

Be My disciple

Part 1

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[00:00:01] The third chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, read from verse 13 to 15. Mark 3 verse 13 to 15.

And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would. And they came unto him, and he appointed twelve, and that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons. We turn to Luke 14.

Luke 14 from verse 25. Luke 14 verse 25 to 33. And there went out, and there went a great multitude [00:01:19] with him. And he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and accounteth the cost, whether he hath sufficient to finish it? Lest, perhaps, after he hath laid foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that beheld, behold, it begin to mock him, saying, This man begone to build, and was not able to finish. [00:02:13] Or what king going to make war against another king? Sitteth not down first, and consulteth, whether he is able, with ten thousand to meet him, that cometh against him, with twenty thousand, or else, while the others is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and desired conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he is of you, that forsaken not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple. Now we turn to St. John's Gospel, the 8th chapter.

The 8th chapter of St. John's Gospel, we read from verse 30 to 31. [00:03:07] St. John 8, verse 30.

As he spoke these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And then are ye my disciples indeed. We turn to chapter 13.

Chapter 13, we read verses 34 and 35.

A new commandment I gave unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

[00:04:10] And finally, we read a verse in chapter 15.

Chapter 15 of John, and we read verse 8.

In this is my Father glorified, that he bear much fruit, so shall he be my disciple.

It is my purpose to speak from the scriptures that we have read together this afternoon. And at the outset I would say that as I have read them and meditated upon them personally, they have been a fresh challenge to my own heart.

[00:05:03] And in asking you to consider them this afternoon, I feel that they will be a challenge to all of us again here this afternoon, both the speaker and those who are here.

And that is why the word of God is given to us, is it not, that it might challenge our hearts and that by the Lord's help we might bring our lives into conformity with our Lord's will as revealed in the scriptures. You will have noticed that all the verses that we read, the five passages, all dealt with the subject of discipleship.

[00:06:04] And I would take as my theme the last six words that we read from John 15 verse 8. The last six words, the Lord's own words to his disciples, so, so shall ye be my disciples.

The root meaning of the word disciple is a learner, one who sits at the feet of a master to learn from him, and then goes out with thoughtful endeavour to put into practice in his own life that which he has seen in the master.

[00:07:01] The Pharisees said that they were Moses' disciples, they boasted in it, and then there were the disciples of John the Baptist.

But to us who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ is granted this supreme privilege to be his disciples, not to be the disciples of Moses or Paul or Apollos or some great and noble man, but to be disciples of our blessed Lord and Saviour, the Lord of glory. And he speaks to us from his word, so shall ye be my disciples. What a privilege.

[00:08:05] The verses that we have read together suggest to me a mountain climb, the climbing of a mountain, a spiritual mountain of course.

The Lord calls us to climb the mountain path with him, to leave the level of the plain and the lower slopes and to go up with him into the mountain, the mountain, if you like, of his will, the mountain of discipleship, to be his mountaineers here in this world.

We gather here this afternoon as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice in the possession of eternal life through faith in him. We know that our sins are forgiven and that there is reserved in heaven for us an eternal incorruptible inheritance. [00:09:24] And all that is very true and blessed. I wouldn't minimize it for a moment, but we find in the Gospels that our Lord Jesus Christ calls us not only to believe on him, but also to be his disciples. For the brief time of our life here, to be learners at his feet first of all, and then to go out with endeavour to put into practice that which we have learned from him, to be his disciples, to be his mountaineers in this world. [00:10:11] And so to glorify him.

And there are rich rewards for those who climb the mountain of discipleship, who are willing to be, as the Lord says, my disciples.

[00:11:02] Rich rewards, joy and blessing, indescribable in human language, to be his disciples here in this world.

Let no one say, oh I'm too old to be mountaineering. Do you remember what is written of Caleb, that warrior for God in the book of Joshua?

Joshua 14 verse 12. That stalwart man of faith and courage, of whom three times it is written that he wholly followed the Lord his God.

Eighty-five years of age, and when the land was being divided, he went to Joshua and he said, give me this mountain. He wanted a mountain to climb and overcome for the Lord. [00:12:07] He didn't want an easy lot. He wanted to be one of God's mountaineers. Give me this mountain. Oh what a man. What an example for us to follow.

