

## “Defining a Disciple-Part One”

### Introduction

DTR. Some of you know what that means. Others are confused. Here’s a clue. The mention of these three letters are enough to strike fear in the hearts of some young men and women who are in relationships with one another. They will go to great lengths to avoid the DTR talk. They will even break off the relationship if they think they can’t avoid DTR any longer.

DTR stands for “define the relationship.” It’s that official talk that you have with the person that you’re going out with in which you define where this relationship is headed. Are we just hanging out together? Are we just having a good time together? Is this just something to do on the weekends? Or are we going to get serious with each other? Is this more than just a casual relationship? Are we going to be committed to each other?

We’ve been talking about changing the way we do church and I suggested to you a couple of weeks ago that the biggest change we needed to make was that \_\_\_\_\_ needed to become the kind of disciple of Jesus who makes disciples.

And in that sermon, I really challenged the elders of this church to lead us in that change, for them to become the kind of disciples of Jesus who

make disciples. The elders met the very next night and it was a very interesting meeting. To a man they said that they would try and do that.

In the midst of that conversation I was reminded of something pretty important. You can't make disciples unless you are a disciple yourself. While there may be some things that you may be able to teach me to do that you can't do yourself being a disciple is not one of those things. The bottom line is I can't help you to become a disciple if I am not one myself.

This whole business of changing the way that we do church really begins in your heart and my heart with the question, "Am I a disciple of Jesus?"

Let me quickly say I am not encouraging you to question your salvation. If you've made the good confession then let the words of your lips settle that issue for you. Romans 10:13 says that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." You've called upon the name of the Lord, now trust in what the Scripture says.

What I am asking you to do is to define the kind of relationship that you have had with Jesus since that moment. When you made that good confession, and particularly when you were baptized you stepped across a line. The good confession can be done in private. You can say that you believe in Jesus and no one else has to hear. But baptism is a public way of identifying with Jesus. At least one other person has to be present and as a general rule a bunch of other persons are present. In baptism, you publicly identify with Jesus and step across a line.

Let me say right here that it likely that no one told you all of this when you were baptized. But you need to know it so pay attention.

When you passed through the waters of baptism, you crossed a line. Paul says in Romans 6:4 that “We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

When you were baptized you crossed a line. On this side of that line, you were your own God. As a consequence you lived for yourself. You did what you wanted to do. You said what you wanted to say. You became what you wanted to become.

On the other side of that line Jesus is your God. As a consequence you now live for him. Now you say what he wants you to say. Now you do what he wants you to do. Now you become what he wants you to become.

What I am suggesting is that you have the DTR talk with Jesus. I’m suggesting that you have the official talk with Him in which you finally, once and for all define where this relationship is headed. Are you just hanging out together? Are you just in the relationship for what you can get out of it? Is this just something to do on the weekends? Or are you going to get serious with each other? Is this more than just a casual relationship? Are we going to be committed to each other?

By the way, Jesus ever so often during his ministry would force the DTR talk on people. For example, the sixth chapter of John opens up with Jesus feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. The next day the same five thousand people get hungry again and go looking for Jesus. When they find him, Jesus looks at them and says, “I tell you the truth, you are looking at me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because

you ate the loaves and had your fill.” You are looking for me because of what I can do for you. And he goes on to challenge that crowd to move beyond what He can do for them into a deeper relationship with him. And John 6:66 says, “From that time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

If you decide that you are just not ready for that, no one’s going to beat you up. It’s your relationship. You’ll have to deal with the consequences of that decision.

But, and I hope that this will be where most of you find yourself, If you decide that it’s time for you to get serious about your relationship with Jesus, then I want you and I to spend some time with this 24<sup>th</sup> verse of the sixteenth chapter of Matthew.

Remember I said you can’t help someone else to become a disciple if you’re not one yourself? Well in this verse, Jesus defines what it means to be his disciple. We going to stay with this verse for two or three weeks and we’re going to learn how Jesus defined a disciple.

Let’s dig in. In this verse,

## **1. Jesus taught his first disciples to deny themselves.**

*“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself,…” Verse 24a*

Jesus understood human nature pretty well. He made us and he spent 30+ years walking in our shoes. He understood that it is one thing to say that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, to say that He is your God. It’s a very different thing to actually live out that truth in your daily life.

