

Marks of a Disciple

Luke 14:25-35 (New American Standard Bible)

Discipleship Tested

²⁵ Now large crowds were going along with Him, and He turned and said to them, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to Me and does not **hate** his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and even his own life, he **cannot be My disciple**. ²⁷ Whoever does **not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple**. ²⁸ For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who are watching it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build, and was not able to finish!’ ³¹ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to face the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² Otherwise, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and requests terms of peace. ³³ So then, **none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions**.

³⁴ “Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? ³⁵ It is useless either for the soil or the manure pile, so it is thrown out. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Introduction

In Jesus’ earthly ministry, people followed Him wherever He went. Sometimes thousands of people at a time. Remember one day He fed five thousand people with 5 loaves and 2 fish? Interestingly, Luke the Gospel writer, distinguished the crowds in three tiers of Jesus’ followers: apostles, disciples, and the people. Listen.

“And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as **apostles**” (Luke 6:13). “And then Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of **His disciples**, and a great multitude of **the people** from all Judea and Jerusalem, and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon” (Luke 6:17). Where do you see yourself among these three groups?

This morning, we will think about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Content

The Merriam-Webster defines disciple as: *one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another*. Pretty good. But let me tell you what the Bible says about disciple:

Disciples are the people of God who are taught and trained by Jesus to repeat, carry on, and proclaim what they have learned from their Master.

The word “disciple” or “disciples” appear 256 times in the Bible: twice in the Old Testament and 254 times in the New Testament. Out of 27 books in the New Testament, it appears only in the first five books: the Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. Gospel John takes up almost 1/3 of the occurrences (81 times).

In the Old Testament, two occurrences are found in the Book of Isaiah (8:16 and 50:4). In both occasions, the Hebrew word for disciples is ‘lah-mah-d (תַּלְמִיד).’ Its root carries the meaning of ‘to exercise, to learn, to combine, to be accustomed to, or to be trained’ (e.g., soldiers doing drills, **a bullock to the yoke**—BDB, p. 540). Interestingly, Jesus used the same word ‘yoke’ when He invites us to learn from Him. Remember Matthew 11:28-30? ²⁸ “Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ **Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** ³⁰ **For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.**”

I also looked up in the Bible to find out what it involved being a disciple of Jesus.

First, disciples are **called and chosen by their Master**. Not everyone who wants to follow the teacher automatically becomes a disciple. Sure, you can choose the teacher to follow. You even can request to be a disciple, but the final decision is always made by the Master. Disciples are ‘called and chosen.’ (Luke 6:13).

Next, once you are chosen as a disciple, you **stay with your Master**. 24/7. You live together. You eat together. You sleep together. Wherever the Master leads you, you go with Him. Here are some examples from the Bible. Jesus took His disciples through the storm (Matthew 8:23). They went to dinner (Matthew 9:10). They were hungry together (Matthew 12:1—the disciples picked the heads of the grain to eat. Matthew 21:8—Jesus was hungry too). They walked many a mile together. They attended a wedding feast too (John 2:2). They marched into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1). They cleansed the Temple together (Matthew 21:12). On the night before Jesus was crucified, they had the Last Supper with Him. They were in the Garden of Gethsemane when their Master prayed. They saw Him arrested. They witnessed His crucifixion. They also witnessed the Risen Christ with their own eyes. Disciples stay together with the Master.

Thirdly, disciples are **taught by their Master**. They learn from the Master in words and examples. Jesus taught them many lessons about the Kingdom of God, both in public (Matthew 5) and in private. They learned how to pray, that is, the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:1). They learned that the Lord doesn’t like to waste (Jesus commanded them to collect the leftover bread and fish—John 6:12). They learned about the true meaning of giving **more** offerings to the Lord (Mark 12:43). Jesus taught them multiple times about His suffering, death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21, 20:17). On the night before His death, the Master

even instructed them to do the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him and to love another as He has loved them (John 13:5). Disciples learn from their Master.

Fourthly, the disciples are sent to **continue the ministry of their Master** (Matthew 10:1--*Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to **cast them out**, and to **heal every disease and every sickness***). Then, He sent them out to the villages. They baptized the people in the name of Jesus their Master (John 4:2). They worked together with their Master to distribute bread and fish to the hungry crowds (Matthew 14:19, 15:38). This, later on, became the model for the first soup kitchen in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-3). They also testified to the public of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 21:24). Disciples are engaged in the Kingdom ministries: prayer and proclamation of the Word.

The Great Commission

The risen Christ, as He was ascending to Heaven, commanded His disciples to go out into the world with His gospel message. He said: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.* ¹⁹ **Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰ *teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:18-20). Did you hear? The Master wanted and still wants His disciples to go out and make more disciples of all nations. That is the Church's #1 mission today. From now on, I will talk about the marks of a Christ's disciple. There are seven all together.

7 Marks of a Disciple: All from the Lord Jesus Himself. **1. Deny Yourself** (Matthew and Mark). **2. Carry your own cross and Follow/Come after Me** (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). **3. Hate all, even your loved ones for Me** (Luke). **4. Give up your possessions** (Luke). **5. Continue in My words** (John). **6. Bear fruit to glorify the Lord** (John). **7. Love one another as I have loved you** (John).

