

**"My Favorite Subject"**  
**Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 8:18-22; Mark 10:28-30**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, I'm going to preach about my favorite subject. I'm not talking about Republican politics or the Yankees or Little Debbies or even running. What I'm talking about is discipleship to Jesus.

But that isn't the only reason I'm preaching about it. Discipleship to Jesus isn't just my favorite subject. It's also the most important that I know. Consider this. The word "disciple" or its plural "disciples" is used 269 times in the New Testament. Those two words in fact cover almost one whole page in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Apart from prepositions, pronouns, and linking verbs, very few words do that. What that shows us is this. The New Testament is a book by disciples, about disciples, and for disciples of Jesus. Discipleship to Jesus, in other words, is the most important subject I know and so that's what I'm going to preach about today.

I read three passages to you – Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 8:18-22; and Mark 10:28-30. Each of those teaches us a vital truth about discipleship to Jesus. So, let's look at them all.

## **MATTHEW 28:18-20 – A DISCIPLE IS . . .**

We start with one of the most celebrated passages in the Bible, Matthew 28:18-20. In verses 19-20, Jesus gives His eleven disciples, and us, what we call "the Great Commission." That commission teaches us something that all of us need to know – what a disciple of Jesus is.

First, it's someone who is with Him. Notice the last part of the Great Commission in verse 20. Jesus says, "*and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" The 12 disciples were originally with Him in His physical presence. They actually left their professions and families and were with Him in His earthly body for three years.

Since He ascended of course, we can't be with Him in His physical presence. But we can be with Him in His spiritual presence, which is just as real as His physical presence. You see, He is not now in His

resurrection body. Consequently, as God, He always fills all of the space all around us. So, we are with Him by constantly placing our mind on and communicating with Him. We call this practicing the presence of God or in this case practicing the presence of Jesus.

A disciple of Jesus is second of all someone who tries to learn all that He says. We see that in verse 20. Jesus commands the 11 disciples to make other disciples by teaching people what He says. Teaching what He says implies those people learning what He says and that's exactly what a disciple of Jesus does. He or she tries to learn what He says.

Jesus Himself explains how to do that in a crucial verse, John 8:31, *"If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine."* We learn what He says by abiding in His word. That means that we devote our time and attention to His personality, teachings, and life.

One of the best ways to accomplish that is by immersing ourselves in the gospels, particularly and the Bible generally. We don't dabble in our efforts here. We study Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and eventually the entire Bible intensely and never stop. That's why I've tried to master the Sermon on the Mount myself and to help you master it. It can be argued that Matthew 5-7 is the centerpiece of all of Jesus' teachings. As disciples of His, therefore, it only makes sense that we learn it and I mean thoroughly. It's a first crucial step in learning all that He says.

A disciple of Jesus is third of all someone who tries to do all that He says. Look at verse 20 again and the words, *"to observe all that I commanded you."* A disciple of Jesus not only tries to learn but also to do all that He says. That involves two things that I don't have the time to discuss today – trying and training. We can do much of what Jesus says by intending and trying to do it. But some of what He says, like turning the other cheek, takes training. I've developed a discipleship trilogy based on the Bible and the works of Dallas Willard. That trilogy is the training I'm talking about.

Several years ago, a Christian who studied the Sermon on the Mount shared a testimony with me about it. His ex-wife's husband was a real

pain in the neck to him. He was always doing things to cause tension between his ex-wife and him and it usually worked. So, he disliked him and it showed. He always spoke gruffly to him and talked very badly about him to others. But he was serious about following Jesus, which was why he was studying the Sermon on the Mount. Well, 5:43-48 spoke profoundly to him and he acted on it. He began speaking and acting kindly to his ex-wife's husband and praying for Him on a regular basis – just like Jesus said. He also quit talking badly about him to others.

That helps us understand what a disciple of Jesus is. It's someone who is with Him in order to learn and do all that He says.

### **MATTHEW 8:18-22 – DISCIPLESHIP IS A DECISION**

So, decide to be a disciple of Jesus, which brings us to the second passage I read Matthew 8:18-22. This passage teaches us that discipleship is a decision. At first blush, what Jesus says here seems hard-nosed and to some even cruel. But it isn't when we understand it.

Two men came to Him and expressed their desire to follow Him. But instead of welcoming them, He told the first that He didn't have anywhere permanent to stay and that he wouldn't either if he followed Him. He then told the second that he would have to allow someone else to bury his father, who was either dying or already dead.

Now, most people think that Jesus was being hard here but He wasn't. He was just trying to tell those two men and us what being a disciple of His requires and it's this. We must decide to be His disciple, to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says, and then arrange all of our affairs to that end. That is a radical statement and I want to say it again. We must decide to be His disciple and then arrange all of our affairs to that end.

Neither of these two men was apparently willing to do that. This passage shows that they had already made some kind of decision to follow Jesus. But we can infer from what He said that what they wanted to do was fit that decision into their life.

