

The path of discipleship

Part 1

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Duration	00:26:43
Online version	https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/fw038/the-path-of-discipleship

Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] Luke chapter 9 and verse 41 And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you? Bring thy son hither.

Verse 45 But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them that they perceived it not, and they feared to ask him of that saying. Verse 46 Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. Verse 49 Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us.

Verse 53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.

[00:01:03] Verse 55 He know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

Verse 56 And it came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes of holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first, to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. [00:02:03] You might say, dear brethren, that I am bringing you down from the top of the mountain, and yet this is exactly what Scripture does. At the beginning of this chapter, we are engaged with the glory of Christ on the mountain, transfigured before his disciples.

The Father's voice heard from heaven, wonderful scene.

And then we descend from that into an area where the disciples and others are exposed.

I think we all feel that the pathway of discipleship is extremely testing.

And the more we desire to follow Christ, it would appear, the more trials seem to come across our way. I believe this is of God, because we've got to learn that Christ is everything, even in the pathway of discipleship. [00:03:10] In the realm of glory, it goes without saying that he is supreme. In the pathway of practical Christianity, he's still supreme, because we cannot live the pathway of discipleship without Christ. He said this to his own, Without me, you can do nothing.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the disciple is often referred to by what he is not.

That's perhaps a peculiar way to express it, but I think it's true. In the Gospel by John, the disciple is described by what he is.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, when ye have love for one another.

In chapter 8, those who are set free by the Son and by the truth are the disciples of Christ. [00:04:07] In chapter 15, those who bear fruit are the disciples of Christ.

But in this Gospel, and in Mark and in Matthew, we find that disciples have to give up and to avoid certain things.

And dear brethren, for a few moments, I want to draw your attention to a few mistakes that occur in the connection with these people that we read of in this section. I don't think we're wasting our time. We'll find ourselves, if we look closely, in these verses.

In the first section, there was a man who had a great need. He brought his son to the disciples, and they were unable to deal with the matter in hand. In other words, they were powerless. They couldn't deal with it. [00:05:02] How often we feel this, and why is it?

Perhaps if we desire power to be a sensation in this world, this is one very good reason why power is withheld. If we desire to be prominent in the exercise of power, then you can be sure we'll never have it. But so very often we desire to have power for a good reason. We desire to help. We desire to do something for people who are in need. And yet we feel the power isn't there.

Perhaps the real reason is that Christ hasn't been sufficiently in the matter with us. We haven't been thinking of him sufficiently, his glory. We haven't been seeking his presence to derive power and guidance and wisdom from himself.

Because it's obvious, when the Lord takes over, the matter is resolved. [00:06:04] Oh, how earnestly we would desire to have more power in our Christian lives and testimony, so that the glory belongs to Christ and not to ourselves.

And this, of course, comes out in a later section, but we'll deal with the other one first. The Lord said something to them, and they didn't understand. And oh, how true this is in our spiritual experience, how often we just don't understand.

We haven't sufficient discernment to understand what's in keeping with the Lord personally, and what's in keeping with his testimony.

We ought to know, they ought to have known. He had said this to them often, that he would die, that he would be rejected, and he would rise after three days. He had said this often, but they didn't understand.

[00:07:05] I suppose we can say that at this time they hadn't the Holy Spirit, and that would be true. And yet it's no excuse, because he had often said these things to them, and they ought to have understood from the Old Testament scriptures and from his own words that it was necessary for

Christ to die.

But perhaps they were thinking of themselves.

Perhaps they enjoyed his company so much that it was unthinkable that he should die. Perhaps they thought about the power that they had seen exerted by him. It was unthinkable that he should allow himself to be overcome by others. But they didn't understand that the way he was taking was the way of divine wisdom, and according to a divine plan.

And perhaps this is one reason why we fail to understand the things of God, [00:08:02] because our thinking doesn't fit into the divine thinking. We haven't adjusted our minds to the way God thinks, to his plan, to his scheme, and we make so little progress in the understanding of the divine mind. And then, what a solemn lesson.

In the presence of these words, dear brethren, that he was going on to suffer, to be rejected and to die, there were those who could talk amongst themselves who was to be chief. What a solemn thing.

Wanting to be preeminent in the presence of the suffering Christ. And the Lord had to teach them this lesson, that they were to be humble, to be like a little child.

Now, this is one of the things we will certainly learn if we desire to be a disciple. Because a disciple simply means a person who is taught. [00:09:02] And if he's taught by the Master, this is one thing that he will be taught very, very effectively, that it's right for a disciple to be humble, and to make much of Christ and not of himself. I know as I say these things, that it's the easiest thing in the world to try and project your own image onto the eyes of the brethren, and not Christ. And you may be even saying the very best things about Christ, and yet at the same time seeking to draw attention to yourself. This is the flesh. We all have it with us. We know its workings. But the Lord said, a disciple must be humble.

And oh dear brethren, if we are in the company of Christ, we shall be humble.

Mr. Darby's books are well worth reading. My brother says, by the by, I'm saying this by the by too, but it's a good by the by, because his writings are full of deep instruction as to the person of Christ, [00:10:06] as to the pathway of the Christian in this world, and many other things. In the synopsis, in the notes on Leviticus, he refers to the meal offering, or the oblation, and among other things he says, who could be proud in company with the Lord Jesus? Isn't that a test dear brethren? Are we sufficiently in his company? Are we sufficiently marked by him, that we are humble?

It's not like Uriah Heep, who said he was a humble man, and was a rogue. It's a question of taking on the character of Christ, and being like him. And this is what the Lord was teaching his own. I know, and I'm sure you do, a difficult lesson to learn. Because the Old Testament says, the Egyptian was an imposing man.

[00:11:03] And the man after the flesh always seeks to be imposing.

And then this solemn lesson, the disciples come to the Lord and they said, we found a man casting out devils in thy name.

We forbade him, because he followeth not with us.

They were divinely chosen by the Lord to be with him. Well, they didn't choose him. He said so in the Gospel by John. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

And he chose them, and they were with him. I suppose that they were rightly proud of such a position, to be chosen to be with the Lord. And then they came across persons who were casting out devils, effectively in the name of the Lord. And they opposed them, and I suppose they said to them, you ought not to do this. You don't follow with us. You're not with us. You're not in the company. [00:12:04] And the Lord had to teach them this very important lesson, that we all need to be taught. That those who are effectively standing up and defending the name of Christ, have to be thought affectionately of, and not to be spoken disrespectfully of. Not to be spoken disrespectfully of.

I suppose sectarianism is a root that's in the human heart.

That is, thinking that one particular little company possesses all the features that are true and honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we must guard against this very zealously. Now, I want to guard against any idea that Wallace has given up the truth, and thinking of a great conglomeration of believers together without any reference to the truth, [00:13:01] I would say that's far from my mind. In the broken days in which we live, there is a pathway that must be governed by the truth of God. If that pathway is plain to us, we ought to follow it. But that does not mean that we do not respect and love those who defend the name of Christ, who perhaps do not see eye to eye with us in walking in that path. If they do not desire to walk in it, they are responsible to God. And we are responsible to God to follow the pathway that we believe to be true in Scripture. But let us respect those who love the name of Christ. They are not against Christ, they are for Christ. And they do it according to the light that they have. There are enemies in this world who hate the name of Christ. Let us reserve our hostility, our spiritual hostility, for persons of this kind. [00:14:01] And this is what the Lord taught the disciples, that if there were those who loved his name, and who defended his name, and worked in his name, they were worthy of respect.

Then he goes on to speak about, rather he goes on to a village of the Samaritans. And they did not want him, because he was going on to Jerusalem.

And then the disciples, they thought that they would act in a right spirit. The Samaritans, they were not for the Lord, they were hostile against him. And so they thought, well, we spoke against the other ones, and we were wrong. Surely we will be right this time, if we ask fire to be sent down from heaven, as Elias did. And they were wrong again. Because in the Gospel by Luke, the Lord is the vessel of grace. And desires earnestly the blessing of even those who are against him. [00:15:01] And the disciples had to learn this, that they had to watch their spirits. They didn't know the kind of people they were. As being in the company of the vessel of grace, they ought to be like him. And desire earnestly the blessing and salvation of those who are even hostile to Christ himself. There was certainly no excuse for the Samaritans. They were entirely governed by sectarianism, in its worst possible form. Hostile to the center, having their own form of worship, they wouldn't receive anyone who had his face in an opposite direction. And Christ, the Son of God, was refused on this basis.

And here is another lesson that the disciple must learn, to watch carefully his spirit. Mr. Darby said, and rightly said, that divine principles in the hands of an unspiritual man [00:16:02] is like a sword in the hands of a drunken man. And how true this is.

What damage has been caused by wrong spirits, by hard, harsh, and speaking that is not of Christ, and yet all supposed to be in the name of Christ himself.

And so the Lord says, watch your spirits. Be careful about your spirits. Make sure that what you do is in accord with the one who himself was the vessel of grace. Oh, what a rebuke to these men.

In the company of one who showed kindness and love at every point, and yet here they were, they hadn't learned that lesson, they hadn't followed the Master, and they desired to be cruel, they desired to be on the line of judgment. He said to them, you know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, [00:17:02] but to save them, and they went to another village. I believe, dear brethren, that as we find ourselves in circumstances like these, the measure in which we react in this way would indicate our lack of being in the company of Christ. But if we show his spirit, if we show the features that are like him, this will indicate really how much Christ means to us. This will indicate how much we have appropriated him when we react as he reacted in the spirit of meekness and kindness and gentleness, yet with truth, this will indicate that we have been appropriating him when we react in the same way. And then, finally, these classes of people who came to the Lord and desired to be in the pathway of discipleship, and yet how they were found wanting. [00:18:02] Here is one who says, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

What a statement to make. I'm sure we would all hesitate before we make a statement like that, to say out that we would, yes, we would follow the Lord wherever he leads us. We might desire to do this.

