

DISCIPLESHIP SERIES

Message #7

ENEMIES OF DISCIPLESHIP – Part 1**“IMPULSIVENESS”**

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” (Luke 9:23)

The Lord Jesus invited would-be disciples to follow Him. He did not embellish the experience of walking in His footsteps by saying, “It will be a wonderful life!” Or “Your troubles will vanish and your bank account will flourish.” He did not lure followers with promises of better health and more wealth as some of His so-called spokesmen do today. Instead, He wanted His followers to know that there would be tough times and He wanted them to pre-determine to tough it out.

The last six verses of Luke chapter nine depict three enemies of discipleship. We will see that these enemies defeat more would-be disciples than any physical foes. We will see that these are very real and dangerous enemies. They are not flesh and blood enemies; they are not external but internal enemies that attack our inner being. What, then, is the nature to these enemies? Answer: They are attitudinal enemies – enemies that attack one’s will and destroy one’s spirit. There are three such enemies mentioned in these verses. The first one is in verses 57 and 58 and this is what we read:

“Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Luke 9:57-58)

The first enemy that we meet is impulsiveness. Impulsiveness is an enemy of discipleship. The dictionary tells us that “impulsive” means: “The sudden spontaneous inclination or incitement to take an unpremeditated action.”

The advertising industry and the merchants in America capitalize upon what is called “impulse buying.” That is, spur-of-the-moment decisions made to satisfy a whimsical notion, a passing fancy or a sudden desire. The advertisements, store displays, lights, color, music and even smells are designed to trigger the impulse to buy the products displayed. Consequently, much merchandise is purchased for which the buyer was not shopping, which was not needed and which later will be discarded or sold at a garage sale!

Impulsive decisions are not limited to the area of merchandise. Unfortunately, there are impulsive, rash and hasty decisions being made in the spiritual realm as well. Numerous are the persons who leap before they look! Who, when they hear what they think is a better offer, an easy way to heaven, a spiritual “quick fix”, agree before they understand what is involved. They make spur-of-the-moment decisions which do not last. Impulsiveness is bad on the budget – but in the spiritual realm it can be catastrophic.

Impulsiveness can be seen throughout the scriptures. It caused:

- Esau to sell his birthright for soup;
- Samson to forfeit his physical prowess;
- David to commit adultery;
- And it was the reason that Demas journeyed with the Apostle Paul only briefly.

There are two illustrations of impetuosity in Luke 9 – one is an impetuous outburst of anger, the other an impetuous outburst of ambition. Both are equally dangerous. In verses 52-54 we read that Jesus had set His face toward Jerusalem and as they progressed on their journey they came to a village of the Samaritans, but they did not welcome Him. James and John saw this and said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”

James’ and John’s response was, “Lord, you just say the word and we’ll kill them!” This was an outburst of impetuous anger. Have you ever had a sudden urge to violently right a wrong, as James and John did? Ever been cut off in traffic? Ever see a parking place and you are waiting as the spot is being vacated when someone else rushes in front of you and takes it? Did you have a sudden flash of anger? James and John were imperfect disciples and so are we! Let’s not imitate them but learn from them how not to react.

The second illustration of impulsiveness or impetuosity is in verses 57-58 where we see an outburst of ambition. This is what we read: “Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”

Let us take a closer look at this man who said, “I will follow You wherever You go.” I call this man Mr. Impulsive. Upon closer examination you will understand why. Consider, first, the opportunity Mr. Impulsive had:

I. HIS OPPORTUNITY.

What a great opportunity Mr. Impulsive had. The fame of Jesus had spread and news that Jesus, the Miracle Worker, was coming along the road had preceded Him. Crowds gathered to see the Healer, the Teacher Whom the common people gladly heard. There He comes with His disciples! Perhaps He will perform some miracle here; maybe He will give one of His sermons here. What an opportunity to see and hear this famous Person!

One man in the crowd was perhaps thinking: “I would like to go with Him, I could listen to Him all the time, I could see Him perform miracles – it would be exciting to accompany a famous person. What a golden opportunity this is! I have heard it said, ‘opportunity knocks but once’ – this must be my opportunity to be something, to do something worthwhile, I think I’ll go with Him!”

I can imagine that kind of thinking taking place in the mind of the man standing along the roadside. There is an age old aphorism that says, “Four things come not back: the spoken word, the spent arrow, time that is past and the neglected opportunity.” I have known many people who let opportunity pass them by. I remember a member of the church of

which I was pastor; God called him to the mission field, he finished his preparation and then one day asked me to pray that he would be able to buy a certain house here in the USA that he thought was a great bargain. I said to him, "No, I will not pray that you be able to purchase that house. You said that God called you to serve Him on the foreign mission field. You need to be focusing all your energies and expenditures on getting to where God has called you." He delayed, lost interest and never went to the mission field. Like the man in Luke 9, he missed out on the open door of opportunity that the Lord had set before him.

