

## **Introduction**

As I look out on the congregation this morning, I see that you're in your "Sunday go to meeting clothes." For me, my church clothes, suits, are my work clothes as well. That isn't the case though for most of you. You aren't usually in your church clothes. You're usually in your everyday clothes, which vary according to the occasion.

That provides a helpful analogy for understanding discipleship. We're disciples of Jesus no matter what we're wearing. I know that because the book of *Proverbs* teaches it. *Proverbs* puts discipleship in everyday clothes and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

## **The Nature of Proverbs**

*Proverbs* is different in content than the other books of the Old Testament. It addresses details of character and behavior that they don't. Let me go over the verses I read earlier and you'll see what I mean. 10:5 – poverty is no disgrace but slackness is. 10:19 – you can't put your foot into a closed mouth. 12:10 – be kind to animals. 14:4 – make sure the prize is worth the price. 14:15 – don't be gullible. 18:13 – jump to conclusions and you'll have a great fall. 20:19 – those who gossip to you are probably gossiping about you. 20:29 – each age has its appointed excellence. 21:9 – don't marry a nag. 25:16 – too much of a good thing is sickening. 26:4 – some things don't deserve an answer. 26:17 – don't stick your nose in other peoples business or it'll get cut off. And finally, 27:15 – don't abuse the goodwill of your friends.

Those samplings illustrate something about *Proverbs*. Religion is only implied in most of its sayings. It seldom takes us to church. It names everyday life instead as the realm in which we cast our allegiance for or against Jesus. The other Old Testament books put discipleship to Him in church clothes. *Proverbs* puts it in everyday clothes.

That teaches us two things about discipleship to Jesus, both of

which all of us desperately need to know and believe.

### **Discipleship Presupposes Our Life**

First, it presupposes a life – yours and mine right where we are right now.

Many sincere followers of Jesus don't believe that. What they do believe is that only "full-time Christian workers" can be disciples of His. And since they are not that, then they cannot be. That is the basic assumption under which many followers of His operate.

Some years ago, for instance, a Christian declared that he can't esteem and please Jesus like I can. I asked him "Why?" and he told me. It's because I'm devoted to religious work and he's not. I go into my office on Monday morning and begin preparing a sermon. He goes into his factory on Monday morning and begins machining parts. The first, he said, esteems and pleases Jesus far more than the second. He can't be a disciple, in other words, because he doesn't do religious work.

But that's wrong. Discipleship isn't limited to full-time Christian workers. It's available to everyone no matter what they do. The factory worker, mother, attorney, shut-in, garbage collector, stockbroker, and hamburger flipper have this in common. Each can be a disciple of Jesus. Just as much so as the Pope, Billy Graham, or Rick Warren can.

That then is what *Proverbs* teaches. Discipleship to Jesus presupposes your life and mine – right where we are right now. Dallas Willard says it well, "***You, in the midst of your actual life there, are exactly the person God wanted.***" It is exactly that life of ours that Jesus wants us to give Him. It doesn't disqualify us from being a disciple of His. On the contrary, discipleship to Him presupposes it.

### **Discipleship Encompasses Our Whole Life**

*Proverbs* teaches us a second thing. Discipleship encompasses our *whole* life. Let's analyze the verses I read in terms of their subject matter: being lazy, keeping our mouths shut, being kind to animals, not

paying too much for something, not believing everything everyone says, not deciding or concluding things pre-maturely, hanging around gossips, dealing with the pro's and con's of our age, deciding whom to marry, moderation, minding our own business, and the goodwill of friends. Notice that none of those are what we would call religious things.

The message is clear. Being disciples of Jesus isn't a matter of *what* we do but *how* we do it. Think about the "religious things" in our lives – praying, reading the Bible, worshipping, fasting, and so on. Now think about the "non-religious things" – cleaning the litter box, taking out the trash, watching television, playing computer games, going on vacation, shopping, planning our weddings or funerals, and so on. The second are just as much a matter of discipleship as the first are.

I'd like to recount a little experience of mine that I shared with our Wednesday night group. I heard my dog Isaac in the beginning stages of throwing up. So I quickly got him off the couch and tried to get him outside before he did. I didn't succeed though and he threw up on the kitchen floor. But he wasn't done yet. I know that because he rushed into the bedroom, jumped on to the bed, and finished there, making a second and worse mess. Here's what I want you to see. How I reacted and acted to that was just as much a matter of my discipleship to Jesus as what I'm doing now is, preaching.

Stop and consider the circumstances, experiences, activities, and events of our everyday lives this past week. Each of those was within the scope of our discipleship to Jesus. That's because discipleship to Jesus encompasses your whole life and mine.

Which raises a question. How do we bring it into our whole life? It isn't something that's mysterious and vague. It's something that's specific and observable instead. We bring it into our whole life by doing three practical things, each of which I want to explain to you.

### **Learn What Jesus Says**

First, we learn what Jesus says. He has much to say in the Bible

about how we should live our everyday lives. True apprentices of His take what He says seriously and learn it.

