

# THE MAKING OF A DISCIPLE

by David H. Roper

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## Part I

### Matthew 28:16-20

While I was on my vacation this past summer, I read an account of the messages that were given at Inter-Varsity's Urbana Conference. In those series of messages there was one given by Warren Webster, who was a missionary to Pakistan for some 15 years. In reviewing his ministry, he had this to say: "In had my life to live over again, I would live it to change the lives of men, because you haven't changed anything until you've changed the lives of men."

That really struck me and caused me to reaffirm again in my heart my own desire to change the lives of men. I do not think we are in any disagreement that the world is in wretched shape, and it is that way because there is something desperately wrong with men. The only answer to the world in which we find ourselves is to change the hearts of men. And I know of only one Person who can change the heart of a man, and that is Jesus Christ.

For the next three Sundays I would like to talk to you about what Jesus Christ intends to do through us to change men, to disciple all nations for him. I want to survey some of the factors that go into the making of a disciple. (We will pick these up in more detail in following messages.)

The events in Matthew 28 took place at the end of our Lord's 40-day post-resurrection ministry to his disciples. In this 40-day period, five times it is recorded-in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts-that the Lord commissioned the disciples to disciple the nations. This passage in Matthew 28:16-20 records one of these incidents:

**Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountains to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

The disciples all died by the close of the first century, so these words were not addressed to the disciples alone, but have validity for all time. They are addressed as well to us. I would like to talk about three things in this passage: the *men* who are found in this passage; the *mandate* that was given to them to disciple all nations: and the *method* by which this mandate was to be carried out.

These men intrigue me. They are set in contrast to the Jewish rulers mentioned in the preceding paragraph who were attempting to discredit the fact of Jesus' resurrection. The reaction of the disciples is set over against their attempts to dismiss the resurrection. The disciples, out of obedience to Jesus Christ, went to northern Galilee to meet the Lord there. The leading Jews resisted him, but the disciples obeyed him. Prior to the cross, Jesus had told the disciples that after the resurrection they were to meet him on a mountain in northern Galilee, and they went out of obedience to him, knowing that they would meet him there.

The passage does say, "some doubted," but it does not in any way indicate that these men were lacking in faith. The word used here is not suggestive of loss of faith but rather, of hesitancy. They were uneasy, and who would not be? They still did not quite understand what the Lord intended to do. Their hopes of

establishing a kingdom on earth had been dashed: the Lord had been taken from them and crucified. They had seen him in his resurrection body and knew him to be the victor, but still they were hesitant and disturbed, not quite understanding what the Lord yet intended to do. But they went anyway to the appointed meeting place. Remember also, the Lord had told them that the Jews were going to take his life, and that they would be next. They had confidence in his ability as a prophet. They believed him. They knew their lives were on the line, and that any association with this man would jeopardize their safety from this point on. So they were uneasy, they were anxious, they were fearful, but they went anyway, because they trusted him.

I think one of the amazing facts of this passage is the contrast between the extent of the commission that the Lord gave, and the relative insignificance of this little band of men. Here were eleven men who were told to go out and conquer the world and lay it at the Lord's feet. Eleven insignificant men. That would make anyone uneasy. These were men who had never been more than 50 miles from home. They had probably never been outside the country of Palestine. They had ranged as far with the Lord in his ministry as they had ever traveled. Jesus had no funds to carry out this assignment. He had no basis of political power. He had already been rejected by his own nation. And yet he tells them, "Go, and make disciples of all nations."

We realize now that the secret of his success was not the size, or the power, or the material qualifications of the group, but rather, the divine authorization given to them by the Lord. In verse 18 Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. You go therefore. . ." The Father had given to the Son the authority, and the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit, gave to the disciples the authority to go out and, for all time, bring men into a relationship with him. They had a promise that all the resources, all the power of the Father, the authority of a Sovereign Lord who created men and by whom lives again could be recreated, was available to them if they would simply act upon it.

That was their authorization, and they needed no other. Historically, we know that within a period of a few weeks they saw 5,000 come into a relationship with their Lord. Within 35 years they had planted churches in every major center in the Roman Empire. Recently I heard Dr. David Hubbard say that there is today not one place in the occupied world that is more than 50 miles from an assembly of believers. They went out believing that it could be accomplished, and in the name and the authority of Jesus Christ they conquered the world. A little, insignificant group, but with all the power of a sovereign God available to them they accomplished and are still accomplishing what they set out to do.

This leads me to some strong conclusions. The first is that God is not preoccupied with numbers; we are. We count noses; we measure success in terms of numbers and other estimates of strength and power. But the Lord never does. In his program numbers are totally inconsequential. We might as well weigh people as count them. Either measure would be equally inconsequential. God is never concerned about the size of a group. Size has nothing to do with success. Success is always based on relationship.

For instance, God was not at all embarrassed to send Elijah and his servant against the whole nation of Israel. That did not bother God, because he knew that his servants could accomplish what he sent them to do; they had available to them his power. Jonah was sent to evangelize the whole city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire; Paul and Barnabas were sent into Asia Minor to plant churches; two men sent into a pagan area that had never heard the gospel. We would organize great armies to go, but the Lord sent Paul and Barnabas. Later, he sent Paul and Timothy into Europe to plant churches there. The Lord himself spent three-and-a-half years ministering first to the masses, then drawing together twelve men and eventually, eleven men, and it was through these eleven men that he was able to accomplish his program. He spent all of his time training them. We would be terribly discouraged if we had spent three-and-a-half years and we only had eleven people to accomplish a work. And yet the Lord said, "I have finished the work that the Father gave me to do." He did not measure his success in terms of size. Size is never equated with success.

There is an interesting passage in the book of Haggai in the account of the effort to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. The work went slowly at first but finally the temple was completed. In contrast to Solomon's temple, it just a tiny thing, and the people were terribly discouraged. Haggai encourages the nation not to despise the day of small things because the Lord says, "I am with you, and my Spirit will be with you. I will fill this house with glory, and the desire of all nations [literally, the One desired of all nations] will come into it, and its latter splendor shall be greater than its former

splendor." He was looking prophetically down through the years to the time when the Messiah would stand in the midst of that very temple, the temple that Zerubbabel and Joshua built-expanded by Herod, but the same temple-and fill it with his glory. And the latter splendor of it was far greater than anything Solomon's temple possessed, with its gold, jewels, and ornate furniture.

Haggai says the same to us today. Do not despise the small things, because God's splendor will fill them. The glory of Jesus Christ will control it and use it for his honor.

We can really get bothered at this point. We look at our office, and here we are, two or three men, maybe only one man. What can we do to accomplish his program of making disciples here? Or we are on a campus, and maybe we're the only Christian in a dorm. What can we accomplish? And so we get discouraged, and we want to quit, because we just do not feel that God can accomplish all that he has promised to do.

I think this last year at Stanford was one of the most difficult years of my life. I have shared this with some of you. It was one of those periods when God taught me so much about what he is like, and what he will do. Some of you remember last year we gathered 100 people together to pray for that campus, and for the Foothill campus. We began to send out prayer letters, and we claimed this promise from Jeremiah, "Call unto me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which ye know not." We believed that and we still do.

But in my mind I assumed the great thing he was going to do was evangelize the entire student community. He did not do it. We had meetings, we confronted many men with the gospel, we saw men come to know Christ, but he did not do what I thought he was going to do. It was the most discouraging thing that ever hit me. I thought God had failed, that he had lied, that he could not do the great things he had promised to do. But then the Lord began to show me what the great thing was: that there were a few men in whom Jesus Christ lived, and that they were going on, growing, maturing in Christ. And they were winning their friends to Christ. In a quiet, underground way, the Lord was accomplishing the great things he had promised.

I believe it is going to go on. It can go on in your neighborhood, in your office, in your home, in your school, wherever God has put you, God will use you, not to reach the masses necessarily, but to touch lives significantly for Christ's sake. We may be outmanned and outgunned in terms of numbers and influence, but it is totally inconsequential in terms of God's reckoning because he will use you to change lives.

There is a second strong conclusion that I have reached as a result of looking at the lives of these men: God is not concerned about the quantity of men, but he is concerned about the *quality* of their lives, God's method is men, men who are controlled by the Spirit of God; not programs, not machinery, but men, women, students, boys, girls, anyone who is available to him. And I believe that these disciples would qualify as that kind of person. I think quite often that we do not think very highly of these men. But I cannot accept the thought that Jesus totally misjudged these men. He had God's insight into lives. He knew men, He knew the quality of their lives. He scrutinized the lives of these men, He spent a night in prayer before he made his decision. I do not think he chose wrongly, even in the case of Judas. He knew from the beginning what Judas was to be. This man was chosen deliberately to accomplish the purposes of God, in terms of the prophetic scripture.

Jesus knew these men, and he chose them out of all the men that he contacted in Palestine because he saw them not in terms of what they were, but what they were to become as he spent time with them. He sensed that they were men with open hearts and minds. They were hungry, perhaps, for the wrong things, but he took that hunger and turned it into a hunger for him. He never dealt with men who played games but only with those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

God will put anyone to use who has the real thing, who has a quality of life that only a follower of Jesus Christ can have. I am convinced that people are looking for those who have the real thing. It is the only way we will ever reach this disillusioned generation today. They are fed up with programs, they are fed up with the institutional church, they see nothing but phoniness. They are looking for real people.

Now if you are real, to use the contemporary term, you will be where the action is. People are looking for the real, people are looking for quality, and if we have it they are going to want it and they are going to seek us out. We do not have to be religious (please save us from religion), but we have to be real people who are

possessed by God and whose obsession is to serve Jesus Christ. That kind of person God will use.

