

Discipleship

Part 1

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Speaker | Michael Johnson |
| Date | 07.12.2005 |
| Duration | 00:45:07 |
| Online version | https://www.audioteaching.org/en/sermons/mjo003/discipleship |

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

[00:00:01] I want to isolate some particular facets of discipleship and to speak to you very directly and simply on three things. Before itemizing them, may I say that discipleship, I think it was said in the reading, whether it emerged very clearly or not on Saturday is another matter, but discipleship is simply a matter of learning by following. One way or another in the scriptures that we've considered, it should have emerged, but just to state it plainly, discipleship is simply a matter of learning by following. The word disciple strangely enough isn't too akin to our word discipline in English and certainly in the [00:01:02] original. It derives from a verb which means to learn. Now when you think of learning, you must see the thing perfectly demonstrated in another person. And I firstly want to speak about discipleship exhibited in all its brilliance and splendor in the Son of God here in this world. And then I want to speak about discipleship seen in a man of like passions. And lastly, to turn the keen edge of the word of God upon you and me by way of challenge, discipleship in the very day in which we live. Some years ago when I listened to our brother F.A. Hughes, that he made a statement which has lived with me. I may not have his words exactly, but I certainly have got the sense of it, and this is what he said. He said, God will never [00:02:04] reproduce anything in you and me except we apprehend it firstly and perfectly in the Son of God. And when we see it perfectly exhibited in the Son of God, then it will be the delight of the Holy Spirit of God to reproduce the same kind of features that were seen in him perfectly in the saints of God down here in this world. That was the reason I read to you Isaiah chapter 50. Fragmentary remark in the Bible reading on Saturday, unfortunately not developed. I felt it could have been developed with good advantage, but time passed by. A brother referred to one of the words that we read in Isaiah chapter 50, verse 4. The end of the verse. He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned every day that went by. The Son [00:03:10] of God received from his Father here in this world a word that delineated the path of his pleasure down here in this world. And a brother made a comment to the effect that the word to hear as the learned, the word the learned is exactly the same word which is found previously in Isaiah as the word the disciple. We've got good scriptural warrant for saying that the features of discipleship in all their brilliance and splendor were seen in the Son of God down here in this world. Now just briefly alluding but not dwelling at this point on Luke 15. However you read Luke 15 and certainly if you read the verses that we covered in relation to the verses [00:04:02] that go before, there are at least two threads which emerge as plain as a die from the verses that we read. Firstly the thread of devotion, commitment, whatever you like to call it, devotion, commitment, total commitment to the Lord himself. And secondly equally clearly the thread of sacrifice, a preparedness to sacrifice. Now in the verses that we read in Isaiah chapter 50, can I direct your attention to a statement in verse 7? The Lord Jesus said, for the Lord God will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded, therefore have I set my face like a flint. If you looked at the Lord Jesus here in this world, you wouldn't have had to look twice to

discover what [00:05:02] the bent of his life was here in this world. It was a paramount desire to please another. It's very challenging sometimes to say to yourself, I just wonder what people see when they look at you and me. Is there a very clear course that we pursue through this world or is it a bit of a blurred picture, not really sure what the dominant feature of life is? It wasn't like that with the Lord. When they looked at the Lord here in this world, one glance was sufficient to make it clear that he lived for the pleasure of another. His devotion is epitomized in the words, therefore have I set my face as a flint. And no matter what it was that met him in that path through this world, whether his family or his friends or his disciples or suffering and shame, characteristically the [00:06:01] path of the Son of God through this world was one of utter devotion to the will of his Father. But just as clearly there was a total preparedness to sacrifice. Can I direct your attention to verse 6? I gave my back to the smiters and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting. It's equally clear in those words that the Lord Jesus was prepared to stop at nothing, cost what it might to live in this world for the glory and the pleasure of his Father. That's why I read to you those words in John chapter 6. If I might take the liberty of using the new translation reading, they get the sense over better. The Lord said, as the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father, even he that eateth me [00:07:03] shall live on account of me. As the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father. Can I occupy your hearts for a few moments in taking up the thread of devotion that marked the Lord Jesus down here in this world? Now I'm not sure of this, you've got to judge this yourself, but in Hebrews 10 there is a statement made which couldn't possibly be made of any one of you and me.

