

INTRODUCTION

The main job Jesus left us to do was to make disciples. There is a difference between a believer and a disciple. There is no such thing as an instant disciple; like the word, it takes discipline. A Russian comedian, Yakov Smirnoff talks about when he first moved to America, he was amazed at the variety of instant products he could buy in the store. There's powdered milk: just add water and you have milk. There's powdered orange juice: just add water and you have orange juice. Then he saw Baby Powder and thought, "What a great country! If you want a baby, just add water!" Some people think that's how discipleship works. You take a believer, add a little baptism water, and "poof" you have a fully-devoted follower of Jesus—a real disciple. But it takes more than water to make a disciple. Disciples are made, not born.

In Luke 14, Jesus was getting closer and closer to the cross. People who wanted to see a miracle or get a free meal from Him were mobbing Him. The crowd is about to become much smaller because He started setting forth the cost of discipleship, and it's not a popular message. It requires total commitment.

A hog and a hen sharing the same barnyard heard about a church's program to feed the hungry. The hog and the hen discussed how they could help. The hen said, "I've got it! We'll provide bacon and eggs for the church to feed the hungry." The hog thought about the suggestion and said, "There's only thing wrong with your bacon and eggs idea. For you, it only requires a contribution, but from me, it will mean total commitment!" That's the cost of discipleship.

In this passage of scripture, Jesus provided five vivid images, and used each one to teach a lesson about discipleship. Let's number them as we read the text:

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. [That's mark #1] And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. [That's mark #2]

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' [That's mark #3] Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with then thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. [That's mark #4]

Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile, it is thrown out. (That's mark #5) He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

People choose to Jesus on several different levels of intimacy. It's like a set of concentric circles.

On the outside you have the crowd. The mob following Jesus knew who He was, but they would soon be gone. Today, the people in East Texas who express an interest in Jesus represent the crowd, but they seldom ever worship with other believers. It’s like the crowd of over 6,000 people who showed up here last Easter—where are they today?

A deeper level of commitment is the congregation. These are people who attend church on a fairly regular basis. In other words, they “congregate” with other people to worship, but are not an active member of any local church. They call themselves church-shoppers, but they are more like church-hoppers. They are like a butterfly flitting from one church to another, never really committing themselves to serve Jesus. A deeper level of commitment is the church. This circle represents those who have affiliated with a local church and have a deeper level of intimacy with Christ and His body. But there is a level deeper than that which we could call the committed. These are the ones within the church who are real disciples—they are radical Christians—sold out to Jesus. Like in many organizations, in our church about 20% of the people do 80% of the work and give 80% of the financial support of the church. That’s the committed core.

Which circle represents where you are today? Where would you like to be? The job of a disciple is to become part of the core committed and then move out into the crowd to make more disciples.

As we study these five marks of a real disciple, let’s first note the vivid image Jesus uses, and then dig into the meaning of His words.

1. A FAMILY: LOVE JESUS SUPREME

The first image Jesus uses is a family. Are you surprised Jesus said that to be a disciple you must *hate* your family? I read about one pastor who entitled his message on this text, “How to hate your wife.” You may be asking yourself, “Doesn’t He talk elsewhere about *loving* everyone, including our enemies?” Sure, remember, Jesus often used figures of speech to give His words a greater impact. He used metaphors, similes, and parables. And here, He simply employed hyperbole. Hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration to emphasize a point. My wife uses hyperbole all the time when she says something like, “I’ve told you a million times to put the seat down.” I know it isn’t a million times (only half a million). So, don’t get upset because Jesus used hyperbole. Also, the Greek word in this verse means something totally different than our English word for “hate.” The word is *sane*, which means “to prefer above.”

To be a disciple, you must love Jesus more than you love anyone else—even family members. Your love for Jesus should be so powerful that in comparison, it seems as if you hate everyone else. It is also true that sometimes your love for Jesus will alienate you from others, even your family. A few years ago, a former Muslim came to know Christ and was baptized here at Green Acres. It was a tough decision for him because he knew the moment he became a Christian, his family back in Iran would not just disown him, they would have a funeral for him and consider him to be dead. He had to make the hard choice, but he followed Jesus—even though His family opposed it.