In the five scriptures that we read, we have five points on our mountain climb, if you like. The five points on the road of discipleship.

They all begin with the letter P, not that there's any value in alliteration, but it may help us to remember them. First of all, we read in the third chapter of Mark, verse 13. [00:13:05] If you would like to turn to it again. Mark 3, verse 13. This is our first acquaintance with the mountain.

And we read there, and he, the Lord Jesus, goeth up into a mountain and calleth unto him whom he would, and they came unto him.

Here we have in this verse, and the following verse, the purpose, verse 14. And he ordained twelve that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out demons. [00:14:04] Here we have our first P, the privilege of being the Lord's disciples. The privilege of being his disciples. It's a two-fold privilege. First of all, to be with him, and then to go forth to preach and to serve him. The Lord Jesus went up into a mountain, and he called unto him whom he would. Well, that meant, of course, that they had to go up to the mountain where he was, probably on the lower slopes of the mountain. But they went up to him. He called them, and they came. There was the Lord's call, and the response of the disciples. And so it must be with ourselves. [00:15:05] The Lord called us to him for salvation, and through his grace and mercy we came to him. And now he calls us to be his disciples, to come to him, to tread the mountain path with him. To go up away from the mists of this wilderness world of which we sang, to go up into the mountain with him, with the Lord, in communion with him, to walk the path of his will for us. Well, I said it's a two-fold privilege. First of all, to be with him. Oh, how privileged those twelve men were to be with the Lord. They accompanied him as he journeyed from village to village. [00:16:08] They journeyed with him. Day after day they heard his gracious words. They saw his miracles, those acts of power and grace. They were with him continually. Oh, how privileged they were to be with the Lord. And that is the first privilege of discipleship, to be with the Lord, in communion with him. To know the joy and the blessedness and the reward of journeying through life every day with the Lord, consciously in his company, in communion with him, realizing his presence and learning from him, learning of the grace of his heart. [00:17:03] So close to him as to feel the warmth of his love and the power of his presence with us continually. That is the first privilege of discipleship. And then the second part is to go forth to serve him. He called them to be with him and then he sent them forth to preach and to heal and to cast out demons. I know, of course, that this applies here to the twelve disciples, but in principle it applies to all of us whom the Lord calls to learn of him and to be his disciples in this world. It is as though the Lord says, in effect, first myself, then my errands. We must never reverse the order given to us here.

[00:18:11] First we must be in the Lord's presence, in communion with him, to learn of his grace, the compassion of his heart, his love and tender mercy. And then we can go forth equipped by that communion to run his errands in this world, to carry his messages of love and mercy to those who are in need. He sent them forth to preach. Not that every disciple is called to preach publicly, but the scripture says that the Lord gives to every man his work.

[00:19:02] Some he may call and does call, as he did Peter, to feed and shepherd his flock, to care for the lambs and the sheep, to be his under-shepherds. But, you know, to be a shepherd you must have the mind of a shepherd. You must have the hands of a shepherd. And above all, we must have the heart of a shepherd. And only in the Lord's presence, that great, that good, that gracious shepherd, can those things be learned. We must be in his presence first, and then we can go forth equipped to serve him. Well, that is my first point, the privilege of being the Lord's disciples here in this world. [00:20:07] And now let us go a little further up the mountain. Luke 14, verse 25. There's some very stiff climbing to be done in these verses.

Of course, we all understand that this afternoon we can do no more than plot the course and see something of what is involved in this mountain climb with the Lord.

The actual climbing has to be worked out individually in our everyday lives. But here in Luke 14, we have the second point that I would make, the preeminence of the Lord's claim upon us as his disciples. [00:21:13] The preeminence of the Lord's claim on us as his disciples. And you'll notice in these verses, three times the Lord uses those words, he cannot be my disciple unless the conditions are fulfilled. He cannot be my disciple. And three times we have that expression used. Verse 26. If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. [00:22:01] The conditions may seem to be severe, but the joy and the blessing and the reward is more than proportionate to the severity of the conditions.

Father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, those are the closest of human relationships. But the Lord's claim must come first before the closest natural ties.

And the Lord uses the word hate. What does it mean? Oh, I think it means that our love and loyalty to the Lord is so intense that normal human affection and loyalties are cold in comparison. [00:23:03] The Lord's must come first, his claim. And then, lower down in the chapter, verse 27.

