

Discipleship

Part 5

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[00:00:00] I think most of us know we've been speaking about the pathway of a disciple, and tonight we are finishing up these meetings with the address on the testimony of the disciples.

I've read these four passages because each of them stresses the Lord, referring to his disciples as my disciples, my disciples.

I think the Lord takes a great deal of pleasure in having people whom he can address or speak of in this way as his disciples.

Many teachers had their disciples, and they followed their teachers, but the Lord, I believe, rejoiced in the fact that he had persons who had followed his teaching, persons whom he [00:01:04] could refer to as his disciples, and they are marked by very distinctive features, and we want to consider them for a little this evening. First of all, those who really love him, those who in the time of his absence remember him in this wonderful act of the Lord's Supper, his disciples.

And then in John's Gospel, these three positive features of abiding in his word and expressing love to each other, and lastly, bearing fruit that the Father may be glorified.

Now the Lord connects this wonderful expression, my disciples, with all the persons mentioned in these sections.

[00:02:03] Now in Luke's Gospel, and I believe that Paul follows Luke when he gives his instruction in Corinthians as to the Lord's Supper, and that's why I've chosen from Luke this account. In both Matthew and Mark, the Lord says, my disciples also, but I've decided to read the portion from Luke because it so closely resembles what Paul says in his writings to the Corinthians. And this bearing upon us, because if we had only the record of the account in the Gospels, the record of the Lord giving the Supper, we might have said, well, this is only for the disciples. But thank God, when we come to the Apostle to the Gentiles, he receives the revelation from the Lord in glory, and that to a Gentile assembly, the particulars regarding the Lord's [00:03:08] Supper.

Now I think you will agree with me that in testimony, it's a wonderful thing for the disciples of the Lord, those who have imbibed his teaching, who have answered to it, to be gathered together with the Lord in the midst with a desire to remember him in view of his coming again.

Now the Lord didn't say gather together some of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and bring them all

together and we'll commemorate the Passover Supper with them. No, he said, I want my disciples.

And we can understand that the Lord loved them. John's Gospel tells us that he loved them through everything. They had been his constant companions in his public ministry. [00:04:04] Now he was going to leave them. But before he left them, he indicated to them how they could keep him in perpetual remembrance. And so he used the occasion of the Passover Supper to inaugurate another supper, the Lord's Supper.

And we're very thankful that after 2000 years, the disciples of the Lord are still remembering the Lord.

They're still answering to his desire and they're gathering together just in exactly the same way as they did at Jerusalem in a simple fashion to express their love to him. And so we are very thankful that we in our day in some measure can follow the directions given in the gospel and reach this point where in simplicity and in devotion to the Lord, [00:05:04] we remember him.

I believe the first thing that we see in Luke's gospel is the Lord directing or giving guidance.

He doesn't want them to make any mistakes. He doesn't want them to be led astray. He wants them to come to that particular point where he would be with them, where he would sit down with them and where he would indicate to them the reality of his death, which was approaching through the figure of the bread and the cup.

And I believe in our day, we too can receive this guidance from the Lord, guiding us away from everything that's spurious, guiding us away from everything that's empty, and bringing us to the place where we can meet with the Lord, whether it be with few or many, and [00:06:02] there realize the reality of his presence and the reality of his death as we break the bread and drink the cup together.

The Lord said, with desire, I have desire to eat this supper with you before I suffer.

The Lord was referring to the Passover supper.

Does not the Lord desire his disciples to be with him today?

Is not this a very definite indication of the testimony of a disciple today, that he turns aside from all that's evil and all that's of a spurious character to meet the Lord in simplicity and truth?

I think this is one of the outstanding marks of the testimony of a disciple, the privilege [00:07:01] of meeting the Lord.

I suppose in those early days, people would say, now, what do these Christians do?

Unfortunately, many evil stories circulated about the believers in the early days. The enemies of the truth circulated the most abominable stories about them, but if they inquired with genuine inquiry, they were bound to receive the answer that when the brethren in those days came together, they came together just to break a loaf and to drink from a cup. By that means, they commemorated the death of the Lord, they kept him in remembrance, and they did this in view of his return.