It seems to me it's absolutely unique, but Hebrews 10 you find these words, says, when he cometh into the world he saith, I come to do thy will, O God. Now that's at a point when there's no natural communication between anyone else. Couldn't possibly be said of anyone else. [00:08:03] If those were the first words that were spoken in this world, maybe they predate the words that we'll look at in a moment in Luke 3. But at the very point of entrance into this world, and whether you like it or not, it's a world which largely has been dominated and to this very moment is dominated by men who pursue their own wills. There was one found who said, I come to do thy will. He was utterly devoted to the will of another. Now the 30 years of silence of the Lord's life are passed over very briefly. They're passed over in very few words. But words of immense fullness, think of the few words that sum up those 30 years of hidden perfect service in this world. The words uttered when he was about 12 years of age, wist ye not that I must [00:09:06] be about my father's business. I found recently in a literal translation of scripture that it could almost be said, did ye not know that I should be utterly in my father's things. Must have cost the Lord to say something like that. No one so observed the right response to his parents than the Lord Jesus. But when it was the paramount will of his father in this world, he said, wist ye not that I must be about my father's business. Few words, but how weighty and how characteristically of life that was lived in obscurity. What had been said at the point of entrance was maintained without any wavering or diminution in this world. He said, wist ye not that I must be about my father's business. The words that we read in John chapter 6 were not [00:10:06] set in an easy setting. If you were to read just a little lower down, you'd find that on that occasion some of his disciples, when they heard the challenging words that he spoke, they walked no more with him. And it was in that kind of setting that the Lord Jesus said, as the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father. Ever addressed to yourself, what's my reason for being here in this world? Might have difficulty framing an answer. Wasn't like that with the Son of God. He said, as the living Father has sent me and I live on account of the Father. I pass very quickly over, it's not that there's any shortage of occasions where the same kind of utter devotion to the will of his Father was seen here in this world, but we haven't time to do it. [00:11:03] But if I can take you quickly over to the end of the Lord's life, at the moment that he was about to enter into Gethsemane. A lot of the small phrases

of Scripture we pass over very quickly.

I believe, like the writer said, that every word of Scripture is of eternal weight. There's no padding in the Word of God. Luke 22 says of the occasion when the Lord Jesus went into the garden of Gethsemane for the last time, that he went in, our authorised version says, as he was wont. New translation says, according to his custom. Went into the garden of Gethsemane often. He went in according to his custom. But when he went in on the last occasion, he didn't go in as he'd gone before. He went in knowing that the people over whom he'd lavished so much love had refused [00:12:09] him. He went in knowing that very shortly the leadership of Israel was about to ally with the power of Rome with a view to crucifying him. But utter devotion to will of his Father gave Scripture to say, he went into the garden of Gethsemane, as was his custom. And in that garden, he said words like these. He said, Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not work my will, but thy will be done. I don't pretend to say very much about these words. I very often feel that when you read some of the comments that were made of that occasion, they are beyond the ability to any man, certainly beyond my ability to undertake any exposition. [00:13:03] How can you say anything about words like these? Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly. There never must have been a want of earnestness in the prayers of the Lord Jesus, but faced with those kind of circumstances, Scripture says, being in a conflict, he prayed more earnestly. But such was his utter devotion to the will of God that cost what it might, and who can describe what it was that cost him? That his sweat became, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground, and with the power of Israel about him, gathering darkness before him, Satan not far away, having experienced betrayal within the circle of those upon whom he had lavished so much favour, having experienced the rest of the disciples fleeing in the pressure of that moment. He says, [00:14:04] Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but my will, but thy will be done. There's no want, was there, of perfect devotion to the will of God in the Lord Jesus. If ever you want a filling out of the words, I have set my face as a flint, and cost what it might, the Gospels fill out the path of one who was utterly dominated from the moment in this world when he said, I come to do thy will, to the moment there he laid down his holy head in death, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. It was equally so in the matter of sacrifice, wasn't it, too. The Lord was prepared to stop at nothing, and to sacrifice all, if it meant carrying through the will of him that sent him. I think someone referred already to this [00:15:10] weekend to the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew chapter 12, when his mother and his brethren came to him, and they said, thy mother and thy brethren are without. And he looked round on those that were there, and he said, behold my mother and my sisters and my brethren, they that hear the word of God and do it. Must have cost the Lord a lot to say that, non-maintained, a right response to his parents, a right filling out of the relationships here in this world by the Son of God. But when it was a question of pursuing the will of God, he was prepared to sacrifice in his own family circle. Don't know who made the remark yesterday, but in the Bible reading, or maybe it was a table, [00:16:05] wasn't it, someone made a remark that the most testing place of all is in the home circle. In the circle of his very relationships, even where his own mother was involved, when it was a question of pursuing the will of God, the Lord Jesus was prepared to sacrifice all. And who can tell the feelings that went through his holy soul when he said, behold my mother and my brethren, they that do the will of God and hear it. I just pass on again right to the end of the path of the Lord Jesus. I'm thinking particularly of the words that were spoken by him right at the end of the 14th chapter of John's Gospel. These are the words, the Lord said, that the world might know that I love the Father and as the Father hath given me commandment, even so I do. When you think of words [00:17:08] that he had spoken earlier, John chapter 12, now is my soul troubled and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour, but for this cause came I unto this hour. Who could tell what it must have meant to the Lord of life and glory, to contemplate at the end of that path of utter devotion,

