

## Discipleship

We are Disciples of Christ. That is our name. What makes us disciples? We might come up with several different answers to that question. Before we answer, we might ask the question what is a disciple? Well, the word most often translated as disciple is the Greek word Μαθητής (ma-thay-TASE) which means a learner (indicating thought accompanied by endeavor); One who follows someone's teachings; an adherent; a student. (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary)

As we sit here this morning, we may or may not feel like students. For some, I have become a teacher. Yet, there is a grave danger in this concept. I am a tool presenting the word of God. As your preacher, I see my mission defined by Paul in his letter to Timothy where he says: **I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great (Lit. all) patience and instruction. (2 Timothy 4:1-2 NASB)**

So, my duties are not only to instruct but exhort (or encourage), and to urge people to correct their errors. I am to be ready to do this at all times. This means that I must do things that are not popular or even appreciated.

Even with the part of my apostolic job description telling me to instruct, I am not the teacher the disciples are to follow. That teacher is Jesus the Christ. Once we understand that Jesus is our teacher, mentor, leader, or instructor; we are ready to learn His definition of disciple. Let's open our Bibles to the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew and begin reading with the 24<sup>th</sup> verse.

**“A disciple (Or student) is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! (Matthew 10:24-25 NASB)**

Let's pause right here for a moment. Jesus uses the ancient Greek model to show the relationship between the teacher and the student. We see similar models when we look at the relationship between Socrates and Plato and then between Plato and Aristotle. The disciple is not greater than the teacher but the disciple becomes like the teacher.

Next in these two verses, Jesus warns His disciples they will be subjected to terrible treatment. They had accused Jesus of being the ruler of demons. So, the disciple may expect similar treatment. As we remember that Satan is still free to attack the disciples today, we should not expect that we will be treated any differently than Jesus was treated.

Following the warning, Jesus then tells disciples they have a job to do. That job is to share the message of Jesus. We are to make public the good news of Jesus and His saving grace. Yes, we are to do this even though we are aware of the mistreatment that we will face.

**“Therefore, do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. (Matthew 10:26-27 NASB)**

As disciples, we realize that we are human. We have human fears and uncertainties. Here is where faith goes to play. Jesus assures us of God's protection and preservation. However, this may involve losing our life in this world. Do we have faith enough to believe the words of Jesus?

**Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:28-31 NASB)**

The sobering moment in our spiritual life comes when we realize that our sins separate us from God. We realize that apart from Jesus we will face God in judgement. The writer of the Hebrew letter tells us: **It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31 NASB)**

The only hope that we have is to be in Jesus. Being in Jesus is not; never has been; nor ever shall be a private affair. We must openly and often confess our relationship with Jesus. Again, the words of Jesus speak to us.

**“Therefore, everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33 NASB)**

At times, we may come to think that this confession is the one we make prior to baptism. We make that confession then to confirm that our baptism is based on our love and understanding of Jesus. However, we need to live every day in such a manner that we show our belief in Jesus. We are to proudly acknowledge our relationship with Jesus even when it may cause us discomfort. We may recall that Peter did not feel comfortable to confess Jesus when He was arrested. It may be a human reaction to seek our own safety over confessing Jesus. Yet, once more our faith must be strong enough to confess Jesus even in the worst of circumstances. Jesus quiet clearly tells us that when we confess Him, He will confess us before His Father. Jesus made His confession before everyone and it did cost Him His life on the cross. As a disciple, have we become like Him enough to do the same?

Confessing our belief in Jesus will definitely separate us from some people. The tragic reality is that in some cases, we will have friends and family turn against us when we follow Jesus.

**“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN’S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. (Matthew 10:34-36 NASB)**

Becoming a disciple of Christ forces us to choose. It is a life-long commitment. This commitment requires that we place our service to and for Jesus before all others (mothers, fathers, children, sisters, brothers, or spouses) and even above our self.

**“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has -found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39 NASB)**

Being a disciple is a demanding calling. Thanks to Mr. Roget, I found several other words that could be used in place of the word disciple. Some of these words have a negative connotation. Such words as fanatic (with the underlying meaning of obsessed), zealot, devotee are alternate words suggested in my Thesaurus. Often, we want to be close enough to Jesus without becoming a fanatic or zealot. We don't want to go too far. Yet, there is another word that we don't want to be called and that is hypocrite. Hypocrite, as we have mentioned before, is from a Greek word meaning a play actor. We don't want to be accused of play-acting as a disciple. Are there specific signs that may help us know if we are on the right track toward being a disciple? Yes,

there are signs. As we wrap up this message on discipleship, let us consider some more words of Jesus in which He tells us the signs of being His disciple.

First, in John 13:35, Jesus tells us an identifying mark of a disciple: **By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35 NASB)** This is not a love in words only. The love that we have should reflect the same love that Jesus demonstrated in accepting people regardless of who they are, forgiving people even when they make it hard to forgive, meeting their needs with the resources we have available. That is the love that marks a disciple.

Second, Jesus tells us to stay in His word so that we truly be His disciple. **“If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31b-32 NASB)**

Third, we must deny our own wants and wishes in favor of living for Jesus. In Mark the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter Jesus said: **“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. (Mark 8:34b-35 NASB)**

Fourth, is one of the hardest parts to being a disciple. We must put Jesus before our family and friends. Most of us would gladly sacrifice our own life to save a family member. When we read the words of Jesus found in Luke 14:26, we may draw back. **“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26 NASB)**

That word hate stares back at us. Most of us love our family. The original language allows for this to be a comparative state, as in love less. Commentator Matthew Henry writes this concerning this passage: *Every good man loves his relations; and yet, if he be a disciple of Christ, he must comparatively hate them, must love them less than Christ.*

Fifth and finally, we must be willing to die for Jesus. In the verse following the one we just read, we find these words: **Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27 NASB)**

The people who heard Jesus on that day, knew all too well the death by crucifixion. Jesus is telling us that we may face this death just because we are His disciple. Are we willing to follow Jesus to this degree?

As we began this morning, we asked one question: What makes us disciples? The answer may be summed up in one sentence. If we exhibit love toward others, if we learn and live the expectations found in Scripture, if we deny our self in all situations, if we place Jesus first before any other relationship, and if we are willing to die for the cause of Jesus the Christ, then we may be sure that we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ.