

True Discipleship - Part 1

by William MacDonald

A Christian's zeal for God is essential for effective service and advancing the gospel.

Duration: 27:48

Scripture: Mark 8:36, John 2:13-17

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of maintaining zeal for God in the Christian life. He warns against getting caught up in worldly pursuits and living a life without true passion for God. The speaker shares a story about a young man who works for Ford Motor Company and is also involved in singing at funerals. He highlights the need for Christians to set boundaries and prioritize their devotion to God above all else. The sermon also mentions the example of C.T. Stud, who dedicated his life to serving God in various continents and was inspired by an article written by an atheist.

Transcript

We'll continue our studies on the subject of Christian discipleship, and I'd like you to just turn for a minute to John chapter 2, and we'll begin reading in verse 13. John chapter 2 and verse 13. Actually I'm just going to emphasize verse 17, but for connection we'll begin with the 13th verse.

The Jews' Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and he found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting. And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables, and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence, make not my father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

That's the verse I have particularly in mind, his disciples remembered that it was written of him, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. It's almost impossible to think about Christian discipleship without thinking about this word zeal. You know, a Christian could be excused for not having great mental ability.

As far as I'm concerned, the great work that's being done for God today is not being done by intellectual giants. And if I were to be able to choose a fellowship of Christians to make history for God, I'd probably choose a group of people who are of very average intellectual attainment, but who had hearts overflowing with love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so I say this morning, a person, a Christian, could be

excused for not having great mental achievement.

And also a Christian can be excused for not having great physical prowess. You could live a very normal Christian life and be quite uncoordinated in your joints and all the rest, but it's absolutely unforgivable for a Christian disciple not to have zeal. Because we're followers of the one of whom it could be said, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

Did you ever stop to think what that verse means? What does it mean, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up? Well, it means this, that the Lord Jesus Christ was consumed with a passion for the things of God his Father. And his whole life was lived in sort of a spiritual tension. And I use that in a good sense, not in a bad sense.

There was no fretfulness or worry, but his whole life was lived in a state of spiritual tension. He said, I have a baptism to be baptized of, and how am I straightened until it be accomplished? The cross was ever before him, and he went on consistently, forwardly to face the cross and redemption for mankind. The same blessed Lord Jesus Christ said, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

The night cometh when no man can work. What a wonderful thing to picture the Lord Jesus Christ moving through this scene. Every day with its appointed duties, I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day.

The night cometh when no man can work. Now John the Baptist was a man with zeal. You remember the Lord Jesus said of him, he was a burning and a shining light.

And I think those words express very vividly the idea of zeal. In fact, I could scarcely define zeal without introducing the idea of fire, without the idea of burning, because a man with zeal is a man with a red-hot passion for a cause, and a Christian zealot is a man with a red-hot passion for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul was a man of zeal.

This is a great thing that we need today. Someone has written the following description of the Apostle Paul, and I commend it to you. I think it's a very apt description.

He is a man without the care of making friends. He doesn't care whether he makes friends or not. Without the hope or desire of worldly good, not trying to get ahead in the world, without the apprehension of worldly loss, these things don't make any difference to him.

Without the care of life, without the fear of death, he's a man of no rank, country, or condition. A man of one thought, the gospel of Christ. A man of one purpose, the glory of God.

A fool and content to be reckoned a fool for Christ's sake. Let him be called enthusiastic, fanatic, babbler, or any other outlandish description that men may give him, but still let him be nondescript, because as soon as they call him traitor, householder, a citizen, a man of substance, a man of the world, a man of learning, or even a man of common sense, it's all over with his character. He must speak, or he must die.

And though he should die, yet he will speak. He has no rest, but hastens over land and sea, over rocks and trackless deserts. He cries aloud and spares not, and will not be hindered.

In the prison he lifts up his voice, and in the tempests of the ocean he's not silent. Before awful councils and gatherings of kings, he witnesses in behalf of the truth. Nothing can quench his voice but death.

And even in the article of death, ere yet this fiery flame and rolling smoke have suffocated the organ of his soul, he speaks, he prays, he testifies, he confesses, he beseeches, he wars, and at length he blesses the cruel people. Well, that zeal, in the New Testament sense of the word, the zeal of the Holy Spirit. And thank God for men and women down through the centuries who've had this same zeal for our blessed Savior.

Perhaps one of the books that influenced my life more than any other was the biography of C.T. Studd. I read it while I was yet in the Navy, and the night I finished that book at midnight, I knew that a revolution had taken place in my life. One of the things that impressed me about C.T. Studd was this.

He came to the conclusion that if everything the Bible says about Christ is true, there's no other alternative than to be all out for Him. C.T. Studd said, Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.