going into death. And death in all its power, there's an expression that's found in the book of Joshua. When the children of Israel were about to cross from the wilderness into the land, a parenthetical word says, at the time of harvest Jordan overflowed its banks and the Son of God met death in all its power. But such was his preparedness to sacrifice for the will of God that he would stop at nothing. [00:18:04] It wasn't just that utter devotion to the will of his father marked him, it was the fact that also he was prepared to sacrifice to the extent of laying down his life and not just laying down his life, but laying down his life under the death of the cross, laying down his life under the wrath of God. I'm not going to pursue that anymore, I leave it with you. Eternity will fill out the words that we've been considering this morning, but they're absolutely vital if we're to get any clear definition of what true discipleship here is in this world. We've got to take account of the Son of God. What the law of the meal offering says in Leviticus 7 is, it's to be taken and a [00:19:02] handful of it was to be put upon the altar and it was to be burned for the pleasure of God, the kind of thing that we've been going over this morning, infinitely rejoices the heart of God. Any savor of a life that was lived to his devotion, any savor of a life that was marked by that kind of sacrifice must be utterly pleasing to the heart of God himself. But handfuls were also taken for the benefit of the priests and they were to eat it in a holy place apart. John chapter 6 verse 57 says, even he that eateth me shall live on account of me. If we get deep down in our souls some apprehension of what discipleship was seen in the Son of God, then it will be the delight of God and the normal work of his spirit to reproduce the selfsame features of Christ here in this world. 2 Corinthians 3 18 is [00:20:06] on exactly the same plane. We all beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Can't help but think that the divine writer guided perfectly to pick his words. When he picked up the word for transformed, he picked up the word that we teach to our school children about the metamorphosis of the butterfly, how the earth-grubbing selfish caterpillar is transformed into the heavenly butterfly. And such is the way that it pleases God by simple heart occupation with Christ down here in this world, the true meal offering to reproduce the same kind of features in you and me. And that was why I read to you the words that are found in 2 Corinthians 5, 2 Corinthians 5 9. Paul's words, [00:21:10] wherefore we are ambitious, whether present or absent, that we might be well pleasing to him.

