

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

Message #2

“ENLISTING IN DISCIPLESHIP”

Luke 9:23

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

T-Shirts with messages on the front are popular with a certain segment of society. I was in a shopping mall and saw a young man approaching me who had an interesting message on the front of his T-Shirt. These were the words: "I once was lost in the shuffle, but now I just shuffle along with the lost." Those were the actual words!

I stopped him and said, "Excuse me, but I read the words on the front of your shirt and would like to talk with you about them." He replied, "Ok! You like them, huh?" I said, "No, I don't! You see, I once was lost in the shuffle but Jesus Christ saved me and I would like to tell you how you too can stop shuffling along with the lost."

He ducked his head, stared at his shoes and said, "Well, to tell you the truth I am already a Christian. I guess I shouldn't be wearing this shirt, huh?" I said, "It isn't a very good testimony for a Christian is it?" He answered, "No it isn't. I'll stop wearing it." I added, "What you wear is your business, but a Christian has no business shuffling along with the lost." He agreed and we had a good talk about the things of the Lord and went on our way.

Disciples do not shuffle along with the lost. Discipleship is about the undisciplined being disciplined; the untaught being taught; the fuzzy-thinking Christian becoming a focused Christian; the casual Christian becoming a committed Christian.

The great omission from the Great Commission, in this present day, is the failure to make disciples. Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." (Matt.28:19) He did not say, "make converts" or even "church members." He said, "make disciples." Disciples are made, not born! This places a sobering responsibility upon those of us who minister the Word of God.

The Greek word for "disciple" is "mathetes" and means "a taught or trained one; a learner-follower." A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has been disciplined by the teachings of Christ and trained to follow Christ. It is impossible to separate discipline from discipleship. The word "discipline" according to the Oxford Dictionary, means "to train in self-control or obedience." Christian discipleship and discipline are synonymous terms. There is no such concept as discipleship without discipline. Discipleship means discipline. Without adhering to the disciplines of Christ we are not disciples no matter how vociferously we claim otherwise.

Illust. When I enlisted in the U.S. Naval Aviation branch of the military, I took the oath that all enlistees in the United States Military take. This is the oath:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders

of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. “

Picture yourself standing before the Lord Jesus, repeating this discipleship pledge: “I am willing to come after You, therefore, I will deny myself, and take up my cross daily and follow You.”

It is my prayer that this series of messages on Discipleship will result in two things: (1) the enlistment of new disciples of Jesus and (2) the encouragement and strengthening of those who are already disciples.

What is involved in enlisting in discipleship? There are four main thoughts in Luke 9:23 that give us the answer. First,

I. THE CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP.

“If anyone desires to *come after Me*, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

In Mark’s account of the occasion of Jesus’ discipleship call, he writes, “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Mark 8:34) It was a call to a mixed audience.

Notice the words, “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also.” This was a mixed multitude – “the people,” meaning the general populace, the outer circle, and “his disciples,” the inner circle. His remarks fell on the ears of the curious as well as the committed.

This call of Christ comprises an invitation. You and I receive many different kinds of invitations during our lifetimes. We receive invitations for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings and the list goes on and on. How we respond to those invitations depends upon who is inviting us and how well we know them.. The Lord Jesus extends to us His invitation to follow Him. It is the most important invitation that any of us will ever receive.

Jesus gave two great invitations during His earthly ministry. The first invitation to us is “Come *unto* me.” (Matt. 11:28) The second invitation is: “Come *after* me.” (Luke 9:23). It is obvious that one cannot come “after” until one has come “unto” Him. These are two completely different invitations directed at two different groups:

- One call is to the outside group – “come to Me”
One call is to the inside group – “come after Me”
- One is a call to faith – “come to Me”
One is a call to follow – “come after Me”
- One is a call to sonship – “come to Me”
One a call to discipleship – “come after Me”

- One call is to the school of Christ – “come to Me - learn of me”
One call is to the service of Christ – “come after Me”
- One call is to lay down something – “heavy laden” - burden
One call is to take up something – the cross
- One call is to come into the arms of Christ – “come to me”
One call is to come into the army of Christ – “come after me”

I have heard these two invitations treated as though they were one and the same. It is obvious that they are different and require different responses. Jesus Christ continues to extend these dual invitations. Have you accepted both? If not, why not?