So many people do that very same thing today. I used to do follow up for a Christian television program. The program would send me the names of people who had called and "made a decision for Jesus." I would then contact and visit them in order to disciple them. I contacted a total of 14 people before I quit doing it. Not one of the 14 was open to being disciplined. One man said it this way, *"I do want Christ to be part of my life but I'm not interested in doing the things that you're talking about."* Those people were like the two men in Matthew 8. They were not disciples of Jesus.

You see, disciples of Jesus are those who decide to follow Him and then systematically and progressively arrange their affairs to that end. They don't fit their decision to discipleship into their life. They fit their life into their decision to discipleship.

What that means as a practical matter is this. If I'm a disciple of Jesus, my family, profession, hobbies, habits, likes, dislikes, and literally everything in my life is subordinated to that. If something interferes with my discipleship, then that something has to be modified or adapted so that it won't. And if it can't be modified or adapted, it has to go.

The great disciple of Jesus and Quaker John Woolman is our model for this. Woolman was a retailer who committed himself to giving his customers quality merchandise at a fair price. So his business boomed. He had so many customers in fact that it began taking away from His relationship with Jesus. He writes about that in his journal: *"There was now strife in my mind betwixt the two . . . I then lessened my outward business; and as I had opportunity told my customers that they might consider what shop to turn to: and so in a while, wholly laid down merchandize."* Do you grasp what he did? He sent his customers to his competitors and eventually gave up retailing altogether because it interfered with His discipleship to Jesus.

What Woolman did wasn't extreme but normal for disciples of Jesus. Discipleship to Him is a decision. We decide to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. We then systematically and progressively

arrange all of our affairs to that end.

## **MARK 10:28-30 – DISCIPLESHIP IS THE GREATEST BARGAIN**

Now, most people think that what I just said as a costly thing to do. But it really isn't. The third passage I read, Mark 10:28-30, teaches us this in fact. Discipleship is the greatest bargain in life.

Peter pointed out to Jesus in verse 28 that the other disciples and he had left everything and followed Him. As I said before, they had actually left their families and professions for three years. It was a high price to pay and Peter was apparently wondering if it was worth it.

Jesus responded to him by making perfectly clear that it was. In verse 29, He mentioned those who had arranged their affairs around their decision to discipleship. He then said this about them in verse 30. They will receive a hundred times as much as they have given up, now in this life and forever in the eternal life to come.

You know, one of the phrases that we sometimes hear today is "the high cost of discipleship." That phrase expresses the idea that discipleship to Jesus is a costly option - one that's meant only for a few specially called people here and there, like missionaries for instance.

But nothing could be further from the truth. For one thing, discipleship isn't an option. The New Testament reveals that we can't be Christians and not disciples. For another thing, discipleship is the greatest bargain in life. Don't get me wrong. It is going to cost us something. John Woolman, for instance, lost customers and profit because of it. I have an attorney friend who lost his wife (she left him) because of it. But what we get in return far outweighs the cost.

Jesus Himself made that very point in verse 30. Notice the number that He used here, *"a hundred times as much."* He didn't mean for the word "hundred" to be taken literally. It's a number that stood for "far more." The truth is that our return on discipleship is far more than a hundred times the cost but let's think of it in those terms for clarity's sake.

I'm no shopper like most of you women are but even I know that's a real bargain. Suppose that you go to Best Buy and see a large flat screen television that costs \$4000. But the sales person tells you that you can have it for 1/100<sup>th</sup> of the cost, \$40. How many of you would buy it? Any of us who had actually had the \$40 would. That's a real bargain isn't it at which any person in his or her right mind would jump.

It's the very same way with discipleship, Jesus says here. There's no blue light special at K-Mart that can even compare. It's a bargain. It is in fact the greatest bargain in life.

But just what is the bargain? What is it that we get for arranging all of our affairs around Jesus? I'll tell you. It's all the benefits, assurances, and promises that God offers in the Bible. Most of you know what many of those are: a life penetrated through and through by love, abiding peace, hopefulness that stands joyfully firm in the most discouraging circumstances, a confident faith that sees all outcomes in the hand of God, power to withstand what is evil and to do what is right, and total ease in the face of aging and death. Those things and much more are what disciples of Jesus get. And as you can see, they're worth far more than any price that we have to pay for them.

Take the attorney I mentioned whose wife left him because of Jesus. He is one of the most winsome, joyful, and "at peace" individuals that I have ever met. Yes, he deeply regrets that his wife left him. But if you were to ask him *"Is discipleship to Jesus worth it?"* I know what he'd say (because I asked him once.) It's a resounding "yes."

## **CONCLUSION**

Which leads me to this thought in closing. There's an old hymn that says *"All the promises in the book (the Bible) are mine."* That's true but only if we're disciples of Jesus. So, if you haven't done it, decide to become one today. You'll eventually understand if you do why it's my favorite subject and the most important. It's because of a simple fact. Discipleship to Jesus is the greatest bargain in life.