

Heart of Discipleship



2. A Passion for Following Jesus (Luke 14:25-35)

So here we are at the second in our new series, Heart of Discipleship. Last time we looked at a Passion for Repentance. The whole basis of Discipleship is founded on repentance and baptism, amongst other things signifies that. As we have trusted Christ, we had a change of heart and a change of direction. We testified that we have decided no longer to follow our way, but follow the One who has redeemed us by His broken body and shed blood.

As we look at a Passion to Follow Jesus this morning, we are going to realise afresh how difficult it is to actually follow. We'll find that it's easy to do things but it's not easy to have a changed heart and mind.

And Jesus knew that there was this difference. He had crowds of people following Him. Why were they there? To learn from God? To follow him wherever? To do whatever He would ask?

Or were they there for other reasons? To hear his wonderful stories? To listen and be challenged by His stirring preaching? To see Him do wonderful miracles? After all, it was excellent theatre! It was great entertainment! It warmed the soul! It was something they could cherish and tell their children about. Surely God will be pleased with them for having followed Jesus and listened to His teaching? They'd have given God their portion and He will have given them a lift? Wasn't that OK? Surely they were more spiritual for listening to Jesus and seeing His miracles?

They saw in Jesus vitality and the power of God but seeing and hearing had not changed them. Theirs was a faith of doing because that was the nature of law. It's a faith of doing.

The writer of Ecclesiastes said quite correctly that there is nothing new under the sun and right down to the modern age we see faith as something we do. If you are a disciple then we do things. Normally it means doing church. "Spiritual people" are seen as the leaders, or the keenies who get to the services. "Spiritual people" are those that can spout Bible knowledge like an encyclopaedia. "Spiritual people" are those who serve faithfully in the church. And the rest? They're not heroes, they're zeros. Do you know what that makes most people in most churches - failures.

The problem is that each one of us is committed to something: it may be our house, our family, some activity we do, some political thing. It may be the church - it's so easy to confuse serving the church instead of serving Christ. And we may consider all these things we are committed to as important, even spiritual.

And Jesus turned to this religious crowd and cuts the ground from under all their feet. Being a disciple isn't defined by what we do, but by what we are. And it challenges all of us, whether we think that we are people who are committed to the church and to the work of God, or whether we are frustrated believers who find life difficult. It's a radical message and turns religious logic on its head.

Why is it radical? Because being a disciple of Jesus is not about going to Church, or doing great spiritual feats, or following laws and traditions - about being religious - but

entering into and deepening a relationship, and Jesus sets down what discipleship means here.

Discipleship changes our priorities

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

This seems a strange way of putting things doesn't it? This is a good example of what people call hyperbole. It's when you exaggerate something for effect. Jesus doesn't want us to start a hate campaign against our closest relatives. Discipleship is loving Jesus above all others so that which is most important in the world seems like hate in comparison. And why would we want to do that? Because it is the example of Christ. It was because of His love for us that He was prepared to leave that which was His right and die for each one of us as this bread and wine will signify to us again this morning.

When we see the world in this eternal context, we see things as they are. We have changed priorities. Life is not something that finishes at death, but is something that leads us into eternity. What truly matters are the values and priorities of heaven because that is the only thing that lasts.

For the people following Jesus, they had their lives, their and religion which was immensely important to them. it controlled their lives. And Jesus says: forget that and follow me.

We live in a world where by and large, Christians conform to the values and conventions of it. We decry the awful events of the last few weeks in Russia and Iraq. We remembered in our harvest service last week those who were hungry. Yet we are active participants in a society that has created those problems of injustice and violence. It's our greed as a society that keeps a third of the world in poverty and hunger.

And we say as Christians that we are different. We say we follow Christ. yet our churches are divisive places and in steep decline, places full of religion: but full of Christ?

Jesus takes all this and turns it on its head. It's Jesus who should be the most important thing in our lives. Not family, not church, not ourselves - but we should be conformed to Him. Like Him. Reflecting His nature, His love. As I've said in previous weeks, if we love Him, we will desire Him. We will long after His presence and we will yearn to know Him more.