Those who knew this, or those who saw it, must have been very impressed by this because [00:08:02] there was nothing else to attract, no, the thoughts of the saints were directed to the Lord himself.

We find from Corinthians that the Lord's Supper certainly has a testimonial character. Ye announce the Lord's death until he come.

There was a testimony that there were people remembering the Lord in his death in view of his coming again.

I know there is a difference of opinion as to when this coming will be. Some think it's the rapture. Personally, I believe it to be the appearing. I'll tell you my reason why.

At the supper, you remember the Lord when he gave them the Passover cup. He said, I won't drink this anymore with you until I drink it anew with you in my Father's [00:09:01] kingdom or in the kingdom of God.

So at the setting up of the supper, at the Passover feast, what the Lord had in mind was his return to set up the kingdom.

I believe this is what Paul has in mind too when he says, we announce the Lord's death until he come.

I believe every time we break bread, dear brethren, we're indicating to the world around us that there's another man who's going to take charge. There's another man who's going to rule in this world, and he's the man who went out of this world by the cross, the one who died in such a shameful way.

But he's coming back, and he's going to take over the rules of government in this world and reign for the pleasure of God and for the blessing of all concerned. Oh, dear brethren, how privileged we are as his disciples to gather around him. [00:10:05] We've imbibed his truth.

We have appropriated it. It has governed our lives. We've learned to love the Lord, to respect him, to reverence him. And this coming together gives us the opportunity to express our devotion to him.

I'm sure any unbiased person coming along to the morning meeting as we speak of it and sitting by and listening to the hymns and listening to the prayers and listening to the scriptures being read would be bound to say there's only one person who really matters in this gathering because that's all we talk about. He's the only one we sing about. And so the Lord is prominent in the gathering of his disciples.

And if we only commemorated his death in the sense of failure, what a dismal thing it would [00:11:05] be. But we know that when we're thinking of him and his death, we're thinking of him and his triumph in all the glory and greatness of his victory.

And surely it becomes every disciple of the Lord to meet with the saints, to remember him in view of his coming again.

When we come to the beginning of Christianity, as we find it expressed in the second chapter of the

Acts, we find that those who believed, and there were many who believed, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship in the breaking of bread and prayers.

So there was a very definite testimony rendered by those early believers as to this wonderful [00:12:02] privilege of remembering the Lord in his death.

It was one of the features that was expressed by the believers in those early days. And as we come through the Acts of the Apostles, we come to a moment when Paul the apostle says he met a few believers and he says, we being assembled on the first day of the week to break bread.

Here we find a stated day, a stated time to come together and remember the Lord.

And the disciples of the Lord did this.

We don't believe in having mixed companies, unconverted people, converted people all meeting together, doing this act of remembering the Lord.

We believe it is exclusively for the disciples of the Lord, for the brethren of Christ, for [00:13:03] those who are converted, those who are saved, and no one who is unconverted ought to partake of the Lord's supper. It's for his own, and only his own can enter into the enjoyment of it.

When we come to 1 Corinthians 10, we are reminded of the obligations of this testimonial act, the table of the Lord, which cannot be separated from the remembering of the Lord. The table of the Lord surely emphasizes to us the responsibility of purity and separation from evil that is dishonoring to the Lord.

We cannot drink the Lord's cup and the cup of demons.

We cannot do this. It's impossible.

We must keep this table pure for the Lord.

It's the Lord's table.

[00:14:02] And so the responsibilities of remembering the Lord are so definitely stressed when we come to 1 Corinthians 10, the responsibilities of the fellowship. When we come to chapter 11, again the privileges stress, although Paul brings it in to correct disorder amongst the people of God and indicates he had nothing to praise them for in the way that they were holding this wonderful feast. And so he went on to speak about the way that Luke wrote in his gospel, the Lord in the night he was betrayed, taking the loaf and taking the cup and reminding his own that this was the way the Lord died for us. This was the way the Lord shed his blood for us. And the supper is such a joyous occasion as we meet together to remember him.

