

## “Defining a Disciple – Part Two

### Introduction

The baggage handlers at a local airport were dismayed when they unloaded a pet carrier of a local prominent woman only to discover that her dog was dead. She had a reputation for getting what she wanted and so they decided that their only hope was to find another dog that looked just like hers and replace her before they delivered the pet carrier to her house. They scoured the pet shops and kennels and finally found one that looked just like hers. They put it in the carrier and drove to the woman’s house. They rang the door bell and the woman came to the door. Here’s your dog, Mrs. Jones. And the dog helped out by barking in an excited way. She said, “That’s not my dog.” “Of course it is, they lied.” That’s not my dog. Finally they confessed to their deception. “How did you know it wasn’t your dog? What gave it away?” She said, “My dog was dead and we were just bringing it back here to bury it.” Sometimes the deceptions we work so hard on don’t fool anyone but ourselves.

A few weeks ago, I suggested to you the biggest change that we must make in the way we do church is you must become the kind of disciple that makes disciples. My suggestion last week was that change really begins in our hearts when we ask ourselves the question, “How am I doing in this business of following Jesus? What kind of disciple of Jesus am I?”

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 evaluate the kind of relationship you have had with Jesus since you made the good confession and were baptized. When you passed through the waters of baptism, you crossed a line.

In Romans 6:4 talking about baptism Paul likens the line crossed in your baptism to the line crossed in death. He says "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 this side of that line, you were dead in your sins and trespasses. On the other side of that line, you were alive in Christ. On this side of the line, you didn't have a relationship with Jesus. On the other side of the line you do have a relationship with Jesus. On this side of the line, you weren't a disciple of Jesus. On the other side of that line, you are a disciple of Jesus.

In the 24<sup>th</sup> verse of the sixteenth chapter of Matthew Jesus defines the kind of relationship he wants to have with us. We're in the midst of trying to understand His definition so that it can provide us with a "measuring stick" against which we can evaluate the kind of relationship we actually have with him.

There really are two motivations for doing this evaluation. First, you can't make disciples if you aren't a disciple. Secondly, you can't make if you don't know what it looks like. We are trying to understand Jesus' definition of what a disciple is so that we will know what we are trying to make.

Last week we looked at ten words of verse twenty four. *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.”*

What I suggested to you last week was that (This is point No. One)

**1. Jesus defined a disciple as someone who says no to their interests and desires.**

A part of evaluating the relationship we've had with Jesus since we crossed the line of baptism is evaluating how well we do at saying no to ourselves.

Let me give you a diagnostic question to use in this evaluation. How self-controlled am I?” When something unexpected happens, do you react to it or do you respond? Are you frequently disappointed with your reactions and less frequently happy with your responses?

And if I were a betting man and if your answer to that question are honest, I'd bet that you might say, sometimes I respond but most of the time I react.

For example, when that guy cut me off in traffic, “I responded by thinking things like, “He may be in a hurry to get to his dying mother's side.” Or

“I hope he’s not rushing through life, like he rushing through traffic. He’s missing so much if he is. Maybe I better pray for him.”

But then you were sitting there watching TV about 9:00 PM and you think about that Blue Bell ice cream in the fridge. You reacted by dipping yourself a big bowl.

For many of us this notion of self-denial is a brand new concept. It’s something we’ve never thought about. But we need to think about it and think about it a lot. One of you suggested that as a way of practicing self-denial you were going to start fasting one day a week.

What does it mean for you to deny yourself?

What I am pretty sure is that Jesus was saying his disciples will say no to their first thought will be in line with their own interests and desires.

Now, let’s pick up where we left off last week. Not only did Jesus teach his disciples to say no to their interests and wants,

**2. Jesus also taught those first disciples to take up their cross.**

When you add the next four words of verse twenty-four to the ten that we looked at last week, you get:

*“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross...” Verse 24a*

What does it mean to “take up our cross?”

If you still have your Bible open to Matthew 16:24 run your finger back up the page to 16:13. In verses 13-20 Jesus poses a question to the disciples as to who they think he is. And Peter answering for the group says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” As soon as these words are out of Peter’s mouth, in 16:21 Matthew records that

*“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”*

As soon as the disciples got it that Jesus was the messiah, the Son of God, He begins to teach them that it is God’s will for him to go to Jerusalem and to be crucified. In obedience to God’s will Jesus will take up his cross. The cross in Matthew’s gospel, really in all four of the gospels, is the symbol of Jesus’ complete and total obedience to God’s will.

When the early Christians talked about the cross it was short hand for the obedience of Jesus. Flip back in the New Testament to Philippians 2:5-8. There Paul writes these words,

*“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.”*

In order to be my disciple Jesus says, you have to deny yourself. To deny one's self is to say "no" to your interest and desires. But it is not enough to say no to what you want or your own self-interest—to say no to what you want to think, say and do. You must also take up your cross. You must say "yes" to what God's will and interest. You must say yes to what God wants you to think, say and do. To take up your cross means to be as committed to being obedient to Jesus as He was to God.

So a part of evaluating ourselves as disciples is evaluating how well our obedience to God measures up to Jesus' obedience.

As you think about that let me remind you of something you may be tempted to forget. Jesus does not choose the symbol of the cross randomly. The cross was and is the most excruciatingly painful form of death ever invented by man. He understood that being obedient to God was going to be painful for him.

We might as well go ahead and say this now. If you're going to be obedient to God like Jesus was obedient to God, then you should expect that some pain will be involved. God is going to ask you to do some things that it will be painful for you to do.

As you think about that let me point out a couple of things to you.