For time's sake this morning, we will cover only three of them in the Gospel of Luke.

Carry your own cross and Come after Me. E.g., An initiation ceremony at an abbey. The initiate, surrounded by other monks, is lying on the floor face down. They cover him entirely with a white sheet and declare three times, "You are dead. You are dead. You are dead." Kind of a chilling ceremony, come to think of it. But the ritual reminds the initiate to consider himself dead from then on. No longer he ought to think of himself. Likewise, when Christ commands the disciple to come after Him by carrying own cross, it means that s/he is dead for the sake of the Gospel. E.g., In the first century, the cross meant dying for the faith in Jesus. Today in America, dying for the Gospel is a foreign concept and it rarely happens. But in the first century and even in the twenty first century in some parts of the world, the disciples literally endure death threats and even suffer the loss of their own lives. Christ says, if you are serious about becoming My disciple, be prepared to die and follow.

Hate all, even your loved ones for Jesus. Once again, many of us misunderstand this command. We think this is a rather harsh, too exacting, and even impossible command to keep. Our question is: *why do I have to hate my loved ones, my parents and children, or even my own life? No, we say, I don't hate them or will never hate them no matter what.*

That demands a clarification on Jesus' part what He meant by the word 'hate.' It is totally different from what you may think it is. A secular definition, first. The Merriam-Webster defines 'hate' as: *a. intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury. b. extreme dislike or disgust. c. a systematic and especially politically exploited expression of hatred. d. an object of hatred.* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hate>). Isn't this how we understand what hate is? Isn't that how we understand what Jesus meant in today's text? But wait. Let's hear Him what He truly meant by 'hate.'

Did you know that there are two kinds of meaning of 'hate' in the Bible? First, same as its secular counterpart. Hate means intense hostile feelings towards certain individuals or things. E.g., hate enemies. That's clearly not what Jesus asks us to do towards our family. Listen carefully. What Jesus meant by 'hate' of our loved ones is this: **'not to love them more than Him.'** **'Not to put them above Him.'**

For instance, Jesus said, *"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."* (Luke 16:13). Another instance. The Bible says, God hated Esau. *"Was Esau not Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob; ³ but I have hated Esau* (Malachi 1:2-3). In other words, God loved Jacob more than Esau. Do you get it now? By **hating your own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and even your own life**, Jesus clearly meant to love Him more than you love all others, to devote yourself to Him more than you do for others, and to put Him first in your life above all others. E.g., If your loved ones urge you to do something that is against God's will, will you do it? Never forgive your enemy, for one. Would you listen to them or listen to Jesus? Let's move onto the third mark of a disciple.

Give up your possessions. Here's another tough one to swallow. Give up your possessions to be Jesus' disciple?! Yes, that's exactly what Jesus says here. Once again, many, if not all of us, feel like we simply can't do that. Honestly, we would rather keep our possessions and follow Jesus just a little, not all the way. Not as a disciple, but as a bystander.

The exacting cost of discipleship vs. His yoke. Let's face it. In human eyes, Jesus' commands seem impossible to follow. But in Jesus' eyes, they are light and easy. By the way, He never commands us to do something we cannot do. With His help, we can do it. For instance, if we look at Jesus' commands from eternal point of view, loving Jesus more than all others makes a perfect sense. He is the Lord of all and king of kings after all. He starts us on this practice early because that's what matters eternally.

Sure, material possessions are important for our survival on earth, too, but from divine perspective, they are not that important, because they don't last. None of us can take them with us when we die. Born naked, we didn't bring anything with us and when our spirit returns to God, we leave everything behind, don't we?

Christ urges us to keep that perspective in mind. *"Keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth"* (Colossians 3:1-2). If you believe obeying Jesus is a great loss to you, consider what you get back for eternity in exchange of the worldly goods and relationships. To name a few, we get rest, peace, security, wisdom, truth, life, light, healing, forgiveness, freedom from oppression, freedom from sin and death, resurrection, and most of all, life eternal in the presence of God. Remember what Christ said, My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. Unless He is telling us a lie, He is telling us the truth that it is easy to follow Him as His disciple. Our reluctance to follow His commands should never cancel His divine truth. We can be His disciples only when we obey His command from the heavenly perspective, and only when we fully submit ourselves to His yoke.

Conclusion

Perhaps the real issue here is the fear and insecurity we have: we are afraid that we are going to lose everything if we follow Jesus denying ourselves. We are afraid to become a martyr if we follow Jesus ready to die. We are afraid of the rejection if we put Jesus first above all relationships. We are afraid to become the poorest of all if we give up our possessions. That's not what Jesus has said. That's not what He has in mind. He will not make our life so miserable and poor. On the contrary, when we obey His commands, He will grant us an abundant life full of joy and security. E.g., Solomon asked only for wisdom, and the Lord added all others such as power, wealth, and glory.

So, think long and hard about all three marks of a disciple. Do they seem impossible to keep? Not so, according to Jesus. With God nothing is impossible. Christ cries out: *The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.* What is your answer to His call to follow Him? Will you say to Jesus, "Sorry, Lord, I still can't do that!" or "Yes, Lord, count me in! I trust in You. I will follow You all the way!" What is your answer?

Let us pray.