

DATE: MARCH 25, 2001

SERMON TOPIC: DISCIPLESHIP

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE: JOHN 15: 5
LUKE 9:23
2 CHRONICLES 16: 9

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DISCIPLESHIP

PRAYER

Gracious and eternal **God** we have come now to hear a word from you. And we ask as always oh, **God** that you would speak to us and speak through us. Teach us to love you more that we may learn to love each other and **Lord** help us to serve you better that we may be willing to serve each other. For it is in thy son's name that we pray, amen.

SERMON

From the scripture that was read in John, chapter 15 I want to read simply verse 5. John, chapter 15 and I want to zero in, if you will, on verse 5 and there we find these words:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

I want to continue our discussion about discipleship. So if I could use that as a thought this morning that's all I'm going to be talking about is discipleship.

Some of you have been blessed in coming out on Thursday evening and others for whatever reason not have been able to get there, so it only seems right because we're almost halfway through our studies in the book, we're up to the 3rd chapter, amen. Everybody who's been coming knows what that means.

But nevertheless I thought it appropriate that we would take some time and talk about it on Sunday morning because it's not just for those who gather on Thursday. Some may not be able to come because they have to work. Some may not be able to drive at night. There may be all kinds of reasons and so we don't want to leave anybody out of the discussion, if you will, so we thought we'd take some time this morning to talk about discipleship.

This is one of the key verses that we have been committing to memory. There are some others which I will be reciting but we begin with this one because it reminds us that **Christ** is indeed the vine. **God**, if you will, is the gardener and He is the gardener who cares for the branches in order to make the branches fruitful.

Now the branches represent all of those who came to be followers of **Christ**. The fruitful branches are the true believers, those who by their living union with **Christ** produce and bear much fruit. But those who become unproductive, those who turn back from following **Christ** after making what amounts to just a superficial commitment, those who are admirers of **Jesus** rather than followers of **Jesus**, when the storms of life were raging they turned in a different direction. These are they who will be separated from the vine. Unproductive followers are as good as dead and will be cut off and tossed aside.

So we're talking about Christian discipleship. One of the things we discovered in defining discipleship is that discipleship is developing a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with *Jesus Christ* in which certain things will take place in your life. Let me say that again, Christian discipleship is developing a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with *Jesus Christ* in which certain changes will take place in your life.

You might ask what are those changes. Well, first of all, He will transform your character into *Christ* likeness. Your character says a lot about who you are. People may not often -- well we have a tendency to want to judge simply by what we see on the surface. But you see even the nicest, dressed up, well looking vessel may be messed up, rotten and corrupt inside. Well let me put it this way, you can't judge a book by its cover.

So therefore having this personal, lifelong and I emphasize the word obedient relationship -- see it's not just about a relationship but an obedient relationship with *Jesus Christ* will transform my character into *Christ* likeness. Let this mind be in you which was also in *Christ Jesus*.

If my character conforms to His character then you ought to be able to see something throughout my daily walk and talk. You ought to be able to see that my walk and my talk are consistent rather than divergent. That on the one hand I come to church and shout all over the place and then outside on Monday and I'm raising you know what everyday for the rest of the week.

There ought to be something in my character that ought to speak to the glory of *God*. Not because I'm looking for the praise of men and women. Not because I need to be patted on the back. But because I'm trying to be like him. I realize that I'm not there yet and I won't obtain it on this side of the joiner. But my goal is to be like him. I want to be so much like him that we become indistinguishable, if you will.

But not only will He transform my character into His image, if you will, into *Christ* likeness but He will change my values into kingdom values. See kingdom values say that I'm going to love my neighbor as I love myself. Kingdom values say even those who are opposed to me I'm going to love them just as much. Kingdom values say I value life. Kingdom value says I value you.

Again, it's something that infects my character. I can't help myself. My walk ought to be one of honesty and integrity, one of good works trying to help somebody else rather than pull down folk. So again, these are kingdom values. I'm trying to advance the cause of my savior.

Understand I'm not doing this in order to be saved. See because I'm already saved and now I'm doing this because it is the outgrowth of what has taken place on the inside. In other words, nothing I do can earn salvation in the kingdom of *God*. I don't care how long I've been a member of the church, don't care how long I've sat on particular board or ministry, don't care how long I've sung in the choir, how long I've been an usher, how long I've been a preacher. It doesn't matter.

What matters is do I have *Jesus Christ* in my life, have I accepted him as *Lord* and savior of my life. If I have it means He has transformed my character and He is working on me everyday. It means He's changing my values so that I'm an honest -- I'm trying to be an honest person that when I say something you can depend on what I say.

Some folk you hear them say something and you shake your head automatically oh, they lying, *Lord* I know they lying, how he fix his mouth to say that, how could the

words even -- you just shake your head. That reputation will follow you wherever you go.

But in *Christ* I'm striving to be a person of integrity. I have made kingdom values my values and I've learned that it's not the material things in life that matter most. But what matters is what can I do in the service of my *Lord*. So when I sing in the choir, I'm not singing to get recognition. If you don't call out my name, that's all right. If it's not in the bulletin, that's all right. I'm going to sing because the joy of the *Lord* is my heart.

When I stand up to pray before the congregation, I'm not trying to sound eloquent in speech in order to have folk pat me on the back and say what a great prayer that was. No. I'm praying because I'm talking to the *Lord* and I want him to know I love talking to him.

Kingdom values, kingdom values. Whatever area of service *God* opens up for me, I want to be like Isaiah was when he was in the temple and saw the *Lord* high and lifted up. The *Lord* said who will go for me. He said *Lord* here am I, send me. That's kingdom values, kingdom priorities. *Lord* what is it that you need me to do in your name. Not what I think ought to be done because sometimes my priorities might not be *God's* priorities. *God* has a way of turning things upside down to get them right side up.

So again, I come to understand that in *Christ* He transforms my character into *Christ* likeness, He changes my values into kingdom values. But not only that, He involves in His mission in the home, the church and the world. What do you mean by that? Well there is a mission that we are on and the mission is to seek and to save those who are lost and bring them to a saving knowledge of *Jesus Christ*. That's our mission. That's the mission of the church. If we don't do anything else follow through on the mission, follow through on the mission.

So in the home lifestyle evangelism is a word we often hear and we kept talking about. In other words, by the way I live my life I am already a witness for *Christ* because I understand that this is not about religion and spiritual -- I'm getting so sick of hearing folk talk about being spiritual and spirituality and oh, he's into religion. No, I'm not into religion. I'm not about being spiritual because that is so vague and amorphous, it's so out there that it might take in anything.

No. I am about being a Christian. I want to walk and live so *God* can use me through *Jesus Christ*. I want to be filled with His Holy Spirit so that when I go forward in His name there'd be no mistaking. Oh, he's acting like a Buddhist. No. He's acting like a Hindu, he's acting like a Moslem. No. Make no mistake I'm unapologetically Christian and I thank *God* that He saved me one day.

That's what enables me to go out and preach and proclaim His word because the word that I read says there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Great *God* from Zion. If you can't understand that then just know this, call on His name and His name is *Jesus*.

For *God* so loved the word says John 3, 16 that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So again, I understand that I've got a mission to go into all the world as *Jesus* told the disciples in Matthew, 28 go into all the world and preach and teach this gospel baptizing in the name of the father, of the son and of the holy ghost. I thank *God*. I thank *God* that He has empowered me to do His work.

But just as He has empowered me, He empowers you. He reminds us again I am the vine, you are the branches. Understand here that when He talks many people try to be good, they really do. Honest people do what they think is right but *Jesus* says that the only way to live a truly good life is to stay close to him. I can't be good by myself. I just can't. It's not in me. It's not my nature.

It goes all the way back to the garden when Adam and Eve made that mistake and we are their descendents, if you will. So it's not in our nature to just be good on our own. See we measure goodness when we talk about it like that in terms of what we loosely think good is. But still thinking with a natural mind, with a mind that has not yet fully comprehended or apprehended *Christ*. So therefore when I become a Christian in *Christ* I begin to see it.

My brothers and sisters, Christian discipleship is developing a personal, personal lifelong -- that means for as long as I walk this earth for as long as I'm here, as long as I'm in this world I'm developing a lifelong, obedient relationship.

Now here's where we get into trouble because many of us are not obedient. I can't understand for example a Christian who says I'm not going to church, I don't like organized religion so I'm not going to church. Well that sounds cute but *Jesus* died for the church. If *Jesus* died for the church who are you to stay away from the place He died for? Not only that, *Jesus* went to church, He went to the synagogue as was His custom all the time. So if He was in the habit of going being who He was and who He is again what makes us so much better that we've decided that we don't need to go?

Then not only that when you consider that we ought fellowship with one another. When I come to church on Sunday morning or even throughout the week, I recognize that I'm coming into *God's* house. A very special place unlike my house or unlike any place else that I go no matter how fancy the office buildings may be downtown, no matter how nice someone's personal office space may be, no matter how dressed up or decorated the school may be when I go into church I am in *God's* house.

This is a special place so I've got to act on my best behavior. You know that's what my momma used to tell me as you're growing up and had company coming and your mother would tell you get on your best behavior. Or if she's getting ready to take you out some place and she gives you that warning before you went so that you wouldn't be in trouble when you got back. She'd say you be on your best behavior.

When you come to *God's* house, you ought to be on your best behavior. Now your best behavior ought to be evident every day but sure enough when you get in here. When you get in here this is serious business. This is *God's* house. I want to experience *God* in a way that's unlike anything I encounter out there. No wonder the psalmist declared I was glad when they said unto me let us go into the house of the *Lord*.

So again my brothers and sisters, I want to come into here, be in this place and be in an obedient relationship with him. When I fail to come, when I choose to stay away from the rest of the body then I am acting in disobedience to *God* because you see even Hebrews tells us we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. So if I do that and I don't go and I do walk away, then I'm in a state of disobedience.

There are what we've learned up to this point six key disciplines in being a disciple. There are spending time with the master. Meaning spending time with *Jesus*. The second is that we have covenanted, that we will live in the word, which means we spend time reading the word and committing the word to memory.

One of the things we say often now is that memorization puts it in the head but meditation puts it in the heart. So if I memorize the word yes, I've got it up here and a whole lot of folk have memorized, they got it up here. Oh, you can talk to some brothers out on the corner and they can run it down for you because they've memorized. But they haven't mediated on and let it become a part of them.

When I meditate on the word of *God* and I let it sink into my being, I let it hold me up and begin to prune and correct me because that's what the word of *God* will do. It will reprove, it will correct, it will encourage, it will convict. But it will let me know where I've fallen down and what I'm not doing right. I can't approach the word of *God* in my same old, same old spirit. Well that's just how I am, that's just who I am.

Well the bible says if anyone be in *Christ* they become a new creature. So that means that you know you can't teach an old dog new tricks, first of all why would you think of yourself as a dog? Secondly, you know if you're in *Christ* old things are passed way, all things become new. So even those old bad habits that you had, you need to take them to the *Lord*. Now that's not to say you'll get rid of them over night. But at least I'm working on them.

We spend time with the master. We live in the word. We pray in faith, we pray in faith, we pray in faith. We pray believing that *God* is and *God* answers. I've said it before many of times *God* gives us three answers yes, no and wait. Two out of the three we don't like. But *God* is still answering. *God* still answers our prayers.

The other three are disciplines, we haven't gotten to them yet but we will in the coming week. Fellowship with believers, witness to the world and minister to others. These are the disciplines of becoming a disciple, a disciple of *Jesus Christ*. *Jesus* has provided resources for those of us who are going to follow him and be obedient. What resources did He provide? First of all, He prayed. He prayed for us. Read John, chapter 17. Read the whole chapter because not only did He pray for the disciples, He prayed for the disciples yet to come. He prayed for you and I. He prayed for the unity of those who would be His disciples. That we would be one in the spirit. One in His spirit.

He also sent us the Holy Spirit. He had promised to send us a comforter. He promised to send us one who would lead and guide and direct us into all truth so He gave us the Holy Spirit. But not only that, He provided the written word. We have the bible. We have available to us what disciples did not have available to them. We have the written word of *God*. We have the bible and we can go to the bible and find strength for today and hope for tomorrow.

No matter what we've got to go through the bible will speak to our situation. We're not the only folk who've been lonely. You're not the only person who's had your feelings hurt. You're not the only one that someone lied to, on, at or about. You're not the only one who felt so separated from everybody you didn't know what to do and even felt separated and alienated from *God*. You're not the only one.

So read His word and let him speak to you. *God* will talk to you out of the book. We are a people of the book, those of us who are Christians because we live by the book. At our church we say what, we are bible based, *Christ* centered, Holy Spirit lead and mission minded. That's the kind of church we are striving to be in *Christ*. So again He reminds us in Luke 9, 23 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up His cross daily and follow me." That was one of our memory verses.

My brothers and sisters, there's a scripture in 2Chronicles, chapter 16 and verse 9 and if yall have been using your workbook, those of yall who come on Thursdays, you saw this one too. This wasn't a memory verse but it's in there. It simply says, "For the eyes of the **Lord** range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."

What a promise. What a promise that **God** watches over me wherever I am, whatever circumstances I find myself in, no matter how depressed I may be, no matter how alienated, alone, discarded I may feel, no matter how broken the eyes of the **Lord** range throughout the earth. Bless His holy name to strengthen. **God** has a purpose in watching over us. He wants to strengthen, to encourage, to let us know we are His and He cares for us.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Let's make sure that we stay attached to the vine. Let's make sure that we don't try to put ourselves in the place of the gardener because you see it's not ours to do the pruning and the cutting. When you want something to bear fruit in the garden, you have to do a little pruning and sculpting here and there. It's not to hurt but to help. It's not to hinder but to move forward.

So we Thank **God**. We Thank **God** because He said to us in John 8, 31 and 32 if you hold to my teaching -- oh, my brothers and sisters, if you hold to my teaching then you are really my disciples. But He didn't stop there He said then you shall know the truth. Oh, bless His holy name and the truth shall set you free.

One day. While I may be shackled right now the songwriter said shackled by a heavy burden beneath a load of guilt and shame. But then the hand of **Jesus** touched me and now I'm no longer the same. I don't know about you but one day I shall be free. Oh, I know I'm wrapped up in this robe of flesh right now and I've got to deal with this while I'm here. It doesn't always act like I want it to act. Sometimes the hand hurts and I don't know why. As age comes on me my eyes will grow dim and my steps will grow slow. But that's all right because I'm on my way and one day -- oh, bless His holy name. One day I shall be free.

If you continue in my words says **Jesus** then you are my disciples and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. You won't be tied down with these lies and hypocrisy going on down here. You won't be hindered by the stuff that bubbles down here because one day, one day this robe of flesh I'll drop and rise to seize the everlasting prize. I'll shout while passing through the air farewell, farewell sweet hour of prayer. I like that. I shall be free because the truth of **God** will set me free and the one whom the son sets free is free indeed.

Can't nobody do me like **Jesus**. Can't nobody do me like the **Lord**. Can't nobody do me like **Jesus** because He's, He's my friend. I thank **God** that He is the vine. Me, I'm just the branch. I might not even be a big one just a little branch. But the stuff that nourishes the vine also nourishes the branch. So if the branch stays connected to the vine, I can get what I need. In my darkest hour, I can get what I need. I can call on him and He'll hear me when I cry and I'll just say thank you **Lord**, thank you.

The doors of the church are open. The invitation for Christian discipleship is now extended.