**True Disciple of Jesus**

August 2, 2020

Mark 9:30-10:12

Key Verse 9:35 “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’”

In today’s passage, Jesus teaches us what a true disciple of Jesus looks like. First, a true disciple is one who is humble (33-41); Second, a true disciple does not cause others to sin (42-48); Third, a true disciple does not use the Bible to justify his own sinful desires (10:1-12).

**First,** a true disciple is one who is humble (30-41). Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. He knew that flogging and crucifixion unto death awaited him. What could Jesus do at such a time? When we have some problem in our heart, we may become self-preoccupied and so distracted that we can’t do much of anything. Jesus knew that a brutal death was just around the corner. Yet at this very moment, he wasn’t thinking about how sorry he was. Rather, his heart went out to his disciples. Jesus knew that they were still spiritually immature. So he taught them the main point of the Bible again, that is, his death and resurrection. Did the disciples understand what Jesus meant? No. What were they doing? Look at verses 33-34. “They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.” Jesus was on his way to die on the cross for the sin of the world, but his disciples were arguing about who was the greatest, oblivious to Jesus’ personal agony of soul. Perhaps the glory of the transfiguration renewed their hope in the earthly messianic kingdom and they were fighting about who would be the prime minister.

Everybody wants to be first - number one. Everyone loves to rank people. Who is the number one basketball player? Who is the richest person? Someone even asked me, “Who is the number one mathematician?” Humility is not viewed as a virtue in our culture, and it was not viewed as a virtue in ancient pagan culture, either. Humility is foreign to fallen DNA. Humility is alien to the human heart. The human heart, every human heart, every fallen human heart, is a relentless worshiper of itself. It is the nature of man to be dominated by pride. Nobody lacks self-esteem; everybody is consumed with himself or herself in one way or another. To say that all human problems are because people lack self-esteem, is a lie.

Humility is hard to learn. If we put a big banner out in front of the church and say we are going to have a conference on how to be last, nobody would show. We would not attract a crowd at all. But the disciples needed to learn humility. A true disciple of Jesus needs to learn humility. Look at verses 35-37. “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.” Jesus used a little child in his audiovisual analogy of one who is truly great. In the world, a great man is the one who is on top. But in God’s kingdom, a great man is a servant (35), like our Lord Jesus Christ, who washed his disciples’ feet. William Temple said, “Spiritual humility is not thinking less of myself than of others. It is not having low self-esteem or a low opinion of myself. True humility is the freedom from thinking about myself at all.” Jesus exemplifies this humility. Philippians 2:6-7 says, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant.” Moses is considered the greatest man in Israel, but he was humble. Numbers 12:3 says, “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” When his brother and sister challenged his leadership, he did not say, “How dare you?” Instead he simply prayed to God. When God punished his sister Miriam with leprosy, Moses did not say, “You are getting what you deserved,” but prayed for her healing.

Look at verse 37 again. “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me.” What does it mean to welcome a little child? Someone may say, “Well, I love children because they are so cute. I have no problem to welcome a little child.” Such a person has a naïve idea about a child because he is thinking about the childlikeness of a child. But there is another word that describes a child, that is, childish. Children are childish and immature. For example, children’s demands never end. Children do not know how to thank others for what they did for them. They only focus on what they do not have and whine relentlessly until they get what they want. Children are egocentric, selfish and chaotic. Whenever they play, they tend to break things. They don’t know how to clean after themselves, making their places like a pig pen. But the comforting truth is that children grow slowly and steadily until they become mature adults. All human beings are like children. As children grow to be mature adults, all human beings have potential to grow to be great men and women of God. When Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me,” he meant that we must understand others’ childishness and bear with it in the name of Jesus. Jesus bore with twelve different kinds of childish people during his life on earth in the hope of God until each of them grew to be a great servant of God. Think of how childish they were: They were arguing about who was the greatest even at the last supper, the day before Jesus’ crucifixion. If we cannot bear with even one childish person in the name of Jesus, we are not true disciples of Jesus. But if we bear with at least 12 different kinds of childish people in the name of Jesus and raise them as great men and women of God, we are true disciples of Jesus.

**Second**, a true disciple does not cause others to sin. Look at verse 42. “And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.” To our Lord Jesus, causing someone to sin is a most serious matter under heaven. Why? It is because when we cause someone to sin, we may send them to eternal destruction in hell.

