

The Twelve | Enrolled in the School of Jesus (C)

Cross-bearing: Dying to Live (MP)

Luke 9.12-36

February 21, 2021

Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." ¹³ But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ (For there were about five thousand men.) And He said to His disciples, "Have them sit down to eat in groups of about fifty each." ¹⁵ They did so, and had them all sit down. ¹⁶ Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke them, and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. ¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets full.

¹⁸ And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him, and He questioned them, saying, "Who do the people say that I am?" ¹⁹ They answered and said, "John the Baptist, and others say Elijah; but others, that one of the prophets of old has risen again." ²⁰ And He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." ²¹ But He warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, ²² saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day."

²³ And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. ²⁴ "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. ²⁵ "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

We've been looking at WHY Jesus Christ spent so much time – in His three-year-long work – focused on these twelve young men – the Disciples. And we've tried to learn something of HOW He went about training them.

Today, we look what we might call the Rule/Code of Discipleship or the basic assumption – the Apostle Paul will go on to call it the "Law of Christ" (Gal 6.2). And it's stated by Jesus at a crucial moment in the program AND stated as a paradox – seems self-contradictory but actually expresses a deep truth: "If anyone would follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me for whoever wishes to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

He states this notion/rule/basic concept in His school right after the disciples make an enormous breakthrough (sort of the final exam for “unit one”). This marks the start of “unit two”. To understand it, we have to look at the movement of the whole story.

TODAY – I want to talk about OUR DISCIPLESHIP. How’s that going? Are you seeing any changes in your spiritual life? Are you growing, maturing, deepening, making any strides? Are you seeing any new truths or richer understandings? How does your believing in Jesus affect your relationships with God, family, church members and people in your daily routine? In light of this basic code in the school of Jesus what does it mean to be a modern disciple?

Let’s look at these two scenes and I’ll organize the teaching under three headings–

1) Ebb and Flow of Faith

2) Spiritual Catalyst

3) Breaking the Fourth Wall

There’s a tremendous failure of faith in the first scene and then a miraculous break-through of faith in the second scene. At the start of the chapter, Jesus Christ sent out the twelve, “and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And...to proclaim the kingdom of God.” (1-2)

They were to take NO PROVISIONS for the journey – as if they were conquering the Promised Land and God would provide EVERYTHING.

And they come back ELATED at how God used them to display His Kingdom: there’s truth and healing and liberation and good triumphing over evil everywhere they went. Like the land flowing with milk and honey! God provides!

Then, they go on a retreat with the Rabbi to celebrate/discuss the invasion of God’s Kingdom ...but... they’re discovered. Gigantic crowds are drawn to Jesus Christ, hoping to be healed and helped and taught.

And now it’s the end of a long day and the crowds are so immense 5,000 men (plus women and children Mat 14.21) and the Apostles are at-wit’s-end and overwhelmed and they ask, “Lord, say the closing prayer! Let’s call it a day! SEND THE CROWDS AWAY...we’re in the wilderness and we gotta’ give these people time to find something to eat.”

And, in what strikes ME as ...a little abrupt, Jesus says, “YOU give them something to eat!”

Why did He do that? Why is He so confrontational with His disciples? What really DID He want them to do? And why would we call this a “faith failure”? What would YOU do?

John’s account specifies that it was Philip. *“Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?’ And this He was saying to test Philip; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. Philip answered Him, ‘Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive even a little.’ One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to Him, ‘There’s a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?’”* (John 6.5-9)

So, it was a TEST: Jesus was planning to ACT but apparently wants them to experience something...to perhaps feel the overwhelming NEED of the crowds, a world teeming with people...sheep without a shepherd... He WANTS them to feel how ridiculously weak they are to help people... great masses ...hundreds...thousands...5,000 men plus many more women and children... AND IN THE WILDERNESS...to feel a sense of inadequacy and even despair... because ONLY in the soil of despair can faith begin to germinate...to sprout...and grow.

Their faith is at a low ebb (they're unbelieving believers!) – and He's cultivating an environment where faith can thrive...