If you truly follow the Lord, you won’t have to look for people to ridicule you and oppose you,

they will find you—and they may be your family members. In Matthew 10 Jesus said, “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved...Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:22,37)

Heather Mercer (here August 22) and Dana Curry were arrested by the Taliban and held prisoner for 128 days in Afghanistan. They both attended Baylor, and surrendered their lives to be fully devoted followers of Jesus. A couple of weeks ago, *Dateline* interviewed Heather Mercer’s mother. It was the kind of story the media likes because they discovered Heather’s mother was totally opposed to Heather’s decision to work in Afghanistan. The media really tried to play up the story to show Heather’s commitment to Christ had divided her family. They wanted to keep asking here how she could do something her mother opposed. That’s what Jesus meant in verse 26.

In her new book, *Prisoners of Hope*, Heather wrote:

“We answered hard questions posed by our families and friends. Extraordinary are the parents who don’t balk at the idea of their child moving to a third-world, war-ravaged, drought-stricken country—and, in this case, a country serving as a hub for international terrorist activity. That we had decided to go as Christian aid workers to a country where a harsh, unpredictable regime severely curtailed religious freedom gave most of our loved ones pause at best, and otherwise prompted serious alarm. We were asked: ‘Aren’t you being foolish? Why would you jeopardize your own safety?’”

Friend, when God calls you, you have to make some difficult decisions, and sometimes your family will not jump up and down and rejoice over your choices. That’s the first mark of a true disciple. Next:

2. A CROSS: LIVE LIKE A DEAD PERSON

The image Jesus used is a cross. A real disciple is someone who carries his cross. There is a hymn we used to sing when I was a child that said something about “the cross I bear.” I thought they were singing about a cross-eyed bear. I remember thinking if I ever met a bear in the woods, I sure hoped it was a cross-eyed bear, so it couldn’t see me well!

Many Christians are just as confused today about what it means to carry a cross. I’ve had someone say to me, “I have migraine headaches, but I guess it’s just the cross I must bear.” Or I had someone take off their shoe one time and show me their ugly big toe. They said, “I have an in-grown toenail, but I guess it’s just the cross I must bear.” I always wanted to say, “Why don’t you have that nasty thing worked on by a doctor?” The cross is NOT a headache or an ingrown toenail.

Today, the image of the cross has lost its horror. The true message of the cross is death. How many of you are either wearing a cross today, or have a cross on your Bible? How nice. But what if we began to sell little miniature models of an electric chair in our bookstore, would you wear one? Or what if someone made a syringe of poison and started offering it as jewelry to wear?

Can't you hear someone walking up to you saying, "I love your electric chair, where did you get it?" Or would you say, "Have you seen my James Avery lethal injection syringe?"

Today, the cross has become benign—a piece of harmless jewelry. In the Jesus' time, it was a horrible, agonizing tortuous mode of execution. It was the noose, the electric chair, the lethal injection of His day. In the time of Jesus when you saw someone carrying across it meant one and only one thing—they were as good as dead. A few years ago, Sister Helen Prejean wrote a book, *Dead Man Walking*. When a death row prisoner is walking from his cell to the place to be executed, the other prisoners say, "Dead man walking." He's alive and walking—but he's as good as dead. That's a perfect description of what Jesus meant when He spoke of a disciple carrying his cross. We are dead people. We should just start acting like a dead person.

Paul understood what it meant to carry a cross. In Galatians there are three dynamite verses about what it means to carry your cross: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20) "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:24) "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14)

That means there is nothing the world has to offer you that interests you—it's as if the world is dead to you and you are dead to the world.

Years ago, the great Nazarene preacher Bud Robinson visited Manhattan. He saw all the buildings, the bright lights and the temptations of the city. Bud was a great preacher, but he had a noticeable lisp. At a church that night in New York City he prayed the following prayer: "Dear Lord, I thank Thee that I have theen all these wonderful things today. But I also thank Thee that I didn't thee a thingle thing I wanted!" For a disciple carrying a cross, the world can't offer a thing we want.

One of the classic books on discipleship is *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor during WWII. Because he opposed Hitler and the Nazis, he was imprisoned where he died before the war ended. He wrote:

"The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. The cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." (*The Cost of Discipleship*, p.99).

In many ways, a dead man is set free. You won't be truly liberated until you understand what it is to be crucified with Christ. The next image is:

3. A TOWER: CONSIDER THE VALUE OF A GOOD FINISH

Jesus presents the image of a man who plans on building a tower. Before he begins the construction, he must "count the cost" to see if he has enough resources to finish the job. Now

this is the cost of discipleship, not the cost of salvation. Before you embark on the Christian life, if you stopped to ask, "do I have enough to finish?" The answer is always, "NO." It's not *our* resources that are necessary—God provides all we need. God is the builder who finishes the job called salvation. In Philippians 1:6 Paul said, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." Jesus is talking about the cost of total commitment. Actually, it's better to think in terms of the value instead of the cost. A good finish as a disciple is the key. A lot of backslidden Christians may go to heaven when they die, but they won't be finishing well. In verse 29 Jesus spoke about the man "who was not able to finish." Jesus says everyone will look at the uncompleted project and ridicule the one who didn't finish it. I'm haunted by those words—I don't want to become a spiritual dropout.

