

The Disciple's Challenge: Sacrifice of the Will

Matt. 4:19; 10:34-40

Introduction

Last week:

We learned that discipleship of Jesus is relational. It's about learning, following and becoming like Jesus. It's not about adopting religious practices, taught by men. It's not about learning rabbinical teaching of the Law. It's not about following someone's preaching about selected doctrines.

Discipleship is about a specific and growing relationship with Jesus – He is the teacher and we are his disciples; He is the Lord or master and we are His slaves.

We learned 3 things from Jesus' call to discipleship:

1. To love Jesus more than all others.
2. To live selflessly.
3. Obey Jesus' teaching personally.

The Proposition this week:

Peter is a great example of learning to follow Jesus practically, despite the challenge of self-sacrifice.

Peter's Story

1. Simon, called Peter, came from a fishing family in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. They shared some sort of business relationship with Zebedee and his sons, James and John.
2. Andrew, his brother was the one who had become a follower of John the Baptist and who became a disciple of Jesus. He also brought Peter to meet Jesus. Then Peter became a disciple, left everything to follow Jesus.
3. Peter learned many things from Jesus and they were not easy lessons to apply in his life, but Peter was very open and outspoken in it all and so we can learn a lot from him about how to follow Jesus. Remember that the Mark compiled his Gospel from Peter's preaching.
4. A lot took place as Jesus travelled across the Land – the Galilee, and Judea, and Gadara and across the Jordan and the Decapolis etc. He

followed Jesus through the cities, towns, and villages. He heard Him preach and saw all the miracles. Now they were to go on a “Missions Trip” and Jesus had taught them. He concluded with final words about discipleship.

The Challenge to Sacrifice Self

Matt. 16:21,24,34-40

Jesus' Unique Challenge

It was not uncommon for rabbi's to call for a commitment from their disciples, but Jesus made much higher demands of His disciples than any of His contemporaries. Using the analogy of a Roman cross, Jesus gave them 3 extremely challenging instructions. To be His disciple, one would have to become like Him in regard to their willingness to sacrifice. They must do 3 things:

1. 3 Challenging Instructions (Matt. 16:21,24)

1.1 Deny your self

This is not to say no to things, but to say an emphatic “No!” to your interests, ambitions and will. It refers to giving up what you want; turning away from selfishness and your own concerns.

1.2 Take up your cross

The instruction is a very intense one. Jesus was calling for an immediate response: “take up or lift your cross at once!” This is not some burden or hardship to bear. This means to follow Jesus and identify with Him in His rejection, suffering and death.

1.3 Follow Him

This involves the choice: either the world or Jesus. Jesus meant that the disciples should follow with Him on the road or journey that He was undertaking.

The question is how were they to do this? What did Jesus mean by His instruction? Let us look at His example for the answers.

2. Jesus' Example of Personal Sacrifice (Matt. 10:34-42)

2.1 Jesus' own Experience

a) Family - His family rejected Him and did not believe in Him or in His mission.¹ Instead Jesus embraced a new family of believers (Matt. 12:46-50)

¹ Matt. 13:53-58; Mark 3:21; John 7:3-5

- b) Finances - Jesus surrendered personal wealth (Matt. 8:20)
- 2.2 His challenge to His disciples
 - a) Family - Matt. 19:23-30
 - b) Finances – Matt. 4:20,22

Jesus gave 3 Reasons (Matt. 16:25-27)

In these next few verses Jesus gave them 3 good reasons to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him:

1. Save or lose (Matt. 16:25)

You may save your life (physical or psychological) but it will cost you eternal life. Conversely, you may lose your life but gain eternal life. This saying of Jesus is found in all the Gospels – no other saying received such emphasis.²

2. Gain or lose (Matt. 16:26)

This verse is essentially the same except that the contrast is between the world and your soul or life, which is your true self, the real “you.” It is frightening to realize that there is an exchange here³ – a gain and a loss. The trade-off is subtle when you go after the world’s things; you lose your true self. The world is passing away and eternity lays ahead – why would anyone surrender what he can’t lose to gain something he can’t keep? Its like Esau trading his birth right for a pot of lentil soup!

3. Choose the eternal over the temporal (Matt. 16:27)

Jesus is coming again, and His reward is with Him. We should invest in the kingdom of God in order to gain an eternal reward for this life means that. It’s a simple equation – by yielding our selves, our resources and our energies in the Kingdom of God now, there will be an eternal and unfading reward in the age to come.

Conclusion

The Key Issue

Self-sacrifice deals with the will – it involves a decision. It involves 3 Instructions:

² Matt. 10:38-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:24; 14:26-27; 17:33; John 12:25

³ The Greek word is antallagma, which refers to something given in barter for another.

1. Deny yourself – practice self-sacrifice and say “No!” to your interests, ambitions and will.
2. Take up your cross – make up your mind right now – identify with Jesus in His experience.
3. Follow Jesus on the path He is walking on – choose between the world’s agenda and Christ’s will for your life.

Application

Are you willing to:

- Suffer the painful separation from loved ones in order to advance the kingdom of heaven e.g. live far away from them.
- Pay the price of living according to God’s agenda, rather than the world’s e.g. deny rather than chase selfish ambition that consumes everything else.
- Invest for eternity today by living fully for the Lord

Remember that Jesus was teaching on discipleship, and not on sonship. We become children of God by faith in Jesus alone, and not by sacrifice. To be a disciple of Jesus will cost you something.