

Discipleship 101

Prayer

Who likes camping?

Camping has varying degrees doesn't it? Some sleep under tarps in the wilderness, some sleep in luxury campers and everything in between. All are okay and have their uses for fun and relaxation. But to embrace a full wilderness experience, you need to put aside the trappings of civilization and embrace the bush.

Today I want to open the Suggestions / Complaints box at a national park and read some of the contents...

- There are way to many bugs out here and leeches in the lake and spider webs. You need to bring in a pest control person and clean up your campground.
- A raccoon came into my campsite and stole some of my food? How can I get reimbursed for this?
- You should put in a Tim Horton's at the trail head so we can get a cup of coffee before we go hiking
- Your trails are difficult to walk up. You should not build trails that go up steep inclines. Can't you flatten down the slope a bit?
- I am very upset, I wanted to hike up to your upper lake, yet the trail ended and I had to climb over a whole bunch of nasty rocks and boulders before I could finish my hike. Do your job and make a path
- My friend said there are some great views at the top of the hiking area but its hard to get there. Can you please pave the trails for next year and maybe have carts to rent. Even better how about a chairlift?

Now when I go to a wilderness area, I personally have setup myself to expect the wilderness... Don't laugh here. It might sound funny but think about it for a second.

Did these people want to go and experience the wilderness, in all its splendor or were they really looking for something comfy and easy while deluding themselves into believing they were living the camping in the wilderness experience?

Based on the comments I read, do you think these individuals were really embracing the wilderness experience?

Did they really want to experience the wilderness or mold the wilderness into the existing pattern of their daily lives?

The Parallel

Just in case you haven't figured it out or rolled your eyes yet, I am using this example to illustrate what happens in the lives of many Christians...

We need to ask ourselves one very important question... Do we want to be a Christian on our own terms or on his?

Now in this sermon as in others before it, I ask the question: Do we want to be fans of Jesus Christ or disciples of Jesus Christ?

Here is something that is going to shock some people... You can attend church, you can give in the offering and profess Jesus in church and still not be a disciple of Christ...

Are we like the campers trying to conform the life to which Jesus has called us to one of comfort and convenience?

We are not saved by our works but by believing in Jesus... Do we believe in Jesus this morning?

Do you know what grieves my heart and so many men and women of God in leadership?

There are many people who consider them selves to be followers of Jesus but they are really only fans of Jesus. There are people who attend churches that are putting on a show by doing all the right things and saying all the correct phrases, but don't embrace that to which Jesus has called us?

Here is a small statistic for you... Did you know that the word disciple occurs 269 times in the New Testament and the term Christian appears only three? You see the terms are actually synonyms... Just like Child, dependent, kid and rug rat mean the same thing...

To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Christ.

Think about that for a minute... To be a Christian is to be a disciple...

Turn with me to
Matthew 16:24,25 HCSB

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it.

Matthew 10:38 HCSB

And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.

Luke 14:27-30 HCSB

*Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.
“For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and cannot finish it, all the onlookers will begin to make fun of him, saying, ‘This man started to build and wasn’t able to finish.’*

Can you see where a Christian is called to be a disciple of Christ?

What does Jesus mean when he says to take up the cross?

At the time when Jesus walked the earth the cross was a symbol of suffering.

Ever had things happen in your life that were really hard to deal with – even when you have turned to God for help?

Through the study of the scriptures, I have come to believe that Jesus meant something far more significant than just that. When he said “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” He knew the symbol of the cross was a symbol of pain and suffering, but it was primarily a symbol of death. Jesus was telling them that they needed to die to their own selfish plans, agendas and desires and turn their lives over to him as his children to do his will each and every day... Jesus is calling us to die to ourselves and be resurrected in spirit to an abundant life in him.

It is a salvation issue to believe in Jesus, but there is so much more in the life of a disciple of Christ than simply salvation. Jesus is not asking us to believe in his existence he is asking us to commit our whole lives to him.

Discipleship begs us to ask the questions:

- Is Jesus master of your life?
- Are you seeking his will?
- Have you put aside what you find comfortable and convenient for what he wants?

Friends, there is no greater joy in life than in trusting Jesus and following his will for your life.

Let’s look at a hard truth of the gospels in

Matthew 10:38 HCSB

And whoever doesn’t take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.

Who was Jesus talking to?

Here in Luke 14... Luke tells us that there were large groups of people following Jesus... There were not the people who didn't like Jesus or who were against him, no these were the ones who were actually listening to what he had to say...

These are people many of whom were fans of Jesus. Yet it was to them he turned and told what was required of his disciples. Not just Apostles here - Disciples...

Do you think it possible that when Jesus looked out at all those people he was concerned for them Do you think that he clarified the requirement of a Christian Disciple for their sake? It seems obvious that Jesus could see they were travelling with him on the journey and that that they were interested. Why the concern, He was drawing a large crowd?

