

Matthew's Gospel 9:35 - 10:42

Implications of discipleship

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New King Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

The example of the Lord

Today our passage in Matthew begins with the example of the tireless ministry of Christ,

"Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (v.35).

Mark also writes about Jesus visiting villages in a circuit (Mark 6:6).

The Lord brought Matthew, the writer of Matthew's Gospel, to himself with the simple words, "Follow Me." Following is what a disciple does. Jesus not only changed Matthew inwardly but also changed his whole way of life. He no longer sat day by day at his tax collector's desk. Instead, Matthew travelled extensively following the Saviour witnessing His power and wondrous life and being involved in His service. As Jesus "went about", Matthew went with Him.

The expression "went about" has almost a casual air, as though the Lord wandered from place to place. But nothing could be further from the truth. There was divine purpose and energy in all the Saviour did. There was never a place He did not intend to be in, or an action He did not intend to perform. We read about the "fine flour" in the Old Testament offerings. This pure and even substance reminds us of the holy seamless life of Christ on earth. In his record of the crucifixion of Jesus, John takes time to write about the tunic Jesus wore. It was "without seam, woven from the top in one piece" (19:23). The cross was not where the Saviour did not intend to be. It was the culmination of His divine work and the complete revelation of the heart of God. That purpose began in heaven "from the top" and was fulfilled in His seamless life laid down at Calvary.

Samuel, Israel's great judge, "went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and judged Israel in all those places. But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there" (1 Samuel 7:16-17). Samuel fulfilled his tremendous responsibilities through an orderly circuit and always returned home. As a child, he did not have a typical home. But as a man, he lived where he was born in the house of his mother, Hannah. The place from which she brought her child a new robe every year. A sign of her constant love and prayers for her son, which shaped his life. During His ministry, the Lord did not have a home on earth, but He lived in constant communion with His Father in the home He came from in heaven. In that continuous communion, He fulfilled a holy circuit of service.

An ironmonger was looking for an apprentice. As each young person came for an interview, he took them to a room at the back of his shop and showed them a large wooden box. Then he told them to look at what was inside the box and see what they could do with the contents. He promised to return in an hour. Every one of the potential apprentices was confused and left very

quickly, giving up the chance of a good job. Everyone, apart from the last young man, who stayed in the back room for the whole hour. Finally, the ironmonger decided to investigate. He found the boy with the opened box in front of him. It had been full of screws of all sizes. The boy didn't notice the man come in. He was too busy carefully sorting the screws into piles of the same size. He had not been confused by the mixed-up screws. He simply saw things of value that needed sorting out, and he was prepared to do the work.

There was a great orderliness about the Lord's life. Yet, our daily experience can often be characterised by disorder, firefighting and even chaos. I must admit I am a naturally semi-organised person. But my wife was an operating theatre nurse, and there is nothing "semi" about her organisational ability. It is worthwhile pausing and asking ourselves how we approach each day. Am I overwhelmed by my responsibilities? Am I casually disorganised? I have suffered from both conditions. The calmness of communion with Christ defines and smooths the circuit of faith. The stillness of knowing God gives us the power to meet the ordinary and extraordinary pressures of life. By following the Lord's example, each new day can be faced in the light of His word. It brings a Christlike order to our lives. And we recognise,

"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"
(Psalm 118:24).

Godly order in our daily lives is characteristic of Christian discipleship.

Compassionate discipleship

The passage also teaches us about the Lord's compassion.

"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary [or harassed, margin] and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (v.36).

When the Lord saw the vast crowds, His heart was filled with compassion. Compassion is about feeling the needs of others in my heart and responding to them. The Lord saw the multitudes like flocks of sheep with no shepherd. As God, He also knew every person in the groups He saw. We might be able to understand and respond to the needs of a few people. The Saviour of the world can understand and respond to the needs of everyone. He is the Good Shepherd who died for us (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd who lives for us (Hebrews 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd who will return for us (1 Peter 5:4).

The compassion He feels is something He wants us to experience. It is interesting that when Jesus spoke from glory to Saul of Tarsus, he said,

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4).

The question revealed the compassion of Jesus in two ways. First, His compassion for His disciples as Saul was persecuting them. He felt their suffering in His heart in heaven. Second, the compassion Jesus felt for Saul as a lost man so far from God that it took Christ's divine intervention to save him. But once converted, he immediately experienced the compassion of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ at Damascus. Ananias healed him of his blindness, and his new brothers and sisters in Christ showed him kindness and fellowship and saved his life by letting him down the walls of Damascus in a basket. Saul became the apostle Paul, and was transformed into a compassionate servant of Jesus Christ. Only when we experience the compassion of Jesus, do we become compassionate disciples. The Lord wants to empower us to address the needs we are confronted with by showing the same mercy the Lord demonstrated to us.

Jesus said to His disciples,

"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest" (vv.37-38).

The harvest refers to the spiritual harvest of people's souls. As the Lord of the harvest, Christ told His disciples the harvest was plentiful and needed many labourers. These labourers illustrate Christ's disciples. Jesus had demonstrated by example how to lead people to Himself, and He was about to send His disciples throughout Israel for their first experience of witnessing for Him.

Commissioned disciples

The Lord chose, empowered and sent His disciples,

"And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sicknesses and all kinds of disease."

The source of that power was the Lord Himself,

"He gave them power" (Matthew 10:1).

And the twelve disciples are named,

"Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him" (Matthew 10:2-4).

Some disciples were fishermen and natural brothers like Peter and Andrew. Matthew was a tax collector. We know much about Peter and John but little about some of the twelve. None of them was extraordinary of themselves. We discover their frailties and failings throughout the Gospels. But Jesus would transform them into exceptional men of faith. Our weaknesses do not limit Christ's power but is the means through which He demonstrates it. Paul wrote,

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

He also writes,

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

The twelve disciples eventually became unique witnesses of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension and through the power of the Holy Spirit led multitudes of people to Christ.

[Of course, these apostles were not the only disciples. Disciples are followers. Apostles are disciples chosen for specific mission. The twelve apostles had a special mission as witnesses to Christ's life on earth \(Acts 1:21\). John writes in his first letter,](#)

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1).

The ministry of the New Testament apostles and prophets is foundational to the Church of Christ (Ephesians 2:20). The twelve apostles give us great insights into the pathway of discipleship with its blessing, faith, responsibilities, mistakes, questions, failures and divine support. As disciples they walked with Jesus everywhere and experienced first-hand the glorious life of the Son of God on earth. And they continued to follow the Lord with greater faith after He returned to heaven and the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. They show us the tremendous potential we have. We have never seen the Lord as they did. However, we have a living faith in Christ. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit, the word of God, and we are part of a fellowship life. This all enables us to be His witnesses. And the Lord also encourages us with His blessing,

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

The Lord commissioned His disciples to work in a specific area with "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). He prescribes their service,

"And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons" (vv.7-8).

John the Baptist preached of the kingdom and the coming King. The Lord preached of the Kingdom as its King. Then the disciples were commanded to preach it. After the Lord's ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, they became the first preachers of the Gospel of the Grace of God. The Gospel we preach today.

The apostles' ministry was a selfless service with a cheerful, joyous spirit,

"Freely you have received, freely give (v.8b).

And it was to be carried out in faith, trusting God to provide for every need,

"Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food" (vv.9-10).

Interestingly, they seemed to start with empty money belts. The implication was that necessary gifts would be provided, but what was given would be used wisely and distributed in the light of the Lord's words,

"Freely you have received, freely give" (v.8).

The disciples were to find fellowship amongst godly people. Those who, like Simeon and Anna, waited for the coming Messiah (Luke 2:25-32, 36-38). And their ministry was one of blessing and warning.

"Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off

the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" (vv.11-15).

The principles of discipleship outlined by the Lord of witnessing through preaching, compassion, faith, fellowship and warning, still stand today. We witness to the Saviour from the pulpit and in our daily lives. This testimony is to be supported by caring, compassionate lives. We are to live by faith, express our fellowship of life and reject what is not consistent with the word of God. And are to be the salt of the earth, living humbly before God.

"He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Costly discipleship

The Lord never disguised the dangers and costs of discipleship,

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (v.16).

Wolves are natural enemies of sheep. In Matthew 7, the Lord describes false prophets as wolves disguised in sheep's clothing. And as ravenous wolves (v.15). Also, Paul says to the Ephesians elders in Acts 20,

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock" (28-29).

Satan is described as transforming himself into an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Peter writes, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). The dangers can be covert and overt. And the Lord explains to His disciples what should characterise them when confronted by persecution and danger.

The Lord highlights two spiritual characteristics necessary for true discipleship, wisdom, and harmlessness,

"Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

These characteristics do not appear to be a formidable defence against outright and fierce opposition. But let's look more closely, starting with wisdom.

James writes,

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ...The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:13, 17-18).

You can see the way wisdom and harmlessness blend together in James' description of the wisdom that is from above. Earlier in his letter, James warned about the dangers of how we use

the power of speech. But in chapter 3, James turns to the subject of wisdom and understanding. It is related to his earlier comments on faith and works. What we do in faith should be characterised by the "meekness of wisdom." Education and intelligence can be characterised by arrogance and aloofness.

But Spiritual wisdom and understanding are marked by humility and gentleness. James uses the word "meekness" in the first chapter of his letter,

"Receive with meekness the implanted word" (v.21).

The Lord describes Himself as "gentle and lowly in heart."

"Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle [or meek, margin] and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:28-29).

James points out that the lack of these spiritual attributes leads to "bitter envy and self-seeking [or ambition, margin]" (3:14), demonstrated by a haughty and divisive spirit. It is seen in Diotrephes in 3 John 9. James is not sparing in his condemnation of such behaviour. He describes it as not descending from heaven but "earthly, sensual, demonic" (3:15). He re-affirms the ancient truth recorded from the beginning of the Bible "where ever envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (v.16).

In contrast to his withering remarks on false wisdom, James describes "the wisdom that is from above" (v.17). Instead of being full of selfishness and ambition, it is pure. Seeking the will of God and selflessly and sacrificially desiring the blessing of others. It is peaceable. It encourages us to "let the peace of God rule" in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). It also promotes peace in all relationships. This heavenly wisdom is gentle. It is marked by the character of Christ. Paul explains that "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hidden in the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:2-3). On earth, the Lord demonstrated His wisdom in meekness and gentleness. These Christlike features should mark us as God's children and the Saviour's disciples.

"Willing to yield" (James 3:17) means being reasonable. Wise people are not unreasonable people disguising self-will by protracted arguments. The wisdom from above fills us with mercy, compassion, and a desire to do good. James connects heavenly wisdom to avoiding the partiality and insincerity he highlighted at the beginning of the previous chapter. He also links it to good works, the fruitfulness of faith and its harvest at the end of the same chapter. In a world increasingly being deprived of peace, may we be witness to the blessings of heavenly wisdom found in Christ, "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24).

The second feature was to be harmless. The Lord as our Great High Priest is described as "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). To be spiritually harmless means to be without mixed motives but to be sincere and straightforward in terms of purity and clarity. Harmlessness is not weakness or vulnerability but the strength of purpose and the ability to discern right and wrong. Not only in what is obvious but with a wisdom that detects what is hidden by guile and hypocrisy. In Romans chapter 16:19, Paul writes,

"I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil."

Then he adds,

"And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (v.20).

The disciple's business is to follow and be like the Lord, characterised by heavenly wisdom and walking in the paths of righteousness. Not self-righteousness but by practically displaying the righteousness we have in Christ. The Christian does not look for persecution but depends on God's power to protect and keep when faced with it. This fits with Paul's teaching to the Philippians, where he and Silas overcame evil with good in Acts 16. Twenty years later, he writes to the Church in Philippi from another prison.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:12-15).

Being as wise as serpents relates to wisdom being used to avoid danger. Being as harmless as doves describes our reactions in dangerous circumstances.

The Lord further warns his disciples to,

"Beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:17-18).

This is seen in the early Church. When Paul was let down the walls of Damascus and protected from dangers by his fellow Christians, these were acts of wisdom.

The Lord also explains there would be times, for example, when Peter and John would be brought before the courts,

"But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (vv.19-20).

The disciples were not worried but armed with sincerity and trust in God. They witnessed fearlessly to the Saviour. They displayed the power of being harmless and only seeking the blessing of God in their hearers.

An outstanding example of this is Stephen in Acts 7,

"And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (vv.59-60).

His sacrifice extended the Gospel into Judea, Samaria, and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:4-8, 26-40).

[In Matthew 10 verse 23, we read,](#)

["I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."](#)

History has witnessed the suffering and persecution of the Saviour and His Church. But this verse has a future application of a day immediately before the Lord returns to earth. The Lord also explained that He had been accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, a name for Satan. It originates from the name Baal-Zebub, a Philistine god which means "lords of the flies" (2 Kings 1:2, margin). If the apostate Jewish leaders regarded Jesus in such a light and despised the Person of the Son of God, they would undoubtedly think of the His disciples in the same way. This was demonstrated in the persecutions of the early Church in the book of Acts. Therefore, in all generations, the disciples of Christ will be treated as the Lord was treated (Matthew 10:24-25).

Courageous discipleship

The basis of fearlessness is an absolute trust that everything is in the hands of the Lord. Matthew ends his Gospel,

"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen"
(Matthew 28:20).

Mark ends his Gospel,

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen" (Mark 16:19-20).

Peter demonstrates this fearlessness and trust. He fell fast asleep in prison the night before Herod intended to execute him (Acts 12:6). Paul declares in Romans 8:28,

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

The Lord tells His disciple not to be afraid but to fearlessly proclaim the truths Christ had shared with them (Matthew 10:27). Our fear should not be of those who may kill the body, but we should reverence the all-powerful God to whom we are personally responsible (v.28). The same God is our father. Not one sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of God (v.29). His care embraces every detail of our lives and is proof of His complete care for His people (vv.30-31).

Paul writes,

"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

The feature of the disciple is the acknowledgement of the Lord Jesus. This stems from a genuine inward faith in the Saviour who died and rose again. When the Philippian jailer appealed to Paul and Silas with the words, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul immediately replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Faith in Christ brings salvation. Rejection of Christ is the refusal of salvation.

Faith in Christ gives us peace with God, can fill our hearts with the peace of God and bring us into a relationship with the God of peace. At the same time, the Gospel divides those who follow Christ and those who do not. Families can be separated because a member confesses Christ. In parts of the world, Christians are persecuted, attacked and sometimes killed by other family members (Matthew 10:35). The cost of being a disciple of Christ can be perilous in parts of the world. And there is evidence of growing intolerance towards the Christian faith today. The early disciples left

all to follow Jesus. And the Lord is not unmindful of the cost in numerous ways of being faithful to Him. Jim Elliot's famous quotation rings true, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." With others, he lost his life trying to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Aucas in Ecuador. Such sacrifice demonstrated the reality of faith in Christ.

Jesus carried His cross on the way to Calvary. It was a sign of life about to be given. People have died for all kinds of causes. Some noble, some not. The Saviour carried His cross for us and died upon it. As Christians, self-sacrifice and devotion to the Saviour who loved us are the marks of true discipleship. It may be expressed on the mission field or in the simplicity of ordinary life. It rarely ends in martyrdom but often in quiet lifelong faith. The actual value of a life is measured by the Lord Himself, who reads our hearts and understands our actions.

And we must never forget that none of us will be in heaven because of what we did for the Saviour but because of what He did for us. But in His matchless grace, He rewards us for what emerges for Him in our life of faith. He values and rewards the most minor action which emanates from His love in our hearts,

"And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Matthew 10:42).

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on the Implications of discipleship, Matthew 9:35-10:42, Talk number T1287.

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