

True Discipleship - Part 3

by William MacDonald

True discipleship requires Christians to be engaged in a death struggle against principalities and powers in heavenly places, and to demonstrate their commitment to Christ through humility, suffering, and obedience.

Duration: 32:25

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:8

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the topics of discipleship and warfare. He begins by referencing 1 Corinthians chapter 4, emphasizing the apostles' role as servants appointed to death. He shares a story about Betty Elliott, who believed that God would protect her and her daughter while ministering to dangerous Alka Indians. The speaker also discusses the importance of using weapons in spiritual warfare, specifically prayer and the Word of God. He mentions Billy Graham's plan to concentrate on the scriptures in the last years of his life.

Transcript

We turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 4, 1 Corinthians chapter 4, beginning with verse 8. Our subject this morning is discipleship and warfare. 1 Corinthians chapter 4, beginning with verse 8. Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us. And I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles, last of all, as it were appointed to death. For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are honorable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place.

Labor, working with our own hands, being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we suffer it. Being defamed, we entreat.

We are made of the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers.

For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. I think that even a casual reading of the New Testament will tell us that Christianity is not a pleasant pastime, but it's a passionate quest.

It's not a matter of hurdy-gurdy entertainment. It's a matter of warfare. As you study the lives of the disciples, the lives of the apostles, as they went forth in the name of the Lord Jesus, you know that they went forth as soldiers.

They didn't go forth wearing crowns. They went forth bearing reproach. And I really think, if we're going to be honest with ourselves, that we'll have to agree that much of what we see in Christendom about us today, and which poses as Christianity, is very far removed from the Christianity that you find within the pages of the New Testament.

I think Dr. Tozer has brought that very forcibly to our attention in the following paragraph. He says, Christ calls men to carry a cross. We call them to have fun in his name.

He calls them to forsake the world. We assure them that if they but accept Christ, the world is their oyster. He calls them to suffer.

We call them to enjoy all the bourgeois comforts modern civilization affords. He calls them to self-abnegation and death. We call them to spread themselves like a green bay tree, or perchance even to become stars in a pitiful fifth-rate religious zodiac.

He calls them to holiness. We call them to a cheap and pawdroy happiness that would have been rejected with scorn by the least of the Stoic philosophers. And once again, I think that if we are to admit the truth, we'll have to admit that this is a picture.

We'll have to admit that Christianity as it's found in the New Testament is a struggle to the death in which there is no turning back. That the Christianity of the Bible is a Christianity in which we're engaged in a death struggle against principalities and powers in heavenly places. It's a war, and war is serious business.

And I think we just should spend some time this morning thinking about this and reminding ourselves of several points in connection with true warfare, points that should carry over to our Christian life. And I would suggest, first of all, that in war there must be unity. There must be unity, and in Christian discipleship there must be unity.

There's no time for bickering. There's no time for petty jealousy. There's no time for arguing over non-essentials or for divided loyalties.

In the Christian faith, we must stand united with one another. You know, it's interesting to me that in the Bible, the way to unity is through humility. In the church at Philippi, two of the sisters weren't getting along too well, and the apostle Paul dealt with the subject in chapter two.

He heard that there were divisions and disputes among them, and he holds up to them the example of the Lord Jesus in his humiliation. It is coming and humbling himself as a man here on earth. And perhaps there are some here today who are going through this sort of problem in your local assembly or your local church.

Well, the secret is easy. According to the word of God, if you want to have a united church, you have a group of Christians who are humble. Humble Christians don't fight with one another.

Just as an illustration of that, I'm reminded of Dr. Ironside. Sometimes he would get up and preach, and some of the people would get furious. Maybe some man would tackle him at the end of the meeting and start to argue, at least try to promote an argument.

Dr. Ironside would say this. He would say, My dear brother, when we get to heaven, one of us is going to be wrong, and perhaps it'll be me. There was no fight.

There was no fight. You can't fight with a man like that, can you? It completely takes the wind out of your sail. The way to unity in the things of God is through humility.

The scripture says, Only by pride cometh contention. You show me contention in a local assembly over matters that are not fundamental, and I'll show you at least two people who are proud. At least two, because it takes two to make a fight.

And if we really had a consciousness of the death struggle in which we are engaged, some of the present things that cause such distress would be cast aside as nonessential. Secondly, in warfare, there must be austerity and sacrificial living. Those of us who remember the Second World War remember the system of rationing that went on.