Well, that's exactly what he did. He ran a rescue shop in India, in Africa, in three different continents, actually. Asia, Europe, and Africa was greatly used of God.

And incidentally, the thing that started C.T. Studd along this track was a little article written by an atheist. It had a profound influence upon him. And I'd like to read you that article this morning.

It says, these are the words of an atheist, If I really believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyment as dross, earthly cares as folly, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought in the morning, and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness.

I should labor in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of eternity alone. I would esteem one soul gained for heaven worth a life of suffering.

Earthly consequences would never stay my hand or seal my lips. Earth, its joys and its griefs would occupy no moment of my thoughts. I would strive to look upon eternity alone, and on the immortal souls about me soon to be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable.

I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? John Wesley was a man of zeal. He said, Give me a hundred men who love God with all their hearts and fear nothing but sin, and I'll move the world. And that's what God's looking for today, isn't it? Men who love Him with all their hearts and fear nothing but sin.

And dear Jim Elliott was a man of zeal. Once again I refer to him. I referred to him yesterday.

Jim Elliott was meditating one day when he was still in college on that verse of scripture, He maketh his ministers a flame of fire. And Jim wrote these words in his diary that day. He maketh his ministers a flame of fire.

Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of other things. Saturate me with the oil of thy spirit that I may be aflame. But flame is transient, often short-lived.

Canst thou endure this, my soul? But in me there dwells the spirit of the great short-lived one whose zeal for God consumed him. Then he closed his meditation with these words, Make me thy fuel, flame of God. You know, that's a wonderful statement.

Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of other things. Saturate me with the oil of thy spirit that I may be aflame. And that is if he knew, as if he knew the martyrdom that lay ahead of him, he said, But flame is transient, often short-lived.

Canst thou bear this, my soul? And you know, the last line of that little meditation of his came from a poem that was quoted by Amy Carmichael. I don't know if you know it or not, but it's a good poem, and I'm going to share it with you this morning. This poem says, From prayer that asks that I might be sheltered from winds that beat on thee, From fearing when I should aspire, From faltering when I should climb higher, From silken self, O Captain, free thy soldier who would follow thee, From subtle love of softening things, From easy choices, weakenings, Not thus are spirits fortified, Not this way went the crucified, From all that dims thy calvary, O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way, The faith that nothing can dismay, The hope no disappointments tire, The passion that will burn as fire. Let me not sink to be a clod, Make me thy fuel, flame of God. Do you know those last two lines burned themselves into my soul today? Let me not sink to be a clod.

Don't let me sink to be a mere lump of dirt, Spending my life doing what an unregenerate man could have done just as well. Make me thy fuel, flame of God. You know, the disgrace of the Christian church today is that greater zeal and enthusiasm are being shown by Communists and false cultists than by members of the body of Christ.

Greater zeal is being shown by cultists and Communists than by members of the body of Christ. In 1903, Lenin had 17 followers. Today, his doctrine controls two-fifths of the world's population.

Karl Marx gathered a group of maybe ten or eleven men around him and started teaching them his principles. When he died, only about 15 people attended his funeral. But today, his teaching controls the minds of a great section of the world's population.

At the last InterVarsity conference in Urbana, Billy Graham read a letter written by a young Communist, an American boy who had gone to Mexico and there had been converted to Communism. He came back to this country and he wrote this letter to his fiancée, explaining to her why he could no longer carry on this friendship with her. Many of you, no doubt, have read this letter, have heard it, but I'm going to read it again today because I know it has had a profound influence upon many young Christian people.

This is what the young fellow wrote to his fiancée. We Communists have a high casualty rate. We're the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible.

A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the Party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive.

We Communists don't have the time or the money for many movies or concerts or T-bone steaks or decent homes and new cars. We've been described as fanatics. We are fanatics.

Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, the struggle for world Communism. We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life.

We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity. And if our personal lives or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the Party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us, in his small way, is contributing something new and true and better to mankind. There's one thing in which I'm in deadly earnest, and that is the Communist cause.

It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and my mistress, my bread and my meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on.

Therefore I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideas, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad.

You know, when you read a letter like that from a young Communist, you realize that that's what we ought to be for Jesus Christ. They've stolen our thunder. We're told in Emory & Ham today that our generation is the uncommitted generation.

Our young people wouldn't pay a nickel to see an earthquake. They have nothing to live for and nothing to die for. Well, perhaps it's partly our failure that we've refused, we've held back from presenting to them the challenge of Jesus Christ, the challenge of full and wholehearted discipleship to the worthy Lord Jesus.