How is it that we can lead others into sin? There may be three ways. Firstly, by direct temptation. You tempt somebody to sin, you invite someone to sin against God. You invite people to lie, to gossip, to cheat. You invite people to love the world. Secondly, by indirect temptation. You provoke others to jealousy by showing off what you have. You provoke them to anger by indifference or unkindness. Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,” (ESV) by inattention, lack of affection, lack of forgiveness, and overbearing expectations. Thirdly, you can cause people to stumble by setting a sinful example, simply by doing things that are against the truth of the gospel. For example, when Peter went to Antioch, he ate with the Gentiles freely. But when he felt that he would be criticized by certain Jewish Christians, he separated himself from the Gentiles. Thus he made the Gentiles feel like they were not fully accepted in the church, and that they were like a second class Christians. His hypocrisy led others including Barnabas astray. So Paul rebuked him in his face.

But if your own heart is impure, you will lead others into sin. You are never going to be able to lead someone else into righteousness if you are not righteous yourself. You are not going to be a purifying influence on others unless your own heart is pure. So the danger of leading others to sin is eliminated when you deal with sin in your own heart. So Jesus calls for a radical, severe dealing with that sin. Look at verses 43-47. “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell.” The language here is so strong. The language calls for radical, severe action against any and all sin. Three body parts are mentioned here, the hands, the feet, and the eyes. It represents everything you see, everything you do, everywhere you go - everything that relates to your life, all behaviors, our continual struggle with temptation and with sin. What Jesus is saying is that entering the kingdom of God is so important that you need to get rid of anything that is a barrier to that. Obviously, Jesus is not calling for physical mutilation. Cutting off one’s hand or plucking out one’s eye would not solve the problem. The problem is our heart. Jeremiah 4:14 says, “Wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts?” How long are you going to go along and not deal with the wickedness that is in you? Choose holiness over hell. Choose the eternal kingdom of salvation over the eternal punishment of hell.

Look at verse 49-50. “Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.” Believers should purify themselves, remove anything from his life that would hinder entering the kingdom of God. As we know, salt is a preservative, and it greatly enhances the taste of food. Imagine eating a $60 Wagyu steak without any salt! It is the same as a Christian who does not give good Christian influence to others. As salt is a preservative, a Christian must live a pure life and influence those around him to value purity. He should not be influenced by the greed and immorality of the world. Jesus also says that if we Christians do not give good Christian influence, then we are worthless like tasteless salt. So, Jesus said, “Have salt in yourselves.” True disciples of Jesus must lead others to Christ through their salty Christian influence.

**Third**, a true disciple does not use the Bible to justify his sinful desires (10:1-12). While Jesus was teaching the Bible, some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” To this question, Jesus replied, “What did Moses command you?” (3) They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away” (4). They justified divorce by using the law of Moses. In Moses’ day as it is today, if a man married a woman and did not like her, literally he just dumped her and proceeded to look for another wife, usually a younger and thinner one. As a result, there were many wounded and abandoned women and impoverished mothers who had to take care of their fatherless children. When Moses “permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce” (4), he was actually making it more difficult for a man to leave his wife by making him go through the legal process of divorce, instead of just replacing his wife at random. In effect, Moses was trying to protect marriage and women by making divorce a legal tedious due process. So, when Jesus said, “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law” (5), he meant that the man’s heart was hardened toward his own dear wife, because he had already decided to leave her. His hardened heart made him forget how much his wife had loved him and sacrificed for him. Nothing hardens a man or a woman’s heart more than when they are no longer faithful, committed and loving toward the spouse of their youth, and they are just looking for a way out of the marriage.

Jesus taught them the true meaning of marriage from Genesis. Look at verses 7-8. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” But when Adam and Eve sinned against God, the woman was cursed. Genesis 3:16 says, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” That curse spells out the conflict in marriage. As she has rebellious attitudes, the man has ungracious, unkind, dominating attitudes as well, and this is the conflict that leads to divorce. It is just easy to break up, get it over with. “I don’t like her anymore. I don’t like him anymore. I don’t want to live with her. I don’t want to live with him. And I saw somebody that’s much better for me.”

Growing up, we learn a lot of false ideas about marriage. Here are several of them:

Marriage will solve all my problems;

If I get married, I will never be lonely;

I will change him/her after we are married;

In marriage, our differences won’t cause trouble. Love conquers all;

Marriage is a trap or prison; Marriage takes all the fun out of life.

These are all false. Conflict in marriage comes in because of the curse of corruption as a result of the fall. Jesus’ teaching of absolute irrevocable commitment in marriage without divorce was so revolutionary and shocking even to his own disciples. Perhaps, Jesus’ disciples may have considered divorce in order to contemplate a younger and more attractive woman. So “When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this” (10). Look at verses 11-12. “He answered, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.’” There is clearly no ambiguity whatsoever in Jesus’ words. To Jesus, divorce is simply allowing oneself the possibility of committing adultery.

In summary, a true disciple of Jesus must be humble, does not cause others to sin, and never uses the Bible to justify his sinful desires.

Big Idea: Be a true disciple of Jesus