### **3. Jesus was obedient to God's will as expressed in the Law.**

When Jesus says to his disciples they must take up the cross, he is telling them that they must be obedient to God's will as expressed in God's written commands which are found only in the Bible.

There is a lot of evidence in the New Testament that Jesus either was a Pharisee or that he was attracted to the Pharisaical interpretation of what it meant to be a Jew. And the Pharisees were absolutely fanatical about obeying God's Will as expressed in the Law.

For example, in the Old Testament God says to His people:

*“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.” Exodus 20:8-10*

The Pharisees were passionate about keeping that commandment. Their passion led them to spend hours and hours trying to answer the question, “What does it mean to work on the Sabbath? For example, they would ask, “Is it working to walk to synagogue?” They eventually decided that it wasn't working to walk to the synagogue and back. Any more than that was work and represented disobedience to God's expressed will in the commandment.

Jesus will say to his disciples, *“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20*

Jesus himself was obedient to God's will as expressed in the Old Testament.

*“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17*

This seems obvious but to take up your cross means to be obedient to God's will as expressed in God's written commands.

If you're going to do that you must know what those commands are. When Jesus says in the Great Commission that we are to teach others to obey all that He has commanded, this is precisely what He is talking about.

Do you know what Jesus commanded? You can't say yes, you can't be obedient to God's will expressed in the Bible if you are not familiar with that Bible.

With regards to making disciples, you can't teach someone to obey all that Jesus taught if you don't know what He taught. If someone asked you what Jesus taught could you give them a summary of what those commandments were?

Let me get a little closer to your feet. Parents, are you teaching your children Jesus' commandments? Are you as interested in your child knowing Jesus' commandments as you are in them getting a good elementary and secondary education so that they can get into a good college?

And just because your children are out of the house and all grown up doesn't mean that you're off the hook. You can still teach them. You are still the single greatest influence on your children's lives.

There more here. Even if we do know all of Jesus' commandments and keep them, we're not done with this business of obedience to God because

#### **4. Jesus was obedient to God's will revealed to him in conversation with God.**

Jesus obeyed God's will as expressed in God's written Word, the Law. He also was in constant communication with God regarding what God wanted him to do in each and every situation of each and every moment. He never thought a thought, said a word or did a single deed without consulting God and thinking, saying and doing exactly what God instructed him to do.

There's a scene very early in Mark's gospel that used to sort of bother me. Jesus is in Capernaum two things happen. First, he is accosted by a man possessed by an evil spirit and he cast that evil spirit out of the man. He cures a man who is suffering from mental illness. Then he heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. The results of these two miracles is that "the people brought to Jesus all of the sick and demon-possessed people they could find and they form this long line outside the door of Peter's house to be healed of their infirmities and illnesses. Early the next morning, Jesus gets up and leaves the house, before the line can form again, and goes off to pray. When the line forms again, the disciples go looking for Jesus so that he can come and heal those who are being brought to him. When they find Jesus,

*“Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also.’ Mark 1:38*

They say to him, “There are a bunch of sick folks back at Peter’s house,” and he says, “That’s nice but we’re going over there to that city.” It always bothered me that Jesus would leave people who were hurting here to go over there to preach. The answer to my dilemma was right in front of me all of the time. Jesus had been talking to God and God had given him other instructions. It’s just simple. Sick people were no match for God whispered instructions to go somewhere else. Jesus was obedient to God’s will revealed to him in conversation with God.

We were talking once in a Sunday school class and I mentioned this part of God’s will and someone said, “You mean that God’s will extends down to which gas station I buy my gas at?” And I said, “Yes.” Their reply was that they didn’t think that God cared whether or not they bought their gas from Shell or Exxon. At the time, I wasn’t quick enough but I’ve had some time to think about it and my response is, “You bet He cares. First of all there may be someone whom God wants you to help out waiting for you at the Exxon and if you decide on your own to go to the Shell station you’ll miss them. Or maybe the owner of the Exxon is in trouble financially and has finally turned to God for help and God has decided to bless him with a burst of new business. If you go to the Shell station you’ll actually be violating God’s expressed will for you.

Taking up our cross means being in constant conversation with God so that we can say “yes to Him whenever He tells us something to do.”

## **Let's close with point number five.**

Denying oneself and taking up one's cross is difficult work. Any honest evaluation of how well we have done in that brings us up against, painfully and hard up against our failures. We're not really doing all that well in this business of being a disciple of Jesus are we?

You and I come into this world as sinners. Regardless of how well we obey this minute, we're going to screw up in the next minute and do exactly the opposite of what He wants us to do.

That's why it's important that we remember

### **5. A disciple's obedience is a response to God's mercy not a requirement for it.**

Our obedience is a response to God's mercy and not a requirement for it. If obedience is a requirement for mercy, we're all in trouble. But it's not. Obedience is our response to having been the recipients of that mercy.

Lest we become confused, turn back to Romans 12:1. Paul spends eleven of the most dense, tightly packed chapters of Scripture describing in great detail the mercies of God. Then in chapter twelve, verse one, he writes these words:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

If it was a requirement for God’s mercy then we would wait until we had been obedient in order to be baptized. That’s why we cross the line of baptism at conversion and not just before we die. On this side of the waters of baptism, you were dead in your sins and trespasses. On the other side of the waters of baptism, you were alive in Christ. On this side of the waters of baptism, you didn’t have a relationship with Jesus. On the other side of the waters of baptism, you do have a relationship with Jesus. On this side of the waters of baptism, you weren’t a disciple of Jesus. On the other side of the waters of baptism, you are a disciple of Jesus.

We are set free from our guilt and shame, to be disciples, the kind of disciples that make other disciples.