

“Defining a Disciple – Part Three”

Introduction

Just in case you thought I wasn't serious about what I've been saying these last few weeks, I've repeated it in today's outline. Take it out and write your name in the first blank in the outline. The sentence now reads _____ (fill in your name) needs to become the kind of disciple that makes disciples.

Look at the sentence you have just written and listen to me. Whether or not we as a congregation are faithful to the charge that Jesus gave us, whether or not America actually is a Christian nation or goes the way of secular and pagan Europe, the ultimate destiny of your neighbor or friend or family member depends upon your response to that sentence.

The biggest change we must make in the way we do church is Terry needs to become the kind of disciple that makes disciples.

The elders are leading us in this change. Together we are studying the gospel of Matthew. We are learning from Jesus how he made disciples so that we can become the kind of disciples who make disciples. They have also begun praying, asking God to show them who He wants them to teach how to be disciples that make disciples. Your name may come up in that conversation so I hope if one of the elders asks you if you want to learn

how to be the kind of disciple that makes disciples, I hope you will quickly and enthusiastically say yes.

If we're going to be the kind of disciples that make disciples, we must to define what a disciple is. You can't be something if you don't know what you're trying to be. If we are going to be a disciple, we need to know what one looks like. Equally as important, you can't help someone else to become something if you don't know what that something looks like. We must understand what a disciple is.

Let me say it clearly. Repeating the four spiritual laws and saying the sinner's prayer does not necessarily mean that you are a disciple who makes disciples. Walking down to the front of a room like this and saying yes to the question, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God" does not necessarily mean that you are a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples. Passing through the waters of baptism doesn't necessarily mean that you are a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples. Being in worship and a small group or Sunday school every week does not necessarily mean that you are a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples.

Those things are good and necessary and if you haven't walked down to the front of a room like this and said that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and passed through the waters of baptism, then you need to do that today. And if you aren't in worship and a small group or Sunday school class every week, you need to make that habit yours.

But those things aren't all that there is to being a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples. Being a disciple of Jesus is something you are 24 hours a

day, seven days a week and making disciples infuses and energizes everything you do in every day.

Jesus defined what His disciples look like in the 24th verse of the sixteenth chapter of Matthew. 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 ourselves and the people we are trying to help.

That verse starts off with the words, "*If anyone would come after me.*" Anyone is a fairly inclusive term. It means anyone.

Next he says, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.*" I suggested to you Jesus defined his disciple as someone practices self-denial, someone who says no to their interests and desires.

He goes on to say, "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross...*" Verse 24a I suggested to you that Jesus define his disciple as a person who says yes to God's will and interest of God's Kingdom.

In this verse the cross is a symbol of Jesus' willingness to say yes to God's will and interest. To say it another way, the cross is a symbol of Jesus' willingness to be obedient to God. 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.

What I suggested was that to take up your cross means to be as committed to being obedient to Jesus as He was to God.

I also pointed out that Jesus does not choose the symbol of the cross as the symbol of his obedience randomly. The cross was and is the most excruciatingly painful form of death ever invented by man. Jesus clearly understood that being obedient to God was going to be painful for him.

He wanted us to know upfront that if we were going to be obedient to God like He was obedient to God, then we should expect that some pain will be involved. God is going to ask you to do some things that it will cost you something.

Today we're going to take a closer look at what saying yes to God's will and interest meant to Jesus. The first thing that I want to point out to you is that

1. Jesus was obedient to God's will as expressed in the Bible.

Fill in that first blank with the word, Bible.

The Bible for a 1st century Jew was what we refer to as the Old Testament. Jesus was a 1st century Jew and for Jews of the 1st century there was one way to know what God wanted you to do. God's expressed will was found in the written words of the Old Testament. It was imperative that every Jew read, study, and know God's Written Word.

This is why the first phase of public education in Israel consisted of memorizing the first five books of the Old Testament and the second phase of public education in Israel consisted of memorizing the rest of the Old Testament. Being obedient to God was the heart of what it meant to be a Jew and God's will was to be found in the pages of the 39 books of the Old Testament so they invested the time and energy to memorize it.

Not only did a 1st century Jew read, study and come to know the Old Testament. They were absolutely determined to do what it said.

There is a lot of evidence in the New Testament that Jesus either was a Pharisee. I think that attraction lay in the fact that 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. Walking any further than that on the Sabbath was work and represented disobedience to God's expressed will in the commandment.

Jesus once said,

“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

He was pointing out that he was obedient to God’s will as expressed in the Old Testament.

In another place he says,

“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

A disciple whose is going to take up his or her cross, who is going to say yes to God’s will and interest is going to have to read, study and know the expressed written Will of God as found in the sixty-six books of the Christian Bible.

A disciple who is going to take up their cross will then endeavor to match Jesus’ obedience to that will with their own obedience.

In the Great Commission Jesus says, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations.* That is not a suggestion. It is a written command from Jesus’ own mouth found in the pages of the New Testament, the Bible.

This seems obvious but a portion of taking up your cross means to be obedient to God’s will as expressed in God’s written commands.

If you are obedient to God's will as expressed in the Old and New Testaments you should expect some measure of discomfort. In the fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says,

"You have heard that it was said. "Love your neighbor and hate your enemies. But I tell you: Love you enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

I think I can say with some degree of certainty that loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you is going to create some measure of discomfort for you.

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 the 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 saying yes to God's will and interest. Because not only was Jesus obedient to God's will and interest expressed in the Bible,

2. 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 Bible.

But there were literally hundreds if not thousands of situations He faced in the course of an ordinary day which were not covered in the Law. So He 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 in the very first chapter of Mark's gospel that used to sort of bother me. Jesus is in Capernaum and 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, “It sounds like 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 here’s my response. “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 which could have been discovered if you had been in conversation with God."

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."

Paul says in Ephesians 1:13-14,

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

The Holy Spirit is given to Christians to enable and facilitate our conversations with God.

Let me close by making one last observation and it is so important that you hear this.

3. Our obedience is a response to God's mercy not a requirement for it.

If you don't hear anything else that I've said today, I hope that you hear this.

Denying oneself and taking up one's cross is strenuous labor. We don't deny ourselves and endeavor to be obedient in order to receive God's love

and mercy. We deny ourselves and strive to be obedient because we have been the recipients of God's mercy and love.

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.”

Offering your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God comes after, as a response to God's mercy.

This is particularly important because 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. 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.

If we were trying to earn God's love and mercy if we were being honest, we have to say we can't do it and either give up or pretend that we were doing well and remember our deceptions only fool us.

Attempting to be a disciple who makes disciples is a response to God's mercy not a requirement for it.

That is why we are baptized at the beginning of our new life in Christ and not at the end of it. On that side of the waters of baptism, we didn't have a relationship with Jesus. On this side of the waters of baptism, we 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 baptized to remind us that on that side of the waters of baptism, we were dead in your sins and trespasses. On this side of the waters of baptism, we are alive in Christ.

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