

The Hallmarks of Discipleship, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 10:26–31

Code: 2282

INTRODUCTION

Matthew's purpose in writing was to affirm that Christ is King. He knew that mankind is prone to raise up other monarchs in competition to Christ. When a person becomes a Christian he submits willingly to Jesus Christ as Lord, Master, and King. He gives himself over to His sovereignty from the petty monarchs in his past. In Matthew 10:24-42 we find our Lord's instructions to those committed to His sovereignty. That is what Christ asks of those who follow Him. Review

Christ's teaching embraces all who claim a relationship with Him--not just a special few. If we claim a relationship to Christ we are to follow and learn from Him. As a result we will be like Him. We will have His values and submit to His authority.

Since the world stooped low enough to label Christ as the devil, it won't hesitate to do the same to us. In Matthew 10:25 Jesus used the analogy of a master of a house--a person with dignity, authority, honor, and wealth. If people dare to malign such a man, they will certainly not hesitate to speak evil against those who belong to his household.

However, true disciples are content to be like Christ. That is their goal so they are willing to pay the cost of discipleship. Lesson

All true disciples are characterized by certain hallmarks.

I. A DISCIPLE DOES NOT FEAR THE WORLD (vv. 26-31)

In Matthew 10 Jesus instructs His disciples not to fear the world (vv. 26, 28, 31), but fear would be the natural response to the warnings He just gave in verses 16-23. Proverbs 29:25 explains, "The fear of man bringeth a snare; but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." The fear of man strangles effective evangelism. Because we don't want to experience difficulty, disrespect, or persecution, we often hold back from telling the good news of Jesus Christ.

Too often Christians are caught up in self preservation. Jesus warned that persecution would happen, but He wanted his disciples to be bold in the face of it. First John 2:15 says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." A person who is afraid of the world, not interested in witnessing for Christ, and unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship is unlikely to be a real Christian. Their priorities are wrong. When the pressure is on they bail out: "they went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). Those

who when under pressure and remain faithful to Christ give evidence of being true disciples.

Fear and the Frozen River

Christ often reminded His disciples not to be afraid: "fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Even after the resurrection Jesus reminded His disciples not to be afraid (Matt. 28:10; Luke 24:38; John 20:19-23). Fear is something Christians constantly need to be encouraged to avoid. We need to get out from the church and our Bible studies to proclaim God's Word to a world that doesn't know Jesus Christ. We need to avoid being like the Arctic River: frozen over at the mouth.

A. He Knows He Will Be Vindicated (v. 26)

"Fear them not, therefore: for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hidden, that shall not be known."

"Therefore" looks back to what Jesus had previously said--that since He experienced persecution in the world, they should expect the same. Nevertheless, they were not to be afraid because "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hidden, that shall not be known" (v. 28).

The truth about everything will one day be made known. Now Christians are looked on as anti-intellectual outcasts and are persecuted. The worldly are successful and the wicked prosper. Yet that will change--the truth will become clear.

God will reveal who was truly successful and vindicate those who are His. What is now hidden will be revealed when God takes vengeance on those who do not know Him. Jesus wanted His disciples to have an eternal perspective--one that would enable them to avoid fear.

1. The reward

Scripture assures believers of their reward.

a) Revelation 22:12--Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

b) 2 Corinthians 5:10--We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

c) 1 Corinthians 4:5--"Judge nothing ... until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God."

d) Revelation 2:10--Jesus said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

e) 2 Timothy 4:8--Paul said assuredly, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."

f) 1 Corinthians 9:25--The worldly strive "to obtain a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible

[crown]."

g) 1 Thessalonians 2:19--Paul said of the Thessalonians, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"

Those who have an eternal perspective don't worry about being popular or appearing wise and noble in this life. That perspective enables disciples to confront society with the claims of Christ while looking for reward in eternity.