That's what the words means. Three times in the New Testament, the word ambition is used. It's translated differently. You can easily find it in a concordance. This is one of them. Paul says, wherefore also we are ambitious, that whether present or absent, we might be well pleasing unto him. The same kind of devotion, the same preparedness to sacrifice that was seen in the Son of God himself, was found in its measure in a man of like passions here in this world. Now, [00:22:08] I'm not pretending that we're Apostle Paul's or anything like that. It pleases God at times to raise up men of giant stature and men who have particular responsibilities laid upon them. Such was the Apostle Paul. But he also was a pattern saint. And it's Paul, not as a called Apostle, nor as an eminently gifted servant of the Lord that I want to refer to him, but rather one who was a pattern saint, one who says, be ye followers of me, even also as I am followers of Christ.

Again, just briefly referring to the same kind of thread that was seen in the life of the Lord Jesus here in this world, to what was seen in a man of like passions, Paul. Think of the words [00:23:05] that he spoke on the road to Damascus. He learned in the words that he heard from the Lord Jesus in the glory, something which had never been known before. It was later when the truth that he was given of God to make known to the church of God at large. But he learned when he asked the question, the blinding light having stopped him, when he asked the question, who art thou Lord? And he heard these words, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. He learned something which never had been known before. I wouldn't want for one moment to diminish the appreciation of every one of us about

how much the nation of Israel means to the heart of the Lord Jesus. If you can ever put your hands on the volume of Dennis' poems, read the last poem in the volume, Zion, and you get some sense [00:24:06] of what scripture is saying when it talks about Israel being the apple of the Lord's eye. But even that is transcended in the words of the Lord Jesus from the glory when he said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. So infinitely connected with those who are being persecuted by Paul on the Damascus road that what affected them affected him. And when Paul heard those words, he said, what wilt thou have me to do? The very same thread of devotion to the will of God here in this world that was seen perfectly in the Lord Jesus, his master, now seen in a man of like passions, Paul the apostle. I know him quickly in his words, particularly to what he says in Acts 20, passage of about 20 odd years had [00:25:06] gone by by the time that he speaks these words, but in Acts chapter 20, having gathered the Ephesus, the elders from Ephesus to Miletus, he says in verse 24 these words, he says, but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify of the grace of God. He evinces the same kind of utter devotion to the will of God that was seen in the Lord Jesus, didn't count his life dear to himself, his whole bent was to pursue that particular work that the Lord Jesus had given him here in this world, the same character of devotion coming to light. Turn again to Philippians [00:26:06] chapter 3 and you say you find the same man saying words like this, that I might know him, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and the power of his resurrection, utterly dominated by the Christ who'd made himself known on the Damascus road, utterly devoted to the will of God here in this world. Move on lastly right to the end of his path, 2 Corinthians 4, he writes to Timothy and he says, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, but they're preceded by these words, I am already being poured out, I am already being poured out. Quite often in [00:27:05] the Old Testament when the drink offering is spoken of, it's spoken right at the end, so striking for example that maybe one of the best examples of a unique drink offering was that which was poured out by David's friends. In 2 Samuel 23, if ever there's a scripture which pinpoints the importance of being near enough to the Lord to catch his voice, it's there. David kept in the hole by the Philistines, he breathed these words, he said, oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate, and three men heard his word, no question of command in it, and they broke through the rank of the Philistines and they got the water of the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate, and they brought it back to David, and he poured it out before the [00:28:02] Lord. Paul at the end of his life says, I am already being poured out, the same kind of devotion seen without wavering in the Son of God in all its perfection here in this world, is seen in its measure in his servant, who at the end of a life that characteristically was lived in devotion to him said, I am already being poured out. And the same character of preparedness to sacrifice also.

