

Bible Study

What Did
Jesus Teach?

By Rev. John H. McArthur, S.T.D.

VII. About Discipleship

Topic for Week of April 10.

LESSON:

Matt. 16, 24; 10, 24, 25; 32-39

Luke 14, 26-33.

John 8, 31; 13, 25.

SUGGESTED HYMNS—"Epworth Praises."

4, 16, 20, 44, 48, 102, 127, 152, 154, 169.

(Do not confine yourself to old, worn-out

hymns.)

The meaning of discipleship. A disciple is one who learns, accepts, and advocates the teaching of his master. A disciple is primarily a learner. But the real disciple is more than a learner. A man may be a learner of the doctrines of Confucius, or of Mohammed, or of Plato, without being their disciples. Many learners, too, may learn something of the doctrine of Christ while at the same time they are far from being His disciples. The real disciple not only learns the teaching of his master, but accepts it as true, and adopts it into his own life and acts upon it in his conduct. More than this, the real disciple not only accepts the teaching of his master as good and right for himself, but advocates it as good and right for all men. He seeks to make it known to others, and endeavors to persuade them to accept it. All these things are required from the disciple of any master, whether he be the disciple of Plato, or of Wesley, or of Kier Hardie. But from the disciples of Jesus there is more than this required. Jesus claimed from His disciples what no other teacher had, even claimed.

We shall consider some of the most striking features of Jesus' teaching concerning discipleship.

Absolute self-surrender to Christ. "Whoever he be of you that forsaketh not that which he hath he cannot be my disciple." Luke 14, 32. Has any other teacher, either before or since, ever required so much from his disciple?—the surrender of his money, his time, his energy, his will, his love, his all? Many a master has had disciples who have been not only strongly attached to his teaching, but likewise affectionately attached to his person. But Jesus requires from His disciples an attachment to his person and to his cause which is not only strong and affectionate, but absolute. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." "Whoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." If a man love anyone, even father or mother, or son or daughter, more than he, he is not worthy of me.

This self-surrender to the Master implies that we render Him instant obedience. To Levi, whom the Master saw sitting at the place of toll, he said, "Follow me," and he forsook all, and rose up and followed Him. That was instant obedience. Likewise when the fisherman disciples came to land, after that great catch of fish, they, too, at the command of the Master, left all and followed Him. Jesus will have no clinging to anything else among His disciples. There must be an absolute giving up of all for His sake.

Jesus will allow no dilly-dallying among His disciples. He will permit nothing to intercept their devotion. One man says: "Master, I will follow thee, but suffer me first to attend to the funeral

of my father." Another man says: "I will follow thee, but let me first say farewell to my family." (Luke 9, 59-61.) But Jesus gives them to understand that the first duty of His disciple is not to attend to these important affairs, but to follow Him. There are many important things in this world that ought to be attended to, but they ought not to be allowed to usurp the first place in a man's heart; that belongs to the Master. No disciple should say, "Suffer me first to do this or that, and then I will follow thee," but he should say, rather, "Master, I will first become thy follower, and then may I be permitted, as thy follower, to attend to the duties of life?"

Jesus must have absolute possession of all that a man hath. On one occasion a rich young ruler came to Christ desiring to know what good thing he must do that he might inherit eternal life. He was a moral young man, above reproach in his life, but he was young, and he was rich, and he was influential, and always recognizing these things in life that might make strong claim for his attentions and his affections. Jesus therefore said to him: "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." The principle underlying these words of the Master is that all our possessions must be laid upon the altar of Christ for His service and for His poor. Whether we give them away to the poor absolutely, as did St. Francis of Assisi, or whether we retain them in our own hands, always recognizing that we are but stewards of the same; in either case they belong to the Master, and must be used only in His service as He directs.

Thus would Jesus teach His disciple:

"Measure thy life by loss instead of gain;

Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured forth;

For life's strength standeth in life's sacrifice.

And whose gives most has most to give.

Discipleship based on love. See what Jesus says about this in Luke 14, 26; also in Matt. 10, 37. Love for Christ must take the first place in the heart of the disciple. Any other love that is legitimate may take the second place; but if it is not satisfied with the second place, and persists in seeking the first place to the detriment of the spiritual life, then we must hate it. That is what Christ means when he speaks of hating father and mother. Not many will ever be called upon to make such a sacrifice, but all should ever be ready to do so rather than compromise our loyalty to Jesus. No family or social relationships should ever be allowed to interfere with our loyalty to our Master. Hear what Henry Ward Beecher has to say on this subject:

Only that which comes between the soul and God, then, is to be spurned and sacrificed. If any affection, how dear soever it may be, persists in coming between the soul and God, then it is to be treated like an adversary. If, in your upward tendency, there circle around between you and your Saviour the dearest friendship or love, you are to say to it, 'I will love you, but I must love Christ more; and press it away. If it come again, and again, and again, and every time with more emphasis, you must press it away, and say: 'Nay; Christ first, and then thee.' But if it become pertinacious—yea, aggressive; if it be an affection that will not let you rest, but assail you, and seeks to drag you down and undo you, then you must use a lordlier tone, and say, 'Get thee away!' But if still, against your whole power, against

your purest self, against your higher nature, it seeks to strip you of all that belongs to you in common with God, then hate it. If it comes to that, put your whole soul against it, as you do against an enemy, no matter what the love is; for any love that will take you away from God will in the end take you away from your best self—from your hope and aspiration."

Love is the motive power in discipleship which leads to a life of self-sacrificing devotion. When a certain scribe said to Jesus, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," Jesus reminded him that he had no money tags with which to offer him for his devotion, but that he might look forward to a life of poverty (Matt. 19, 20). When Dr. Mason, of Burmah, wanted a Christian teacher to take the gospel to a certain warlike tribe, he said to his converted boatman: "Shapon, you have been getting fifteen rupees a month as a boatman; will you go to this warlike tribe with the gospel for only four rupees a month?" Shapon replied: "I will not go for four rupees, but I will go for Christ." That is the spirit of true discipleship, and its motive power is love.

"It is in loving, not in being loved, the heart is blest;

It is in giving, not in seeking gifts, we find our quest.

If thou art hungry, lacking heavenly food, give hope and cheer;

If thou art sad, and wouldst be comforted, stay sorrow's tear.

Whatever be thy longing or thy need, that do thou give;

So shalt thy soul be fed, and thou, indeed, shalt truly live."

—Mrs. M. M. Painter.

Love is the mightiest of all forces. Napoleon knew something of the power of the sword, but he recognized the power of love as a greater force. "I think," says Napoleon, "I understand somewhat of human nature, and I tell you all these (the heroes of antiquity) were men, and I am a man, but not one is like Him. Jesus Christ was more than man. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded great empires; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and this very day millions would die for Him."

What are some of the duties of discipleship?

What are some of the privileges of discipleship?

What are some of the trials of discipleship?

What are some of the tests of discipleship? John 8, 31; 13, 35.

VIII. About Prayer

Topic for Week of April 17.

LESSON:

Matt. 6, 5-15; Luke 11, 1-13; 18, 9-14;

John 15, 13, 14.

SUGGESTED HYMNS—"Epworth Praises,"

5, 9, 40, 53, 88, 99, 101, 133.

(These are all splendid new hymns that you should know.)

Jesus teaches us much about prayer, as well by His example as by His words. In all the gospels we see Jesus at prayer; but for most of our pictures of the kneeling Christ we are indebted to Luke. Jesus is shown to us in Mark as the Man of mighty power; in Matthew as the Man of wondrous wisdom, while in Luke He is the Man of constant prayer. We see Him rising up a great while before day, that He might give Himself to prayer.

"The cream of the Bible is not to be gained by skimming it over."