Now let us look at the *mandate*. These are the men; now the mandate. In verse 19, Jesus says,

**"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."**

There is one imperative here, to "make disciples." The other action verbs are all subordinate to this main idea to make disciples. Literally, he says, "Having gone, make disciples by baptizing and by teaching." He tells us what is involved in making disciples. The main idea in this passage is to make disciples, not friends for Jesus, not fans, not to develop a large following, because Jesus says there will never be many who will follow. To follow involves a cross, and a cross means cutting off our own goals and purposes, the things for which we live, and settling once and for all the issue in our life that Jesus Christ is going to be Lord, and we are going to serve him.

There will never be many who will make that kind of decision. The Lord always drew the lines hard and fast and he said that there would be very few that would step over. And when they did, he would hit them immediately with his claim as Lord, "Are you willing to follow me, and yield everything?"

We are going to spend quite a bit of time talking about this. I just want to mention it in general now, because we are going to come back to it next week. I am convinced that the great commission is not to go out and get decisions for Christ, or just talk to people about Christ. It is to present Christ, and then to stay with people to train them and prepare them until they themselves are independently dependent on the Lord and able to go on, on their own. Jesus said there are three characteristics of a disciple. We will look at these in more detail later on, but in John 8:31, he said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciple (Obedience); John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another " (Love); and John 15:8, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciple." (Fruit). A disciple is a loving, obedient, fruitful person. We will talk more about that later.

We have looked at the men, the mandate, and third is the *method* by which they were to accomplish his commission: (1) going This assumes that we will go. The command is not to go; command is to make disciples, but it is preceded by the idea of going. And what he means is that as we go about seeking our livelihood, wherever we may be found, we are to use that place as a platform for making disciples. Historically, these men were fishermen, merchants, seamen, laborers. Everywhere they went they saw as their prime task to make disciples. Their occupations were simply the means of making a livelihood. Their mission was to make disciples and they were told to go *to the whole world*. God sent persecution, and where there is heat, there is always expansion-they scattered all over the world. Wherever they went, making tents, repairing sails, making shoes, as lawyers, merchants, whatever their task might be, they made disciples.

What a challenging view of our occupations that is! Our job, whether it is as a housewife, or out in the world as a business person, whatever it might be, our job, essentially, is to make disciples. That gives great dignity and meaning to our jobs. Yes, we are to do our jobs well, as unto the Lord. We are to give it the time and energy necessary to do it right. And yes, our job is a means of bringing all of nature into submission. as the Word says we must do, But it is first and foremost a platform for making disciples. We have a whole lifetime to work out the exciting implications of that idea.

Note the Lord said we are to disciple *all nations*. That means that some will go, must go, to other lands. Some will be cleared to live and minister in the land of their birth, and to engage in the worldwide program of making disciples through sacrificial giving, or intercessory prayer, or through an ongoing concern for what God is doing around the world. But again, what an exciting thing to know that we are engaged in an enterprise that is global in its scale; that God is at work in every corner of the world, to bring men into relationship with him. We are simply one segment, one part of what God is doing.

The Lord said we are to make disciples not only by going, but by (2) baptizing, and (3) teaching. These Jews, these 11 men. would have understood what the Lord meant by baptizing. Jews understood the rite of baptism to mean a symbol of repentance, of moving out of the great mass of Judaism and identifying themselves with

Messiah. Baptism was simply the symbol declaring to the community that they were identified with believers of Israel. When the Lord said to these disciples, "disciple by baptizing," they knew what he meant. Not to indiscriminately baptize people, but to present Christ. And then as a mark of that identification with him as Lord and as Messiah, they were to be baptized. They did this in obedience to his command.

And they were to teach. They were to stay until these men learned how to walk. There is both an extensive and intensive aspect of the mandate: they were to go to *all nations*. Jesus said, "and to teach *all things* that I have commanded you." Now this is an enormous task, and I do not think there is a one of us who can say that we are adequate for anything of this magnitude.

I think we have two reactions. One is to get hardened by failure, and adopt an uninvolved Spirit: "We can't do the job; it's impossible. so why even try?" "Every attempt I've made I've fumbled." "I'm shy." "I'm ignorant, so I'm a watcher."

The other reaction is to see the great need and get frustrated. But remember God is the Savior of the world. Jesus said my responsibility is my neighbor, the person in need God brings into my life and gives me the opportunity to share my life with. And my neighbor may not necessarily be my next-door neighbor, because we have six-foot fences in our backyard, and I hardly ever see my next-door neighbor. He can be the man at the office. the shop, the campus. He is the man (or the woman) in need. the student in need, or whoever it might be that God puts us next to.

The most difficult thing about going is the last 18 inches, getting over that little barrier of sharing with someone else what our Lord has done with us. But Jesus said, "I am with you always, to the close of the age." There is an adequate resource for the task that God has outlined for us.

