

Minimum Christianity

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the true nature of discipleship as a commitment to learn from Christ and bear the personal cost of following Him.

Duration: 40:00

Scripture: Matthew 16:21, Matthew 27:22, Mark 8:27-30, Luke 1:26-38, Luke 2:8-20, John 1:14, Acts 2:38

Topics: "Christianity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by sharing an illustration about a missionary couple and their encounter with Mary, the mother of James and John. He emphasizes that the disciples had lost their distinctiveness and holiness, becoming just like the nations around them. The speaker then highlights the rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the central message of the gospel. He concludes by questioning the program and message that Jesus is calling his followers to proclaim, emphasizing that the Christian life is not meant to be easy or comfortable.

Transcript

Mark the 8th chapter and this record concerning our Lord's interview with His disciples regarding His identity. This is the third in a series of messages on discipleship. We have defined discipleship as a commitment to the Lord to learn that which He would teach and obey that which He would command.

A disciple is a learner. From the day he first makes inquiry concerning the mind and will of Christ, he is a learner. He is a disciple in that sense, that specific sense, long before he's converted or born again.

He's an inquirer, interested in discovering that which the Lord Jesus Christ would set forth as His will. We are using this in distinction to that common use, and we feel incorrect use, of making discipleship a step above or a level above being born again. We feel that if one accepts that position, it does violence to certain very precious truths.

For instance, the portion with which we are now dealing for many years in my ministry was the subject or scriptural theme for a deeper life message. I would approach this portion of scripture as instructions to Christians how they could become disciples, and I use discipleship as synonymous with the deeper life. Now, there's only one thing wrong with that.

It just isn't so in the Word of God. Apart from that fact, I suppose it would be correct. But in my conviction, which I'm not too hesitant about expressing to you, I feel that we must return again to the message that our Lord Jesus gave and use the terms in the sense in which they're set forth in the scripture, not trying to adjust the terminology to our thinking, but adjust our thinking to the use that the Holy Ghost makes of New Testament terms.

You'll discover, as we point out, for any that have question about this, that John, the sixth chapter, gives us the case of a company of people that were called by the Lord and by his followers, and in their own mind as well, disciples. But our Lord Jesus told those disciples, so-called, in quotes, how they could have eternal life. He gave the instructions, except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.

When they heard that this was that to which their discipleship was leading them, they turned and followed him no more and refused longer to be considered as his disciple. We come, therefore, to this portion with the desire of discovering the relationship between the cross and discipleship. Unfortunately, in the last hundred years in America, the offense of the cross has largely subsided, because it has been objectified.

Just as it has been cast in plaster and has been shaped in silver, it has been given a hallow of pleasantness by means of the element of distance. Even the rubble of a bombed city can take on shapes rather pleasing to the eye, if you separate the eye that views far enough from the scene of carnage and disaster. And by virtue of the fact that we have put nineteen hundred years between the event of the cross, which involved the Lord Jesus Christ and ourselves, we can gaily wear it around our necks and we can sing of it rather lightly and preach of it with no particular passion.

Separated by centuries, it has lost its effect. And many people are willing gladly indeed to believe that the death of Jesus Christ on a cross in history should become the means by which they should escape from the consequences of their rebellion and enmity against God. Unfortunately, however, to preach the cross of history and preach it alone as the only significance of the cross is to do violence to the Scripture itself, and it is to mislead the individual.

There is indeed a cross in history, but there is also a cross in experience, and we must recognize that this cross is not to be forgotten. I would introduce the message by an illustration that might appropriately have been used for the conclusion, but I think you will see the reason for my concern by use of this illustration. Some four or five years ago, a missionary couple came with her sister, who also was a missionary, in Japan.

The three of them returned on the boat. I had fellowship with the young man for some weeks during that summer. After one message, he said, What you said today reminded me of something that my sister-in-law told me on the boat coming over.

I want to share it with you. She didn't quite know what to do about it, and I didn't know what to do about it, but here it is. She said that they were leaving Yokohama.