In any war of any consequence, this takes place. And in the Christian war, it should take place too. There should be austerity and sacrificial living.

On Wednesday night, I told you a young man who was president of the freshman class at a large Christian college, and who resigned as president of the freshman class rather than spend class funds for things which did not result in the eternal blessing of souls. And this morning, I'd like to read to you the letter which he wrote and which was distributed to all the members of the freshman class the day his resignation was announced. This is the letter.

It says, Dear Freshman, For the past two weeks, the freshman class cabinet has been discussing the thoughts which are presented in the letter below. After a time of much prayer and deliberation, this letter was submitted to the student council executive committee, which moved that the cabinet of the class of 63 have the authority to vote on its acceptance. The student council also made the ruling that since our freshman constitution is not specific on the issue of office vacancy, that the vice president of the class should take over the duties of president due to the limited time left in the unexpired freshman term.

With sincere regret, on Monday, March 7, the cabinet unanimously voted to accept Roger's resignation. This is his letter. Dear Classmates, Since the matter of class parties, jackets, and the class gift have been brought before the cabinet, I, as the president of the class, have been considering the Christian attitude toward these areas.

I think we would find the greatest joy for our own selves in giving ourselves, our time, and our money entirely to Christ and for others, thus finding the reality of his words, He who loses his life for my sake will find it. For Christians to spend their money and time on things that do not result in a definite witness to the unbeliever, or for the building up of his children in him, would seem to be inconsistent with the fact that 7,000 people die daily from starvation, and over half the world has never heard of man's only hope. How much more glory we could give to God by helping to spread the gospel to the other 60% of the world

who've never heard of Jesus Christ, or even in many neighboring homes, instead of coming together in a little clique by ourselves, limiting our social well-roundedness to those of like mind and wasting money and time for our own pleasure.

Since I am aware of specific needs and opportunities where finances can be used to such great advantage to the glory of Jesus Christ, and for helping my neighbor here and abroad, it's impossible for me to allow class funds to be spent unnecessarily on ourselves. If I were one of those who are in so great a need, as I know of so many to be, I would want those who have the ability to do all that they could to supply me with the gospel and with my material need. And as ye wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

But if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Therefore it is with love and prayer that you might see the Lord Jesus giving his all, that I hereby submit to you my resignation as president of the class of sixty-three. In hymn with you, Roger Malster. Did you know that verse, that letter I've just read to you has really had a profound effect in the hearts and lives of young people throughout the midwestern area of the United States.

We think that in order to keep young people today in the Christian fold, that we have to provide them with entertainment and a lot of things like that. But I want to tell you this, that thinking young people go to the word of God and they read what it says, and they know what it means, and they can detect sham when they see it too. And here's an illustration of that.

A young fellow who's willing to realize that this is war in which we're engaged, a war for Christ, and he feels that there should be sacrificial living in order that men might not perish for want of the gospel. Then thirdly, I would suggest this morning that war demands suffering. War demands suffering.

We have young people today that think nothing at all of going into the armed forces, of taking the training there, crawling under barbed wire entanglements while a machine gun sprays bullets overhead, doing all of this for Uncle Sam. And yet when it comes to doing this for our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, when it comes to sacrifice for Him, it's a different story. You know, to me it's a crying shame that there are young people today who would do for a dollar bill what they wouldn't do for Christ.

It's a crying shame to me to think that there are men and women today who would cross the ocean for standard oil, but they wouldn't do it for the Savior. Something wrong, isn't there? I'm afraid there's something wrong. A faith that costs nothing is worth exactly that.

No considerations of personal safety or immunity from suffering should stop us in our service for the Lord. I'd like you to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 11 in this connection, to me one of the most superb passages in all the writings of the Apostle Paul. His apostleship had been called into question.

They said he wasn't a true apostle, he was just a fraud, he was just an imposter. How does he defend himself against the charge? 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 23, he points to his sufferings. The other night I read a letter from a young communist telling why he couldn't go on with his engagement to his girl.

But here's a letter that's something greater than that. The letter of the great Apostle Paul, he says in 2 Corinthians 11, verse 23, are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I'm more. In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils of the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness, besides those things which are about that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. I tell you when you read something like that, there's reality there, isn't there? But I think we all know deep in our heart of hearts that this is true Christianity.