## Part II

### Luke 14:25-35

**Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, "if any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own wife, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace. So therefore, who ever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

**"Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the land nor for the dunghill; men throw it away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."**

I am sure you must have been struck by what seems to be the harsh tone of these words from the Lord, the One who told us that the greatest commandment is to love God and our neighbor. I am sure these words must have struck the disciples with even greater force than they strike us. The Lord was certainly an enigma to the disciples. He was always up to something that would completely derail them. They never knew him, and, of course, they could never really know him.

The Lord himself said, "No one knows the son but the Father." And today he still upsets us by the strange things he said.

The Lord, at the very outset of his ministry, seemed to indicate that anyone could come to him. His invitation was, "Come to me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Men began to respond in great numbers. Luke takes note of the fact that there were great multitudes following the Lord at this time. But now, instead of gathering this number together and teaching them, he begins to warn them against himself. Instead of inflaming their hearts, he throws cold water on them. He seems to go out of his way to offend and antagonize the very people he called to be his disciples. What is he up to?

May I suggest the answer is found in the nature of the crowd that was beginning to gather around the Lord at this time. He was followed by various types of people, people who listened to his words, watched his actions, wanted to be a part of this great movement. But the Lord knew their hearts. He knew that they were following him for what they could receive, their motives were selfish. And he began to move to thin out the ranks.

In this discourse he gives them a revelation of the only terms by which a man can become a genuine disciple. Three times he gives the terms, without which, he says, no one could be his disciple. In verse 26, in verse 27, and in verse 33 he lays down the terms; and then by means of two parables, he clearly explains the reason for the severity of these terms.

Let us examine first the terms of discipleship. These are solemn words. Verse 26:

**"If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."**

He hits at the very heart of human relationships, the dearest relationships that we have. These have to be laid aside out of loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 27, he says:

**"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."**

He moves into the personal life, and the necessity of laying aside our personal ambitions, our own goals in life.

And third, in verse 33,

**"So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."**

He strikes at our possessions, the things that we own, and says we must abandon these. "Without these terms," he says, "you cannot be my disciples." Now frankly, when I read a passage like this, I have to ask myself the question, "If these are the terms, am I a disciple?" Because certainly these are qualifications impossible to fulfill. It would seem to be a direct appeal from law, laying down demands that are impossible and saying, "Unless you fulfill these requirements, you will never be my disciple." But let us look in detail at these terms.

The first says we must hate our fathers and mothers and wives and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even our own lives. We have to remember, I think, that Jesus frequently used "alarm" words to arrest people's attention and alert them to danger. He is not saying that we must be malicious and hateful to our families in order to follow him. He is not saying that we have to abandon our homes or ignore our wives and children if we are going to follow him. To do so would be to ignore much of revelation in other parts of the Scriptures that tells us we must love mother and father; and love wives as Christ loved the church. He is saying that we must be alerted to the possibility of a competition in loyalty between Jesus Christ and those whom we love; that love for the Lord takes precedence over all other loyalties. He must be first. And there may be times when to follow Christ will appear to be hatred of those we normally love.

I have a good friend, Jim Hutchings, who was a chaplain in Viet Nam for eighteen months. At the end of his tour he chose to extend his time because of the great ministry that God had given him among the GI's in his unit. It was not an easy choice; he missed his family. And to those of us who knew Jim and his family, it

would appear that he hated his family, and had turned his back on them and abandoned them. This certainly was not the case. Jim would have liked nothing better than to go home to his wife and children. But there was a higher claim on him: his loyalty to Jesus Christ. So he stayed in Viet Nam out of obedience to that call.

That is what the Lord is saying, that he is the object of our ultimate devotion. Our primary devotion goes to him. Notice he does not name sin as necessarily a deterrent to becoming a disciple. We think of the sins we commit, rebellious attitudes and actions, as the things that keep us from following the Lord. But he put his finger on the highest of human relationships. There is nothing greater than love for father and mother. Mother love is a cardinal virtue, but even these things may and do challenge our loyalty to Jesus Christ. Our love for our families can turn us against the Lord. Every relationship has to be examined and regulated by our determination to be a disciple. Does this relationship draw me closer to the Lord, or does it separate me? I have known many young people who have had to walk away from a love relationship because they sensed that to continue the relationship would drive them farther away from the Lord. I have a friend who walked away from an opportunity to be in partnership with his father, because of a higher claim on his life. It is difficult; it hurts. Men have had to walk across their own hearts out of obedience to Jesus Christ, because he comes first. That is why the Lord said, "You must hate your own life, to follow me.

This is, of course, no justification for abusing parents or wives or children. The Lord warned against that attitude when he referred to the actions of certain Jews who brought a sacrifice into the temple and said, 'this is reserved for God,' to keep money out of the hands of needy parents. Our love for Jesus Christ ought to cause us to love our families, and to love our parents and our children with a greater love than we could ever have for them without Christ. But he is saying that we must first love Jesus Christ. Every other relationship must be subservient to that. And it may appear that we hate those around us because of decisions we have to make out of our love for our Lord.