To say that Jesus is your God means that from that moment on you will live for him. You will say what he wants you to say, do what he wants you to do, become what he wants you to become.

Jesus understood that the chief impediment to you actually living that way was yourself. Even though you have said that Jesus is your God, you remain His principal competitor. For however long you have lived before you made that confession, you and you alone have decided what you would say, what you would do, what you would think, what you would become. That habit dies hard. What Paul calls our lower nature or our carnal nature or our sinful nature doesn't just go away when we make the good confession. We have to take some action to tame it and to bring it under control.

In order for us to learn to control our lower or carnal or fleshly nature, Jesus taught his disciples that they had to deny themselves.

To deny yourself means saying no to what you want or think you need to say or do. It means to say no to your interests and desires. It means not even acknowledging your interests and desires. It means that you don't even look in the direction of your desires and interests.

This is easy to understand. Here's an example you'll identify with. Let's say you're standing around with a bunch of your friends and one of your "friends" starts making fun of your shoes, or your hair or your shirt, and the whole group really gets into it and your feelings are getting crushed. If you haven't said that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, if you haven't been baptized, then you can respond to that situation the way you want to. You can say what you want to, do what you want to, think what

you want to think. But if you have said that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, if you have passed through the waters of baptism, then Jesus taught that at that very moment, “you must deny yourself.” As his disciple you can’t respond the way you want to. You must **deny** yourself. You must say no to what you want to do, say or think.

Here’s a bit harder example. Let’s say ‘your child comes home from school and they are the one who’s being made fun of and let’s say it’s not their friends who are making fun of them. Let’s say it’s their PE coach who’s doing it. Now you make fun of my child, you hurt my child, even if it’s just my child’s feelings that you are hurting and you become my enemy. Right there at that moment, I am down with the Psalmist who wrote, “happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us—he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.” But Jesus says, my disciples can’t respond the way they want to. My disciples must deny themselves. My disciples must say no to what they want to do.

Paul echoes Jesus’ teachings and actually draws a bold line underneath them in Galatians 5:24 when he writes these words, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.”

Jesus, Paul, the New Testament teaches that we are to deny ourselves. We are to say no to our own desires or interests.

Nobody told you that when you were thinking about making the good confession did they? You haven’t heard much of that from the TV preachers have you?

We have replaced Jesus' call to self-denial with a call to self-fulfillment, to come and be satisfied.

Point number two, not only did Jesus teach his first disciples to deny themselves,

## **2. Jesus modeled what self-denial looks like.**

If Jesus had just taught that those first disciples that they had to deny themselves, it would have been bad enough. But he didn't stop with just saying that his disciples had to say no to their desires and interests. He actually lived by the things that he taught. There was this incredible consistency between Jesus' words and his deeds that astounded people. This was one of the sources of the authority with which he taught that astounded people. He didn't say "Do as I say, not as I do." He said, "Do as I do." He taught self-denial and he modeled it so that his first disciples could actually see what it looked like.

I've listed a bunch of scriptures in your outline that I think are illustrations of Jesus' modeling what self-denial looks like. This morning I want to focus on two or three of those scriptures.

The first one I want to show you is Mark 1:36. This is what it says, "*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*" *Mark 1:36*

This verse always causes me to pause. Remember in his humanity Jesus was just like you and me. He probably loved to crawl under the covers and get all snuggly and toasty and there were times when He needed rest. If you run your fingers back up chapter one, you'll discover that the day

before had been a grueling and exhausting day for Jesus. He had called four disciples, Andrew & Peter and James & John. He had driven an evil spirit out of a man in the synagogue of Capernaum. He had healed Peter's mother-in-law. Those two actions, the driving out of the demon and healing of the woman had caused a line of demon-possessed and sick people to form at the door of Peter's house and Jesus had exorcised demons and healed people, at least in my imagination, long into the night. He was tired. He needed to sleep, but instead of sleeping in the next day, Mark tells us that *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed."* Jesus said no to his interests and desires. He modeled self-denial for those first disciples on the very first day they were with him.

