

The Hallmarks of Discipleship, Part 3

Scripture: Matthew 10:34–42

Code: 2284

INTRODUCTION

American President Theodore Roosevelt reportedly observed there has never yet been a man who led a life of ease whose name is worth remembering. He said, "I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life" (Hamilton Club, Chicago, 10 Apr. 1899). The Lord does not call His disciples to a life of ease. The high calling of discipleship is perhaps most forcibly stated in Matthew 10:38-39, where Jesus says, "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Jesus' instructions in Matthew 10:24-42 call for self-denial and self-sacrifice--a commitment to obey the divine will at any cost.

A. The Need for Genuineness

Many people claim to follow Jesus. But our Lord often spoke of the marks of a genuine disciple to expose those whose discipleship was only a facade. That distinction has often been overlooked in contemporary Christianity.

Speaking of Israel, the apostle Paul said, "They are not all Israel, who are Israel" (Rom. 9:6). All who are outwardly God's covenant people are not that inwardly. In a similar way, not all who are outwardly disciples of Jesus Christ are inwardly His disciples. Matthew 10:24-42 gives us the marks of a genuine disciple.

B. The Need for Effectiveness

Matthew 10:24-42 also deals with the effectiveness of the disciple. Jesus was concerned not only with qualifications but also with how a real disciple effects his world and is effected by it. Genuine disciples are to have an impact on what surrounds them.

REVIEW

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

II. A DISCIPLE CONFESSES CHRIST BEFORE OTHERS (vv. 32-33)

LESSON

III. A DISCIPLE PUTS CHRIST BEFORE HIS FAMILY (vv. 34-37)

Jesus said that some who followed Him would be delivered up to councils, scourged in synagogues, and brought before governors and kings (Matt. 10:17-18). Those who were His true disciples would confess Him (Matt. 10:32), while those who were not would deny Him (Matt. 10:33). In Matthew 10:34-37 Jesus builds on what He had already said to show that He would bring division.

A. The Paradox of Christ's Coming (v. 34)

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword."

1. Jesus did not bring peace

a) Contrary to Jewish expectations At the time of Christ, the Jewish people expected that when the Messiah came He would bring peace. Isaiah said He would be the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

Speaking of the Messianic kingdom, Psalm 72 says, "The mountains shall bring peace to the people" (v. 3). It also says in the Messiah's "days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth" (v. 7). Isaiah 2:3-4 says, "Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and

let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." So Israel thought the Messiah was coming to bring peace.b) Contrary to the disciples' expectationsPrior to Jesus' instruction in Matthew 10, His disciples had begun to experience the peace that comes in knowing Jesus. It is possible they anticipated that bliss to gain immediate acceptance throughout the world as they preached the gospel. Since the Messiah had come and He was the Prince of Peace, it would have been natural to assume that His kingdom rule was imminent.

2. Jesus did bring division

However, the immediate establishment of the Messianic kingdom wasn't to be and the Lord warned His disciples not to be under any illusions about Him inaugurating the kingdom of peace.

Paradoxically, it was the Prince of Peace who brought division and a sword. In the sovereignty of God it was necessary that the offer of peace with God result in division and strife.

a) Old Testament teachingThe Old Testament pictures the divisive nature of the Messiah's coming.

Micah 7:6 says, "The son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." That passage is almost directly quoted by our Lord in Matthew 10:35-36.b) Rabbinic traditionThe

divisiveness of the Messiah's coming was affirmed in rabbinic tradition. Shabbath 118a in the Talmud pictures the advent of the Messiah as being preceded by years of great distress. The rabbis were well aware of Micah 7:6.c) New Testament realityJesus confirmed that His disciples could expect to

see division--not peace. Rather than the incarnation of Christ resulting in peace, the message the disciples proclaimed was going to split and fracture the world into segments and parties that would be pitted against one another. That is why we ought not to think that when we proclaim the gospel, everyone is going to line up to sign on the dotted line.d) Reformation historyMartin Luther reportedly

said that if our gospel were received in peace, it would not be the true gospel. He knew from experience how divisive the gospel can be. While part of the Roman Catholic Church he preached the truth but it didn't bring peace. Rather it shattered the Roman Catholic Church and gave birth to the Protestant Reformation.