This isn't about being a zealot. It isn't about doing things. It's not about going to Church. It isn't about doing more service in the Church. When I hear sermons on this passage - and I've even preached on it myself - it's easy to guilt trip people into doing more things in church. It isn't about that. Discipleship is about realising the love God have for us and in understanding we love because He first loved us. it's not a call to do, it's a call to be. And it's that change of heart in us that changes our priorities as human beings.

It's a change of heart that makes us look at our possessions and say "Where's Jesus in these?"

It's a change of heart that makes us look at our relationships and say "Where's Jesus in these?"

It's a change of heart that makes us look at our motives for service and say "Where's Jesus in these?"

It's a change of heart that makes us look at the use of our time and say of each moment of the day "Where's Jesus in this?"

All I can say about these words this morning is look on them again and let the Holy Spirit minister into your life, because it's His work in us. I'm not saying to you - here's scripture and you must be more committed. What I'm saying is look again at the cross and see the Saviour dying for you and let the Spirit remind you afresh of His love for you and that will control everything you say and do.

Discipleship changes our direction

And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple

This seems a strange thing to say. Carry a cross - the Roman symbol of execution: a mark of shame. And people as we know wear these things as jewellery. In the youth Alpha book there's a great picture of a lady wearing electric chair earrings and another wearing a gun necklace - all like the cross being symbols of execution. Hardly delightful stuff.

But before we shun identification with the symbol of the cross, we see here that Jesus wants to identify with the cross by taking ours up - he says daily in Luke 9. So we should be people who identify with the cross, not as something we wear but something we live.

Many people would say that this identification with the cross must mean that we should be so dedicated to Christ that we should be prepared to die for Him. I guess that's true because as we have explored before, the Christian word for love, agape is self-surrendering love, love for others that even means death on a cross.

But there's more!

- it is a symbol of God's love in action for the human race therefore it is a symbol of our love in action as we join Him in that mission of love. As we take up the cross of Jesus, we as disciples show we are following Him in His mission of rescuing the world.
- it is a symbol of obedience to the Father - for us it is a symbol of obedience going to follow Him - where He goes, I go. Whatever He asks, I'll do.
- it is an acceptance of God's power, not mine. Jesus did His earthly work in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we take up the cross we recognise that we can't do any of this without the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus never asks us to do things that are impossible. What He asks is possible - but never in our power: only in the power of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to have the same vision of our lives He does and see what He can do in His power.

Discipleship isn't just about our devotion to Jesus, but our devotion to His mission and task by expressing His love to others and to a lost world. Like our love for Him, it's not something we can vamp ourselves to or an obligation of law to do things. It's a passion that wells up from our heart as the Spirit ministers into our lives. It's a work of grace so let's just claim it.

Discipleship is costly

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple

Counting the cost is an important part of life as Jesus shows from these two simple pictures here. However much we might want something, there is a price to be paid. If we start something and then we can't finish then we look very foolish don't we? Come and have a look at the unfinished decorations in my hallway if you don't believe me! And here's Jesus giving you the cost. He's based it on tithing I guess. Tithing meant you gave 10%. Jesus added another 0 - He wants the lot! That's a high cost. He wants everything. It isn't I believe the material that Jesus is after - but you!

When we become Jesus' disciples, we need to understand that it involves something. Jesus doesn't skimp on the descriptions. He doesn't deceive. If we follow Jesus, the consequences could be costly. As Magnus Magnusson used to say "I've started, so I'll finish". There's nothing sadder than seeing individuals and churches becoming shipwrecked because they don't understand what Jesus is all about. The second picture that Jesus uses is even sadder. If we enter into the spiritual battle without the resources then we have to find terms of peace with the enemy - surrender! As we look at the church in Britain today; as we look at the individuals within it, we see surrender all over the place.

