivered by the power of God he gets all the glory. So Jesus says the one who's not against us is for us.

This is a patient rebuke of John and the other disciples. If we're honest it's a rebuke of us too.

Disciples are angry because this man was doing something they couldn't do.

They were angry because God was blessing him in a way that he wasn't blessing them and they wanted him to be stopped immediately. If we're not careful we can stumble into the same anger and envy.

[24 : 34] We can stumble into this as a church. We're so thankful we're not the only church in Athens preaching the gospel of Christ. We're not the only church in Athens preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We rejoice in the work of Greenhouse, Clearwater, East Athens, East and Alley, Idlewild, and others. But if we're not careful we could become bitter if fruitfulness falls on them in a way that it doesn't fall on us.

Let us be a church that's for other churches. There's no territory to protect.

Let's fan in the flame the name of Jesus wherever it is proclaimed. We could stumble into this anger and envy as individuals as well. Jonathan Edwards this wonderful little book I mean this thing is super dense but wonderful book called Charity of the Spirit it's all about 1 Corinthians 13 I commend it to you.

Well it's like going to the dentist I mean he's going to get in your face but I commend it. He says envy may be defined as a spirit of opposition to the happiness of others considered as compared with our own.

[25 : 53] Envy may be described as a spirit of opposition to the happiness of others considered as compared to our own. Do we find it hard to rejoice with others? Do we struggle to be happy with others especially when they're blessed with health or wealth or success in some way?

Hypothetically speaking when you're scrolling through Facebook and you see your friend down at the beach while you're changing diapers all day do you ever just want to hear that they stepped on a sand spur?

you know nothing too major just fall into a sand spur bed? Are you uneasy or uncomfortable when someone experiences an out of blue promotion?

Do you try to tear them down the next time you get a chance to take away from their big moment with a story of their biggest failures? Do you find it hard to draw attention to and honor the gifts talents and strengths of others?

Me too. Wonderfully Edwards says in that book that in heaven we'll be completely freed from an envious spirit such that when someone comes in with more rewards we'll rejoice it'll increase our joy to see God give more rewards to someone else for his glory oh to be there but let us turn now as let's be individuals who are for other believers other people let us turn from anger and envy be liberal with love and support be the most big hearted open handed gospel loving people in the city of Athens the one who's not against us is for us so receive them and rejoice with them and if that wasn't clear enough Jesus makes two final statements that tie to it for truly he says in verse 41 truly I say to you whoever gives a cup of cold water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose their reward

[27 : 56] I think the idea is tying it back to that I mean they were casting out demons but even a cup of cold water in my name will bring glory to me and reward to them so everything done in my name even something as great as casting out demons or something as seemingly insignificant as a cup of cold water brings glory to me so let them alone in fact Jesus seems to conclude the discussion and I think our breaks in the Bible are not helpful here in verse 42 with a warning whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin it'd be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea the little ones might think it's a reference back to the child being placed in the middle of them but it's not that word just means the word for child is not there just little is so what Jesus is talking about is a believer that's fresh and new simple childlike whom the disciples were quick to look over people don't know everything yet don't know all they're saying yet people disciples were prone to look down

Jesus said if you touch that man you destroy his faith it's better for you to be drowned in the sea point three falling Christ is a call to be ruthless with sin falling Christ is a call to be ruthless with sin like every good preacher Jesus gets passionate when he comes to the end Jesus hits hard in these verses he warns them about the enemy within we have a problem you and I have a problem and the problem is not outside us it's inside of us it's sin it's our enemy within this enemy that's often unseen as Jesus points further down the path as he points further down to what he's going to encounter in Jerusalem as he points further what they're going to encounter as they go he warns them first and foremost at the ever present danger of sin look in verse 43 he says if your hand calls you to sin cut it off but if you enter life crippled then with two hands to go to hell if your foot calls you to sin cut it off but if you enter life lame then with two feet to be thrown into hell if your eye calls to sin tear it out better for you to enter the kingdom of

