

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

Message #6

“THE ESSENCE OF DISCIPLESHIP”**Luke 9:23*****“If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”***

What is the essence of Christian discipleship? If we could find one word that would tell us what discipleship is all about, that sums up the very core of discipleship truth, what would that word be? That one word would be: **Obedience!** Obedience is the heart and soul of what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to ask you a question: how did the human race get into such a mess as to need reminders, instruction and encouragement to obey God anyway? The answer: it all began with Adam and Eve, as if you didn't know; Adam and Eve had only one real decision to make back there in the Garden of Eden and that was to obey God or not to obey God! Instead they obeyed their cravings – not God's commands!

Illust. The soft-drink company that produces Sprite, in its current marketing campaigns, has enticed us with this slogan, “Image is nothing. Thirst is everything. Obey your thirst!” That's what Adam and Eve did and look where it got them – and us!

One of the keys to understanding the basis of our fellowship with God is to comprehend this truth: that God wants us to obey Him for His glory and for our good. If only Christians could wrap their minds around this truth and live by it consistently, we would know joy unspeakable and sinners would see Christianity on display in the lives of holy men and women of God.

Illust. I can remember my Father trying to explain to me that he wanted me to avoid the mistakes that he had made and therefore, he wanted me to obey him so that he would not be disappointed and I would avoid some of the pit-falls and disappointments in life that he had experienced. This came from a father who, just like all of us, made his share of mistakes in growing up – but, our Heavenly Father never made mistakes!

He knows us well, He knows our weaknesses and where we might stumble; He knows what tempts us, and He wants us to have victory over temptation; He wants us to enjoy peace, but that peace comes through obedience to His will. The Apostle Peter writes: “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. (I Pet. 1:14) So, our Heavenly Father expects us to be obedient children and follow Him as obedient disciples.

Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. (John 10:11) A shepherd leads and if the sheep want the benefits that a shepherd gives they must obediently follow him. As we think about obedience, which is the essence of discipleship, let us look to our Shepherd, the Lord Jesus and learn from Him. We are told several times in scripture that the Son of God was obedient to His heavenly Father. Let us see how He demonstrated obedience in His life; note that He demands obedience in our lives and see also, that He deserves our obedience. First, then, let us concentrate upon the obedience that Jesus demonstrated while here on earth.

I. OBEDIENCE IS DEMONSTRATED BY JESUS.

The life of Jesus is the ultimate Model of obedience. His example is the standard by which we should measure our obedience. The New Testament speaks of the obedience of Christ several times. Notice,

A. The Intent Of His Obedience.

Romans 5:19 – “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”

Using my sanctified imagination, I view a scene in heaven something like the following: The Father says to the Son, “Son, it is my decree that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. I love poor, lost sinners, and I am sending you down to earth to shed your blood on an old rugged cross so that whoever believes in you will have eternal life.” Then I hear the sinless Son of God say, “Yes, Father, I will go.” The intent of Christ’s obedience is clear: that many would be made righteous.

B. The Extent Of His Obedience.

Philippians 2:8 - “He... became obedient to death, even death on a cross!” His death was His great act of obedience to the Father.

Jesus came into the world and died upon a cross and through Christ’s “obedience many will be made righteous.” He obeyed to save us from the consequence of Adam’s disobedience.

II. OBEDIENCE IS DEMANDED BY JESUS.

John 14:15 “If you love me keep my commandments”

John 15:14 “You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you.”

Those of us who served in the military know what a command is and we learned that they are to be obeyed and without delay. When the command, “Forward march!” is given, it means, “Forward march!” and that without hesitation. He who hesitates is trampled!

The Lord Jesus is the Captain of our Salvation and as such He demands our obedience.

A. The Right That He Exerts.

Jesus illustrates His right to demand our obedience with a story recorded in Matthew Chapter 21. It reads as follows: "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered." (Matthew 21:28-31)

Now, let us review Jesus’ story about the two boys. I call them: “Will” and “Won’t”. Or “Did” and “Didn’t”. That father had the right to exert his authority over his sons. Likewise Jesus has every right to demand that those who claim His name obey Him. It is not the lips but the life that makes a disciple! The result was that each boy did the opposite of

what he initially said.

B. The Response He Expects.

The Lord Jesus, and I emphasize *Lord*, expects prompt obedience from those who call Him *Lord*! “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)

Look at a couple of the early disciples’ responses to Jesus’ call:

- To Peter and Andrew, Jesus said, “follow me, and immediately they left their nets and followed him.” (Matt. 4:19-20)
- To Matthew the tax collector, Jesus said, “follow me, and he left all, rose up, and followed him.” (Luke 5:27,28)

Peter, Andrew and Matthew’s response show that they recognized His authority, His right to their obedience, and they responded immediately. That is what He expects of all who call Him “*Lord*.”!

