

CONDUCT OF A DISCIPLE

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, April 14, 2013

Jesus called men and women to follow Him. Those who choose to do so are called disciples. It's a choice everyone, everywhere must face.

We may bow our pride before Him in humility and faithfulness now, or we will bow it in humiliation and regret later, but make no mistake about this: God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, forever.

Last week I spoke to you about the *character* of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Why character first? Because if you have godly character, then nothing else matters. And, if you lack godly character, then nothing else matters.

Today, let's see how character plays out... how it forms the conduct of a disciple.

Jesus warned that discipleship is not easy. There are common elements of our lives that may interfere with our progress.

Interference

Luke 9:57-62

⁵⁷ *As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."*

⁵⁸ *But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."*

⁵⁹ *He said to another person, "Come, follow me."*

The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father."

⁶⁰ *But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God."*

⁶¹ *Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family."*

⁶² *But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."*

In this passage, we encounter three would-be disciples and Jesus explains the hurdle each one must get over to be His disciple.

The first expressed his desire to follow Jesus, but Jesus, knowing what was in his heart, pointed to his unspoken desire and expectation that following Jesus would bring good things and comforting things into his life. To the contrary, Jesus warned that following Him carries no promise of a comfortable life or many possessions.

Our *expectations* may be the very things that interfere with our following Jesus closely. When things don't go the way we have expected, we may balk at taking the next step. We may resist continuing in the same direction. We may argue with the voice of God, instead of yielding ourselves to His leadership.

Jesus invited the second man to follow Him, but he hesitated, because he thought he first needed to complete certain matters in his life, to follow through on traditions that dictated what would be appropriate behavior.

Common cultural traditions (or family traditions, or religious traditions)—even good ones—may interfere with a disciple's life. If your choices, your direction, your behavior, are determined by familiar tradition, instead of by the Holy Spirit, you may miss what Jesus has for you.

A third man indicated his desire to follow Jesus, but he, too, put Jesus off because of relationships that were dear to him. As important as family is in the divine economy of God's Kingdom, family relationships may interfere with doing what a disciple must do. If you love even your family more than Jesus, then you don't deserve to be called His disciple.

In these three examples, "Me first" was a common retort to the Lord's call.

If Jesus is not Lord of all, then He is not Lord at all.

Instruction

Matthew 16:24-25 (cf. 23)

²⁴ *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me."* ²⁵ *If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.*

Anyone who wants to may be a disciple of Jesus, but everyone who chooses the disciple's way must heed these same fundamental instructions.

The first issue to be decided is "Who's boss?" A disciple must deny himself that role and give it over to Jesus. Doing your own thing, or doing things your own way, is contrary to the conduct of a disciple.

Many who recognize this fact (intellectually) still have great difficulty living up to it. Old habits die hard. And selfish habits are the hardest of all. To put Jesus first—in everything—is a lifelong classroom experience, because there are always new challenges to be faced (a path you've never walked before) in which, until our faith in Jesus is firm, self-reliance threatens again to take over.

The second order Jesus gave is to take up our cross. *Our* cross. Many seem to think that their difficult burden is their cross, but the cross is not hardship, it is death. No one has ever survived the cross; it is 100% fatal. Jesus has instructed His disciples to prepare for death.

The only preparation for death that many people make is to resist it at every turn. A few make financial preparations for their inevitable demise, but far fewer make spiritual and emotional preparations. Yet it is the only thing certain about life: we will die. (I know some will be raptured at Christ's return, but that is a glorious exception to the rule.)

It is simply foolish not to prepare for death, when we know it is inescapable. If we believe in preparing to live well, we should certainly prepare to die well, too.

For the Christian, death is not to be feared—avoided when possible, but never feared—for it is the doorway to Heaven and the very presence of Christ and of God.

The bottom line is this: if you are afraid to die, you are not yet ready to live. That's why Paul urged the church to live "as those who have risen from the dead." We have not physically done so yet, but, since we were "buried with Christ by baptism," we do now share the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

So, with purpose and resolve, aim for the life to come. Keep Heaven in mind, as a real place which you are destined to enjoy, and live in such a way that you may arrive there with joy, instead of regret.

Jesus' third instruction was to follow Him—not watch Him from a distance as you read the Bible, but to personally engage with Him—listen to Him, obey Him, emulate Him. Paul taught us to "have the same attitude as Jesus," not clinging to privilege or power, but humbly laying them aside for the sake of serving others.