Now he interprets this principle, I think, in verse 27 when he says, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot he my disciple." In order to understand what he meant by "cross," we have to think in terms of the disciples' understanding of the word. If they saw a man dragging a cross up a hill, they would know that the man was going off to die; his life was at an end. This is what the Lord is saying. In order to be a disciple our life must end. All things precious to us and our program must be waived out of regard for his program. This was the cross that the Lord himself endured. Philippians says that the Lord did not think it a thing to be grasped after to be equal with God, but he set this equation aside and became obedient unto death, even the death of a cross. He poured out his life for all men, out of obedience to his Father. He set aside his prerogatives as God'. he came to earth, identified himself with men, set aside all the glory that was his, for us.

And a cross always has a vicarious aspect to it. It is on behalf of others. If we are to follow Christ, we are to live no longer to please ourselves and indulge ourselves but to live on behalf of others.

Paul writes in Romans 15:

**"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself..."**

Jesus did not seek his own selfish motives; he came to seek and to save the lost. And Jesus says if we are going to be disciples, that must be our program as well: not to live for self, but to live for the highest good of others. If we are going to enter Christ's enterprise, we are going to have to do it his way.

Then third, in verse 33, he says we must renounce all that we have; our possessions. Now granted, possessions in themselves are not wrong. It is not the things that we own; it is the things that own us that God is talking about. He is not talking about possessions per se, but the things that we have that possess our heart, that come before our allegiance to Jesus Christ. Every possession must be brought under his authority and rule.

Now these are the terms of discipleship. They have to do with the most personal ambitions and goals, and with our dearest possessions. God may not necessarily take anything away from us. But if we are going to be

disciples, we must be wilting to yield all to him. What if God does take our family, or dash our fondest dreams, or take our prized possessions? How will we react? With bitterness, with anger against God, with rebellion in our heart? Then it is an indication that we love them more than we love him. Corrie Ten Boom once commented that she learned to hold everything loosely in her hand, because she knew she would grasp them tightly and the Lord would have to pry her fingers away, and it would hurt. If we are going to be true disciples, we must hold things loosely, counting nothing as our own. Everything is a gift given to us by God to be used for him, to be enjoyed, yes, but most of all to be placed under his authority. Only thus can we be a disciple.

Now, having declared the terms (in no uncertain terms), he gives the reason for the stringency for these terms. He uses two parables. One, a man who builds a tower.

**"For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'"**

And secondly, he uses the parable of a king, going to encounter another king in war.

"Will he not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace."

Why these two figures? Is he saying that we need to count the cost, like a man who goes to build a tower, or a king who goes to war? I do not think so, because he has just told them that they are *not* to count the cost; that there is no comparison between love of family and love of Jesus Christ; that one cannot consider discipleship in terms of a profit/loss transaction. There is to be no hesitancy regarding fellow shipping with him in the cross. No, it is not they who must count the cost, but *he* who must count the cost. *He* the king going out to war; *he* is the builder desiring to erect a tower. These two figures run all the way through the Scriptures.

God is in the world for building -- building men, and building a church. He is here to do battle against the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is he who has to reckon on the quality of his workmen and his warriors. Jesus said, "I come to build my church [that is the building aspect] and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it [that is the warfare that is going on]." He said that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, rulers of wickedness in high places. That is the battle. The Apostle spoke frequently of building a house of God. that the church is a great temple that we are building. These two figures run all through Scripture-building and fighting. And the supreme question that the Lord asks is, "Will I have enough men qualified who will stand by me till the building is done, and the battle is won?"

In the Old Testament there is the story of Nehemiah. who went back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls that had been destroyed by the Babylonian invaders. When he got there he discovered that there was a great deal of opposition to the rebuilding, and so it was necessary for Nehemiah to arm his men with a trowel and with a sword. Half of them were given over to the responsibility of erecting the wall; the others to defending those who were building. Again, the figure of building and fighting. He is asking for men who will build and do battle. He is not concerned about the number, but he is concerned about the quality of those to whom he entrusts this task.

The Lord is sifting the crowd, I think this explains the severity of these words, He is not concerned with size of the task force. Size is no guarantee of success. But he is concerned about the quality of the men who are following him. (There is also the story of Gideon in the Old Testament, who learned from God that 300 wholehearted men are to be preferred over 32,000, who had no heart for the task.)

The Lord emphasizes this principle again by another analogy in the last two verses in this chapter, when he talks about salt and its properties.

**"Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"**



Jesus had told the disciples earlier that they were the salt of the earth. They understood that he spoke of them. They were of no use to him unless they had the true quality of salt, the bite, the aseptic quality of salt, with its ability to arrest the spread of corruption. Today the Lord is still looking for disciples who have this salty quality that he can spread throughout the world.