I believe that was the port city. Miss King from Japan, the woman's missionary union, can correct me if I am wrong in my geography, but leaving from there and coming back to the States, a company of the missionaries, or the members of the community there, the little church group, had come down from the inland city to see the family off. They had testimonies, choruses, and prayer, and getting ready to leave the company, my friend's sister-in-law stepped to the gangplank and started into the ship.

And one of the young men separated himself from the group and came up and stood beside the gangplank and said, Please, before you go, I have something to ask of you. She said, What is it? He said, Now, I want to ask you some questions first. You're the one that witnessed to me, aren't you, about Christ? Yes.

And you're the one also that told me the gospel. Yes. You told me that God said I was a sinner.

Yes. And that Jesus Christ died to save sinners from hell. Yes.

And that if I'd accept Him, believe on Him, live for Him, I'd go to heaven when I died. Yes. And I did just what you told me to do, didn't I? Yes.

And I was baptized. She said, You were. And went to Bible school.

Yes. And yet, and he pointed his finger at her, you didn't tell me everything that Jesus told you to tell me. Why didn't you tell me all of it? Why did you tell me part of it? What do you mean? You just told me about the cross on which Jesus died.

You didn't tell me about the cross on which He wanted me to die. I found out about that. I've been reading and studying in the Bible school.

And now I find that Jesus told you to tell me that if I was to come after Him and follow Him and believe on Him, I must be prepared to take up my cross and follow Him. You didn't tell me that. I've just had word from my father this week that the girl that I wanted to marry cannot be my wife if I remain a Christian.

I've had word from my father that I'll be disinherited. And furthermore, my parents are going to count me as dead and I will no longer be welcome in the home. You didn't tell me it was going to cost that.

You told me if I just believed on Jesus, I'd go to heaven. I don't want to go that badly. And tears came to his eyes.

I said, I'm sorry to hurt you. But as soon as you get on that boat, it goes out to harbor and we go back to our city. I'm going to go to my parents and with them I'm going to go to the Shinto temple and I'm going to renounce Christianity.

And then with tears now filling and flooding his eyes, he said, that's the reason why so many of the Japanese people have not remained true. They didn't understand. Why didn't you tell us all that Jesus told you to tell us? I wonder if this could be one reason possibly why for the last 25 years in America, out of every 100 that have professed first-time faith in Christ, about only 3-5% have given evidence of regeneration a year afterwards.

I wonder if it isn't time for a clarion call to the preachers of the gospel to become preachers of the word, and not simply to confine and restrict our message to that phrase, beautiful, wonderful as it is, Christ died for our sins, was buried and raised again the third day, but to preach the word which magnifies the holiness of God and the majesty of God and the nature, the heinous criminal nature of sin, and that the whole of the crime against God is that men have turned unto their own way, and that to return again is to renounce their own way, which involves a cross for the individual as much as for Christ. I therefore submit to you that this portion that you've heard read for a few minutes of intensive consideration gives us just this. Notice first, please, beginning with the twenty-seventh verse and through the thirtieth verse, that you

have the revelation of the person of Christ.

Here is one that has lived for thirty years in a little village. Well, not quite all in that time, some eight years perhaps, possibly even twelve, were spent down in Egypt. But for many years he's resided in his home village of Nazareth.

Unquestionably, there'd been a little cloud around his origin. The angel spoke to Mary, and the angel spoke to Joseph, but the angel didn't speak to the gossips in Nazareth. They never heard.

They didn't know, and there's a stigma, a question about his birth. They called him out of great consideration. We know who he is.

He's Joseph's son. The miracle, the marvel, the wonder that she had been conceived of the Holy Ghost and that that one born of her was God come in the flesh wasn't commonly what they talked about when they gathered at the well in Nazareth. That wasn't what they said.

We know it in history through the light of the window of God's Word and the revelation of the Holy Ghost to our hearts, but they didn't. And he was a root out of the dry ground. No beauty they should desire him.

I don't think he would have been voted the young man in the Nazareth high school most likely to succeed. I don't think that he had that type of personality and that type of drive which would have marked him as a gainer and a pusher. I think there was a quiet modesty and sublime patience, but that isn't a virtue that brings too great remuneration in the markets of time or in the estimation of men.

He was there without, he increased in wisdom and knowledge and favor with God and man, but I don't think that when he was set forth we have reason to suppose that when he left on this occasion to go where John was preaching, that anyone there knew John didn't know. I'm sure that John was rather perplexed. He'd been told that he was to announce the Messiah, but I do not believe that he ever anticipated that it would be Mary's son, his cousin.

I don't think so. I'm sure that he wasn't, I'm rather certain in my own heart, at least by virtue of the fact that later on when he's in prison, he sends word back and says, tell us certainly if you be the one. I didn't make a mistake that day, did I? It's what John is saying.

I'm going to die, I feel my, but I haven't lived in vain, have I? He saw the Holy Ghost descend upon Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, this one with whom because of the relationship of mothers he was so well acquainted. Then he's turned to those who were his followers, and he said the next day with all the conviction that came from revelation from God, behold the Lamb of God. That's all Peter had as far as we know.

That's all that he had. He heard John testify, and John identified the Lord Jesus, and he saw the works that he'd performed, but you know, friend, let me say something. That person whose faith rests upon phenomena is doomed to uncertainty.

When your confidence is based upon some phenomena, whether it's emotion or mental or physical, whatever it is, when it rests upon phenomena, you must have a continuous repetition of the phenomena in order to have certainty in your heart. But when it rests upon the revelation that God gives, certainty is immediate. When it rests upon experience that you have with God, it's immediate, positive.

It cannot be gainsaid, cannot be denied. Now the question is asked, who do the men say that I am? He's attracted a lot of attention. He's filled the conversations of people.

Who do they say that I am, is his inquiry. Oh, some say that you're John the Baptist, and others, well, they say you're Elijah. And some say, well, you're just one of the prophets, and other the prophets that have come.

And then that question of all questions, whom do you say that I am? And that answer, the only one of all possible answers, thou art the son of the living God. The revelation of the person of Christ wasn't given to the multitude, wasn't given to the rabbis, it wasn't given even to the neighbors in Nazareth, but it was a revelation that was given to those that were prepared to bend beneath the word of God and the truth of God. And that company that came and said, do some mighty miracle and we'll follow you, he had nothing for them, but those who had heard the message of John, repent, bring forth works, meet for repentance, your lives are wicked and sinful, cease with the past, turn your purpose from pleasing yourself to pleasing God, and then they give evidence of the genuineness of the turning by their willingness to accept the stigma of baptism.

To this company he was prepared to bring revelation of himself. And the source of this revelation was that they had observed his works, and they had then deduced from what they'd observed that he was the Christ. No, a multitude saw the works.

They had heard his words, and his words had somehow subjectively carried with them the connotation of truth. No, many heard the same words and rejected them as being wrong. What was it? Flesh and blood has not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven, he hath revealed it unto thee.

Has the Father in heaven revealed unto you that this one Jesus, the Jesus of history, the Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of the New Testament, is God come in the flesh? Have you had this personal inner revelation that he is very God of very God? Very man of very man indeed, but Emmanuel, God with us? Have you had that? That's the source, the revelation of the person of Christ. But begin now with the 30th verse, the 31st verse rather. And on the basis of this, not until this, you're not a candidate to be taught the doctrines of Scripture and the truths of Scripture in their fuller, important meaning until this is certified, until you know with that inner knowing that it no longer depends upon argument and rationalized logic, but it's a revelation given of God.

But until that time, you are not a candidate for the deeper teachings of the Word of God. Then, when he had assured himself that his Father had revealed this unto them, he began to teach them. The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and of the chief priests and scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

And Peter took him and began to rebuke him. Who would ever tolerate him in a day when you have to have positive attitudes toward your purposes and goals and where you have to think constructively of whoever would permit a leader to have such defeatist attitudes? Now, I know that in the gubernatorial race in the state of New York, someone is going to be defeated, but you ask either man that's one of the prominent candidates that he's the one, and he'll deny it. He knows he's going to be elected.

Each has the same confidence. And that was the kind of vim and fervor and enthusiasm that Peter wanted. Why? Because here was the Christ, and what did he understand was to be the ministry of the Christ, why it was to establish the throne of David and to give back to Israel the glory that Israel had had

under David.

And let us not forget who would be the members of the cabinet when the new government was established. Well, I know what James and John thought about, and they asked their mother to work. You know, all politics isn't done on the convention floor, and we've heard about the smoke-filled rooms.

Well, this was a food-filled room, and the mother of James and John had invited all the disciples there and had fed them in the middle of the day until, in the heat and the warmth, most of them were in the shade of the date palms in the outside yard napping, and she said, now, Lord, would you just give me a moment? And after all, what could he do with his hostess that had been so considered and kind? Yes, what is it? And what is the word that he says? What is the message that he brings? What is it that he hears from her? Lord, when thou comest into thy kingdom, let James be your deputy governor, and let John be the secretary of state. Let one sit on your right hand and the other on your left. Ambition was there.

Pride was there. Oh, they had been willing to, as it were, affiliate themselves with one whose claims they felt were valid, but the rest didn't, and after all, taking him in the days of his obscurity, when he was an unknown, a virtually political unknown, no one had any confidence in him. They were the ones that had given themselves to him and brought him into prominence.

Don't you expect that they anticipated the spoils system to operate in the first century as well as in the twentieth? Indeed so. And all of the people that will contribute so generously of time and money during the next few months, believe me, they're not all entirely motivated by purely patriotic incentives. There are others which we wouldn't have to be skeptical or sarcastic to suggest exist.

And so is this company of disciples. And when the Lord says, now listen, I've got to, Peter begins to think of the fact that he's sold his business, he's sold his ships, he's given up his license to peddle fish in Capernaum, and he hasn't any work, and he was counted on being elected. And you can hear, understand what he's saying.

Now, Lord, this is just impossible. It can't be that way. It wasn't the way we planned it at all.

You're the Messiah, you're going to be accepted by the Pharisees and the scribes, even the Sadducees. Sooner or later we'll join you, get on the bandwagon, and the first thing you know we're going to have this Roman yoke off of our necks, and Rome will become the tale of the nation, and we'll be where we were under Solomon, and you're our man. Oh, if you can see it.

What was it? They were following Christ out of selfish motives for what they could secure from him. I think of that communist in Anderson, South Carolina, that said to my preacher friend, I have no time for religion in America. He said, in the Bible I find that Jesus died on a cross.

But today I find people are living off of the cross. It never was intended to be that way. It was intended to be the means of death, not only for Christ, but all that should come after Christ.

And Peter didn't like it. And there are many people in our churches today that don't like it. And there are some that would use plausible theological arguments in an effort to keep the cross in heaven and history, and keep it out of the heart.

But it must come to the heart. God put it in the heart. It must abide on the heart.

We can't take it anyplace else. And our Lord rebuked him. He said, get thee behind me, Satan.

Why? Every effort to utilize fundamental truth, evangelical Christianity, the plan of salvation, every effort to utilize Christ for self-examination has but one authorship. It has come from hell. He is not to be used.

He is to be worshipped, to be adored, to be loved. He was never intended to be the tool for my success, for your ambition. He is the one before whom all must fall in the absolute abandonment of their entire beings.

One avalanche of love and adoration of worship. As John said, he is to envy Christ. The Lord was being tempted by one that was giving the doctrines of Satan.

He rebuked him. Turned from him. Wouldn't hear it.

Wouldn't have it. Couldn't. Get thee.

And he identifies the spokesman. The very one that he said, flesh and blood have not revealed this, my father. The fact that you've been born of God, my friend, doesn't mean that you're omniscient.

The fact that you're right about who Jesus Christ is does not follow that it automatically means that everything you say about Jesus Christ is so. There is but one authority. That is the word of God.

And however, whatever experience I may have had with God, or you may have had with God, whatever gift or blessing he may have bestowed, this is the rule. This is the north and the south and the east and the west of our belief. We dare not go beyond it.