BUT... the question IS: why are they NOT believing?

Even WITH the big crowds and the scary wilderness and the encroaching darkness...hadn't they seen His miracles? (At least eight major specified miracles thus far in Luke!) Hadn't they just seen God miraculously provide? They'd seen God heal by their own rough hands... BUT already, ONCE AGAIN, they're failing to believe...that HE would provide and show again the beauty/power of God's Kingdom!

A failure to believe... their faith has ebbed away.

Then, in the next scene: a break-through of faith: "Who do people say that I am?"

"Some say John the Baptist or Elijah or a prophet of old risen again... "

And YOU? Who do YOU say that I am?"

Peter, answers for them all! "The Christ of God!" He speaks directly and certainly. You get the idea that the others were nodding in agreement as if to say, "Yeah! Definitely!" In the other accounts Jesus Christ says, "flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." In other words, this is NOT a conclusion you could draw on your own. It's a gift of God and the gift is received BY faith!"

Side by side...ebb and flow...one dramatic crisis of faith, a FAILURE TO BELIEVE, then immediately an astounding, miraculous FLIGHT OF FAITH...a revelation received by FAITH. The question is HOW?

What was the catalyst or the cause...how'd they go from depths of doubt (like the Israelites in the wilderness – "No food...") to the heights of solid confidence and rest...from fear to faith...HOW DID IT HAPPEN? ...What made the difference?

Well, it could've been the feeding of the 5000. At the end there are 12 baskets full of leftovers – that's not accidental! Jesus is the New Israel, the Better Moses and TWELVE new tribes...and each disciple sees it!

Maybe this was THE miracle that “tipped the scales” from unbelief to faith...finally enough evidence!

Maybe they see that THIS is the Kingdom...healing ... feeding ...liberating ... That Jesus is beyond the Law; no emphasis of legal restrictions in this eating – it’s indiscriminate/unconditional provision and goes to everyone (whether they wash their hands or not – whether clean or unclean) and IT’S NOT A FUNDRAISER! No one is asked to pay for the food!

It’s mercy NOT MERIT...and all those LEFTOVERS! Maybe it forced them to conclude – this is NOT the “do this and live” way of the Law. This is the lavish free, ridiculously generous way of grace and the Kingdom come!

All those thoughts ...were certainly dawning on the disciples... but... this was MORE than just adding up the evidence and drawing the right conclusion. There’s a catalyst at work...something mystical... a hidden, behind-the-scenes agent working to change the hearts and EYES of the disciples...

You could easily miss it...but I think it’s found in these simple words, v. 18, “And it happened that while He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him and He asked them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’”

“WHILE HE WAS PRAYING ALONE...” He was praying and He was praying for THEM... That’s the x-factor, the catalyst that ignited the evidence and led to that blazing conclusion, “YOU are the Christ of God!”

This is Jesus Christ forming the souls of those in His care, His students, His disciples. He takes them on field trips. He sends them on missions. He lives in front of them. He teaches. He puts them in hard spots and then pushes them (“YOU give them to eat!”) ...and then...the catalyst: HE PRAYS FOR THEM ...and there’s a spiritual reaction, a breakthrough; it’s the turning point in the whole narrative.

And ...as soon as the reaction takes place and they draw this conclusion, they identify Him: “YOU ARE THE MESSIAH”. Then immediately, always moving them ahead, He says, “Next Lesson is called, ‘What IS a Messiah?’”

You correctly labeled the Container (“You are the Christ”) but now we have to look at the contents of the Container and we’ll find that you really don’t know what a Messiah or a Christ IS! You have all these strange ideas about what I’ve come to do...”

As soon as they pass Test #1 the Teacher “warned them and instructed them not to tell this to anyone, saying, ‘ (I) The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.’”

“Don’t tell anyone that I’m the Christ because you really don’t know what that IS...But I’m going to go to work on that ...Let’s begin with the BIG IDEA that I’ve come to live and die IN YOUR PLACE. I’ve come to obey for you...and to suffer for your disobedience. I’ve come to defeat the powers of darkness and that can only be done by My life, death and resurrection.”