Now I sense that each of us has a hunger to be put to use. We want to be a part of this enterprise; we want to be men and women of quality that the Lord can use. I feel that these words are for us, At first sight they do appear harsh, but I think that these are like the words of a surgeon who tells his patient that he is forced to engage in radical surgery to heal his body. The surgeon knows he must cut deeply into the flesh, or the cure will be superficial and the man will never be whole again. The patient's response is to yield himself to the surgeon's hands. The surgeon insists on this right if he is to do his work properly.

God wants to heal, and put to use. An unyielded Spirit will keep us from wholeness and excitement of cooperation with God. We will be caught in some eddy and we will watch the mainstream of God's purposes pass us right by. But, as Paul says, If we present our bodies a living sacrifice, if we will make ourselves available to him -- our family, our time, our possessions, all that we have -- God will fill and use us.

Finally, in the first two verses of chapter 15, we note the response of the people who were gathered. In chapter 14 he closed with these words, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And Luke says,

**"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near him."**

There is a significant connection here. It was the sinners and publicans who heard him, and wanted to be a part of this operation. They were willing to allow Jesus Christ to move into their lives and correct and to do whatever needed to be done, to qualify them.

**"And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"**

The Pharisees and scribes were repelled because there was too much to give up. Jesus delights to take sinners and turn them into soldiers, if they will turn to him.

### **Part III**

#### **Colossians 1:24-29**

We now come to the third and last of these studies on discipleship. There have been some very difficult things to be said, because they are things that the Lord said. But I hope you understand that I am as much the target as you. These are truths that I want God to make real in my own life. I certainly am not standing in judgment on anyone, but I am convinced of the validity of these principles. I am anxious to see them working in my life, and in the Body of Christ at large.

I have been so challenged in re-reading the gospels in conjunction with these studies to see that the men the Lord disciple were young men, in their late twenties and early thirties. The Lord himself, by the time he was my age, had wrapped up his program. God is after men and women in the vigor of youth, in the prime of manhood and womanhood, to challenge them at that point in their life to a life of service.

Last week we talked about the characteristics of a true disciple. A disciple must say no to all that he is and has if he is to follow Christ. I know we struggle continually with that, but what counts, of course, is the attitude in the struggle. Are we willing to follow and are we willing to be made willing to set every-thing aside? That is the key question. God never rebukes that attitude, although at times we may fall short in the performance of it.

There is a story having to do with Alexander the Great (I'm not sure about the historical accuracy of it), but the story is told about a young soldier who was called before Alexander for disciplinary action. The soldier appeared in careless, slovenly dress, Alexander asked, "Soldier, what is your name?" He replied, "My name

is Alexander." Whereupon Alexander sprang to his feet, struck the soldier in the face, and knocked him down. And as the soldier was rising Alexander said, "Young man, either change your name, or change your profession."

Impressive, I thought, but how unlike the Lord, who never strikes us down because we fail to uphold the name of Christ in our behavior at times. How unlike him. His desire is to move in and to support and to supply the strength, the grace, the resources to conform us to his concept of a disciple. As we saw last week, he will turn a sinner into a soldier. If we are willing to make ourselves available to him.

C. S. Lewis said, "We are all men under construction." There may be bits of unfinished lumber showing here and there, and a few protruding nails and unsightly scaffolding, but you can see that a work is in progress, that the builder has committed himself to bringing the building into conformity with the blueprint. Though we are unfinished, he is at work, and we can rely on that. As the Lord promised, every man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness will be filled. God's heart hungers to put us to use. He just wants us to be available to him.

Now we want to look at the third and fourth aspects of discipleship: the *goal* of discipleship, and the *method* by which this goal is to be achieved.

Colossians 1:24-29.

**Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you [Paul's office was that of an apostle and teacher], to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom [there is the method: warning and teaching that the word of God may be made fully known], that we may present every man mature in Christ [and that is the goal: to present every man mature in Christ]. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.**

You may question the use of the Apostle Paul as our example. because he did have a unique ministry. Not many of us are called to an apostolic office'. that of church planning. It was Paul's ministry to go into unreached, pagan areas to plant the gospel. But even though his ministry was unique, the goal. and the method of a man's ministry is the same, no matter what his office maybe.

Now let us look first at the goal of our ministry. That is where we should always begin because as someone has said, "If you aim at nothing, that's exactly what you'll hit." We need to ask ourselves the question, "What are we doing to these people?"

I remember walking into Howard Hendricks' office in seminary, and seeing a plaque on his wall which said, "What in the world are you doing to these people?" He said, "Every time I get up to walk out of that door to teach a class, I look at that plaque." Now we need to keep asking ourselves that question. What is the goal, what are we after? Paul states the goal in verse 28 -- to present every saint *mature* in Christ.