Here we have the revelation of the purpose. The Son of Man must. Must.

Why? For the fulfillment of the eternal purpose hidden in the heart of God before the foundation of the world. For the fulfillment of the great needs that were demanded by the justice of God, which has been so flagrantly violated by man's sin and must be publicly vindicated. For the fulfillment of all the pictures in the Old Testament, all the types of the Old Testament, all the prophecies concerning the Son of God.

It was mandatory that he must. But expositors and exegetes and commentators in Israel had been quite willing to overlook the first coming of Christ in humility and rejection and suffering and death because they saw no personal gain or interest in it. They were then willing to ignore such scriptures and accept only those which spoke of his second coming.

And thus the blindness continues on Israel today because they were unwilling to accept the same clear prophecies concerning his first coming that there are concerning his second coming. Our Lord says he must. He must.

He must what? He must suffer. He must be rejected. If he had just left it, he must suffer.

Then there could have gathered around him a halo that is often associated with martyrdom. If it had been simply that he gave himself up to the cross for those ideals that he held, then that generation of men could have rallied around him and they could have thought of him as a national hero. But it wasn't that he just was suffered.

He must be rejected. He must be rejected. And that does what? That puts stigma and shame and humiliation on the name of Jesus.

He must be rejected. He's been rejected. That was his purpose, to be rejected, just as Satan had rejected God in the hour of his trial, and even Adam had rejected him in the garden, and you rejected him at the age of accountability.

So it was that this company of people, when he came in the flesh, would reject him. They did. They rejected his claims.

They rejected his work. They rejected his ministry. They rejected his message.

They rejected his person. The indictment that they used when they brought him before their tribunals was, he's a fool. He says he can take the temple down and build it in three days.

It took Herod with a great crew of men forty years. He says he's a king. Look at him now.

They rejected him. He must be rejected. And he must die.

And he must be raised again. He was rejected. He did suffer.

He did die. And he has been raised again. But in this next portion, beginning with the thirty-fourth verse through the thirty-eighth, you find the revelation of the program of Christ.

He has his person by the Father. His purpose, the cross. But what's his program? What's his program? What kind of people is he calling? What's he saying to Peter and all the Peters that will come after him? What's he saying to James and John and all the ambitious ones that will come after him? What is the message that he's given? What is the truth that he's declaring? What is the gospel that we're to preach? The Christian life is not a carry-yourself ride.

It's not a Sunday school picnic. It's not a little happy band. The Christian life involves, for the one that would come to Christ, everything that it involves for the Christ that did come.

You cannot change it. You cannot alter it. The tragedy of twentieth-century Christianity is that the Christian message has become acceptable.

We have been given a place in society. The testimony of the truth has been so diluted that no longer are we an offense. The testimony has been lost its edge, it's lost its cutting power, it's lost its significance, its meaning to the place where society is willing to accept us.

They can hold us. Beloved, when this evil world governed by Satan can embrace the Church, the Church has lost its power and its blessing from God. Jeremiah, the ninth chapter, tells you about it.

You need to read it on your knees and realize what's happened. Here was his people Israel that had lost their distinctiveness, lost their holiness. They had lost that for which God had brought them into being, to be a witness for him.

They were no longer a royal nation, a holy nation, a peculiar people. They no longer were there as a testimony to him, a royal priesthood. They are just like the nations, didn't you? They sweep to you at your face and talk about you behind your back.

All of the little social sins that have always characterized the world have now sort of flowed in like the muddy Nile does into the blue Nile until the blue and the white have merged in just a muddy flow. And that's what's happened. And when that happens, then the world can put its arms out and become banked to the Church.

It can hold it. It can hold it. Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ did once and for all do such.

I've had people say, how is the world treating you? And I have to hang my head in shame and chagrin and embarrassment and grief when I say, far too well. Far too well. If the world knew what I believe and what I want to live and what I want to see done, the world would take me and drive me into the caves.