[00:15:03] I remember as a young lad reading about a certain philosopher, I've just forgotten his name at the moment, but he had incurred the wrath of the emperor and he was told that he had to die.

And his punishment was to drink a cup of hemlock, Socrates, that was his name. And I remember the picture well, and some painter had painted this picture and you see the philosopher with a cup of

hemlock in his hands, poisoned, and all around him are his disciples and they're all crying, overcome with grief. They're going to lose their teacher, they valued him so much and he's leaving their presence and they're going to be deprived of all his wisdom and all his teaching. So they're very upset.

And I have often thought, what a difference from that little company in the upper room [00:16:03] at Jerusalem, another teacher and what a teacher and a few disciples, they too are a bit sorrowful that the teacher is leaving them, but what wonderful words he's giving to them. He's telling them what to do.

And he says, you'll be able to keep me in perpetual remembrance. I don't know if there are any establishments in Great Britain that have a remembrance meeting for Socrates or any other philosopher.

Thank God for the companies of disciples who meet together to remember the teacher, the son of God.

Every Lord's Day morning, thousands of believers, thousands of disciples who meet together to remember the Lord.

And although the disciples were very sorry that the Lord was leaving them, it wasn't long before their hearts were filled with joy. [00:17:02] They met him again. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord, saw him as one out of death, having conquered death with all the glorious victory that he had won and their hearts were glad. Dear brethren, haven't our hearts been glad ever since?

Isn't it the most wonderful meeting of all to gather around the Lord and have our hearts taken up with him as we remember him?

We don't come together to get help for the pilgrim pathway when we come to the supper. We don't come together to even pray on behalf of others, although that's very important. We don't come together to learn something more of the Bible when we come to the supper. We come to remember him, to call him to mind, and also to be led by him into the worship [00:18:01] of his God and Father.

How wonderful, wonderful privilege. And so the disciples of the Lord are not like the disciples of Socrates or any other philosopher. The disciples of the Lord are glad when they gather around the Lord, even when they are occupied with his wonderful death.

So I make no apology in saying that every Christian ought to be remembering the Lord.

Everyone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be remembering him in his death in view of his coming again.

It is indisputable from the word of God that in the early days those who believed were baptized, and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers.

[00:19:01] It seemed to be the understood thing. It seemed to be the thing that was normal, and Christians readily responded and did these things.

How strange it is, with all the culture and teaching of divine things in our country for so long, well over a thousand years, well nigh two thousand years, sometimes a very long period elapses before a converted person remembers the Lord.

I believe we should be instructed in this, that the Christians, the believers, when they accepted Christ as Savior, they seemed to respond immediately in baptism, in remembering the Lord, and living here in testimony for the Lord Jesus.

So we are very thankful for this first indication of testimony amongst the Lord's disciples, my disciples, they meet together to remember him.

[00:20:05] Now we turn to John's Gospel, chapter 8.

John's Gospel, chapter 8, and the Lord said certain things, and when he said them, many of the Jews believed on him.

Now if it stopped there, we might have said, well that's a very wonderful thing, that so many people have believed on him.

Unfortunately, as we read down in this chapter, we find that that belief wasn't a very genuine kind of belief, it wasn't a very deep form of belief, it didn't last very long. And so the Lord goes on to say to those who believed on him, if ye continue in my word, [00:21:05] then are ye my disciples indeed, or you are genuinely my disciples.

This is the force of this word, indeed. You are really, genuinely my disciples if you abide or continue in my word.

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Now if I understand this passage correct, there are three things, there is the word of Christ, there is the truth, and there is freedom.

When the Lord says my word, I believe he is emphasizing the authority of the word.

After all, if it was some man's word that was spoken, then, well, we could afford to [00:22:02] ignore it.

But when it's Christ's word, my word, we can't possibly ignore that word.

It's the authority of the person who is speaking.

And this gospel, as we know, portrays the Lord Jesus Christ in all his greatness and glory as the Son of God.