That's it! To produce maturity in every believer. The word that is translated "present" in this verse is the same word that we find in Romans 12:1 where Paul calls upon believers to *present* their bodies a living sacrifice. He uses it again in Romans 6 where Paul says we are not to yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness, but to *yield* ourselves to God, and our members as instruments of righteousness. It is a military term that means, essentially, to stand at attention. In the army we learned that before you can give or receive orders in close order drill, you must call your men to attention. And so Paul says that his goal is to stand every man before God, ready to take orders, ready to move in whatever direction he desires.

We need also to define what this word "maturity" means. I think the simplest explanation is this: it involves understanding and acting on the principle that *Christ is our life*, It is discovering that, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." It is continually walking according to that principle that *Jesus Christ is my life*: depending, acting, thinking, working, living, responding, to that wonderful truth: Jesus Christ within, the hope of glory. A person who understands that principle and acts upon it is a nature man. The immature man acts and operates on the basis of the Law. He has an external code that coerces him into obedience. He is doing things for Christ, and living for Christ, and obedient to Christ out of a sense of duty. Paul says the law is for the immature. It is necessary for the person that does not understand that Christ is our life.

But the nature man does not need the law; he operates on the basis of grace. Not that he is lawless, but that Jesus Christ himself lives out through his life the righteous requirements of the Law. The mature man allows a living Lord to meet the demands of righteousness in his life.

Maturity is described oftentimes in scripture in terms of its effects, or results, as the ability to discern between good and evil, or to understand the deep things of the Scriptures. That is what a mature man does, but basically a mature man is one who understands and acts upon this principle: Jesus Christ, our life. Not dependent upon a law, not dependent upon a church, not dependent upon other Christians (except as we need them for fellowship in the Body), but dependent upon Jesus Christ and on him alone-no other basis for action. That is what maturity is: being independently dependent upon Christ.

Let us look at an illustration out of Paul's experience. Paul established a church in Ephesus, appointed leaders, then left them for a while. On a return trip, in Acts 20, we have recorded the words that he addressed to those elders that constitute his farewell to them. He told them he would not be back but he was leaving them with responsibility for spiritual leadership of the church. He assumed that these were mature men, capable of fulfilling the charge which he had given them.

His final words to them were, "And now I commend you to *God* and to the *word of his grace*, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." This was all they needed, the Lord of the Word, and the Word of the Lord. They needed nothing else. They did not need Paul; they did not need the apostles; they could move on their own. Now that is what maturity is, and that is what God is after in your life and in mine and in the lives of the people God will put us in contact with.

In Philippians 3 there is another statement that corroborates this principle. Verse 9 indicates his desire to be "found in him [and then, parenthetically, he explains what it means to be found in him], not having a righteousness of my own, based on the law [the law would be for the immature man, who needs it], but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith [activity that grows out of resting upon Jesus Christ]; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Three attitudes, he says, that he carries about in his thinking as a result of his being found in Jesus Christ through faith: he wants to know him, intimately, and he wants to know the power of his resurrection life (to be able to face every circumstance with the mighty resurrection power of Jesus Christ); and he wants to share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. He identified with him in his death on the cross to the extent that he will set aside his rights, his goals, his ambition, his self, in order to allow Christ to live through him. Paul does this (verse 11) "that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

Several times from this pulpit you have heard expositions on this passage. It is a difficult passage to interpret. Certainly, Paul is not saying that there is some doubt that he will attain the resurrection of the body, because in other places he states, without question, this is his prospect. He is saying, "I want so to live that in every circumstance I manifest the resurrection power of Jesus Christ-that I become a standout from among those who are spiritually dead, who do not understand the principle of Jesus Christ living through me." Paul says, "That's my goal-Christ living in me in resurrection power."

Notice in verse 12, he says,

**Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfected, but I press onto make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I**

**have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are *mature* be thus minded.**

Do you see what he is saying? If you are a mature man, this will be your mind'; " I want to know Christ. I want him living through me; and I want self to be reckoned dead, on the basis of the cross." This is our goal. Paul says, "My goal, the focus of everything I am doing in my ministry, is to present men as mature in Christ." It is not to build buildings, not to perpetuate programs, but to present people *mature* in Christ. This, Paul says, determines his message.

In Colossians 1:27 we read:

**To them [his saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

In Ephesians he talks about "Christ in you" in terms of the Church; in Colossians he talks about "Christ in you" in terms of the individual. It is the theme that runs all the way through the book. Christ is our life, the source of every activity. Paul says because his goal is to enable you to see that Christ is your life, his message is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The content of our message is Christ. The burden of our teaching is Christ. As the song writer said, "Beyond the sacred page we see thee, Lord." And as the Lord said to the Pharisees, who were perhaps biblically the best-taught people of their time. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. But they are they which testify of *me* ," We miss the whole point of the Scriptures when we teach them merely to understand the argument of the book, or the geography, or the history, or even just to know the book, as good as that may be. The purpose of all biblical teachings is to present Jesus Christ as the One who is adequate for living, and thus to present men as mature in Christ.