In addition to Christ’s call there is, secondly:

II. THE CANDIDATE FOR DISCIPLESHIP.

“If *anyone* desires

 (Luke 9:23)

As we noted, in Mark’s Gospel Jesus addressed “the people” and also “His disciples.” In the curious crowd there may have been those who would respond to His call and join those who were already His committed disciples. Therefore, Jesus called out, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

There are, at the very least, two qualifications in Jesus’ call that open the door to a life of discipleship. The qualifying words are: “anyone” and “desires.” One word presents an appeal, the other pertains to an appetite. I will explain as follows:

A. **The Extent Of The Appeal** – “*If anyone.*”

The universality of the appeal underscores the impartiality of God. Would all those who heard become disciples? No. But they could not say they were not invited. There are many “impartial invitations” in the New Testament. Some of them are:

Mark 4:23 “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

John 6:51 “If anyone eats of this bread he shall live forever.”

John 7:17 “If anyone will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine.”

John 7:37 “If anyone thirsts, let him come unto me, and drink.”

John 10:9 “If anyone enters in, he shall be saved.”

John 12:26 “If anyone serves me, let him follow me.”

Are you an “anyone”? The door to the Discipleship Classroom is wide open to those who have responded to Jesus’ invitation to “*come unto me.*” That invitation also contained these words, “*and learn of me.*” Those who do not respond to the appeal to “*come to Him*” will have no desire to “come after” Him and learn of Him.

Neither is this appeal for a select few who might think themselves to be super saints. Another qualifier is in the word “*desires*.”

B. The Existence Of An Appetite – “If anyone *desires*”

“*Desire*” is a powerful word. The synonyms are: yearning; longing; craving; hunger. The desire of which Jesus was speaking is the possession of a spiritual appetite. “They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6) Discipleship begins with desire, with a yearning, longing, hunger for Jesus. The Psalmist had this appetite, this desire for God. He said, “I desire to do your will, O my God.” (Psalm 40:8)

It is this hunger for God that motivates disciples to prioritize their lives and make the choices and changes necessary to follow the Lord Jesus. Spiritual desire is at the heart of discipleship. Some who profess to be Christians simply lack this quality. If you do not have that longing, craving, yearning, hunger to “come after” Jesus, it could be that you have not truly “come to” Him!

The call that Jesus gave addressed the matter of the candidate and, in addition, gave conditions for discipleship. Look now at those conditions.

III. THE CONDITIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP.

“If anyone desires to come after Me, *let him deny himself*, and take up *his cross* daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

Note two conditions in this statement:

A. Condition One: The Rejection Of Self.

“Let him deny himself.” The greatest hindrance to following Jesus is not other persons but our own selves! Consider the variety of words prefixed by the word “self” that illustrate how “self” can dominate us: self righteousness, self centeredness, self interest, self confidence, self consciousness, self defense, self importance, self indulgence, self opinion, self reliance, self satisfaction, self seeking, self sufficient. To desire Christ is to deny self. The option is to desire self and deny Christ!

What does self-denial mean? To deny *to* self something and to deny *self* are two different things. Throughout history there have been those who misunderstood what Jesus was saying. Consequently they went to great extremes to deny *to* themselves certain comforts. For example:

- Saint Ascepsimas wore so many chains that he had to crawl around on his hands and knees. He said he was practicing self denial.
- Besarion, a monk, denied his body comfortable sleep. For 40 years, he would not lie down to sleep.
- Macarius sat naked in a swamp for six months until mosquito bites made him look like a victim of leprosy.
- St. Marion spent eleven years in a hollowed-out tree trunk.