The eternal word become flesh so that God might be declared, and that person's word cannot be lightly taken up and lightly laid down.

His word, my word, oh dear brethren, what a challenge this is to every heart when it hears the word of Christ, my word.

Nobody can possibly ignore the import of that word.

When he says the truth, I believe it's the character of his word, the truth. [00:23:03] There was no element of error in it. It wasn't the kind of word that would lead people astray. It was the truth.

It could be believed implicitly without any question whatsoever. It was the truth as it governed persons.

Now I suppose the way in which the Lord spoke was calculated to meet a variety of need amongst people, but in whatever way the word came and to whoever it came, then that word was truth, and it was calculated to produce in the persons who heard it and obeyed it freedom, and this is a very wonderful thing. Now of course the Jews, they weren't very pleased about this word, which indicates that their belief wasn't of a very deep character, and they began to object to the Lord saying that they were ever in bondage.

[00:24:03] And the Lord says anybody who practices sin is a bond slave of sin, so they can't possibly claim freedom, and they knew perfectly well that they knew what it was to be under the bondage of sin.

But the Lord said, my word abiding in you, my word abiding in you, that word being truth shall set you free, and this will indicate that you're really my disciples. And so I believe in the testimony of a disciple, there is the evidence in his life that he has accepted the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, bearing upon his life and conscience, and that word is truth to him, and that word applied to his life has produced freedom. Unfortunately there are millions of people today who are held in bondage to ideologies, [00:25:07] they are held in bondage to sin in various shapes and forms, they are held in bondage to influences of various kinds, unfortunately they don't know. If they knew, perhaps they would desire to get free. But it doesn't matter what form of bondage there is, the word of Christ applied to that bondage can produce freedom.

And thank God we live tonight in a land where there's a measure of freedom. I'm afraid it's being eroded away piece by piece, there isn't the same amount of freedom in this land as there was 30, 40, 50 years ago.

It may be that we shall live to see the freedom of Christians affected, I don't know, I [00:26:01] hope not, but it's quite possible.

But we know this very well, that the freedom that we enjoy was obtained through men and women who refused to be in bondage to one kind of influence and another, either from the authorities or from religious persecution.

And they fought for freedom in a right way, in a proper way, and they obtained that freedom. And it's here for us to enjoy.

But when we come to our lives individually, it's then we perhaps find that we are in bondage to one kind of influence and another, and it's only as we apply the word of Christ in all its authority and power to our lives, and accept that word as truth, then and then only do we become the genuine disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[00:27:08] The Lord says, his words, then are ye my disciples indeed.

The Lord doesn't want disciples who turn away because the word is too difficult. I think we mentioned this before.

In chapter 6, the Lord spoke some words, and the person says, this is a hard saying. Who can bear it?

And they went back, and from that time they walked no more with him. And they were called disciples.

I'm sure the Lord could never say of them, they are truly my disciples. They went back instead of continuing in his word.

And dear brethren, if the word of Christ comes to us, and we find it cuts across our own [00:28:05] natural desires, if we feel its challenge, let us accept its challenge because that word will set us on the right road for spiritual blessing and right testimony for the Lord. If we are not acting as we ought to act as a true disciple of the Lord, if we are not fulfilling our obligations as we ought to be, then let us hear the word of Christ coming to us, my word.

If ye continue in my word, it's his word.

If we obey that word, if we accept it as truth for our souls, then we'll be truly his disciples. His disciples, genuinely.

And then we shall be free. It's a wonderful thing to be free.

I can think back over 40 years of believing in our Lord Jesus Christ. [00:29:04] I have to confess that many of those years were wasted because I wasn't free. Many of those years I wasted by being in bondage to one thing and another. We're very thankful that in some measure we can testify to the Lord's goodness in restoring one's soul and leading one along so that one can be free, free from those hindering influences and free to be for the Lord, to be for him in this world.