2. The revelation

We need to live for the future. Only then will we know who were hypocrites and who were heroes. Too many Christians trade momentary popularity for an eternal reward.

a) Luke 12:1-2--Jesus said to His disciples, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hidden, that shall not be known." Here the same phrase used in Matthew 10:26 refers to the unmasking of hypocrites--those who hide the truth about themselves.

b) Luke 8:16-17--"No man, when he hath lighted a lamp, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed, but setteth it on a lampstand, that they who enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hidden, that shall not be known and come to light."

c) 1 Corinthians 3:12-13--"If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble--every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is."

d) Ecclesiastes 11:9--"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

e) Ecclesiastes 12:13-14--"Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

Someday God will expose the entire record of our lives. Many who looked like winners in this life will be revealed as eternal losers, while others who were persecuted for their faith and thought to be losers will be revealed as eternal winners.

John Calvin and another minister were banished from Geneva after preaching God's truth. Calvin, when he was notified, said, "If we had served men, we should have been ill rewarded. But we serve a great Master who will recompense us" (Jean Moura and Paul Lovet, Calvin: a Modern Biography [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1932], p. 158).

B. A Disciple Fears God More Than Man (vv. 27-28)

"What I tell you in darkness, that speak in light; what ye hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops. And fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

A person who truly worships and fears God does not fear man.

1. He keeps nothing secret

There are no secrets in Christianity. We are to give the message of the gospel as we have received

it.

At the time Jesus taught, the rabbis would train their pupils by standing beside them and speaking privately into their ears. Then the young men would repeat what they had been told. The Lord used that picture to show how the disciples were to openly speak what they had been privately told.

a) By telling all

When Jesus said, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that proclaim upon the housetops" (v. 27), He set no restrictions on the contents of what His disciples were to pass on. We are to hold back nothing that our Lord has chosen to reveal.

Too often Christians hold back God's truth for fear of alienating non-Christians. The style of much of today's evangelism is questions like, "Would you like to be happy?" "Would you like to have all your problems solved and go to heaven forever?" "Would you like to experience true love?" Apparently those who ask such questions think they will make Jesus so desirable that unsaved people will end up asking, "Where do I sign?"

If you were to approach someone you work with and lovingly say, "My friend, do you know you are in danger of burning in hell forever if you don't receive salvation through Jesus Christ," you would probably get persecuted. Because that kind of message offends people, many hold back from disclosing crucial spiritual truths.

b) By adding nothing

Verse 27 means we are to tell not only nothing less than the whole truth, but also nothing more. That means first getting alone with God and pouring over His Word. Only from that secret place of study and prayer may we go to speak God's Word to others. When we add to the message of God's Word we only confuse people regarding the truth.

c) By making public proclamation

In the days of Christ's ministry on earth, announcements were commonly made from housetops. Houses had flat roofs with short walls around the edges that served as patios. People often slept, ate, and had social events on their roofs. Making an announcement only required that a person stand on his roof and shout. A high roof would be an advantage, and many people were likely to hear such an announcement because they tended to be outside. Also there were no cars, TVs, or stereos to drown out the sound. Christ wanted His disciples to be as public as possible with the gospel message.

Rabbis sometimes taught on housetops and religious officials would announce religious holidays by blowing a trumpet from a housetop. That is similar to the minarets used today in the Moslem world from which Moslems are called to prayer. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote about the time he tried to calm an angry mob by addressing the people from the roof of his house (Wars of the Jews, 2.21.5). Housetops were the common public forum of Jesus' day. Today we're to use whatever common public forums are available to us to proclaim the gospel.

d) By paying the price

There is a price to pay for telling the whole gospel. Acts 21:10-11 records how the prophet Agabus warned Paul that he would be imprisoned for preaching the gospel in Jerusalem. The text then records Paul's resolution to finish his ministry in the face of persecution. Paul's example shows us that the gospel is never to be kept secret, and that there's a price to pay for publicly proclaiming it.