And our goal is not only maturity in terms of the individual, but maturity in community. As Paul points out in Ephesians 4, his goal is not only to see individuals mature, but to see them maturing in relationship to other believers so that they understand their place in the Body. They know what their place is, and they function in their place and altogether, as one Body. Every member functions together with the other members, each one drawing on the strength of the head -- interrelated and ministering to one another. That is our goal, to present all men mature in Christ.

Now, the *method* . In verse 25 Paul says that he became a minister in order to make the word of God fully known. That is the method in general. He wants to declare the whole counsel of God. Going back to the mandate that we discussed during our first study together, the Lord said that we are to teach men all things that he has commanded, We must teach those mighty principles by which God operates. His method is two-pronged.

In verse 28 he says,

**Him we proclaim, *warning* every man and *teaching* every man In all wisdom . . .**

Warning and teaching. Teaching -- instruction concerning specific biblical principles Warning (to use a figure that I picked up from Bob Smith) means to draw a man's life out to a fine point. You link specific need with specific biblical principle. There is no other way to bring a man into maturity than to teach him the truth of the Word of God, because it is the word of truth that relates men to Christ. Paul says. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God maybe perfect [mature]; fully equipped for every good work."

The *goal*: to present every man in Christ The *method* .: by teaching.

Now if I can change gears here I would like to suggest some practical procedures to get on with this assignment. Where do we start? I think we have to start with our own heart-attitude. Do we really want to disciple men? If we don't, God can change our hearts. And if we do, God will put us to use. But it starts right here. As Paul said to that same group of Ephesian elders in Acts 20, "Take heed to *yourselves* , and to your

teaching."

It starts here with me. Do we want to have a ministry? Then I think we need to ask God specifically to give us someone whom we can disciple. God delights to answer very specific prayer:

"God, give me someone in whose life I can make a major spiritual investment." And he will do it. You may start with some group you are presently working with, a Sunday school class, or a Bible study. And as you pray for that group, God will give you a sort of spiritual affinity with an individual in that group. Maybe someone in your office does not yet know the Lord. The Lord will give you the opportunity of winning that person and discipling him. It maybe a neighbor, it may be a business associate, it may be a child, it may be a relative. We will discover that God has put someone in our sights, and we simply cannot get them off our mind.

Then, as a third step, having discovered this person, we need to take the initiative to ask him to study with us. We all hate to impose upon people. We think we are invading their privacy. The amazing thing is that the world is full of people starved for love and understanding and companionship. They try to project that bold front but it is not real. Down inside there is a little child who wants love and companionship. Often we can completely miss opportunities to minister to people if we do not take that look inside.

There are people everywhere who want that loving personal touch. And God will open the door, if we will take the initiative. Then, expose them to the Word. I suggest some very simple helps in this regard. Many of you may not know what helps are available. At the risk of beating Mr. Stedman's drum (which I do not mind doing), I would suggest the sermons which are printed and available in the back of the church as a fundamental means of getting into the Scriptures together. I have used these by giving them to people, asking them to read them, and then getting together to discuss them. There are some other helps that are available. There is a new series of studies put out by Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship called "Learning To Love God" - Campus Crusades has a series that we have used extensively with college and high school students, called "Ten Basic Steps To Christian Maturing."

Then, as a fifth step, pray for them. Paul writes to this same church at Colossae in chapter 4 that he knows God is going to complete what he has begun in their lives,' and he follows that immediately with the statement that he is praying for them. His confidence that God is going to carry them on is based upon his dependence on the Lord in prayer on behalf of these people.

This is an exhausting assignment. There is something about giving yourself in a spiritual ministry to someone else that is draining of physical and spiritual strength. Remember the account of the woman who touched the Lord's garment. He sensed that power had been drained out of him. And you certainly feel that way at times. It is very, very, easy to avoid the responsibility of bearing someone else's burden, We have enough of our own without picking up someone else's. But Paul gives us a word in verse 29. He writes,

**For this I toil** [I give it everything I have]. **striving** [he uses a Greek word, "agonizo," agonizing] **with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.**

Literally. "all of *his* energy which he mightily inspires within me." It is the Lord who is committed to this responsibility. It is really not our task. He said, "I am with you to the end of the age." And he will be, for it is his promise. He is always there in power. It is the basis of our strength. When we are tempted to give way to fear and weariness and boredom (because this is not always an exciting process) there is, by faith, his strength, his energy to accomplish the task.

*Our Father, what a marvelous thing it is that we are co-laborers with you. Your desire is to build lives, and you have committed to us the wonderful responsibility of sharing with you in that task. It is an overwhelming assignment, but we thank you for your strength, available to us, that enables us to break through the feat and the selfishness and the indifference that we all feel. And so we ask you this week to use us that we might be fishers of men, that we might disciple those whom you are seeking. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

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