But instead of that, somehow we've been unable to communicate and tell the world why we're here and what we're to do and what we're to be. And so it can wrap its arms around us and let it snuggle up under its protection and its fellowship. We're no longer there capable of piercing it, making it uncomfortable in our presence.

And our Lord Jesus saw it. And even though we've changed and the Church has changed and Christianity has changed, God's Word hasn't changed. And it's my responsibility and your responsibility not to conform to this present world, even to the Church in this present world.

It's my responsibility and yours with me to conform to God's Word, to hear it, to heed it. I don't want to just be angular and awkward and a social misfit. That's not what I'm talking about.

But oh, they hate my God and they hate His Son. Let somehow His beauty and His holiness and His character be manifest in you and manifest in me, and they will turn their hatred from Him to you. Would God it could be so.

Our Lord never said that we were going to be numbered among the best dressed and the best accepted and the most popular. He never said anything like that. He didn't say that that would be our lot.

What did He say? Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and come follow me. What was the crime? What's the attitude of the world? I want to do what I want to do. What has made the church acceptable to the world? That people have been in the church calling themselves Christians still governed by this same principle of hell.

I want to do what I want to do. And the church is filled with people that are just as ambitious and self-willed and self-governed as the people outside. They've taken up a bundle of doctrines and a bag full of ideas and a parcel of religious notions and a box full of theological teachings, but they still are under the same government.

I'm going to do what I want to do. I'm going to be what I want to be, translated into a religious context. But it remains, and this is the reason why the Jonah or the whale of the world has not been able to discharge the Jonah of the people of God, because we're not angular.

There's nothing sharp. There's nothing cutting. But when you live your life under the control of another, under the government of another, when you have denied the right to your career, the right to your relationships, the right to your ambitions, when you have denied yourself and have brought yourself under the government of another, where you must do what he tells you to do, regardless of expediency, regardless of the principles that operate in the world, regardless of any of these things which would make

us acceptable, but when our concern becomes one and one only, and that is to glorify him whose name we name, we're going to discover the world won't be able to make peace with us.

What God could come. The greatest thing that could happen to the cause of Christ in New York would be to have a wave of persecution burst out, and next Sunday, big placards on the door. Anyone who enters in here is subject to immediate arrest and incarceration in a concentration camp.

Oh, beloved, the ones that came in under the edict of that notice would be a people that were prepared to die for Christ. But listen, no one is a Christian unless he's denied himself and taken up his cross. This isn't a deeper life message, this portion.

This isn't a deeper life message. This, my dear, is minimum Christianity. This is the basic issue.

Who's going to be God? Ah, there's a cross in history. But that cross was never intended to be by Christ for you as some great concert pianist would sit down and play for a congregation of thousands. No.

That cross was for you, that you might voluntarily identify yourself with that cross and embrace that cross and take the death of that cross for you and be rejected as well as to suffer. The cross, it's a cross for Christ, but it's a cross for everyone that comes to Christ. The purpose of the cross is to die.

You are a Christian today. You have been born of God when you know that the cross holds no terror and you love it and you're willing to embrace it. Rejection by your friends, your family, your business for the cause of Christ.

All of these are possibilities that you must weigh. You must understand. There's a cross for you.

Have you willingly embraced it? Do you uphold it? Do you accept it? Do you cling to it? Are you born of God? Let us pray. Our Father, we ask Thee to press the cross from its place in history. And take it, Lord, from that altar that we've set it, where we've set it, to be viewed through our spectacles of hymns and poetry and sentiment and emotion and pleasure at the fact that another occupied it for us, that we might escape the indictment that it held and bring it right back and lay it upon our hearts today.

That to be a Christian, to belong to Jesus Christ, is to be prepared willingly, gladly to suffer, family, position, possessions, to all flee away. To be a disciple is to cling to Christ. To call the call is to Christ.

To come to Christ. And to cleave to Him, though it means His cross, His suffering, His rejection, becomes ours. Oh, let there be rise from this company to the last person a willing embrace, a willing embrace of the Christ of the cross and the cross with Christ.

Seal this truth for our hearts. In Jesus' name, amen.

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