You cannot follow Jesus and lead Him at the same time. A disciple purposes to listen to Christ's voice and let Him lead.

You cannot follow Jesus and resist Him at the same time. A disciple yields his own will to the higher wisdom of Christ.

A disciple is a follower. A disciple walks at Jesus' side. He or she stays where Jesus stays, goes where Jesus goes, does what Jesus does, and says what Jesus says.

Initiation

Mark 6:7-13

⁷ *And he called his twelve disciples together and began sending them out two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits.* ⁸ *He told them to take nothing for their jour-*

ney except a walking stick—no food, no traveler’s bag, no money.⁹ He allowed them to wear sandals but not to take a change of clothes.

¹⁰ “Wherever you go,” he said, “stay in the same house until you leave town.¹¹ But if any place refuses to welcome you or listen to you, shake its dust from your feet as you leave to show that you have abandoned those people to their fate.”

¹² So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins and turn to God.¹³ And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.

Jesus came to dwell among us only for a short time. He knew that He had come from God and was returning to God. In a very short season (less than four years) Jesus was to teach and train disciples to carry on His Kingdom work.

Full instruction must go beyond words, in order to train, not only the intellect, but also the behavior. So Jesus introduced His disciples to His ministry. Their initiation included three responsibilities (and so does the conduct of disciples today).

The primary responsibility of a disciple is to preach good news—tell others about Jesus and His way of life and salvation. In order to preach good news, we must first *be* good news, for if the Good News does not fill our hearts and dictate our attitudes, our words and quotations will not evoke faith.

When you meet people who are in trouble, in struggle, in need, in confusion—does your *presence* bring good news to them? Will they be glad you’ve come? Will your actions and words lift them? If so, that’s good news.

If you cannot *be* good news, *without words*, do not try to tell others about Jesus yet. Their perception of the gap between who you are and what you say will confuse, and perhaps irritate, them.

The second responsibility of a discipleship initiate is to cast out demons. This scares a lot of people, because their thoughts have been tainted by Hollywood images of horror and terror. Instead, ask yourself if Jesus showed any such terror? Even when confronted by a man filled with thousands of demons Jesus was calmly authoritative. Because He was God? No! Because He trusted God! Because He had been authorized by the Father to overcome all the works of the evil one. He knew His own authority.

Since His authority was real, He didn’t have to yell and threaten, He simply said, “Go!”

Our passage informs us that, for their initiation, Jesus gave to His disciples the same authority that He had been given. And they returned, rejoicing that the demons had been subject to them in Jesus’ name (that is, because of the authority Jesus had given them).

In the Western world, demonic manifestations are less frequent than in other cultures. I don't think they are absent, just more subtle and less frequently observed. But our responsibility remains to "cast out" or to displace demons (to quench their influence), as Jesus did.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead spelled the defeat of demonic strongholds and influence. It is this source of power that infuses Christ's disciples with authority to "overcome all the power of the enemy."

A most effective manner of exercising this authority happens to be one that is seldom recognized or taught (perhaps because it is less dramatic and calls less attention to the disciple), yet it is the one that is accessible by the most people. It is this: "overcome evil with good."

Simply by doing good to others in Jesus' name, demonic influences are quenched and disabled. Without breaking a sweat or speaking a word, ordinary disciples can render demons powerless to act or manifest, as they intentionally and faithfully do good to others. Marvelous!

Our third responsibility is to heal the sick. Many Christians are willing to pray for the sick, asking God to heal them. But I cannot escape the fact that Jesus said, "(You) heal the sick."

I know that I do not possess that power to heal in myself. God alone can heal—the soul and the body. Yet God, the Holy Spirit, lives in me (and in every born-again Jesus-follower), and He works through me when I act in faith.

Healing always involves both soul and body. We may be in health only "as our soul prospers." So healing always begins with comfort and encouragement to trust in God through Christ. Prayer and counsel, as well as anointing oil, are effective means of healing the sick.

These are a disciple's responsibilities. Don't overthink them; just do them. The more you practice them, the more the Holy Spirit will teach you about them, and the more people will be blessed by your presence and ministry.

Beware the interferences that threaten to rob you of your faith and surrender.

Heed the instructions that fit your heart for a disciple's work.

And let Christ initiate you into His Kingdom ministries. Just say, "Yes!" and watch the supernatural begin to unfold.