If I'd have read later at the end of Acts chapter 20 to you, I would have read these words. Chapter 20 of Acts verse 35, I have showed you all things how that so laboring he ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. [00:29:03] Just before those words he says, these hands have ministered to my necessities and to them that were with me. In some places, rather than taking that which he ought to have expected, the support of the saints for the work that he carried out, he was prepared to work to support himself. 2 Corinthians 12, he uses words like these, he says, I would rather love and be rather, I would rather spend and be spent, though the more abundantly I loved, the less I am loved. The same kind of sacrifice that was seen in the Son of God, was seen in Paul down here in this world. Preparedness to sacrifice, his place that it must have had at the beginning and preeminence in this world, having sat at the feet [00:30:03] of Gamaliel, a preparedness of sacrifice to serve the saints of God here in this world, a preparedness to sacrifice to the extent of laying down his life. We read the words, neither count I my life dear. 2 Corinthians 2, Timothy 4, the words that I've spoken to you already, just after

the words that we've considered. He says, the time of my release is at hand, about to lay down his life in the testimony of God here in this world. A man of like passions, the same threads of devotion to the will of God, the same preparedness to sacrifice here in this world that was seen in all its perfection in the Son of God, seen in a man of like passion. Where do we stand in relation to it all? I don't think that you can [00:31:04] possibly evade when you read the words in Luke chapter 14, the challenge that comes over with these words. And 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. Don't think that you can evade that in that the question of devotion, utter devotion to the Lord himself rises clearly out of it. The word hate is an extremely intense word. Our brother Gordon said from this very platform on Saturday morning, it's not an absolute word, it's a relative word. Usage of the word elsewhere in the New Testament carries very strongly with it. The idea of [00:32:01] renouncing the claims or the influence of one. I think we can say in the light of these words, renouncing the influence or the claims of one for the light, for the rights of another. We have a brother on Tyne's side who's a very gifted open-air gospel preacher. Quite often, maybe every time he stands up to preach, he makes a statement like this. He says, it costs you nothing to be a believer. It costs you nothing to get saved. It costs you nothing to get to heaven. It costs you everything to live for God here in this world. Where do we stand in relation to simple devotion to the Lord, simple devotion to the will of God through this world? Now I don't feel in any way able to raise these things with you. I can only say that reading words like these and pouring over [00:33:08] them before the Lord, it makes me feel really how far short of the divine standard my own life has gone. But there must be value in facing one another with the stirring challenge of Scripture, a preparedness to renounce the claims of another for the paramount claims of Christ himself. And he's altogether worthy of absolute devotion to him, even as he in this world demonstrated in every step absolute devotion to the will of his God. I want to bring it down to a very practical plane. Devotion to the will of God. I happen to have spent the past fortnight working in Edinburgh and I've taken opportunities to get round to the small gatherings there. It [00:34:07] seems it's a feature of the day in which we live that the numbers that are found at prayer meetings, numbers that are found at readings of the Scripture through the week, considerably lower than the numbers that we expect to find for the breaking of bread. Where does the question of utter devotion to the Lord come in all this? What kind of priorities have we got in our life? What kind of things demand our time and our talents when the Lord Jesus says, and face the keen edge of the word, if any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and besides all this his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Just [00:35:05] as clearly seen in the later words, the matter of utter sacrifice. Verse 32, verse 33 rather. So likewise, whosoever there be of you, he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. I suppose, to be honest, I direct these words mostly to those of you who are younger.

A lot of us here have had the best part of our lives behind us. About 20 years ago, after a particularly sweet breaking of bread, I came out of a meeting and found myself talking to a brother in his early eighties, who certainly in the days that I knew him was a tremendous help to the [00:36:03] gatherings, and making some comments on the words that had been occupying our attention and the sweet sense of the Lord's presence. He said to me, serve the Lord whilst you're a young man. He said, if I had my time again, I would have served the Lord with everything that I could command. I think a lot of us might say, if we had our lives again, we'd serve the Lord with all our commands. If we had second lives, what a different response it would be. We don't get second lives, we only have one life. And I direct my words particularly to those of you who are younger, who've got the whole of the best part of their lives in front of them. Discipleship demands utter devotion. Discipleship [00:37:02] demands an utter preparedness to sacrifice. When we talk about ambition and the man who said, therefore also we are ambitious, whether present or absent, that we might be well pleasing to him. What is your