2. He keeps things in perspective

Jesus said, "Fear not them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Man can only kill the body, not the soul. The worst he can do is only temporal. Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

However, God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell forever. Hell is where Satan himself will be subjected to continual destruction. Only God has the keys to death and hell (Rev. 1:18), so only God should be feared. Man's power is puny beside the power of God. Matthew was not threatening Christians with hell. He was pointing out that all mankind should fear the One who determines the destiny of both soul and body, not those who can determine merely when and how to kill the body.

Our fear of God shows itself by how we react to opportunities to share the gospel that we are sure will result in persecution.

a) Persecution by family

When we fail to communicate the gospel to our family members because we know they will be angry and might even ask us to leave, we show that we fear man more than God. If we truly fear God and reverence His infinite holiness and majesty, worshiping Him as He ought to be worshiped, we will speak on His behalf regardless of any threat that stands in our way. Go to Hell and Get Away from It All?

Some people think the destruction in hell spoken of in Scripture means total annihilation. But that is not what the Greek word translated "destroy" in Matthew 10:28 means. It's the ongoing destruction spoke of in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 "on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." The destruction of hell is continual and forever. In Matthew 10:28 the Greek word translated "hell" is Gehenna. It was the name of the city dump in the Valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem. Jesus used it to illustrate the terrible nature of hell because in that dump worms continually fed on the garbage and fires were perpetually lit to burn the trash of Jerusalem.

In hell the unsaved will be consumed in their resurrection bodies forever. People often wonder if there is literal fire in hell. Since both the saved and unsaved are resurrected to eternal life with literal bodies (Rev. 20:11-15), it follows that the fire in hell is literal and eternal. We don't know what kind of fire exactly, but it will be terrible! People must be warned about what they face apart from Christ!

b) The persecution of Paul

Paul did not disobey God's call to preach the gospel because he feared God. He worshiped God so much he could never say no to God to say yes to men. Those who truly venerate God do not fear men because they are focused on obeying God and fearing Him alone. I'd rather fall into the hands of angry men than the hands of an angry God.

c) The persecution of Latimer

William Barclay tells us that the sixteenth-century English minister Hugh Latimer "was preaching when Henry the king [Henry VIII] was present. He knew that he was about to say something which the king would not relish. So in the pulpit he soliloquised aloud with himself. 'Latimer! Latimer! Latimer!' he said, 'be careful what you say. Henry the king is here.' Then he paused, and ... said, 'Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! be careful what you say. The King of kings is here'" (The Gospel of Matthew, vol. 1 [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958], p. 397; cf. Foxe's Book of Martyrs [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978], pp. 273-74). The king didn't like what he heard and Latimer was eventually burned at the stake.

d) The persecution of early Christians

During the persecutions endured by the church in its early years, many Christians hid in underground caverns in Rome and outlying areas. They dug many miles of catacombs, and buried their dead there for a period of nearly 300 years. Archaeologists estimate that up to four million Christians were buried in those catacombs.

e) Persecution during the Dark Ages

It is estimated that millions of Christians died for their faith during the Dark Ages.

f) Persecution in China

Countless numbers of Christians died for their faith when the Communists took over China.

g) Persecution in Africa

Many also died for the name of Christ in the civil wars and rebellions that have taken place in Africa. The Unbound Soul

Even though man can kill the body he can't touch the soul. The immaterial part of every man and woman remains an eternal reality. Of the two parts that constitute what man is, man does not need to worry about persecution to the material part because it is bound to this earth. Christians look forward to shedding the old body and being resurrected into a new body. If we are worried about what people do to our physical body we are too earthbound. We are to have the perspective that present persecution is a light thing compared with the vindication that will be ours in eternity.

Jesus' warning in Matthew 10:28 must have been particularly poignant for Judas (and those like him). There will always be phonies in the church, and verse 28 serves as a terrible warning that God will destroy them both soul and body in hell forever.