The Paradox of the Prince of PeaceOne would expect that our Lord would bring peace. John the Baptist was the herald of Christ and was to announce the peace the Messiah would bring (Luke 1:76-79). The angels who proclaimed Christ's birth announced peace on earth (Luke 2:14). In John 14:27 Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." In John 16:33 He says, "These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." In Romans Paul wrote of the peace God has given us (Rom. 1:7; 5:1; 8:6; 14:17).There is peace in the heart of one who believes, but in the world there is nothing but division. The Old Testament writers didn't clearly see the time difference between Christ's first and second comings, and the interval between the two (1 Pet. 1:10-11). The first coming brought a sword and the second coming will bring ultimate peace.

The gospel of peace is divisive. It is a refiner's fire, a separating of sheep and goats, and a winnowing of grain. If Christ had never come, the earth would have gone on in unity to hell, doomed for all eternity. The paradox of the Prince of Peace is that when He came a war broke out.

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B. The Impact of Christ's Coming (vv. 35-37)

"I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."

In Luke 12:49-53 Jesus says, "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? ... Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division; for

from henceforth there shall be five in one house, divided; three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Perhaps the most devastating expression of the divisiveness Jesus can cause is in home relationships. Those are generally the most meaningful relationships in a person's life. But true disciples are committed to their Lord and are willing to exist, if necessary, in an environment of divisiveness in the place that should provide the greatest security and love.

The Greek word translated "at variance" is used only here in the New Testament. It refers to cutting something apart. Jesus said that the rending of relationships would extend from immediate family relationships to those by marriage.

1. Division between parent and child

Such divisiveness is at odds with the natural love one feels as a parent or child. A strained relationship with a neighbor, boss, or friend is rarely as bad as being at odds with someone in one's own family.

2. Division between man and family

Luke 9 records how a man pledged to follow Jesus, but first desired to bid farewell to his family.

Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (v. 62). Jesus will not accept someone as His disciple who is unwilling to breaking away from family ties for His sake.

3. Division between husband and wife

There are wives who will not come to Christ for fear of separation from their husbands and husbands who reject because of their wives. Children often fail to come to Christ for fear of their parents. Too many desire a comfortable family life in place of a living relationship with Christ.

First Corinthians 7 deals with the reality of division in marriage when one partner comes to know Christ. The apostle Paul explained that a believing husband is to remain with his unbelieving wife if she desires to stay in the marriage and vice versa (vv. 12-13). In both situations the unbelieving partner is blessed: "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband" (v. 14). "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace" (v. 15).

By becoming a Christian a person affirms his commitment to the lordship of Christ. That means a willingness to forsake all for Him. Raising your hand, signing a card, walking down an aisle, or saying "I love Jesus" are one-time occurrences that of themselves do not demonstrate a life in union with Christ. Salvation is by faith in the finished work of Christ, but it does not occur without producing an unswerving commitment to obey Christ. It is a commitment so deep that a person will say no to the natural objects of their affection if loyalty to Christ so demands.

One Pilgrim's Family Predicament

The Puritan John Bunyan knew what it meant to forsake his family for Christ. He was called to preach but was ordered by the government to stop preaching or be imprisoned. That meant he would be unable to support his family--they might lose their home and starve.

Nevertheless, he determined to obey God's call to preach and was imprisoned. He wrote in an appendix to his autobiography, Grace Abounding to the chief of Sinners, "The parting with my Wife and poor Children hath often been to me in this place [of imprisonment], as the pulling the Flesh from my Bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries, and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with, should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind Child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. O the thought of the hardship I thought my blind one might go under, would break up my heart to pieces.... But yet, recalling my self, thought I, I must venture

you all with God, though it goeth to the quick to leave you; O I saw in this condition, I was a man who was pulling down his House upon the head of his Wife and Children; yet thought I, I must do it, I must do it" (cited by T. R. Glover, Poets and Puritans [London: Methuen & Co., 1915], p. 110).

A result of Bunyan's predicament God used him to bless millions of families. While in Bedford prison he wrote the Christian classic, The Pilgrim's Progress.

Matthew 10:36 affirms that Christ came to bring a sword that would fall in the house. Verse 37 states plainly the high calling of discipleship and the choice that must be made. You can't be a disciple of Jesus Christ and participate in the salvation He offers if your family means more to you than He does.

IV. A DISCIPLE FOLLOWS CHRIST ANYWHERE

A. The Call to the Cross (v. 38)

"He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of Me."

You may have heard a devotional about bearing or taking up your cross. And you may have heard various definitions of what the cross might be--your spouse, teenager, in-laws, old Chevy, leaky roof, distasteful class at school, neighbor, boss, or any number of other things. But Jesus didn't speak of those things.

Jesus also didn't speak in the light of His own crucifixion on Calvary. His disciples didn't yet understand that Jesus was going to be crucified (Matt. 16:21)--even after He told them He would be killed they failed to accept that reality until after it happened. So there was no mystical or devotional sense to what Jesus said.

When Jesus said to take up your cross, His disciples knew immediately what He was talking about.

He was talking about dying. Those men, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were from Galilee.

When Jesus was about ten years old, Judas of Galilee and his followers revolted against the Romans and lost (Josephus, Wars of the Jews 2.8.1). To make an example that would not be forgotten, the Romans crucified over two thousand Jews, placing crosses along the roads of Galilee. Everywhere people went they saw men dying on crosses along the roadside. And every Jew that was crucified carried the crossbeam for his own execution on his back as he marched to the cross. It was a lesson that was not forgotten.

Jesus impressed on his hearers that those who follow Him must be willing to die a torturous death rather than deny Him. Crucifixion is the most excruciating death man has ever invented. Beyond the agony caused by nails driven through one's hands and feet, death itself comes by slow suffocation. The disciples understood Jesus meant they were to be committed to the point of death. Jesus isn't the savior of those who aren't committed to Him. The love of the Lord Jesus Christ must overrule the instinct for self-preservation.

B. The Call to a Choice (v. 39)

1. A bad choice (v. 39a)

"He that findeth his life shall lose it."

"Findeth his life" refers to securing one's physical safety by denying Christ under pressure. There are many kinds of pressure, and many ways of denying Christ. But yielding to pressure and preserving one's life ultimately results in the loss of one's own soul.

2. A good choice (v. 39b)

"He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."

Jesus didn't mean that you get saved by being a martyr. Rather if you are a genuine Christian, you will be willing to die for Him. When faced with denying the Lord or denying yourself you will deny yourself even to the point of death. He who confesses Christ and suffers death is far better off than the apostate who escapes death temporarily but receives eternal damnation.

When John Bunyan was brought before a judge and threatened with imprisonment for preaching without a license, he replied that obedience to Christ required that he do two things: actively obey

Christ's commands to the utmost; and when threatened with punishment for such obedience, willingly suffer that punishment rather than refuse to obey Christ (cf. Glover, p. 110).

It is better to lose everything--your ease, comfort, family, and life--and be hassled, intimidated, and badgered by the world than to forsake Jesus Christ. Not all of us will face that choice, but those who do will be proved true or false by whether they follow Jesus Christ or not--no matter what the cost.

V. A DISCIPLE BRINGS BLESSING TO OTHERS (vv. 40-42)

"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no way lose his reward."

A. Those Who Believe Receive the Gospel

Even though we often bring a sword that divides, we are also allowed to participate in the eternal salvation of God's people. When we preach the Word, live godly lives, and confess our Lord by our testimony, some will believe in Jesus Christ.

We have a limited ability to reward those who receive us and believe the gospel message. But the Lord has an unlimited ability, and does that work for us. In verse 40, the Greek word translated "receive" refers to a full acceptance of the gospel message and the messenger who brought it. By receiving the message and the messenger, are they receiving the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

In John 14:23 Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (NIV). When we preach the gospel we participate in giving people the Trinity--the Father and the Son make their home in every believer by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

B. Those Who Believe Receive Rewards

1. Because they receive God's people

In Matthew 10:41 the term "prophet" refers to the task of those who proclaim the gospel. "Righteous man" refers to their character. Both terms refer to the same person. A true disciple declares God's truth and practices what he preaches.

When we represent God in word and deed and are received by those who come to believe, they will receive the same reward we receive. Every disciple is not only promised future blessing, but is also a means of blessing to those who receive their testimony.

Those who want to be a blessing in the world need to confess Christ before men. They need to be bold, and not try to excuse their testimony or be ashamed of Christ. That kind of life becomes a source of reward for others.

2. Because they help God's people

When we think of prophets and righteous men we generally picture high-class supersaints. But in Matthew 10:42 our Lord refers to His disciples as "little ones." Disciples are the Lord's "little ones"--not much in and of themselves. When they present the Lord Jesus, and someone demonstrates his reception of the gospel by giving them a cup of cold water, the Lord will reward that helper. Those who receive the gospel are rewarded both when they believe the message and when they help the messenger in his work.

William Barclay recounts the story of a young man in a country village who, "after a great struggle, reached the ministry. His helper in his days of study had been the village cobbler. The cobbler ... was a man of wide reading and far thinking, and he had done much for the lad. In due time the lad was licensed to preach. And on that day the cobbler said to him, 'It was always my desire to be a minister of the gospel, but the circumstances of my life made it impossible. But you are achieving what was closed to me. And I want you to promise me one thing--I want you to let me make and cobble your shoes--for nothing--and I want you to wear them in the pulpit when you preach, and then I'll feel you

are preaching the gospel I always wanted to preach standing in my shoes.' Beyond a doubt the cobbler was serving God as the preacher was, and his reward would one day be the same" (p. 399). Because a disciple represents the Lord Jesus Christ, when a person receives a disciple he receives the Lord Himself and will be rewarded, just like the disciple he receives. By receiving the message and messenger of the gospel, a person embraces the blessings and eternal gifts God gives to His own.

CONCLUSION

We who are disciples of Jesus Christ are involved in a fantastic enterprise. For many we are a source of conflict, for others a source of blessing. To all we must show where they stand before God. That requires a commitment to follow Jesus Christ at any price.

In the depth of winter Napoleon's army was retreating from its invasion of Russia. The army was pressed on all sides and had to cross the Beresina river to escape. The Russians had destroyed all the bridges and Napoleon ordered that a bridge be built across the river. The men nearest the water were the first to carry out the almost impossible task. Several were carried away by the furious rapids. Others sank through cold and exhaustion, but more came and the work proceeded as fast as possible. Finally the builders completed the bridge and emerged half dead from the icy water. As a result of that incredible effort the French army marched across the Beresina river in safety (R.F. Delderfield, The March of the Twenty-Six [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962], p. 197). That was an instance of heroic self-sacrifice. In a similar way, Christ calls His disciples to give their lives to build bridges for others to cross into the presence of God. If you're a real disciple you will be willing to do just that.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is perhaps the most forcible statement about the high calling of discipleship?
2. Why did Jesus often speak of the marks of a genuine disciple?
3. _____ disciples are to have an impact on what surrounds them.
4. Why did the Jewish people at the time of Christ expect that the Messiah would bring peace?
4. Paradoxically, it was the Prince of Peace who brought _____ and a _____.
5. What passage in the Old Testament pictures the divisive nature of the Messiah's coming?
6. What lesson does the experience of Martin Luther demonstrate?
7. What is the paradox of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace?
8. What does the Greek word translated "at variance" in Matthew 10:35 mean?
9. What passage in Scripture shows Jesus' attitude towards those unwilling to break away from family ties for His sake?
10. Where did Paul write about the problem of Christians married to non-Christians? What were his instructions?
11. Why aren't raising your hand, signing a card, walking down an aisle, or saying "I love Jesus" indications in and of themselves of a life in union with Christ?
12. What was Jesus referring to when He said that one must take up his cross and follow Him?
13. Yielding to pressure and preserving one's life results in the loss of one's own _____.
14. When Jesus said, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39), did He mean that only martyrs are saved? Explain.
15. According to John Bunyan, when a disciple is unable to actively obey Christ, what is he to be willing to do?
16. In verse 40 what does the Greek word translated "receive" refer to?
17. In Matthew 10:41 to whom do the terms "prophet" and "righteous man" refer?
18. For what two things are those who receive the gospel rewarded?

Pondering the Principles

1. Will the Lord receive as His own someone who once made a "decision" for Him, but then lived a life that denied Him in word and deed? In Matthew 10:32-33 our Lord says, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (NIV). Paul expresses the same thoughts in 2 Timothy 2:11-13. The Puritan theologian John Owen wrote, "It is taken for granted by all that Christ is able to save us ... though we live in sin and unbelief.... But indeed Christ hath no such power, no such ability: He cannot save unbelieving, impenitent sinners; for this cannot be done without denying Himself, acting contrary to His Word and destroying His own glory" (cited in The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations, edited by I.D.E. Thomas [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977], p. 302). Do your words and deeds acknowledge Jesus Christ before men?

2. The author of Hebrews wrote that Christians are to "make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, NIV). In 1654 Thomas Brooks wrote, "Holiness is the very marrow and quintessence of [Christianity]. Holiness is God stamped and printed upon the soul; it is Christ formed in the heart; it is our light, our life, our beauty, our glory, our joy, our crown, our all. The holy soul is happy in life, and blessed in death, and shall be transcendently glorious in the morning of the resurrection, when Christ shall say, Lo, here am I, and my holy ones, who are my joy" (Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Christian Assurance [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961 reprint], pp. 319-20). If you desire to follow Christ in accordance with Matthew 10:5-42, holiness of character in the power of the Holy Spirit will be the key to your success.

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