Jesus saw an issue in these followers that we still see today. They were fans... not disciples. People mistake their interest in Jesus and their willingness to listen to what he had to say for discipleship. They considered themselves to be followers because they are going through the actions of following. These people are fans of Jesus not disciples of Jesus...

Now some of those people in the crowd would willingly follow Jesus as disciples. Yet as we see today there are some who would follow him only if the cost isn't too high or the requirements too rigorous.

Falling Away

How many people here have seen people turn to Jesus for help with their relationships or with their finance, or sickness but loose their faith when these problems are not immediately resolved?

God is sovereign and he may choose not to answer our prayers as we would like. This is a hard one to deal with... Some things we wont know until we see him face to face.

Yet I must ask, how many people here have seen other people seek prayer and counsel and then when the direction given requires them to change their way of doing something or make a sacrifice of some sort, they bail. These poor souls ask for help because they are stuck, but choose not to change to make the situation better. Then they get angry with God for what they perceive is his lack of help, when in truth it is their own rebellion, pride, stubbornness or disobedience to change that keeps them prisoner...

People have to choose... Choose faith in prayer and Godly direction or respond in fear and fall back to the same old way of doing things.

You know Einstein said something profound, which I think is most apropos here...

He said: "You can't solve problems with the same level of thinking that got you into the problem in the first place..."

I'd say God's ways are far above our ways... Let's bring his thinking to bear.

How many people have you seen when their own wisdom has run out; make the same mistakes in their lives over and over again.

It totally grieves me to watch...

Called to Obedience and Service

I'm with Joshua... (Joshua 24:15 NIV)

*But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then **choose for yourselves** this day **whom you will serve**, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*

Have you ever had your faith tested? Did you pass or fail? Did God's will come before what you wanted?

So some might ask does that mean I have to give up everything I am doing?

No, there is nothing wrong with hobbies, having a career, having goals and so on, but if these things or anything come between you and God, They are an idol.

If you think your commitment to Jesus wont be tested, I have sad news...

Here is the good news though. We may at times be weak and fail but Jesus is there to pick us up. A disciple doesn't have to keep on failing; they can ask the Lord for strength and not continue to fail. In short, people are literally empowered to choose.

Taking Scripture Literally without thorough study...

Now the first thing that a person struggling in this area will bring up almost invariably is Verse 26 NIV - which says:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."

So... before there is a stampede to my office with this scripture in hand and misunderstand about what Jesus is saying here, let me provide some context...

When we deeply exegete this passage and we examine the culture of the day, what is meant here is simply emphasis to prove a point. It is hyperbole or exaggeration. In speech when we say things like: "I am so hungry, I could eat a cow or He is as skinny as a toothpick or he is older than the hills." When we read "Hate" here and we look at how this phrasing was used in the Jewish culture we find that what it means is simple to love less. What Jesus was essentially saying is that nothing should come before our love for him.

Jesus is NOT saying to hate your family and yourself...

So... Why do I talk about this here? Humm... As disciples we need to read and study God's Word so we truly understand what he is telling us...

Although, it seems that for some people, just opening the bible and reading a verse is hard... Here is my advice: take up your cross...

- Is Jesus Lord of your life?
- Is Jesus Lord of your wallet?
- Is Jesus lord of your time?
- Are you reading your bible?
- Are you praying for guidance?

Friends, this is a heavy sermon. It speaks to us to examine our walk with Jesus as his disciples. What we have shown today is clear. Jesus our Lord and Master wants disciples not fans...

Pastor Rick Warren in his book "The Purpose Driven Life" asks the question: What is a disciple? I quote him here as he has given some great starting points...

He says a disciple:

- Is pleasing God every day, this is true Worship. They realize that they are planned for God's pleasure.
- • Is an active member of a local body of believers, which is Fellowship. They understand that they are formed for a family.
- • Is learning to be more Christ-like in their behavior every day, which is Discipleship. They realize they are created to become like Christ.
- • Is serving sacrificially within the local body of believers, which is Ministry. They know how they have been shaped for service and live it out continually.

- Is sharing God's love, forgiveness and hope with people who do not know Christ, which is Mission. They declare openly and confidently, "I was made for a mission."

Do we as disciples have a handbook?

God has given us instructions in his word...

We are told in 2 Timothy 3:16 that:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work

Notice the words: **Servant of God and equipped for every good work.**

I submit to you these thoughts from his word:

Luke 6:47-49 – See also Matthew 7:24

As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete

John 12:47

"If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day

Luke 11:27b - 28

... a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Closing thought...

- When you sing the song... All to Jesus I surrender do you mean it... Cause he IS listening...