The second illustration of the self-denial of Jesus I want to show you is found in Matthew 8:1-2. There Matthew writes:

*"When He came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.' Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." Matthew 8:1-2*

Leprosy was and is a horrible disease. Skin lesions are the primary external symptom. Left untreated, leprosy can be progressive, causing permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes. Contrary to popular belief, leprosy does not directly cause body parts to fall off on their own accord instead they become disfigured or amputated as a result of disease symptoms.

When Jesus saw this man kneeling before him, everything human in him must have wanted to draw back, to pull away, to put as much distance

between him and this disfigured and oozing pus man as possible. But instead of doing what he wanted to do, instead of doing what was clearly in his best interest to do, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. Matthew never forgot that lesson in self-denial. Matthew never forgot that day when Jesus said no to his desires and interests.

This third illustration of self-denial by Jesus is found in the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Luke's gospel. Let me set the scene for you. It takes place as Jesus is being crucified. The Roman soldiers who actually crucified him have lead Jesus nearly naked through the streets of Jerusalem to humiliate and shame him. Now they have thrown him to the ground and are in the process of driving nails through his hands and his feet. Crucifixion was and is the most brutal and painful form of execution humankind has yet to devise. I can only imagine how badly those nails hurt as they pierced and tore Jesus' flesh. At that moment, I know that Jesus wanted to tear himself out of their grasp and run away. He wanted to cry out to those tens of thousands of angels to come and save him from the excruciating pain and humiliation and shame he was enduring. He opened his mouth

*“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34*

When Paul writes in Philippians 2:5-7

*“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”*

He is reminding us of the example of self-denial that Jesus modeled for those first disciples.

Finally, let me suggest to you that

### **3. Jesus still expects his disciples to practice self-denial.**

Let me read you the first part of Matthew 6:24 again.

*“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself,...” Verse 24a*

“Anyone” is a fairly inclusive word. Anyone means anyone. A part of this DTR talk that you and I need to have with Jesus must involve some confession and tears that we have not practiced self-denial as Jesus expects us to.

I cannot tell you what self-denial will look like for you. Your self is different from my self and so at some level denying yourself will also be different from denying myself.

But I think I can give you some hints at what it will look like.

You love Jesus but if you want to be sarcastic with your wife, you’re going to be sarcastic with your wife. You love Jesus but if you want to holler at you husband, you’re going to holler at your husband.

You love Jesus but if you want to have sex before marriage, you’re going to have sex before marriage. You love Jesus but if it’s in your best interest to sleep with this girl or that guy, you’re going to do it.

You love Jesus but you’re going to use your talents and skills and time the way you want to use them.

You love Jesus but you're going to spend your money the way you want to spend it.

I hope that as you think and pray about this morning's sermon, you will be moved to confession and tears.

Please don't stop with confession and tears. Let your confession and tears move you to repentance, to a resolve to turn and go the other way, to make a 180 degree turn and be different. Let your confession and tears lead you to repenting of living your life the way you want to, to denying yourself.

Let it move you to pay attention this week for opportunities to deny yourself, to say no your interests and your desires. In the bulletin there's a card with Matthew 16:24 printed on it.

Invitation: Join me in an experiment. Tape it up on your mirror and start your day by getting down on your knees and pray that verse as a prayer.

Or tape it to the visor of your car and every morning before you pull out of the garage or driveway pray that verse as a prayer.

It's a little thing. It won't change your life, but maybe it will cause you to remember that Jesus still expects you as his disciple to deny yourself.

## **Conclusion**

I'm going to ask Jennifer and the praise team to make their way to their places and to get ready for the last song. Now direct your attention to the baptistry and the running water there.

If you have been baptized I want you to remember right now that when you made the good confession, when you were baptized, you stepped across a line.

On this side of the line, you were your own God. You lived for yourself. You did what you wanted to do, said what you wanted to say, became what you wanted to become.

When you passed through the waters of baptism, you crossed a line. Paul says in Romans 6:4 that “We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

On the other side of that line Jesus was your God. You lived for him. You said what he wanted you to say, did what he wanted you to do, became what he wanted you to become.

If you have made the good confession, if you have not confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, if you have not passed through the waters of baptism, if you have not been buried with Christ in baptism in order that you too maybe be raised from the dead to new life, what is keeping you from doing that this morning?

Here’s the line in the sand. Why don’t you step over it today?