When I was first out of seminary in the late 70's I used to drive through a little town called Locapoka (near Notasulga). I've never forgotten the sad sight there. There was the concrete block shell of a church someone had started building years earlier. The project had been halted. There was no roof on the building and trees and shrubs had grown inside the shell. One of the pine trees growing inside the uncompleted church was at least 15 feet tall. I may never know the full story about what happened in that little church. But to everyone who passes by, for years that uncompleted building preaches a sermon: Someone started this, but they didn't count the cost, and they weren't able to finish. There is a great value in finishing what you start!

The older I get, the more I realize there can never be any "coasting" in the Christian life. There is no such thing as spiritual retirement. The pages of the Bible are littered with great men and women who didn't finish well. Noah and his family were saved from the flood, but poor Noah ended as a drunken man who got naked and cursed his son. Solomon was the wisest man in all of history, but he didn't finish well—his many wives turned his heart from God.

Are you going to finish well? I've been here long enough to know some folks who used to be faithful servants—real disciples—but they have dropped out. Oh, they still attend sometimes, and I suppose they'll go to heaven when they die, but unless something changes they aren't going to finish strong. They are like that church building in Locapoka.

The good news is none of you are finished yet. It doesn't matter what has happened in the past, you still can finish well. The finish line is still ahead. Are you sitting down on the track? Are you going to barely drag yourself across the finish line, or are you going to summon God's strength so you can sprint across the finish line?

Billy Sunday was the Billy Graham of his generation. He was a former professional baseball player. He once said: "Stopping at third adds no more to the score than striking out. It doesn't matter how well you start if you fail to finish." A real disciple finishes strong.

4. A WAR: SURRENDER TO THE STRONGER KING

In this image, Jesus describes two kings. One is outnumbered, so he wisely approaches the stronger king and makes peace before the battle ever begins. You and I are one of the kings and God is the other. Guess which one we are? Because we can never win against God, we must surrender to Him. In Jesus' time a surrendering king could be made into a slave of the opposing

king, so it required great humility to bow down and ask for terms of peace. It takes humility today to surrender to Jesus.

You cannot be a disciple unless you are willing to give up control of your life to Jesus. And that's hard to do. None of us wants to give up.

I once read about a lifeguard on a beach who saw a drowning man. He walked into the surf but didn't go out to rescue him. People gathered on the beach and yelled and screamed at the lifeguard to go out and rescue the drowning man. The lifeguard waded a little deeper, and kept his eye on the drowning man, but the yells and screams of the onlookers didn't motivate him to swim out. Just when it seemed the man was going down for the last time, the lifeguard swam out with strong strokes and grabbed the man and brought him back to shore. After some spitting and coughing, the man was conscious. But rather than hailing him as a hero, the onlookers were angry at the lifeguard and said, "You coward! You saw he was drowning, why didn't you go out sooner?"

The lifeguard patiently explained, "You can see that he is much bigger and stronger than I am." If I had gone out sooner, he was thrashing and kicked so violently that he would have probably drowned both of us. As long as he was trying to save himself, I couldn't save him. But when he got tired, and gave up, then I knew I could save him."

That's a great lesson about salvation. As long as you think you are strong enough to save yourself, you won't surrender to Jesus. It's only when you give up and realize you are hopelessly lost, that Jesus can come and rescue you. Have you ever come to a place in your life where you have surrendered everything you have and everything you are to Jesus? I think real discipleship is coming to Jesus and saying, "Jesus, I give up. I give up control of my life."

I think one of the reasons the book of Psalms speaks of lifting your hands in praise is because the lifting of hands has always been a gesture of surrender. Even today, the police will say, "Put your hands up!" Have you surrendered to Jesus? I didn't ask you if you were a Christian. I have found I have to surrender to Jesus often. Maybe you need to do what I do on a regular basis. I get on my knees and I raise my hands and I say, "I surrender all. I surrender all. All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all."