I say if a Communist can be this for the Kremlin, how much more should young people be this for Jesus Christ? If the Christian faith is worth believing at all, it's worth believing in heroically. It's worth believing in sacrificially. If the Lord Jesus is worth anything, he's worth everything.

And perhaps the reason today that many Christians are absolutely miserable, in spite of all the testimonies you might hear to the contrary, perhaps one of the reasons why so many Christian people today are absolutely miserable is because they've failed to heed the word of the Lord Jesus, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And we've failed to live with a burning passion and red-hot fire for the Lord Jesus Christ. God wants men who are zealous for him.

Now, I believe that when a man is zealous and on fire for the Lord, he seems to be drunk. You know, the world always has a natural explanation for every spiritual phenomenon. And you get a man who's on fire for God, the world says, that man's drunk.

And that's what they said of the day of Pentecost. Peter said, no, these men are not drunk with new wine. This is that which was spoken of by Joel the prophet.

They're not drunk, they just have a deep, enormous, haunting, never-stated thirst for God. Now, Bishop Ryle gave us a description of a zealous man, and once again I'd like to share this with you. I don't usually read so much in any message, but I think these are worth reading.

The saintly Bishop Ryle, he says a zealous man in religion is preeminently a man of one thing. It's not enough to say that he's earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thoroughgoing, wholehearted, fervent in spirit.

He only sees one thing.

He cares for one thing. He lives for one thing. He's swallowed up in one thing, and that one thing is to please God.

Whether he lives or whether he dies, whether he has health or whether he has sickness, whether he's rich or whether he's poor, whether he pleases men or whether he gives offense, whether he's thought wise or whether he's thought foolish, whether he gets blamed or whether he gets prayed, whether he gets honor or whether he gets shame, for all this, the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing, and that one thing is to please God and to advance God's glory. If he's consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it at all.

He's content. He feels like a lamp he's made to burn. And if consumed in burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him.

Such an one will always find a sphere for his zeal. If he cannot preach and work and give money, he will cry and sigh and pray. Yes, if he's only a pauper on a perpetual bed of sickness, he will make the wheels of sin around him drive heavily by continually interceding against it.

If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he will do the work of Moses, Aaron and Hur on the hill. If he's cut off from working himself, he will give the Lord no rest till help is raised up from another quarter and the work is done. This is what I mean when I speak of zeal and religion.

Now, you know, a lot of people start off with zeal in their Christian life and then the things of this world come in and pretty soon they're caught up in a whirlpool of activity and they go on and on and on and their standard of living advances as their income advances and they look back on the fag end of a wasted career and they've lived their life without true zeal for God. And I'd like to suggest to all our hearts this morning that there comes a time in the Christian life when a person must say to the demands of business, to the demands of everyday life about him, thus far shall I proud ways come and no further. We were speaking yesterday of a young man in Des Moines in the assembly, one of the assemblies in Des Moines, Iowa and Ray has a nice singing voice, works for Ford Motor Company and sometimes when there's a funeral in the chapel they ask Ray to sing.

So there was one time when he was asked to sing at a funeral and he went to his employer in the Ford Motor Company and he said, I've been asked to sing at the funeral, I'd like to have time off. And the employer said with a sneer, sure, that's right, Ray, we have to marry them and bury them. So Ray went to the funeral.

Well embarrassingly enough, two weeks later there was another funeral and they asked Ray to sing. And he went to his employer and he said that he'd like to get off to sing at another funeral. And the employer said to him, look Johnson, when you work for Ford Motor Company, Ford Motor Company must come first in your life.

What do you say next? What do you say then? Well I'll tell you what Ray said. He said to him, Ford Motor Company doesn't come first in my life. The Lord comes first in my life.

And the employer said, oh sure, he said, that's right, we can all go to church on Sunday. And Ray said to him, and my family comes second in my life. And he said, Ford Motor Company comes third in my life.

He had reached that point and he made the decision. But I believe in the life of every man that really wants to go on for God, and every woman as well, there are crises come, there are decisions that must be made when you say, this far and no further I'm going to live my life for God. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus to the young man who said he would follow him.

He said, first let me go and bury my father. And the Lord Jesus said to him, let the dead bury the dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. You know there are things in this world that an unbeliever can do just as well as a believer.

And I don't want to spend my life doing what an ungodly person could have done just as well. There are things in this life that only a Christian can do. And I want that to be the main bent of my life, doing what others couldn't do just as well.

And so I trust that as we go from the conference in days to come, that each of us as we come to these crises, to these junctures in life, will be given grace by God to make the decision that the great part of our life will be spent in zeal for the living God, in zeal for the one of whom it was said, the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

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