They don’t have any place in their belief system for a Christ who suffers but that’s the next LONG UNIT in their discipleship.

Now when you think of your own spiritual life... my guess is that MOST of the people here today consider themselves Christians. The question is, “Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?”

Some of you may say, “Well, I’m not quite at THAT level. Maybe someday...”

But there are no subheadings of Christians in that way – different gifts and personalities; we’re all unique (not clones or robots) BUT every Christian IS a disciple. To BE a Christian, a believer in Jesus Christ, is to entrust Him with your past, present and future; it means to be under the spiritual direction and the shaping Hand of Jesus Christ, to BE HIS DISCIPLE.

Every Christian is enrolled in the School of Jesus Christ. His prayers for us are the catalyst that bring spiritual truth to life... His prayers and the power and presence of His Spirit IN US convert INFORMATION into FORMATION.

He’s always at work in every Christian and if YOU are a believer (even though you may be weak in faith ...failing in faith...an unbelieving believer...ebb and flow) but if Jesus Christ has taken you into His school, HE IS RENOVATING YOU...Just like He did to the Twelve.

A friend once told me, “Well, if He wants to change me, it must mean He doesn’t love the real me.” My response to that is – He alone sees the real you buried under the rubble/wreckage of the false you (Old Self). Like Michelangelo said, “I saw the angel in the marble and I carved until I set him free.”

He alone knows the real you (infinitely better than you know yourself!) and He actually loves the whole you... and is committed to your being set free!

And in this passage, if you could picture it on the big screen...with the main character instructing His Twelve disciples...He’s like a Potter forming their hearts and like a Sculptor chipping away and bringing beauty from the block of stone...and then...the Artist turns...away from the Twelve and He looks right INTO THE CAMERA...right into your eyes...FROM THE CROWDS...to the TWELVE and then RIGHT INTO YOUR EYES. **He breaks the “FOURTH WALL”** (that’s when an actor suddenly addresses the audience or looks right into the camera and speaks to YOU, the viewer): (v. 23) *“And He was saying to them all (us) ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose*

it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? "

Jesus Christ is saying, "You must fall hard into My hands...must die to your other options. Your other allegiances must all be secondary and AS THE DISCIPLE DESPAIRED OF FEEDING the crowds, YOU TOO must see the ridiculous inadequacy of other avenues... Your kids can't save you ...your singleness ...your professional achievements/reputation can't define you ... your money... your mind...your looks/desirability...your determination, your failings and hurts and scars...all these will fail you. Even if they win you awards and accolades ...even if they win you the whole world...they will cost you YOUR VERY SELF. Stop depending on these things to be your identity and security and the source of your life.

"Fall hard into my Artist Hands and I will kill you and raise you up again...new and glorious like you could NEVER have imagined. Give up yourself – to Me – and you will find who you really are...Hold yourself back from me and you will never become your True Self.

C.S. Lewis closes Mere Christianity with these famous words:

"Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end... Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."

"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it...but whoever loses it to Me will save it"... It's the voice of Jesus Christ speaking to the heart of the disciple. Do you hear Him speaking into the camera as it were – speaking OFF THE page and into YOUR LIFE?... Don't be afraid of His paradox (to die...to deny yourself is to live, is to find yourself) To hold on to our dreams and wants and to cling to our 5 barley loaves is to miss the miracle...it's to refuse the painful renovation that ends in perfect freedom and glory.

"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it...but whoever loses it to Me will save it..."

He's NOT saying, "If you want real life then shame on you – wanting life is BAD!" No! He knows we all want life – He takes that as a given!

He's saying, "But the ways you go about trying to GET life will not actually lead to life... they're all dead ends! ...Instead, fall into My hands every day...follow My way – a death that leads to INFINITE LIFE ...Say "No!" to yourself and leave your life and happiness to ME."

"And in the end" (to use another illustration from Lewis), "And in the end, this shack that you reluctantly gave Me will be a CASTLE, the PALACE, the real YOU I always intended it to be. But there's only one Way to get there; die to yourself and trust in ME"