II. HIS OVERTURE.

When Jesus drew abreast of him, Mr. Impulsive blurted out, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." This man seems to be warm-hearted, charming, enthusiastic, confident, willing and zealous. He seems to offer his service without limit or reserve; there isn't a trace of insincerity; it seemed like a genuine decision; he seemed anxious to follow; on the surface, it seems he meant business! Jesus did not have many who came to Him in this way; surely this will be a success story. Persons along the roadside perhaps patted him on the back and said, "God bless you! You'll make a good disciple! We'll pray for you!"

Illust. I was speaking in a church in Florida and after one of the services a fine, college-age young man, asked me if he could talk with me. He said, God had called him to full-time ministry and asked my advice about several matters. He seemed totally committed and eager to be about the Lord's business. I encouraged him the best I could. A year later, I was back in that church for a conference and there was that young man. I asked him what he was doing there and, with head bowed he said, "I reconsidered my commitment."

He reconsidered his commitment? Yes, many make decisions that dissipate into thin air when the reality of the cost to follow the Lord sets in. That is what happened with our Mr. Impulsive here in Luke chapter nine. Why did he change his mind?

III. HIS OVERSIGHT.

"And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head." (v.58) The answer of Jesus seems strange at first reading. He must have read the man's mind. Jesus was saying: "following me isn't going to be easy – are you ready to rough it?"

Christ's answer reveals a man who was easily swayed by the feeling of the moment; he was the victim of sudden impulse; he was moved by superficial excitement. Maybe he had sat among the lilies and heard Jesus speak the beautiful beatitudes on the hillside; or perhaps he was at the lakeside when Jesus taught the crowd from the boat. He could have listened to those wonderful words every day.

Now, as Jesus passed by he called out: "I will follow you!" Jesus response to him seems harsh at first, but a studied look reveals that this man had not calculated the cost of discipleship. Behind all this man's impetuous sentimentality was an unrealistic soul – he

spoke without considering all that was involved. It is as though Jesus said, “if you follow me you must not expect everything to turn up roses in this life - I do not promise “flower strewn pathways all your life through - I do not have a home myself.”

Jesus Christ never invited followers under false pretenses. He wanted them to come to Him with eyes wide open, knowing full well the cost of following Him. There can be no mistake about it – He did not promise a chaise lounge or silk slippers, “sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain”!

He was and is seeking for those who would deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Him. He looks for those whose purpose in life is not to gain this present world but the world to come; who will not be ashamed of Him and His teachings.

He is seeking for followers today who are willing to follow Him at any cost. He asks no one to follow Him on the basis of illusions, or delusions – He wants us to come to Him on the basis of factual conclusions!

Don't make the fatal mistake that this man made, but say,

“Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow thee;
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
Thou, henceforth, my all shall be.”

When I was President of the University, a young man came to look over the school. He was quite an athlete and highly recruited. The coach informed me that the prospective student wanted to talk with me but would not tell the coach what he had in mind. My secretary arranged an appointment and he came to my office. He was a fine looking, athletic fellow.

We had a great basketball program and had won the National NCCAA Championship two consecutive years. The young man told me that he wanted to come to Christian university to prepare to serve the Lord. He told me that he would come to our university and play basketball for us if we would give him a new automobile!

I said, “We are here to help prepare Christian men and women for their life's work. However, it will cost you to come here and prepare for what you say God wants you to do with your life. We do not bribe students with money or cars to do God's will.” He replied, “Well, I thought I would try.” And I never saw him again.

This would-be-follower in Luke nine was left standing with the crowd by the road-side. He volunteered, then vanished. Why? He wanted to follow for what he might gain – not follow for what he could give to Christ's cause. There is one other thought here about Mr. Impulsive and that is that we never hear anything more from him. He seems to melt back into the crowd and go on his way into obscurity.

IV. HIS OBSCURITY.

When Jesus said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head," silence followed. He was probably thinking, "I thought it would be easy; that's not the kind of life I want." But he said nothing in response to Jesus.

This man's fervor suddenly faded; His zeal plunged to zero; He was excited but not enlightened; He was fascinated but not consecrated; He was superficial but not spiritual; He was not ready to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." He was not prepared "to run with patience the race that was set before him." He wanted to bear the name but he did not want to share the shame; He wanted the rewards of identifying with Christ but he did not want to run any of the risks! He faded into obscurity. We never hear from him again.

CONCLUSION

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from Mr. Impulsive?

- Understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- Count the cost and be willing to pay the price to company with Christ.
- If you are willing to start be willing to stick.
- If you say, "I will follow Jesus" make sure you are willing to go where He leads.
- The greatest enemy to discipleship is not someone or something external to ourselves. The greatest enemy is within us.

Illust. During the Revolutionary War, George Washington came, with his troops, to a stream called Brandywine Creek. After they had crossed he said, "Burn the bridge, from here on out it is victory or death!" When we commit to follow Christ we burn our bridges to the past and set our faces to the future. Walking in His footsteps will be a victorious journey for Christ knows no defeat.

Let us determine to do as the song says:

"I have decided to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back."

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