And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. What does it mean to bear the cross? It's not, of course, the cross of Christ. Only he could bear that with its shame and intensity of suffering. We often sing, alone he bore the cross, alone its grief sustained. His was the shame and loss, and he the victory gained. The mighty work was all his own, though we shall share his glorious throne. [00:24:01] We cannot bear part of the cross with the Lord. What does it mean to bear the cross? It's not the bearing either of a physical weakness or infirmity, as some people have lightly suggested. No, I believe our cross is the reproach of Christ, the shame and the reproach that the confession of his name brings in this world. And that we are called to take up daily and to gladly bear, to count it a privilege to be identified with our Lord Jesus in his shame and rejection. The one whom the world cast out and still refuses. And whosoever the Lord says does not take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple. [00:25:04] And then lastly, in verse 33, so likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Peter, James and John exemplified this truth.

It's written of them that when the Lord called, they forsook all and followed him. They were true disciples in that respect. And the Lord calls us to be willing to forsake all for him. It doesn't mean necessarily that we have to give up everything for him, literally. Although many have done that and gone out to Guyana and Colombia and Peru and Egypt and many other places. [00:26:07] Leaving all the comforts of their life in this land, giving up all for the Lord. But whether we stay here or go to the distant parts of the world, the Lord calls us to hold all that he has given us as his trustees or his stewards. And to be willing to lay everything down when he calls us to do so. Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciples. And just to sum up these verses, the Lord calls us to count the cost of building the tower, of being his disciples. [00:27:01] And then to gladly lay down all for him. Lay down all in consecration at his holy blessed feet, who died for us, who gave himself for us.

So there are two points or stages on the mountain climb.

First of all, the privilege of discipleship. And then the preeminence of the Lord's claim upon us. And then thirdly, in the Gospel of John, chapter 8. Verse 31.

[00:28:01] Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And this is the path of discipleship.

The continuance, the continuing path of discipleship with the Lord. Those who climb mountains tell us that there comes a time on the mountain when they are discouraged, they meet with difficulties. And the conditions call for courage and faith to go on, to go on in spite of the difficulties that present themselves. And the same is true in the mountain of discipleship. There may come a time when we feel disheartened, discouraged, and difficulties loom up in our path. [00:29:09] But the Lord says, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.

And we know that those who go on these mountain expeditions, sometimes some of the party, they turn back. They make their way down to the plain. The path is too difficult for them. And that was so when the Lord was here. There came a time, we read at the end of the sixth chapter of John, verse 66, that many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. For they were not true disciples, they were only nominal disciples. The Lord says, if ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. [00:30:08] In very truth, the path of discipleship, the true disciple, he never gives up.

Like his Lord, from whom he has learned, he goes on to the end. You know, it's written of the Lord Jesus that having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end. The end for him was the cross, with its shame and suffering.

But the end for the disciple, for the Lord's disciple, is in complete contrast. The end for us is the glory of God, the Lord's coming, that glad moment when we shall see him face to face and look into those eyes of love and prostrate ourselves at his holy feet. [00:31:12] That is the end for the disciple. And the true disciple, he goes on to the end. He continues in the Lord's word. What does it mean to continue in the Lord's word? Well, first of all, the hearing of his word, to continue to hear his word day after day. The ear of the true disciple is bent to receive direction and guidance from the Lord himself.

The hearing of his word.

And then the feeding upon his word. In this respect, Mary of Bethany, she was a true disciple.

[00:32:03] We read of her that she sat at the Lord's feet and heard his word. She drank in those gracious words of life from his holy lips. And the true disciple today continues to feed upon the Lord's word. I feel that is what we need very much in these days. To sit at the Lord's feet in quiet meditation upon his word. To hear those gracious accents and his direction for our pathway.

The feeding upon his word. And then thirdly, the doing of his word, the practice. The continuing to work out in our lives that which we have learned from him. As the apostle James writes, isn't it? [00:33:04] Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only. But the true disciple continues in the Lord's word.

He's careful to bring his whole life into conformity with the word of the Lord. Well, we've had three points. The privilege of discipleship. The preeminence of the Lord's claim upon us.

And then the path of the discipleship. Continuing in his word.

And then fourthly, in John 13.

Here we go further up the mountain.

We're getting very high now. [00:34:01] John 13, verse 34 and 35.

A new commandment I give unto you. Verse 34.

That ye love one another as I have loved you. That ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples. If ye have love one to another. All this is very high up on the mountain, isn't it? Here we can breathe the pure air of heaven. Love. Why? That is the very nature of God. And his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given to us. That love is to bubble up and flow over to those around us. [00:35:06] To all those that are the Lord's. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples. If ye have love one to another.

The spring of our love for one another is the Lord's love to us. The constraining power of his great love. In the epistle of John, it's 1 John 4.19. We read these words.

We love him because he first loved us.

And if you have a new translation, I think you'll find the word him is omitted. Of course the Lord is included. He comes first. But it goes wider still.

[00:36:02] Not only do we love the Lord because he first loved us. But we love one another for the same reason. We love all that are his. We love because he first loved us.

There is the constraining power of his great love who loved us and gave himself for us. That is the spring of our love one for another.

And then secondly, the character and the manner and the measure of this love. What is that to be? Well, the Lord tells us in that verse 34. That we love one another as I have loved you.

Our love one for another is to be after the same character and manner and measure as the Lord's love to us. [00:37:07] Oh, I know this is very high up on the mountain. But it's the Lord's words to us.

We take it from him.

We receive it from himself. As I have loved you.

Oh, he gave himself for us.

He laid down his life for us. And the scripture says we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Oh, doesn't it shame us?

As we read such words.

When we look at the poverty of our love in response to the Lord's love to us. Well, there it is.

[00:38:03] And then the result. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples. Oh, there will be a testimony to the world that we are his disciples. This is the proof.

There is the fourth P. The proof or the evidence of our discipleship. If you like, the badge of discipleship. A few years ago I walked into a man's factory in Camberwell. And I was ushered by his secretary into his office. And I sat down facing him at the desk. And I noticed that he was wearing a scripture union badge in the lapel of his coat. And I said to him, I didn't know that you were a Christian. And he said, I've served the devil long enough. And then he told me the story of his conversion. [00:39:03] I don't think he's here this afternoon, but he has been here to these Catford lectures, he told me. And that was just the clue that gave me. The badge was the clue that gave me the indication that in all probability he was a believer. But the scriptural badge of discipleship is our love one for another. And as the world outside sees the manifestation of the love of God flowing out from our hearts. They will know whose disciples we are.

There will be a testimony to the Lord. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another. And then lastly, will you come up with me to the summit of the mountain. [00:40:01] John 15 verse 8.

This is my last point. Here we have the peak of the mountain. We've had the privilege of the preeminence of the Lord's claim upon us. The path of discipleship. The proof or evidence that we are his disciples. And now the very mountain peak of his purposes for us as his disciples. Verse 8.

Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit.

So shall ye be my disciples.

Oh I think this is very wonderful. This chapter of course is all about fruit bearing. We read of fruit. More fruit. And in this verse much fruit for the Lord. [00:41:04] That is part of our privilege as being his disciples. To bring much fruit for him in our lives. But the Lord's thought rises higher still. Till he reaches the very peak or summit of his thought and purposes for us. And here it is in verse 8. Herein is my Father glorified.

Was not that always the supreme object of the Lord's life in this world? Every word he spoke. Every miracle he performed. Every step that he trod in this world was for his Father's glory. And at the end of his pathway he could say. I have glorified thee on the earth. [00:42:01] I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do. And to us once lost guilty sinners now saved by his grace.

The Lord grants to us this most precious privilege. The peak of his purposes for us.

That we in our turn can be his followers in this respect. By bringing in our turn glory to his God and Father. Oh what a privilege. That is the Lord's will for us. Herein is my Father glorified.

That ye bear much fruit.

So, so shall ye be my disciples.

Well there it is dear friends. It's the word of God. These verses are a challenge to my own heart and life. [00:43:02] But they are the Lord's words to us.

He calls us to go up into the mountain with him. To be his mountaineers in the little while that is left to us. As we wait for him to come. Oh may the Lord enable us. May he strengthen us and give us courage and faith. To be in very truth his disciples here in this world.