Learning it requires three things. First, we find His commands. So, as we read the Bible, we look for the specific things it tells us to do and not do. Second, we interpret His commands. We ask the Holy Spirit to show us what they mean and use study aids, like a Bible Dictionary or commentary, if we need to. And third, we apply His commands. We figure what their implications are to us - how we're to live them out.

Take Proverbs 12:10 for instance.

First, I found the command. I came across this verse when I was reading the book of *Proverbs* years ago. I recognized it as a command. Jesus is telling me to have regard for the life of His beasts.

Second, I interpreted the command. Notice the words "***His beasts.***" I took that to mean that all animals are His. Also notice the words "***has regard for.***" I wasn't sure what that means. So I read Derek Kidner's *Commentary on Proverbs* to find out. It means to respect the due relations and proportion of things. It means to regard and treat animals as possessions of Jesus that He loves. Finally, notice the words "***A righteous man.***" Regarding and treating them that way is a matter of righteousness, or in our terms today, a matter of discipleship to Jesus.

Third, I applied the command. I figured out what its implications are to me - how I'm to live it out. One implication is that my dogs aren't just dogs. They're possessions of Jesus that He loves. They're His not mine. I'm dog sitting for Him. I should regard and treat them that way.

That illustrates the first thing we have to do to bring discipleship to Jesus into our whole life. Learn what He says. We take what He says seriously by finding, interpreting, and applying His commands.

### **Bring to Mind What Jesus Says**

There's a second thing we have to do. Bring to mind what He says. Having learned it, we recall and dwell on it in the circumstances, experiences, activities, and events of our everyday lives. Doing that is a

natural expression of realizing and thinking about our main identity. The sequence is this. We realize and think about our main identity, which leads us to recall and dwell on what Jesus says, which leads us to bring discipleship to Him into our whole life.

We have many identities don't we but what is our main one? It's "disciple of Jesus." When I'm preparing a sermon, I'm not primarily pastor of Bethel Friends but disciple of Jesus. When I'm driving my car down Route 224, I'm not primarily motorist but disciple of Jesus. When I'm with my wife, I'm not primarily husband but disciple of Jesus. When I'm shopping, I'm not primarily consumer but disciple of Jesus. You get the point. Disciple of Jesus is always our main identity.

Realize and think constantly about that. We'll naturally bring to mind what He says if we do, no matter where we are or what we're doing.

I speak from experience. When my dog Isaac threw up that night, I thought this. I'm not primarily master of him but disciple of Jesus. That's what I thought and naturally recalled and dwelled on Proverbs 12:10 as a result. I then viewed what was happening in those terms. Isaac belongs to Jesus and I need to regard and treat Him accordingly. I need to be calm and kind. That's what Jesus says and I should do it.

You get the idea. Having learned what He says, we then bring it to mind in our everyday lives as we need to.

### **Try to Do What Jesus Says**

There's a third thing we have to do to bring discipleship to Jesus into our whole life. Try to do what He says. As I've explained before, 80% or so of what Jesus says, we can do directly by intending to. The other 20% or so we can do only indirectly by training to, that is, practicing spiritual disciplines first. When I say "try" today, I mean both of those – intending and training. Anyway, that's what we need to do – try. The Holy Spirit is faithful and empowers us when we do.

Let's go back to my dog Isaac. In the past, I would have gotten angry when he threw up on the bed, mumbled "*Stupid dog*" to him, and

let him out. But I didn't. Having learned what Jesus says in Proverbs 12:10, I brought it to mind. I then tried to do it directly by intending to and did. I had regard for Isaac. I treated him kindly and went about the business of cleaning up the mess calmly.

That shows us something. Disciples try, by intending or training, to do what Jesus says. That's a bigger point than most people realize.

Last week, I mentioned William Law's book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. He wrote it almost 300 years ago but it's a timeless classic. It's easy reading and I highly recommend it to you.

Anyway, he shares a million dollar insight in it. The issue, he contends, isn't whether or not we can become perfect in doing what Jesus says because none of us can or will. The issue rather is this. How near to perfection can we come by sincerely and diligently trying? He writes in that regard: ***"We cannot obey Him (Jesus) as if we were in a state of perfection. But fallen men can do their best, and this is the perfection that is required of us."*** That's exactly right. The perfection that Jesus requires is in the effort not the outcome. He requires that we try our best.

Do you realize what that means? If we try our best, we're disciples of His. If we don't, we aren't. It's as simple as that. So let's try our best. Let's sincerely and diligently try to do what Jesus says.

## **Conclusion**

I close by pointing out the way I'm dressed now. Some of you say that you've never seen me without a suit on. Now you have.

My point in changing clothes is this. I was a disciple of Jesus in my suit. I'm a disciple of His now in my shirt and slacks. So let's do what *Proverbs* teaches. Let's learn, bring to mind, and try to do what Jesus says no matter where we are or what we're doing. Let's put our discipleship to Him in everyday clothes.