James writes: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work,will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:22-26)

Illust. Emily Post, the etiquette queen of years gone by, was asked how one should respond to an invitation to dine with the President of the U.S. Her reply appeared in her newspaper column and this is what she wrote: “A White House invitation is a direct command – drop everything and go!”

Following Jesus without hesitation is more important than an invitation from the President. Drop everything and obey the Lord’s call!

III. OBEDIENCE IS DESERVED BY JESUS.

Our theme verse for this series of messages is Luke 9:23 - “If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” I have said several times that Luke 9 is a discipleship chapter. Seven times the word “disciple” is used in this chapter and six times we find the word “follow” or “followed.”

Our greatest desire should be to follow our Lord and Master because He deserves our obedience. Think about that statement; why does he deserve our obedience? Let us look in Luke 9 for the 3-fold answer. He deserves our obedience, first

A. Because Of Who He Is.

“And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” So they answered and said,

“John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” (Luke 9:18-20)

It is essential that we are careful about whom we follow. The ancient story of the Pied Piper illustrates that graphically. The Lord Jesus, the Christ of God, has never led anyone astray, nor can He for He is God! Read again Psalm 23 and be encouraged to follow Christ our Shepherd.

B. Because Of What He Did.

“The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Luke 9:22)

The Lord Jesus endured the agony of the crucifixion, with all of its ignominy and shame, to pay the penalty for our hideous sin. One Who would die for us and provide for us salvation deserves our allegiance and obedience.

C. Because Of What He Wants To Do.

“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.” (Luke 9:23-24)

What does Jesus have in mind for those who follow Him? He wants to save our *lives*! Discipleship comes after the salvation of our *souls*; discipleship has to do with the salvation of our *lives*!. We ought to obey Him because our obedience brings Him glory and brings us eternal good.

Listen to some of the benefits of following Him: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies.” (Psalm 103:2-4)

He deserves our obedience because of Who He is, What He has done and what He wants to do! These are some of the reasons why obedience is the only response of the grateful heart.

Illust. English Bishop Bruce Baxter, told the following story:

“A young boy was drowning and a stranger rescued him. After artificial respiration had brought the boy back to consciousness, he looked up into the face of the man who had rescued him from the watery grave, and said, “Thank you, sir, for saving my life!” To which the man replied, “That’s alright, son, glad to do it. But just see to it that you’re worth saving!” With that the stranger walked away. The boy never forgot those words. And for the rest of his life the challenge of his rescuer rang in his ears. That boy was Bishop Baxter, of the Church of England. He said, “I wanted to make sure that the life that that stranger saved was worth saving!”

The Lord Jesus loves us with a never dying love, saved us with so great salvation, assures us of eternal life and a home in heaven. Why is it that we balk at obedience?

Illust. On a Chapel door in Lubec, Germany are posted these words:

- “You call me Master and obey me not;
- You call me light and see me not;
- You call me Way and walk me not;
- You call me Life and desire me not;
- You call me Wise and follow me not;
- You call me Fairest and love me not;
- You call me Rich and ask me not;
- You call me Eternal and seek me not;
- You call me Gracious and trust me not;
- You call me Noble and serve me not;
- You call me Mighty and honor me not;
- If I condemn you, blame me not!”

Illust. Jonah is a good example of the penalty of disobedience. It is infinitely better to pay the price of obedience than to have to pay the penalty for disobedience. Disobedience will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and treat you worse than you want to be treated!

CONCLUSION

The essence of discipleship is “obedience” – constant, continuous, consistent obedience. Eugene Peterson wrote a book about discipleship; the title of it is: *“A Long Obedience In The Same Direction.”* That is not only the title of a book but it is the definition of New Testament discipleship.

Obedience is demonstrated by Jesus, demanded by Jesus and deserved by our Lord and Savior. I urge you to follow the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart, soul, mind and body!

Illust. Jill Briscoe, the wife of Stuart Brisco, well-known pastor and author, tells of the time in her youth when someone dared her to stay out after her curfew. When she refused, the person teased her by saying, "Are you afraid your father will hurt you?" Jill replied, "No, my father loves me. If I break my father's curfew for me, I'm afraid I would hurt my father." The obedient disciple does not disappoint the heavenly Father.

Do you desire to take up your cross daily and follow the Lord Jesus? To do so is to live a life of obedience, which pleases God, and has eternal dividends for the disciple. As the song says,

*“Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.”*

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