These were sincere persons but sincerely misinformed about what Jesus said when He said, "Let him deny himself." The meaning of denying ones self in the original language of the New Testament meant "to ignore." It was a term meaning "to refuse to admit one's identity." It means to put self down by putting Christ up – when He has first place in our lives we, in the chronological order of things, take the lower place. John the Baptist said it like this: "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 4:30)

John Wesley described it like this: "There are two paths. The path of God's will and the path of man's will. The two paths run parallel, but lead in different directions. We cannot walk both at the same time. To chose one means to abandon the other. Denying God is to walk in self's path. To deny self is to walk in God's path."

The second condition for discipleship is:

B. Condition Two: The Reception Of A Cross.

"Take up his cross." What does this mean? First, consider what it does not mean – it does not mean to take up Christ's cross. "The old rugged cross" was Christ's cross alone. In John 19:17 we read, "And He, bearing *His cross*, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull." Underscore the words, "He, bearing *His cross*." It was His cross - there was only one exactly like the one on which Christ was crucified.

In Luke 9:23 Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up *his cross*." Jesus had His cross, the would-be disciple will have his own cross. So, taking up a cross does not mean bearing the same cross that Jesus bore.

What does the statement "take up his cross" mean? I have heard persons speak of their physical maladies, some financial misfortune, some fracture in their family, etc. as their "cross to bear." Those situations may be painful experiences but that is not what Jesus was referring to. If that is what Jesus meant, then everyone, saint and sinner, disciple and non-disciple alike have crosses to bear. No, the common problems of mankind are not crosses in the sense that Jesus meant.

For us to understand what Jesus meant we must think about what it meant to the people in Jesus' day. Surely it meant horrible suffering to be literally crucified. But for someone to be identified with Jesus in that day also meant suffering – the suffering of ostracism, renunciation, unpopularity, rejection and confiscation of possessions in many cases. To "take up his cross" meant to identify unashamedly and publicly with Jesus Christ and to endure the disfavor of identifying with Him from a scoffing world.

J. Dwight Pentecost comments on the statement "take up his cross" in these words: "The cross was also the sign of His rejection by the nation. One must be willing to identify with the rejected One and be willing to assume what is involved in that identification in order to be Christ's disciple." (*The Words And Works Of Christ*)

Furthermore, for Jesus to take up His cross meant for Him to submit to the will of His Father. His prayer in Gethsemane was, "Not my will, but Yours be done." (Matt.26:42) Pentecost continues, "In order to be a true disciple one must submit himself comple-

tely to the will of Jesus Christ. The cross in the life of Christ was the test of His obedience to the will of God. One who would be Christ's true disciple must be willing to submit himself to the will of God, whatever it entails."

Taking up one's cross is to submit to the will of God unconditionally and to identify with Christ openly and unashamedly. This world is no friend to grace and the true disciple of Jesus will soon learn that when the world detects that he is Christ's disciple he will suffer rejection and to some degree persecution.

Illust. Thomas à Kempis wrote, "Jesus hath many lovers of His Kingdom, but few bearers of His cross. All are disposed to rejoice with Him, but few to suffer for His sake."

Cross bearing is not forced upon us. Jesus said, "let him take up his cross." If we bear the cross, it will be because we choose to do so. Cross bearing is not accidental, it is intentional. But know this: There are no empty handed disciples, no cross-less disciples of Jesus Christ! So, it is down with self, up with our cross and on with Christ! Let us carry our cross with a smile for a frowning cross-bearer defeats his purpose!

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee."

- Henry Lyte

There is one additional phrase in Jesus' discipleship call that I wish to emphasize and that is:

IV. THE CONTINUATION OF DISCIPLESHIP.

"Take up his cross *daily*, and follow me."