God with one eye with two eyes be thrown into hell there's several words for sin in there's many obstacles along the path when I'm looking ahead for you there's many obstacles along the way of the cross there's many chances to stumble there's many opportunities for you to stagger there's many places where you might fall to your destruction be alert earlier this week I took my oldest son mountain biking for his birthday as we're riding along I'm in front of him I'm constantly warning things coming ahead oh we got a big root we're going over right here we got we got a little dip here we're going over I'm constantly alerting there's things ahead if you if you if you look down if you're not prepared for it you might fall off this spike

Jesus is doing the same thing the obstacles are ahead and chief among them is sin if your hand causes you to sin cut it off foot causes you sin cut it off your eye causes you sin tear it out it's better if you lose a hand or a foot or an eye and still enter the kingdom of God than to go to hell with your whole body intact cut it off Jesus obviously using hyperbole purposely exaggerated to make a very important point the important point is if you!

kill sin! kill you if you don't kill sin sin will kill you John Owen said be killing sin or sin be killing you that's the fact Ray Ortlund says sin is as unchosen as hunger as comfortable as sleep as inevitable as gravity as lethal as poison sin offers itself as an option but it takes over as a master subtle path to destruction is subtle you must fight you must make war because when sin takes over as a master it may be lust or comfort may be anxiety a lot of that going around or fear of man it may be control or envy it may be anger it may be any number of things but the

[32 : 49] Christian is alert to the danger J.C. Riles says a child of God is marked by two things inner peace and inner warfare how's your soul are you comfortable or uncomfortable are you awake or asleep have you laid down your arms or are you at war tell me five things have you repented this week tell me five things you repented of if you can't you might be asleep you might be asleep many have made almost searing passages in the Bible Paul writing to Timothy and 2nd Timothy many have already made shipwreck of their faith many who are with us are no longer with us not because they're not with us or something like that because they've gone completely away from Jesus Christ there's names that just ring up in my head who no longer walk with the

Lord they just break out start running the opposite direction they slowly fell asleep now you may think come on man Christians are always railing against sin what what's it matter anyway Romans 8 13 says if you live according to flesh you will die but if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live if you live according to flesh according to your sin you will die you will suffer eternity in hell you may say you believe in Jesus but all who believe in Jesus bear the fruit of killing sin everyone without that fruit is headed fast to hell there's no more extensive passage on the reality of hell in the book of Mark than this one hell will be hot it's a fire literally a fire I don't know the word for hell is a reference to a valley south of Jerusalem in this day Hinnom Valley where children were sacrificed to idols that had now and this day when

Jesus was speaking had become just a refuse a little trash heap it always had a fire burning burning off the filth and refuse and trash all day long hell will be like that endless burning of all that's ugly and ungodly hell will be long it's an unquenchable fire the worm does not die the fire is not quenched hell is not a place where the wicked are taken out and eliminated hell is not a place where those who refuse Christ go to die hell is a place where those who refuse Christ go to suffer forever and ever and ever if we this is the disciples there's not those people out there people we read about in the news this is the disciples the danger is not an out there danger the ever present danger for those who are inside those who are in the know he says if you don't turn from sin and turn to

Jesus you will not escape the agony and then he concludes with this kind of odd demand for full allegiance look down there with me everything will be salted with fire salt is good if salt is lost in saltiness how you make it salty again have salt in yourself now these are difficult verses now some people would argue that the fires and the salt are referenced or the fires are referenced to the fires of!

of suffering or persecution and the salt is kind of it's what it's what's restored so that you you can be salt and light in a world gone mad because you made it through persecution like a refiner's fire but it seems to me that that's not right that that really Jesus this is a heightening of all he said before and he's calling their their full allegiance to Jesus Christ the Old Testament when a burnt offering is given over to the Lord the fire is completely consummate and the fire is pleasing to the Lord before a sacrifice is altered Leviticus 2.13 says it's salted I think that's what's going on the fire and salt