ambition here in this world? It doesn't matter to me what setting you're in, whether you're at college or university pursuing your course, whether you haven't got a job, whether you're found in the normal run-of-the-mill trades, the demand of the day in which we live is for complete devotion and a preparedness to sacrifice here in this world. And it needs some pretty cool calculating work to be done. Our brother Cor Bruin, when he was outlining the introduction to the address, said about the 14th of Luke, the idea of resource was there. I'm sure [00:38:01] it is. I hope he would agree that very clearly there as well is the idea of sacrifice and the idea of doing some sober consideration. Face this, that in the path of discipleship it isn't a matter of maybe facing sometimes some pretty thorough searching, some heart-rending experiences in the path of suffering and sacrifice, because that's what the cross involves. It's an absolute necessity and it's the kind of thing that demands a weighing of things. I referred to in the Bible reading, someone told me later that the author of the words was Jim Elliot, the young man, was a young man in his mid-twenties who in the 1954 time was seized with a desire to carry the Word of God to the peoples who'd suffered so much under the ruthless dealing of Spain in its acquisition [00:39:06] years of its empire, determined to carry the gospel and he said the words, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose and in the light of it he was prepared to lay down his life. May not be that we are called to martyrdom, some saints of God are today called to martyrdom, but what we're all called to, what the call of discipleship here in this world is a preparedness to deny our own lives by utter devotion to the Lord Jesus and the will of God and a preparedness to sacrifice at all costs. Now my time's through, I don't want to say any more, I think it's worth making one comment about the spring of it all. What is the motive of true discipleship? It must be a simple affection for Christ, a simple affection for Christ. About three [00:40:11] or four weeks ago after a prayer meeting, a brother, dear little brother came over to me, he said, you know Michael, he said, he's in his seventies, he said when I was a young man I would have prayed all night, he said I have to be firm with myself to make sure I'm at the prayer meeting.

Affection for Christ can so easily diminish and where affection for Christ is wanting then the things that we've been talking about, the exhortations that we've been putting to one another will all fall down to the ground. We live in a day of declining numbers and not just [00:41:01] declining numbers, we have to say spiritual power is not what it was some years ago. I'm not very old, I haven't been long in the meetings, passage of 20 years even in my experience has seen a decline. Some of you here who are much older must see it much more markedly than I do. I may be wrong, I fancy at the end of the day the one thing above all other things that's contributed to this has been the leaving of first love, the waning of simple, thoroughgoing affection for Christ. The call of the day in which we live is devotion and sacrifice. God enable us to fasten our eyes upon the Son of God and get the outline of it in all its beauty and in all its perfection and then in some measure God will reproduce the same features here in this world. One last word and I close. [00:42:07] 1957 I listened to our late brother Rushton Jameson speaking on the first two verses of Romans 12. I beseech you brethren by the compassions of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice wholly acceptable to God which is your intelligent service.

I'd never heard anyone speak on it before and he made it as plain as a pipe staff that it's something which you do consciously. It isn't something that you do or maybe in very exceptional circumstances like those that we've been considering in Acts 9 with Paul done on the Damascus Road. Generally it's not something which is done at the time that you turn to the Lord. [00:43:04] And he said it's something which is done once and it's done consciously and when it's done God will take you up on it. I weighed his words and I came to the conclusion taking account of all that God had done for me in Christ. The only intelligent response to those kind of compassions was to hold all that I had and all that I am for his pleasure and service here in this world. Not that it's much, I don't have any great ideas. That if

held out in devotion and sacrifice to God here in this world it will be used. It's acceptable to God, it's wholly acceptable to God. It will be used for his glory, it'll be used for the strengthening and the support of the [00:44:04] saints and much more important it will perpetuate here in this world some faint echo of that which was perfectly seen for the pleasure of God and it will minister a savour of Christ to him. God grant that we face the challenge. It's very easy to sit in meetings. When you're surrounded by the brethren it's easy to give a cent. When you get out into the maelstrom of the world it's a different matter. But God give us the grace to weigh the things that we've listened to this weekend and to respond in our measure here in this world in the very same way in which the Son of God responded. Utter devotion to the will of his Father and a preparedness to sacrifice for his glory and praise until we see him face to face.