



BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

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TO BE A DISCIPLE OR NOT TO BE DISCIPLE? – THAT IS THE QUESTION

Scripture Reading – Mark 8:27-38.

Introduction

You will note that I have used the word disciple in the title of my message. There is a reason for choosing it. The term Christian in our society has in the general lost its New Testament meaning. There are so many different interpretations of the word Christian in our world, that society is confused as to what a Christian should or should not be. Even in some of the evangelical church there has been developed an anemic concept of what it means to be a Christian. The direct challenge of the gospel has been

modified so as to not offend a sinful society. Today we talk about decisions for Christ. That is only part of the truth. The Apostles taught that what should precede a decision is a godly sorrow for our sins that leads to repentance. So often these conditions are played down and ignored. One evangelical pastor admitted that he could not preach repentance for fear he would offend some people in his church. He reminds me of the doctor who feared to tell his patient that he had potentially fatal disease, and so sent him home and told him to take an aspirin because he did not want to offend him or cause him concern. Sin is a radical problem in man and it takes a radical solution to cure it. If the sin problem is going to be solved, then the scriptural conditions, no matter how difficult and challenging, must be proclaimed and obeyed. That is the honest thing to do. It is always a matter of integrity to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is the truth that sets us free. What we have in our society is a cultural Christianity instead of Biblical Christianity. That is why the word Christian has become a relative term and it means different things to different people. So often it has been molded to fit the mindset of the world and in such a way, that it does not demand much of us or disturb our comfort zones. The result of this is, that as society is more or less Christian, so some professing Christians are more or less Christian. Charles Swindoll quoting the Scottish Biblical Professor Dr. SW, Barclay writes, "it is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple, to be a camp follower without being a soldier of the King; To be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight." Someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, So and so tells

me that he was one of your students.” The teacher answered devastatingly, “He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students.” “There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the handicaps of much of the church that there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.” In our culture the word commitment is being used carelessly. New Testament Christianity has been watered down. Research has revealed that the word commitment is a relatively new word as it relates to the Christian’s responsibility. Up to the 19th century the word surrender was used by the Christian church. The church talked about surrender to Christ.

Surrender is a stronger word than commitment. Surrender is the giving up of all of our rights to the Lord Jesus Christ, and making Him Lord of our lives. **Commitment does not have the same force or make the same impact as surrender.** Surrender gathers in all that the Bible teaches us about in required to be a disciple of Christ.

Across our world this morning, there are Christians who are being martyred for Christ and they know what surrender is. They put their lives in danger as they gather to worship. I have observed that in the western world that so many call themselves Christian attend worship when they feel like it. Any personal agenda pushes aside time for God. What concerns me is by this behavior what we are telling our children about what it means to be a Christian. Are we leaving the impression that God is just a convenient attachment to our lives? That He can be manipulated like a pawn on a chessboard at our every whim and desire. When we do this we are sowing seeds in the hearts and minds of our children. What we reap one day maybe to our pain and

sorrow and we will wonder what happened. What happened is that we have reaped what we sowed? There is real sense that the present off hand hostile and irreverent attitude to God in our day, is the harvest of seed sown a generation ago. Worship and service to the Lord and giving a clear witness was not that important. It is tragic that personal activities occupy time that should be given to God. People have become obsessed with their own pleasures and God is not allowed to interfere with that. It is sad that if God is not important enough to spend time in the worship and give of ourselves to His service, then He surely it must be that He is a religious convenience That is the message that so many professing Christians are giving to our society.

This did not happen all at once. You might say this is heavy, pastor please lighten up. That I believe it is a shirking of our responsibility to lighten up when the world is going to hell. Many so called Christians in our country are not showing the world what it really means to have life transforming relationship with God, because the things of God and God Himself are not a priority. In this contemporary age much of the Christian church reminds me of Nero who played his fiddle while Rome burned.

On the other hand so many are wringing their hands and are whining about the world situation, the moral and spiritual decay. This does not solve any problems. The question is what is being done about it?

So many worship God as long as it doesn't it doesn't interfere with their lifestyle and complain they don't have time for the worship of God. However, this kind of lifestyle is not going to convince the world that we have found the authentic meaning of life in Christ, and that He is our first

love and that God is of top priority. As a result the world looks at Christianity as a farce and not a force because it lacks passion and reality.

The question this message poses is **“to be a disciple or not to be a disciple.” Which is it?** It is important that we remove from our minds any ideas of cultural Christianity, which suffers from acute and debilitating anemia and let us fill our hearts and minds with Biblical Christianity. Let us see it as not an attachment to life but the heart of life itself. Paul put it this way **“To me to live is Christ...”** Jesus in Mark chapter 8:34 very simply outlines what it means to be a biblical Christian. He called the people and his disciples to him and said, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up His cross and follow me.”** Jesus is calling each one to be His disciple. His call is clear. He made no apology about that call. His is a call to the surrender of our wills and lives to Him so that we are able to follow Him fully. It is vital that we look at His challenge to discipleship. Notice first of all,

1. THE PRINCIPLE HE ESTABLISHED IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. Mark 8:27-30. There was something that needed to be established before there could be unreserved following of Jesus. To do this, Jesus puts a question to His disciples that gets to the heart of this principle. He does this by asking

a. An Inescapable Question. Mark 8:27,29. It has to do with who He is. **“Who do men say that I am?”** Who is this man who has the audacity to call men and women to leave all to follow Him? **“By what authority does He do this?”** He

addresses this by asking a question “ Who do people say that I am?” This implies that people were talking about Jesus. They had formed an opinions about Him. This question has two faces to it. It is,

i. A General Question. Mark 8:27. “Who do people say that I am?” And the disciples replied, “Some say John the Baptist: others say Elijah and still others one of the prophets.” There was something in Jesus that had aroused the curiosity of the people with whom He came in contact. **This carpenter from Galilee was different from those about Him.** The people thought that He was one of the prophets. One has noted that He certainly had the fire of Elijah as He drove out the desecrators of the temple with a whip. He thundered like John the Baptist as He denounced sin and hypocrisy as he called men and women to repentance. He had some of the weeping prophet Jeremiah in Him as He wept over Jerusalem. Certainly they had reason to think that He was one of the Prophets. Furthermore they said that He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes and Pharisees. There was magnetism about Him that drew the people to Him. They were amazed at His teaching –drawn by His compassion but He was allusive and that gave rise to conjecture about Him. They could not come to a conclusion about Him. They only knew that He was different. But Jesus moves away from this general question to ask,

ii. A Personal Question. Mark 8:29. Then Jesus looked at His disciples and asked “what about you. **“Who do you say that I am?”** Peter answered, **“You are the Christ.”** He did not elaborate on it. He did not need to. **To say that Jesus was the Christ was to say that He was the promised Messiah. The long awaited Messiah.** What other people’s opinion about Him

was not that crucial. It was what Peter and the disciple's personally believed about him that was vital. He was the Christ. There were some who might say if He was just another teacher, His ideas might be interesting. If He was just another prophet we might take time to hear what He has to say. But let us not get too excited about Him after all prophets are a dime dozen. There have been many prophets before Him and there would be many prophets after Him. He probably has a place in the purposes of God, but another will soon replace him. But Peter the spokesman for the other disciples comes up with a startling reply, "You are the Christ." Matthew records a fuller reply. "You are the Christ the Son of the Living God." That changed their whole perception as to who Jesus was. This is vital for who Jesus is determines the effectiveness and the power of what He did on the Cross. If He were just a prophet His death would simply be martyrdom. The scripture says however, that Jesus was manifested to destroy the "works of the devil." The Bible says that Jesus "died for our sins and rose again for our justification." And the Apostle John writes, "that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." And in his gospel he says "that these things were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His name." John 20:31. The question this is "Who do you say Jesus is?" It is important to know who He is. If He is a mere man then there is no hope of salvation. But if He is God's anointed Savior He gives a living hope to all mankind. Who do you say He is? Is your Savior? You see it is important to our salvation to settle on who Jesus is. He is author of our salvation and finisher of our salvation. Having settled this issue, Jesus proceeds to talk about that which is, to Peter,

b. An Unacceptable Revelation. Mark 8:31. Peter was willing to accept that which God had revealed to him about who Jesus was. But Jesus proceeded to reveal what His purpose was in coming to this earth. Note what He says in verses 31 – 32. Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter Him took him aside and rebuked Him. **Note significantly**, that Jesus did not hide the truth of the cross. **Matthew tells us that Jesus spoke plainly.** He wanted His followers to understand why He came to the world. It is one thing revel and to rejoice in the truth that He was the Christ, but it is an entirely different thing to accept Him as the suffering crucified Jesus. Peter was **willing to accept Jesus as the Christ but not as the crucified Christ. He was willing to accept Christ as long it fit into his own mindset. He had a neatly packed idea of a comfortable Christ**, not a disturbing Christ. He accepted a conquering Christ but not a crucified one. Jesus as Christ was acceptable as long as he was the anointed one of God who would in power and majesty free the people of Israel from the yoke of Roman bondage. He wanted the Christ of Glory not of shameful humiliation. His vision was of Christ the victor not Christ the victim hanging helplessly on a Roman cross. The crucified Christ was not acceptable to him. He wanted the Messiah without the cross. Peter could not put together the idea of Jesus as Messiah and Jesus the suffering servant hanging on a cross. How could the world accept a Messiah who was nailed to a cross?

There is a movement in the contemporary church remove symbols of the cross in the church. One has said that Rick

Warren wrote that we should take out the cross from the platform and put in its place the band instruments. What a travesty!!! While we do not worship the symbol, we need to be constantly reminded of the truth that gave rise to the symbol. The Jesus on a cross was an unacceptable revelation to Peter, and he rebuked Jesus for bringing it up. But Jesus said “Get behind me Satan; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Taking up the cross and being crucified with Christ is the principle established in Christian discipleship. Notice secondly,

2. THE PROPOSAL EXPLAINED IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. Mark 8:34.

Jesus said in verse 34. If anyone wants to follow me or if anyone wants to be my disciple, “he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Jesus explains what it means to be His disciple. This proposal is open to anyone. It is

a. A Universal Proposal. Mark 8:34 “If anyone would come after me....” The word **anyone** may not appear to be **significant**. It is crucial to becoming a disciple. It is constant note of the gospel. No one is excluded from the grace of God. The gospel is not for a select few. The power and the blessings of the cross are not limited to a predestined minority. The gospel invitation is to all who would follow Jesus. You can trace this all through the New Testament. Jesus said “If **anyone** is thirsty let him come...” John 7:37. Paul said “**everyone** who calls upon the name of The Lord will be saved.” And he reinforces this in 1st letter to Timothy the 2nd chapter and verse 4. “**God will have all men to be saved**, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” This proposal is for all. “**For God so**

loved the world that He gave His one and only Son..” It is a universal proposal. It is also,

b. A Conditional Proposal. Mark 8:34. Immediately this little word “IF” is inserted into a conversation, what follows are conditions. “If anyone would come after me, he must take up his cross and follow me.” There are two aspects to these conditions. First Jesus tells,

i. What we must Deny. Mark 8:34. Jesus is clear on it. **If you want to be my disciple you must deny yourself.**

Discipleship is a path to be chosen. One has pointed out that there is twofold emphasis. **Deny self – take up the cross-follow Christ. Deny and take up** are actions of definite decision. Following Jesus is a lifelong commitment. I am aware that denying oneself is contrary to what we want to do. It is also contrary to the modern mindset society which is encouraging men and women to self-realization and to “do their own thing”. Paul makes clear that the man Jesus who calls us to deny ourselves, denied Himself. “He made Himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant.” Then Paul adds, “your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 2:7,5. This does not mean to say that we deny life, that we retreat into cave in order to follow Christ. What it does mean is an adjustment of priorities. We surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ so that He becomes center of our lives and self is crucified with Him. We place our selves under a new authority. We do not serve our selves any longer but Him. A pastor asked a woman to teach a class in Sunday school. She was well qualified, not busy elsewhere, but declined saying, “I just don’t want to be tied down to anything.” Looking at her the pastor softly pointed out,

you know we serve a Master who was willing to be tied down to things. In fact He was willing to be nailed to a cross.”

The word “deny” as it is usually translated, means disown, to abdicate, to put self off the throne of our lives entirely. It means a fundamental re-adjustment in life where God is placed at the center of our souls to the denial of self. To deny self is more than to make room for God. It is to hand the keys of our lives over to God. “If anyone would come after me let him deny himself.” Jesus not only tells us what we must deny but,

ii. What We Must Do - Mark 8:34. “Take up your Cross and follow me.” A cross does not mean some problem in life such as a nagging wife or an abusive husband. The man in Roman times who took up his cross was not going out to have his life redirected; he was going out to have it ended. (Tozer). There are those across our world who this very day are being tortured or martyred for the cause of Christ. In our dangerous world there is always a possibility of this happening. But that is the ultimate sacrifice and I hope that most will probably never have to face it. Carrying the cross involves the attitude or spirit that is willing to follow Christ no matter what the price. It means to follow Him without question or **reservation. Tozer was right when he “wrote that “no one gives at all until he has given all.”** This is the proposal presented to us if we want to be Christ’s followers. Finally note,