In giving all though we are not poor, but we enter into all the riches of God. remember what we said when we studied Ephesians. He's a God who made us rich. We become rich by becoming poor because we exchange our wealth for something better. So think very carefully about this: we have all the resources before we start! We have a God who has all the resources at His disposal. We have the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength and ability to be the sort of people God wants us to be. In other words counting the cost is not looking at *our* commitment and effort, but a challenge to use correctly that which is at our disposal.

And so often people and churches find themselves ridiculed and defeated, not because they didn't have it in them, but they never used what they had. Each month I receive a pay cheque from the church. However, it isn't much good to me unless I pay it into the bank. Similarly, our government is able to call on the resources of powerful armed forces, but can you imagine it trying to invade a country without the air force or by leaving its tanks at home.

We have the resources of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords at our disposal. Now think carefully. What happened in creation? God finished it and it was God! What about the work of Christ? It was finished and now He's glorified! What does that tell you? God is a finisher. He finishes what He starts. You are a work in progress. *Phil 1:4 I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* We as disciples are God's work in progress. He knows what He was doing when He called you. Look at what He's building in your life. You were a costly purchase. We often think of how costly our faith is to us. How much has it cost God and He's still working in you. So when Jesus talks about counting the cost, we are not the only ones who have been counting.

Better still, we have a God who opens the windows of heaven to provide for us as we have proved recently. Yet we still think in a worldly way don't we. We still weep tears at our failures to control our compulsions or our tongues. We feel guilty that we aren't like other believers. We try, we fail. We worry. We have a God who provides for us and who can give us the power to be what HE wants us to be. We have to just be people who are willing to follow and let Him finish His work in us.

Counting the cost isn't just about our commitment, but our need to trust in a God who has the cash in the bank and the forces at his disposal: and so often we don't use them or trust Him enough to rest on Him.

Discipleship should not be neglected

34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

This little verse comes at the end of this passage and is put there for a reason. It comes three times in the gospels, each in a different context, although the meaning is the same. The implication in terms of discipleship here is that disciples are the salt which is the same as in Matthew and Mark's gospel. It's here for more than the sake of putting it somewhere. It comes at the end of this section on what it means to be a disciple and as we have seen as disciples we are called to be different, not in what we do but in who we are. And if we follow Him as we are supposed to - in the power of His Spirit - we will be people who are world changers (or at least Swaffham-changers). So what's this about?

Jesus is probably referring to rock salt. It's not the refined salt we have which is pure Sodium Chloride, but contains other stuff too which is tasteless. If neglect our rock salt and leave it lying around in the damp, the sodium chloride will dissolve and lose it's saltiness. We have something - our faith - let's not neglect what God is calling us to be because if we do, we become useless in serving the purposes of God.

The bottom line is that when we came to Christ, we entered into a relationship with our Father, with His Son and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It was (or should have been or perhaps should still be) a life-changing experience. We said as those baptised testified that we were no longer going to live our way but God's way. Being a disciple changes our passions from self-gratification to following Jesus because we have entered into a new love relationship where our passion for Him eclipses our pattern for other relationships and things.

Because our passion for Him is so great, we have a passion for what He does: His work of redemption. Most of all we are people who must understand that we have a God who is a finisher and who has the resources to finish what He has started.

Are we going to let Him finish?

⇒ Listen! ***"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*** Let's pray

Father

As we examine our lives again this morning we realise that we fall so short of what you desire for our lives.

We realise that we love and have loved other people and other things before you: our families, our lives, our possessions, our church, our acts of service.

Help us by Your Spirit this morning to understand again Your passion for us and as we do that, may our love for You well up from within us.

By Your Spirit we pray this morning that you will renew a right spirit within each of us.

May our lives reflect the Saviour who carried His cross for us.

As we count the cost of follow You, may we be people who follow a God who always finishes what he starts and gives us the means to complete too.

May we be salt in this world and bring glory to Your holy name

Amen

Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 26/09/04
Scripture Quotes NIV
© Mark Reid 2004



2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.