In some measure, one would trust to be truly a disciple. And so I believe this is the way that freedom comes, true freedom, freedom from the dominion of sin and influence and any other kind of thing you like to think of by abiding, dwelling in the word of the Lord.

[00:30:01] And now in chapter 13.

A new commandment I give unto you 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. If we take a good concordance and look it up and see how many times we find love to each other is commanded, is exhorted, is enjoined in the New Testament, we'll be quite astounded. I'm sure we will.

There are so many references to this great feature of Christian discipleship. [00:31:03] Love to one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.

Truly a testimony indeed if we have love for each other.

Well when we view Christendom tonight, Church of Rome, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, Baptist Church, Brethren with their multiple divisions, many other companies of Christians with their multiple divisions, and very often sad to say hostility and distance and reserve, can we say that this has been fulfilled?

When we look at the nation of Israel and think of all its folly and departure because it ignored the Ten Commandments, what a terrible condition it got into. Can we say that one of the reasons for the division amongst the people of God, one of [00:32:07] the divisions for declension in our day is the ignoring of this command of the Lord, love one another.

I know sometimes of course things come in amongst the people of God that keep us at arm's length and when you're at arm's length from your brother you can't love him, you've got to get near to him. The Lord indicated this by example in the beginning of this chapter when he divested himself of his clothes and he bowed down and he washed the feet of his disciples. He couldn't get any nearer to them than that. He couldn't wash their feet at arm's length, that wouldn't have been an effective feet washing.

He got down on his knees and he washed their feet and I believe this is the way that we love each other, care for each other, respect each other, have confidence in each other. [00:33:03] By this shall all men know that you're disciples of mine, you're my disciples if you have love for each other. A new commandment.

It's appalling sometimes when we find that so many Christians think that Christian things are optional.

We can do them or we can neglect to do them. We can take them up, we can lay them down. Now I don't find this in the New Testament teaching. I find that there are New Testament commandments and we shouldn't think that this is the only one, a new commandment.

I give unto you that ye love one another. The New Testament is full of commandments, New Testament commandments and if the law was binding upon the children of Israel then the New Testament commandments are binding [00:34:01] upon the people of God and if we ignore them then we do so to our loss, to our shame and to our spiritual declension.

No doubt at all that this is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, a new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another.

I'm sure you've heard the call so often, there isn't much love amongst the Christians, there isn't much love amongst the brethren. The Bible indicates to us that the onus for loving is upon ourselves. We are to love, individually we are obligated to love, not to receive love but to show love and I'm sure this is the best way of propagating love in the Christian company, not waiting till someone comes and loves us but taking the initiative and in the power of the Holy [00:35:03] Spirit loving and there's nothing so rewarding as loving and the Lord is the great example as I have loved you, what a challenge, as I have loved you.

The perfect love of the Lord and that love is to be the example for us.

There was nothing lovable about us and yet the Lord loved us in spite of all that we were and are, he still loves us and this is the standard for those who are really the disciples of the Lord, we are to love one another. Of course by my awkwardness I may make it very difficult for people to love me, still they are responsible to love me even though I am awkward but as I am subject to the Holy Spirit and the truth my awkwardness ought to disappear so that I can be lovable and [00:36:06] it's very refreshing to read of brothers and sisters who are described in this way in the New Testament, a beloved brother, what a wonderful commendation for any brother to have or a beloved sister, what a wonderful commendation to have such spiritual qualities that it draws out the love of the saints towards him or her, wonderful blessing, wonderful commendation and this ought to be a normal thing amongst the people of God, a new commandment I give unto you that you love one another.

Now the New Testament gives us a great deal of help as to the kind of love that we are to put into effect. Romans 12 I think it tells us that our love is to be without dissimulation, [00:37:04] it hasn't to be a kind of love that is looking for something in return, an ulterior sort of love that is looking for some benefit, no it's to be a pure love, this is what James says, to love one another fervently from a pure heart, pure kind of love and it's to be a brotherly love, Peter stresses this too, adding to our love brotherly love and that's a wonderful kind of love because we belong to the same family and so we find many many quotations in the New Testament that indicate the character of the love that we are to show to each other.