I believe it would be foolhardy to make a statement like this unless we said, if the Lord leads us, and if the Lord is with us, we would be prepared to do such and such a thing. And this man, of course, was exposed when the Lord said, Foxes of holes, birds of the air of nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. Here was the Lord saying to him, by inference, now look, if you're going to follow me, it will mean you'll have nothing here because I've got nothing here. And if you're prepared for that pathway, all right, you can follow me. [00:19:01] And then the other man, he says, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

Well, there cannot be any firsts if we are disciples, because the Lord must be first.

And dear brethren, don't think that disciples or the pathway of discipleship is only for a few. Our brother has already emphasized, if any man, or if all, it's to us all, each one of us, we're all called upon to be disciples. And there can be no first in our lives, first our career, or first this, or first the next thing, whatever it might be, it must be the Lord first. And when he comes first, you can be sure that you'll get help and support in the pathway of discipleship.

If it's a legitimate thing to do, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

We would all say, well, that man had a very good reason for going and doing this. [00:20:06] Dear brethren, there's a time coming when all our lives are going to be judged.

We're all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. And our whole life will come under review, and it will be judged in righteousness. Not according to what we call legitimate, and that word is often used as an excuse to avoid the responsibilities of the Christian pathway. And when our lives are under review, the Lord will determine what was right and what was wrong in our lives.

And he'll determine it by the way we have lived it in relation to himself and the claims of God. And we might think now in time, well, this must be attended to. It's legitimate to attend to. The Lord understands. But it may be that by doing this, we are overlooking the claim that his love makes upon us. [00:21:07] And remember, his love led him to give up his all, everything he had. And this is the claim that he makes upon us.

And I would say humbly, dear brethren, that I don't know a great deal about it. And that's why I hesitate to say very much to you. But I do know this, that anyone who desires to put Christ first and to live for Christ will never regret it. That the experience of living for Christ, however feeble that experience may be, is well worthwhile. And he amply recompenses us in a spiritual way for any little sacrifice that is done for him.

But never let us say, there are certain things in my life that come first. And if there's any time left over, Christ can have it. Because that's so very often, although we might not use these words, the way our lives speak. [00:22:05] Then the other one says, Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

And Jesus said unto him, no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. And again the Lord is saying to this man, there are things that must come first. I must have the pre-emptives.

We all say amen when we're reading Colossians, that in everything Christ must have the first place. And that wonderful list of glories that belong to him in that chapter, again we say yes, how right it is. He must have the first place.

In the pathway of discipleship, he must also have the first place. And dear brethren, Christ is a test for every one of us.

[00:23:02] We rejoice in the blessings he has brought to us, but oh what a test he is.

We must never test our Christian life by our own standard.

The Christian life must be tested by Christ.

The act of the covenant was a test wherever it went.

When it was in its normal setting, the glory was there.

God was there.

It was the act of his strength. It was the act of the Lord of all the earth. When it met the waters of Jordan, they had to go back. When it went round the walls of Jericho, they had to come down. When it went into Dagon's temple, Dagon had to bow. When unholy hands were placed upon it, they had to go.

The act was a test wherever it went.

[00:24:01] And Christ is a test to us wherever we go.

We used to hear a long time ago amongst the saints that wherever we go, we carry our brethren with us. This term was used because fellowship was stressed and the obligations of fellowship meant that if we went in a place that was dishonoring to the Lord, we took our brethren with us and we dishonored the fellowship. We don't hear these things so much as we used to. Perhaps we ought to hear them more. But let us think perhaps a little higher that wherever we go, we take Christ with us. In testimony, I mean.

Certain places he can't go.

I'm always reminded of a story an old brother told me and it's worth repeating at this moment. My old boss came in one morning and he asked me how I was keeping. I told him, fine.

I asked him how he was and he said, fine. He says he had been praying to the Lord and he asked the Lord to be with him. [00:25:02] And then suddenly he says the Lord spoke to me and he says, why don't you come with me? And he says, I was rebuked by the Lord because I realized the Lord might not want to go where I want to go. But he says, if I go where the Lord is and where he takes me, he says, I won't come to any harm. And isn't this true, dear brethren? In testimony, we are called upon to represent Christ wherever we are.

It doesn't matter where we are. We are Christians. We have his name upon us. We carry him with us and we ought to be true to him. And so may the Lord help us to see that though the pathway of discipleship is one of great blessing and favor, it's a tremendous test to us. And that test is not our idea of what a Christian should be, but what Christ is. He is the test. He is the standard. And he'll help us.

Never let us turn back, as the Lord says at the end of this chapter, because there are difficulties. [00:26:05] There have always been difficulties. From Pentecost right up to the moment, difficulties have always been with the saints of God. And we read the accounts of those who in faith overcame difficulties and lived lives of blessing and testimony for others because they were true to Christ. Now this is our day.

This is our generation. And the Lord is calling upon us, young and old, that we might be disciples of his with positive features and also by refusing other features. May it be so. For his name's sake.