3. THE PRIORITIES EXPRESSED IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP Mark 8:35-

Jesus said “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

V.36. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet

forfeit his soul or what can a man give in exchange for his soul.” Now Jesus in challenging us to follow Him introduces, **a. A Startling Principle. Mark 8:35.** “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” This is a surprising thought and a startling principle. On the surface this kind of life style is not designed to attract those who are self-centered. Most of us are inclined to save our lives. Furthermore how can you save your life by losing it. Note that Jesus makes the motivation for this commitment clear. The whole challenge of the message of this chapter is for us to follow Jesus without reservation. It has to do with what kind of relationship we are going to have with Him. Jesus said you come after me - deny yourselves – take up his cross and follow me. Jesus is at the center of the challenge. Jesus viewed a person’s life in terms of eternity. We are not just going to live in time. There is an eternity ahead of us. When we lose our lives for Jesus then we save it in eternity. The losing of our lives is not done senselessly and without reason, but selflessly out of love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. We save our lives when lose our lives for Him and the sake of the gospel. What He is saying is that when we give ourselves in the supreme sacrifice for Him we gain. This was a real issue in that day. Paul was beheaded for Christ. Peter condemned to be crucified for Christ requested that he crucified upside down. He did not feel worthy to be crucified in the same way Jesus was. Stephen was stoned to death. The early Christians were thrown to the lions. Harmon Schmelzenbach the pioneer for Nazarene missions in Swaziland, Africa, though warned of the danger – entered the disease infected bushveld of Swaziland to preach the gospel and there he contracted black water fever and died a relatively young man. They lost their

lives, but in doing so saved them. The likelihood of martyrdom for us may seem somewhat remote. What might possibly happen to us is not the main issue. The real issue is “are we so *surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ that we are willing for the extremes.* Are we willing to lose our lives in Him and for Him. **God gave us our lives to spend and to be spent for him and in the service of others, not to keep for ourselves.** If we are willing to spend and be spent for God and in His service the rewards are eternal. If we lose our lives for His sake we will save them. This is a startling principle that Jesus presents to us.

As the darkness of our age deepens, and the hostility to Christians increases, this issue must be settled if we are to be true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. But in order to bring this truth into clearer focus, Jesus confronts His disciples with,

b. A Searching Question. Mark 8:36-37. “What good is it for man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul.” The answer to this question is there is no value in gaining the whole world that is temporary and fleeting, and losing your soul that is immortal and lasting. The world will pass away but not your soul. There is nothing in this world that you can give for your soul. We came into the world with nothing and we will take nothing with us. Jesus is emphasizing the incalculable worth of our souls. In our day many Christians rush to make more money than they need, and as I have observed them down through the years, there are some common attitudes that emerge as they get caught up in materialism. First their love for God begins to fade. They become too busy to worship God and they are rarely found in the house of God. They pull out of serving God. They seem to be utterly unaware that they are losing their

souls. You see materialism is like a narcotic that dulls our spiritual senses. He makes poor bargain who sells his soul for the world. I have told this story but I tell it again. One of my favorite missionaries is David Livingstone. As his body was being brought back to London to be buried in Westminster Abbey, the crowds lined the streets along the route. One man was obviously moved by the whole ceremony. Someone standing next to him asked, "You knew the missionary well?" "Yes," was the reply, "David and I were boyhood friends. Later we went to Africa together. David went for Africa's souls and I went for Africa's gold. And today I realize I concentrated on the wrong world" "What does it profit man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" "What world are you concentrating on this morning?"

Conclusion

Are you a genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you taken up your Cross to follow Him?" The pastor of an underground Chinese church told a group of Southern Baptists about the pre-cautions they must take to avoid government persecution. Each time their church reaches ten to fifteen members, they split to reduce attention. They also use alternate meeting places for the same reason. Because phone lines are monitored, members meet with a volunteer on a downtown street to find out where the church will meet next. One such volunteer was discovered by the government, he was arrested, beaten, and put in prison. He lost his job, house and medical benefits. Another man stepped in and took his place and he too suffered the same fate. One of the visitors said, "I suppose you have difficulty filling that job." The Chinese Pastor replied, "No. We have a waiting list." They were authentic followers of

the Lord Jesus Christ. **If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but ever who loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.**”