I love to read in Paul's letter to the Philippians where he writes to them and he says, Yea, and if I be offered upon the service and sacrifice of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. The thought of that passage is that Paul was willing to be poured out in martyrdom as a drink offering upon the service and sacrifice of the Philippians' faith, and if that happened to him, he would die exactly the way he wanted to die. He says that in the third chapter of Philippians 2, that I may know him, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Paul had the martyr spirit. I believe that passage of Scripture tells us that Paul's attitude was this. Did Jesus suffer? Yes.

Well, then I don't want anything less in life. Did Jesus die, his body go into the grave? Yes. Did he rise from among the dead? Yes.

Well, I want to go home to heaven the way he went home to heaven. Darby suggests that Paul would have been embarrassed to go to heaven and meet Stephen there, whom he had helped to dispatch, if he had gone home himself in any more comfortable way. So when you envision, stand by the executioner's block in Rome and see Paul's head lopped off and rolling on the ground, you can say he died the way he wanted to die.

This is the spirit that animated Jim Elliott while he was still a young man at Wheaton College. He wrote in his diary, I am ready to die for the Elkers. I hadn't even heard of the Elkers at that time.

So war demands suffering. And war not only demands suffering, but it demands implicit obedience. Obedience.

We sometimes chuckle over the fact that young fellows going to the army are told to dig a hole and then they're told to fill it up. Terrible waste of time and of talent, isn't it? Not exactly. The older you get, the more you think, well, maybe that wasn't so unwise.

Because the army wants men who will obey implicitly without asking questions. And if they can train men to do that in digging holes and filling it up, perhaps they'll have men who in the crisis of battle will advance when the call is given. And I don't know if you've ever thought of it this way, but there are a lot of things in the word of God that are little tests of our obedience.

There are a lot of things, for instance, in the writings of the apostle Paul. And really, it's too bad the way some people speak about them. They say, oh, well, that was just a part of the culture of the day in which Paul lived, and that doesn't apply to us today.

Just a little test of obedience, you know, and we just wave it aside. Or we say, oh, well, Paul wrote that. Paul was a bachelor, you know, and Paul was a woman-hater anyway, and if he weren't, he never would have put that in.

They say, well, what's the matter with it anyway? Yeah, well, it says that there in the scripture, but what's wrong with that? And God, I think, has seen fit to put little things in the word of God. We might think of them as little things. Instructions, commandments in the word of God, and maybe when you sit down and think about it, what's the matter with it? Dear friends, I'd like to ask you something.

What was the matter with the fruit in the Garden of Eden? Why was it wrong for Adam and Eve to eat the fruit? Was the fruit poisonous, do you think? I don't think so. Nothing in the record to indicate the fruit was poisonous. Why was it wrong for Adam and Eve to eat the fruit? There's only one reason it was wrong, because God said so.

And God tested obedience on that basis, and he's doing it today. Watch out when you go to the word of God and start dealing lightly with it, and start saying, well, that was just a part of the culture of Paul's day, and that doesn't apply to us today at all. And Paul was this, and Paul was that.

Paul says, if any man among you think of himself to be spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the what? Anybody? Commandments of the Lord. Exactly right. But in this war, God wants men and women who will be obedient to him, and not ask questions.

Could Christ be satisfied with anything less than absolute obedience? The idea is monstrous. I was thrilled to read in Elizabeth Elliott's latest book, the savage Mike Kinsman. The foreword of the book was written by an unsaved man named Cornel Capa, the photographer who took such tremendous pictures down there in Ecuador.

And in this foreword, he tells of how one day he had a conversation with Betty Elliott. He said to her, how can you go in among those wretched, savage, Alka Indians with your little daughter, and expose yourself and your daughter to danger and death? And she said, the Lord will save us from that. And he said to her, why didn't the Lord save your husband? And she answered him, the Lord saved my husband from being disobedient.

If he hadn't gone, he would have been disobedient to the Lord. And I'll never forget in the record how, when those fellows were standing around the organ that morning, they were singing, we rest in thee our shield and our defender. And the clock was ticking by the moment.

And the deadline was drawing near. And one of them says, look, if we don't move now, we're being disobedient. They went forth to the cure our speech and to their death.

That's what God wants in all of our lives. And then I would suggest to you next that war demands skill in the use of weapons. We've already spoken of the weapon of prayer.

And war demands skill in the use of the other weapon, and that is the word of God. The word of God. You know, I noticed in the Sunday School Times, of which Mr. Stacy Woods is now president, that there was a quotation recently, where a reporter asked Billy Graham, if he had the last ten years to live over, how would he do things differently? He says, this is my plan for the next decade.