C. He Knows He Is Valued by God (vv. 29-31)

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows."

1. God's interest

The Greek word for "farthing" (assarion) is basically equivalent to a penny. The word translated "sparrows" refers to little birds. Two small birds could be bought for a penny, or five birds for two cents (Luke 12:6). Those little birds were bought to be served by the plateful as hors d'oeuvres.

Yet verse 29 affirms that not one of those inexpensive little birds falls to the ground without God's knowing and caring about it. Nothing happens in the most simple and seemingly insignificant life that God doesn't know and care about. And God is the Father of every disciple. He knows all about us and even assigns a number to every hair on our heads, which is about 100,000 for the average person according to the most recent World Book Encyclopedia.

2. God's care

The lesson of verses 29-30 is summed up in verse 31: "Fear not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." The same God who cares for little birds cares for us also, and values us much more! We will never get into a situation where God will not care for us and sustain us.

a) Psalm 91:7--"A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come near thee." All may collapse around us but we will remain safe because God cares for us.

b) Matthew 6:28-30--"Consider the lilies of the field.... If God so clothe the grass of the field ... shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

We're often so afraid we might lose our reputation, job, or be injured that we become fearful. But Jesus said not to fear because we are of great worth. God will take care of us.

CONCLUSION

Matthew 10:28-31 explains how we should react to being treated like our Lord. We should not be afraid because we'll be vindicated in the end with an eternal reward. We should maintain a proper perspective by fearing God, not man. And we should also keep in mind that God highly values us. That should diminish our fears of how others react to us.

Focusing on the Facts

1. The fear of man strangles effective _____ .
2. What reasons often hold us back from telling the good news of Jesus Christ?
3. Too often Christians are caught up in _____ .
4. Who are those who give the best evidence of being true disciples of Christ?
5. What kind of perspective did Jesus want His disciples to have? Why?
6. A person who truly worships and fears God does not fear _____ .
7. What kind of restrictions did Jesus set concerning the contents of what His disciples were to pass on?
8. Why do Christians often hold back God's truth? What kind of gospel presentation does that often result in?
9. Christians are to tell nothing less than the whole truth. How are we to avoid adding to the truth?
10. Where are we to proclaim the gospel today?
11. Why is God to be feared (Matt. 10:28)?
12. What situations present us with an opportunity to show whom we fear--man or God?
13. Is the destruction of hell continual and forever? Explain.
14. Of the two parts that constitute what man is, why don't we need to worry about persecution to the material part?
15. According to Jesus in Matthew 10:31, why are we not to fear?

Pondering the Principles

1. Often the reason people fail to commit themselves to Christ is they are not told of God's resources. Salvation appears to them as something that occurs apart from God's power. They assume they will have to pay the cost of discipleship out of their own resources and are apt to turn away from Christ. The Puritan Thomas Watson wrote, "There is a promise that works for our good, 'I will be with him in trouble' (Psalm 91.15). God does not bring His people into troubles, and leave them there. He will stand by them; He will hold their heads and hearts when they are fainting. And there is another promise, 'He is their strength in the time of trouble' (Psalm 37.39). 'Oh,' says the soul, 'I shall faint in the day of trial.' But God will be the strength of our hearts; He will join His forces with us. Either He will make His hand lighter, or our faith stronger" (All Things for Good [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986 reprint], p. 16). Take comfort that the cost of discipleship is met with God's own resources given you in Christ.

2. First John 4:18 affirms that "there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The man who fears is not made perfect in love" (NIV). Believers have no fear of coming judgment. But there is a godly fear. The British pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "There is a holy fear which must not be banished from the church of God. There is a sacred anxiety which puts us to the question, and examines us whether we be in the faith, and it is not to be disdained" (cited in Spurgeon at His Best, edited by Tom Carter [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], pp. 77-78). Godly fear characterizes those who recognize who God is and desire to be pleasing to Him. Is that the attitude of your heart?

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