You remember when the Lord Jesus was in the garden and his enemies came to take him, Judas the betrayer, he went forward to him and he covered the Lord with kisses, the same kind [00:38:05] of word that is used in Luke 15 when the father covered the returning son with kisses, but Judas was a hypocrite, there was no reality in his love, he didn't love the Lord, it was only a means to point the Lord out to his enemies, that's a hypocritical kind of love and it should have no place amongst the people of God, love is to be without dissimulation. Let me say a word again about this commandment, Paul at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians he says, if a man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things that I have written are the commandments of the Lord. Now the Lord spoke about many things in the first letter to the Corinthians, many challenging things, many [00:39:05] things that are most important amongst the people of God and every one of them is a commandment of the Lord, every one of them and they're all binding upon the people of God individually and collectively and they ought not to be ignored, they ought to be obeyed. And if you take a good concordance, again I recommend this, and look up commandment and see how often this word is used in the New Testament, bearing upon our conduct individually and collectively we'll see something of its import. And so the Lord says, a new commandment I give unto you 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. [00:40:04] I think it was some man who in sarcasm said how these Christians love each other and he was referring to their disputes and their quarrels and their strife and hostility. Oh that men could look on and say yes, how these Christians love each other. And thank God we do love each other. There is a great deal of practical, genuine love circulating amongst the people of God and only eternity will reveal how much love has been shown towards each other for the Lord's glory. Now lastly for a few moments in chapter 15. If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you. [00:41:01] Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples. So a genuine disciple of the Lord is one who is marked by fruit bearing. Now I don't think it's very difficult to get the bearing of this figure. If we buy a nice plum tree and we plant it in the garden and we look

after it carefully, we are looking forward to the time when eventually its job of work will be done and it produces nice sweet juicy plums. And of course after having gone to all the trouble we want to partake of the fruit. It gives us a great deal of pleasure to enjoy those plums. It's the net result, it's the end result of all the work that we have put in to this particular tree and we are thankful [00:42:07] to partake of its fruit. Now I think this is exactly the same in the people of God. God has gone to a great deal of trouble, great deal of concern. He sent his Son and his Son died for us. He sent the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit indwells in us. And he's given us his word, he's instructed us, we've become disciples of Christ, he has taught us the right things and if all this is taken advantage of there ought to be fruit. I know in connection with the figure here it's the vine, the figure of a vine that's employed. And this vine is to bring forth fruit and the Father is to be glorified. That's very wonderful. But it shall be known that we are disciples of the Lord if we have fruit in our lives. If [00:43:05] there is something for the pleasure of the Father, something for the pleasure of God. Now again there are many things mentioned in the New Testament that are described as fruit. The fruit of righteousness, fruit unto holiness, the peaceable fruits of righteousness we read about in Hebrews. And there are many others, look them up. But they are features of fruit, things that are pleasurable to God. Now I think it's very wonderful to end up on this note that the disciples of the Lord not only please their teacher but they also please their Father God. That's the most wonderful thing. That not only do they please the one who has taught them but they please this wonderful God whom we know as Father [00:44:01] our lives can produce something for his pleasure. And just as I close I want to speak about an incident connected with a dear brother who had a vine and it wasn't growing very well and he wondered what he could do about it. So he wrote to a certain bureau who dealt with this kind of thing and he got back a very simple reply which astounded him. He says, the reply said, pour in ten gallons of water. Which he duly did. To his surprise the vine started to flourish. And thinking he had done enough and perhaps it required something else he wrote back again and asked for further instructions. And again he got the reply, give it another ten gallons of water. It wasn't very long before the vine was in a flourishing condition and eventually produced some luscious fruit. Why do I say [00:45:06] that? Listen to the Lord's words. If he abide in me and my words abide in you, then water is the well known figure of the word of God. So often we find this. And so if we as disciples are well watered by the word of the teacher and it governs our lives then we're going to bear fruit and we'll be known as his disciples. May the Lord help us to answer in some measure to these things for his name's sake.