I particularly plan to concentrate on the Scriptures. I want to be saturated in the Scriptures when the end of my life comes. I like that.

I want to be saturated in the Scriptures when the end of my life comes. You know, a lot of us have that intention. And then the things of life crowd in, and our little life slips by.

We go out into eternity, and we haven't done what we know is of utmost importance. We haven't really saturated ourselves in the Holy Scriptures. Mr. Robert Little, known to some of you, was up in Evanston not long ago, speaking in the assembly.

And at the end of his message, a man came to him and said, Brother Little, did I hear you get up and I hear you expound the word of God? He said, my, how I wish I had that knowledge of the word of God. He said, tell me. He said, what can I do to get the knowledge of the word of God that you have? You know what Mr. Little said to him? He said, it's too late.

It was. That's true of some here at the meeting this morning. Too late.

It isn't true of some of you young people, perhaps. But it is true of some of the others. A wise soldier will get to know his weapons and know how to use them.

The wise soldier doesn't go around defending his weapons either. He goes around using them. You know, in colleges and universities and schools today, all kinds of doubts are being cast upon the word of God.

The inspiration of the Scriptures, all kinds of arguments are being brought against the Bible. Dear friends, I don't spend my life going around defending the Bible. I'd rather use it.

Now, I know there is a place for the defense of the Scriptures. I know there is a place for apologetics. But my advice to young people today is get to know the word of God and use it.

If I were in a sword duel and a man said to me, I don't believe that sword's real steel. What would I do? Give him a philosophical argument as to the metallic content of the sword. I should say not.

I'd give him a good jab with it. Let him know. I'd let him know it was real steel.

That's what I like to do with the Scriptures too. I like to use the Scriptures and see them. Get into the man and see him wince under the power of God's precious weapon.

Well then, warfare demands that we know the enemy and his strategy. You might just turn quickly to Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 12. We really don't have time to go into this in detail.

Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against the spiritual wickedness in high places. And one of the things that the young Christian soldier has to realize is this.

That most of his opposition in the Christian warfare will come from the religious world. Satan, the dupes of Satan, pose as ministers of righteousness. And if you study the history of the Christian warfare, you'll find that most of the antagonism and most of the enmity has come from men who pose as ministers of religion.

From those who wear the clerical garb, from those who profess to be servants of Christ and are actually his enemies, whose God is their belly. And then war demands undistractedness. No man that warreth and

tangleth himself with the affairs of this world.

A true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is ruthless. He's intolerant against anything that comes between the soul and Jesus Christ and faithful, loyal service to him. Then finally, war demands courage.

There's no room for retreat. We're more than conquerors through him that loved us. Why should we turn back if that's the case? In the portion of scripture I read at the beginning of our little talk, the Apostle Paul draws a very apt picture.

He's speaking to the Corinthians. He pictures them as it were in the amphitheater. And they're sitting in the box seats and they have crowns upon their heads.

The Apostle Paul and the other apostles are down in the arena with wild beasts, whether men or whether animals. They're suffering. They're being torn.

They're being taken apart, as it were, and the Corinthians are sitting with the crowns upon their heads. And Paul says, I would to God that you did have crowns. I wish that the crowning time had come, but it hasn't.

You know, there is a day when Christians are going to have crowns, but that day hasn't come yet. When the Lord Jesus comes back to reign, those of us who belong to him will reign with him. But it isn't time to put the crown on our heads yet.

They tell me that when a king or a queen is crowned in England, that all the other members of royalty and the peers and the lords are around there, and they all have their little crowns too, you know. But nobody would ever think of putting his crown on until the sovereign had been crowned. And the Lord Jesus is now the rejected Lord Jesus Christ.

But he's going to come back one day in power and great glory, and then will be the time for us to put our crowns upon our heads, and not until then. Paul says, I would that you were, that you did reign, that we also might reign with you. But that isn't the case.

You're up in the box seats, and we're down in the arena, suffering for the namesake of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I fear that that's pretty much what it is in Christendom today. The Christians are swimming on in full celestial state, while in many parts of the world, faithful servants of Christ are suffering in the great battle of the ages.

May the Lord impress upon our hearts that we are at war, and the war is real, and it's a war to the death. And this war demands certain things of us, that they're given in the word of God. Let us be faithful to him in this day of his rejection, and wait till we see him crowned, and then let us put our crowns upon our heads at that time.

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