

The True Discipleship Broadcast-1983-05 True Discipleship

by William MacDonald

The Lord Jesus teaches that true discipleship involves living a life of poverty, dependence on God, and sacrificial living for the spread of the gospel.

Duration: 25:23

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, Matthew 5:6, Luke 6:12, Luke 6:20-26

Topics: "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the topic of world evangelization and how it is often approached in modern Christianity. He criticizes the focus on financial and entertainment committees, suggesting that the message of the gospel should be the priority. The sermon then focuses on the teaching of Jesus to his disciples on a level place, which is similar to the sermon on the mount but with distinct differences. The speaker emphasizes the importance of having a small group of dedicated and obedient followers who love and fear God above all else, suggesting that with such a group, the world could be evangelized in their generation.

Transcript

Luke, chapter 6, verse 12. Now, it seems to pass in those days that he went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer time. Whatever day called his disciples to him, and from them he chose twelve, whom he also named Apostles.

Simon, whom he also named Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealous, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor. And he came down with them, and stood on a level place with a crowd of his disciples, and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits, and they were healed. The whole multitude sought to touch him, for power went out from him and healed them all.

Then he lifted up his eyes toward his disciples and said, Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil for the son of man's sake. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for indeed your reward is great in heaven. For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets. Now, we call this section and the section following in Luke chapter 6, the training of the twelve. Here you have the Lord Jesus taking the twelve disciples and training them to go forth with the message of the kingdom.

We mentioned that the teachings of the Lord Jesus were positively revolutionary, and I think we'll see when we come to this passage how true that was. But first of all, in verse 12, you find the Lord Jesus going out to the mountain to pray and continuing all night in prayer. This should speak to us very loudly.

If the eternal Son of God, coming down to this earth as a man, felt it necessary to spend a night in prayer, how much more should we? The sad fact of the matter is that most of us can live and die in evangelical churches today and never spend a night in prayer, in spite of the fact that the work of God is done more in prayer than in any other way, in spite of the fact that we can move men through God by prayer, in spite of the fact that Christians hold the balance of power in the world through prayer, in spite of the fact that, as a book I read this week said, prayer is mightier than the atomic bomb, and it really is. The Lord Jesus continued all night in prayer to God. Why was he praying? Well, he was praying because he had some choices to make the next day.

He was going to choose his disciples, and he made every decision in life a matter of prayer. That would be a good prayer request for us every morning when we get up. Lord Jesus, help me to make every decision today a matter of prayer.

Now, that doesn't mean just a big decision, but it means a little one as well, because God is just as honored in little decisions as big ones. And anyway, who can say where the borderline between big ones and little ones comes? When it was day, he called his disciples to him, and from them he chose twelve, whom he also named apostles. The word disciples, as we've already learned, means learner, and the word apostles means sent ones.

They were to learn of him, and they were to be sent forth by him. Now, what about these twelve disciples? What kind of men were they? Well, most of us tend to think of them as a superior breed of men, somebody completely outside our class. But actually, that wasn't true.

These were men just like ourselves, human beings with all the frailties and infirmities of humanity. Personally, there was nothing great about them. Their only greatness was their connection with Jesus.

I'll never forget when I first read that in one of Spurgeon's writings, he said the only great thing about any one of us is our connection with Calvary. But that's really true. Good thing for us all to remember.

Good for your self-image. The only great thing about any one of us is our connection with Calvary. The idea is the Lord Jesus can take people who are nobodies and imbue them with the principles of his kingdom, and if they go out and obey them, they can turn the world upside down.

And that really happened within the lifetime of these disciples. Failing, sinful as they were, they went forth with the message, and their enemies had to confess with tears of rage in their eyes, these men have turned the world upside down. When he chose these disciples, how old do you think they were? Well, the fact of the matter is they were probably in their twenties, which comes as rather a surprise to us, because most of us have been fed on religious pictures in which these men were bearded old fishermen.

But these men were not old men, these men were young men, and they were probably in their twenties. Jesus was over 30 at this time, and we know that he was older than some of them. Why did he choose young men? Because when you're young, the metal is still molten.

It can still be molded. When you get older, it tends to set, and you become hardened in your ways. But the Lord Jesus knew that youth was God's best chance with the soul, and it really is.

Youth is God's best chance with the soul. Notice that he chose 12 disciples, not 12,000, which they would in Texas, or 1,200, or 120. He chose 12 disciples.

Why did he choose 12? Well, first of all, God is never attracted by big numbers, and he's never repelled by small numbers either. Good for us to remember that in an age when success is measured by numbers. God reduced Gideon's army drastically till he got a group of men who were all backbone for him, who meant business for him, and then he went forth and conquered the Midianites.

That's what the Lord Jesus is saying here. If I can just get 12 men, actually 11, because one of them turned out to be the traitor. If I can just get 11 men who love me with all their hearts and fear nothing but sin, and displeasing God, I can turn the world upside down.

I wonder if he could do that today. Do you think if he could get 11 men today who would love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and obey him no matter what the cost may be, do you think the world could be evangelized in our generation? Well, he chose 12 anyway. Here are their names.

We've gone over them, and now he's going to train them. What follows is not the Sermon on the Mount. I'm sure as I read the verses, some of you said, Oh, yes, yes, we already read that in Matthew's Gospel in the Sermon on the Mount.

I would like to suggest to you that this is similar to the Sermon on the Mount, but it's quite different, too. First of all, this is a sermon on the plain. It says, verse 17, He came down with them and stood on a level place.

Not the Sermon on the Mount. He stood on a level place with a crowd of his disciples. So, I think it's important to see that.

You're not going over the Sermon on the Mount. It's not just a repetition. In fact, the Holy Spirit seldom repeats himself in the Gospels.

One of the fascinating studies of the Gospels is the differences where you have something that seems to be the same, but you look twice at it, and you see that the Spirit of God is bringing out something entirely different. Fascinating study, and one that's largely neglected today. Let me show you some of the differences between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Blessed are the poor in spirit. Here he says, Blessed be ye poor. He doesn't say poor in spirit here.

He says in the Sermon on the Mount, Blessed are ye who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Matthew 5 verse 6. He doesn't say that here. He said, Blessed are you that hunger.

So, let's get that fixed clearly in our minds. Here we're dealing with the Sermon on the Plain. Notice that the multitude was there, although Jesus directed his teaching especially to the disciples.

I think it's very interesting that the Lord Jesus wasn't afraid to share his most revolutionary teaching with the multitude. He was quite willing that they should know what lay ahead if they were ever going to trust him as Lord and Savior. And I think that's good.

I think we don't do that enough today. We try to sugarcoat the gospel, make people think that if they were saved, God would be tremendously lucky, but it's not the case. Okay, he came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear of them and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirit, and they were healed.

I like verse 19. It says, The whole multitude sought to touch him, for power went out from him and healed them all. You know, the world can recognize when a man has the power of the Holy Spirit.

There's something tremendously attractive about a man who's sold out to God and from whom power goes forth. I don't know how many men like that you've ever met, but there are a few still in the world. All right, now, the Lord Jesus is going to go on to the cross.

He's going to die for the sins of the world. He's going to be buried. He's going to rise again and go back to heaven, and he's going to send these disciples out to carry the message.

The task is world evangelization. Put yourself in his position today. Supposing you had the task of world evangelization before you, how would you organize it? Actually, in a sense, you do.

Now, when you think of the evangelization of the world, what do you think of? Well, judging by evangelical Christianity in the United States today, I think the first thing we would do would be to appoint a finance committee because you can't do anything without dollars. I think the second thing would be to appoint a food committee because you have to serve tea, coffee, refreshments to the people. Otherwise, they wouldn't come.

The third thing you would do would be to appoint an entertainment committee because you have to have ding-dong cowboys to entertain the people. There has to be that attractiveness to the message. And then I think the fourth thing you would do would be appoint a public relations committee because you do want the community to think well of you, don't you? Well, this is the way that modern Christians think.

A finance committee, a food committee, an entertainment committee, and a public relations committee. Now, just take that and tip it completely upside down, and that's what Jesus did. Just take it and reverse the whole thing.

Forget those committees and do the very opposite but that's what Jesus did. When will we ever learn? He lifted up his eyes toward his disciples and said, Blessed are you poor for yours is the kingdom of God.

There goes my son, the infinity.

The Lord Jesus sent out his disciples as poor men. Notice it doesn't say poor in spirit, does it? And it doesn't mean poor in spirit either. How do we know? Well, because the contrast is down in verse 24.

It says, Woe to you who are rich. What? Rich in spirit? Doesn't make sense. When he said poor, he meant poor.

When he said rich, he meant rich. The Lord Jesus wanted his disciples to go out as poor men. Why did he want them to go out as poor men? Well, there were a lot of reasons.

First of all, they were to go out representing him and he was poor. You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ how that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. For Jesus' poverty might be rich.

We never read about the Lord Jesus ever carrying money on his person. Isn't that amazing? When he needed a coin, he sent Peter to go and fish in the Sea of Galilee and bring out a fish with a coin in its mouth. We never read of the Lord Jesus using money to manipulate his purposes.

Do we? He never used money as a source of power. He was a poor man. Even born into the world in a poor family where Mary had to go and offer the turtle doves as an offering.

The disciples were to represent him and what a terrible representation it would be if they went forth as rich men. It would give an entirely false view of the Christian faith. I like a story that E. Stanley Jones told.

He went into one of the great cathedrals in Rome and he saw there a statue of the Christ Child, the Bambino. And the people had draped all kinds of beads and jewels around the Bambino's neck. And then E. Stanley Jones went out into the streets of Rome and he saw hungry children with pinched, peaked faces.

And when he looked at them he said I wonder if the Bambino is enjoying his jewels. And he decided that if he were he could no longer enjoy the thought of the Bambino. But that's what we've done.

We've taken Christ and we've covered him with jewels and riches and with such cliches as it's nice to see rich Christians in complete repudiation of the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were going out to represent him. He wanted them to go out as poor men.

Not only that, he wanted them to go out living lives of dependence upon him. If they went out as rich men then their prayer lives would suffer. And they could do things.

In fact, they could carry on religious work without it necessarily being the work of the Lord. Also, he didn't want people to be attracted to him with the thought that they might become rich. You go to certain countries of the world today and if the people have any thought that they might benefit economically they will make professions of faith in Christ.

The poverty is so great. Jesus didn't want that to happen. Years ago, the expression arose in China Rice Christians.

What does that mean? It meant people who would become Christians for a bowl of rice. And I could name a country of the world today where a man will profess to be saved, be baptized, and come into the fellowship of the local church and be in the local church for 20 years all with the hope of what he will get

out of it materially. It's still in the world today.

Jesus didn't want his disciples to go out and hold that before the people. Someone has said that the disciples would never have been able to accomplish what they did if they had been rich. Something to think about, isn't it? The disciples would never have been able to accomplish what they did if they had been rich.

We think the very opposite. We think, well, you can't do anything if you're poor. God has chosen the weak, the base, the despised, the things that are not to bring to naught the things that are that no flesh should glory in his sight.

God wants all the glory to go to him not to the weak earthen vessel. And so he strips us of all that we might depend on so that we can go forth and herald his glorious message. But let's think of those words a while.

Blessed are you poor for yours is the kingdom of God. Is it a blessing to be poor? Well, if you go to most countries of the world today, third world countries, and if you just say, blessed be ye poor, if you go and you see these people dying on the streets of hunger and say, well, never mind, blessed be ye poor for yours is the kingdom of God, they would look up at you with jaundiced eye and say, listen, pal, it's no blessing to be poor, it's a curse. Wouldn't they? How do you reconcile that? Well, the key is found down at the end of verse 22.

Blessed be ye poor for the son of man's sake. That's what it means. There's no blessing just to be poor in itself.

There are people grumbling in poverty today and their lives are miserable from sunrise to sunset. But there is great blessing in being poor for the son of man's sake. What does it mean? Well, it means disciples who could be rich if they wanted to, who could be raking in the money, and they say, no.

In a world such as the world I live in, I choose not to be rich. I choose to use my money, my material things, for the spread of the gospel and for the eternal enrichment of others. And it's a deliberate choice.

Now, you'll seldom hear this preached from any pulpit in the United States today. All I ask you today is, is this what the word of God says? Blessed are you poor for yours is the kingdom of God. These disciples could have been rich.

They could have fished the fish out of the Sea of Galilee and turned fish into silver and silver into bank accounts. They could have done that. Jesus said, that isn't what I want.

I want you to go out to be poor for my sake and you'll get the job done. So, there goes our finance committee. What about our food committee? He says, blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be filled.

Once again, to be hungry in general is not a blessing. It's a curse. But, you've got to put the key in the door but down again to the end of verse 22 for the Son of Man's sake.

For the Son of Man's sake. He's speaking about disciples who could be eating the finest gourmet food, who could be living high off the hog, who could be fat and gluttonous, but it would give an entirely wrong view of the Christian faith. It would be very bad to go to India as a missionary if you weighed 250 pounds.

They don't have Metrocal or other dieting agents in India. They don't need them. But, that's what the Lord is talking about here.

If the disciples went out eating in the finest restaurants, eating the finest food, they could get all kinds of followers in a world like ours, but they'd be followers of the wrong kind. They'd be followers who never had any deep conviction of sin. All they had was a deep hunger in their stomachs.

And what the Lord Jesus is saying here is that he wants disciples who are willing to live sacrificially for the spread of the gospel. In other words, hungry for the Son of Man's sake. Any other hunger is not a blessing, it's a curse, as millions in the world today will tell you.

So, there goes our food committee. Well, we said we also want an entertainment committee. Jesus said, Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Nobody lives very long in this world without weeping. It's a world of sorrow, of sobbing, of sighing, and of crying. And it's not usually a blessing.

Once again, I ask you to put the key in the door. Blessed are you who weep now about perishing souls. It's really solemn.

It's a solemn thing. It's a solemn thing to meet God with sins unconfessed. And sins.

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