Eugene Peterson's book on discipleship is titled "A Long Obedience In The Same Direction." The subtitle is: "Discipleship in an Instant Society." That is a good definition of what discipleship truly is. It is not easy, it is not fast and it is not short! For that reason many do not desire to be true disciples.

Do I hear someone asking, "How long does Jesus expect me to follow in His footsteps?" The answer is in these eight words: "Take up his cross *daily*, and follow me." In these words there are two important discipleship principles:

A. Discipleship is Day by Day. – "daily"

I heard someone say, "Life is so daily!" Yes, and every day we have the privilege of carrying our cross and walking with Jesus. It is not a once a week experience at 11:00 o'clock on Sunday morning!

Illust. J. Oswald Sanders writes, "The temper of our times is for instant gratification and short-term commitment, quick answers to prayer and quick results with a minimum of effort and discomfort. But there is no such thing as easy and instant discipleship. One can commence a walk of discipleship in a moment, but the first step must lengthen into a life-long walk. There is no such thing as short-term discipleship."

(The Joy Of Following Jesus)

It may be relatively easy to carry our cross for one day, but every day cross bearing would be unbearable if it were not for the Lord's provision to lift our load as He promises to do: "Cast your burden on the Lord and he shall sustain you." (Psalm 55:22)

B. Discipleship is Step by Step.

Jesus said, "follow me." Peter said, Christ left us an example "that you should follow his steps." (1 Peter 2:21) Traveling with Jesus as our walking Companion is not only a day by day experience but a step by step journey. Discipleship is not a 100 yard dash – it is a marathon! It is not a destination, rather it is a life-long pilgrimage with Jesus!

There are two kinds of Christian pedestrians:

Far-Off Followers

In Luke 22 is the account of the arrest of the Lord Jesus. In quick succession are these three statements regarding Peter: (a) "And Peter followed afar off." (Luke 22:54) (b) The 2nd statement is in the next verse: "And when they had kindled a fireand were set down together, Peter sat down among them." – among enemies. (c) Then in verse 56 we read, "But a certain maid said, "This man was also with him." Verse 57 tells us that "he denied saying, woman, I know him not."

He followed afar off, sat with Christ's enemies and denied Jesus. Stragglers are a danger to themselves and to the cause of Christ. Peter did get back in step with Jesus. Read about it in John chapter 21.

Faithful Followers.

A good example for today's disciples are those mentioned in Rev 14:4 - "These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes." Day by day, step by step followers do not get out of step with their Lord!

We followers of Christ are called disciples and we are also called "pilgrims" in scripture. A pilgrim is someone who is on the move, going somewhere, not wandering aimlessly about but with a destination in mind. We disciple-pilgrims are going home! We are following our Savior-Shepherd right into the Father's House!

CONCLUSION

Are you a follower or a fan of Jesus? To become a fan of Jesus is much easier than to become a follower. A fan can admire Him from a distance but true followers have an intimate association with Him. They submit to His disciplines, obey and follow Him. Are you a fickle fan or a faithful follower? Jesus' followers are called disciples, not fans.

Jesus is calling out to us, ""If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." This invitation is impartial, individual and interminable. Jesus still carries on an enlistment campaign. Have you enlisted yet? Will you enlist?

Illust. A seminary president was talking to one of the professors when a fellow walked out of the classroom passing before them. The President said to the professor, "He is one of your students, isn't he?" The professor replied, dejectedly, "He attends my lectures, but he is not one of my students. There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student!"

That is the same problem that the church faces. There are many who listen to sermons but not all listeners are students of Jesus Christ; not all attendees are adherents. They are Fans of Jesus but not followers. Are you a fan or a follower?

I have seen bumper stickers on automobiles that have this message: "Don't follow me, I'm lost!" Jesus came to, as He said, "seek and save the lost." (Luke 19:10) Believe in Him, receive Him, follow Him and you will not be shuffling along with the lost!

JdonJ

***** END *****