Finally, Jesus used the image of:

5. SALT: STAY PURE TO PRESERVE GOODNESS

Salt was very valuable during Jesus' time. Roman soldiers were paid with salt rations. The Latin phrase "Solarium Argentum" is where we get our word "salary." Even today we speak of someone who is "not worth their salt." In the time of Jesus the greatest value of salt was in its use as a preservative. Since they didn't have any way to refrigerate meat, salt would be applied to fresh meat to prevent the meat from rotting. The salt created a chemical reaction that slowed down the process of decay. It retarded corruption, so as a consequence, it preserved the goodness of the meat. That's why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" (Matthew 5:13)

We live in a nation suffering from moral decay at an alarming rate. Our society is getting more rotten by the day. Like salt, we must come in contact with our corrupting culture to slow down the process of decay. As salt, our job is to preserve the goodness that still exists in our culture. We must be the ones who speak up when a sexually oriented business applies for a license—as some of us did a couple of weeks ago. We must be the ones who stand up and say taking “under God” out of the pledge of allegiance is not acceptable. We must be the ones who stand up and say in love that abortion is murder and homosexual behavior is perversion. If we don’t speak out against moral evil, we’ve lost our saltiness. Now that kind of activity is not going to make us popular with our culture. When he was trying to preach the annual presidential sermon, my seminary classmate, James Merritt, was interrupted many times by homosexual protesters at the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in St. Louis. Being salt will certainly not make us popular. Have you ever noticed how salt stings when it gets in a wound? Salt irritates, but in addition to being a preservative, it is also an antiseptic—and our society needs a good cleaning! We must be salt in our corrupting world. If we don’t speak up against evil, our nation will become even more perverse than it is now.

But the problem Jesus identified is that some people have lost their saltiness. My salt expert is Lanny Bridges, who is a chemist for Morton Salt in Grand Saline (he really *does* go to work in the salt mines every day). Lanny says pure salt *never* loses its saltiness. Several years ago, he gave me a salt crystal. This salt crystal is as salty today as it was 10,000 years ago. Let me say it again *pure salt* never loses its saltiness. That’s why we must stay pure.

The salt used in the time of Jesus wasn’t mined; it came from the Dead Sea. When the water evaporated, it left salt. But the salt was sometimes so mixed with other minerals that although it looked like salt, and poured like salt, it wasn’t salty. When it was placed on food, it was tasteless. When it was applied to fresh meat, the meat rotted. Jesus warned against the spiritual condition that exists when our lives are not morally pure. When we allow impure thoughts and impure behavior to become mixed in our personality, we lose our saltiness, too. Jesus posed the question, “If salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” In His day, there was no chemical process to make “unsalty” salt salty again. The only thing to do with it was to put it on the road and use it for gravel. Sadly, many believers live such impure lives that they have lost their sense of saltiness in a rotting world. Today, there is a simple chemical process that can restore “unsalty” salt to pure salt, but that process was unknown during Jesus’ day—so what was impossible for man is possible for God. If you have lost your saltiness, God can make you pure again! His blood can make you pure, but His Word keeps you pure.

CONCLUSION

We should be dangerous disciples in this world, but too many believers are harmless to the devil’s work. Too many Christians are like the dog a friend of mine told me about. One day, he walked into an old country store and saw a sign just inside that read: “DANGER! BEWARE OF DOG!” My friend looked around cautiously, but all he saw was an old hound curled up on the floor, sound asleep. He said to the owner, “That dog doesn’t look dangerous to me.” The owner said, “Well, folks kept tripping over him, so that’s why I put up the sign.”

Are you a real disciple? Do you want to move from being in the congregation into the church? Do you need to move from the church into the core of committed disciples? Do you love Jesus more than anyone else, even your family? Are you a dead man walking, carrying your cross? Are you committed to finishing strong for Jesus? Are you constantly surrendering everything you have to Him? Are you willing to stay pure so you can be salt in a rotting world? Jesus is looking for a few good men and women: the humble, the pure, the dead, the committed. Will you decide today to move from being a mere believer and make being a fully devoted follower of Jesus, your goal?

OUTLINE

1. A FAMILY: LOVE JESUS SUPREME

"All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved...Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." *Matthew 10:22,37*

2. A CROSS: LIVE LIKE A DEAD PERSON

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me..." *Galatians 2:20*

"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." *Galatians 5:24*

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." *Galatians 6:14*

3. A TOWER: CONSIDER THE VALUE OF A GOOD FINISH

4. A WAR: SURRENDER TO THE STRONGER KING

5. SALT: STAY PURE TO PRESERVE GOODNESS

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes