

## **Following Jesus; The True Disciple of Jesus Christ**

Last Lord's Day we addressed the very important subject of nominal Christianity. It is a sad fact that there may be multitudes of professing Christians, who claim that they are "believers", but show themselves to be Christians in name only. Their lives do not reflect what the Word of God declares of those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior savingly. They are deceived in their presumption that they have salvation. It is our responsibility to undeceive them, to teach and declare to them the message of true salvation and the nature of Christian living that characterizes true Christians. In this way perhaps the Lord will have mercy and call those Christians in name only to come to Him in truth for their salvation from sin.

In setting forth our subject last week, we showed that though the Scriptures teach that we are justified by God through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, the life of one who has saving faith is a very difficult. It is not an easy matter to live in this fallen world as a Christian. The way of the Christian life can only be realized through intense, persistent striving. As our Lord Jesus taught His hearers, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). The life of the true Christian is one of trial and trouble, of testing and temptation. As our Lord Jesus taught the large crowds gathered before Him, He declared,

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because *narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life*, and there are few who find it." (Matt. 7:13f)

And so, your life as a true Christian involves much striving and fighting, resisting and enduring, overcoming that which is distressing and threatening, as you follow this course unto your promised inheritance, even "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). We had sought to give the emphasis of the Scriptures to the challenging and demanding life that is before the true Christian, and that he must live if he is to overcome and stand before God a saved man (or woman). But we also stress that the Christian life is impossible to live apart from the grace of God that the Holy Spirit gives His people.

Today I would like us to consider in more detail the nature of this life that the Scriptures set forth as true Christianity. What is it that distinguishes a true Christian from a nominal Christian, a Christian in name only? The answer is in the nature and manner that a person follows Jesus Christ in this life. In short, *a true Christian is a true disciple of Jesus Christ*. Today we will examine this matter as we consider our Lord's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

### **I. The Gospel accounts of our Lord Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday**

Today, one week before Easter Sunday, is Palm Sunday, which commemorates the triumphal entry of our Lord Jesus into Jerusalem. This event signaled the onset of His last week of ministry culminating in His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The triumphal entry is recorded in all four Gospels.<sup>1</sup> It signaled the arrival of the Son of David, the Messiah, who would soon be coronated as the promised King of Israel. Each of the Gospel accounts record in slightly different words the welcome of Jesus by the people of Jerusalem. Let us consider briefly the different descriptions and depictions of these Gospel writers.

The account in **Matthew** declared that the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 of the promised king of Israel. We read in Matthew 19:4 and 5,

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12: 12-19.

<sup>4</sup>All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

<sup>5</sup>“Tell the daughter of Zion,  
‘Behold, your **King** is coming to you,  
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,  
A colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

Matthew emphasized that the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was the arrival of a king. And then Matthew recorded the voice of the people welcoming Jesus on this occasion.

<sup>9</sup>Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna to *the Son of David!*  
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’  
Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt. 19:9)

They saw the arrival and entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem as the coming king, who was the promised Son of David, who was about to commence His reign over the promised kingdom of God.

The same account according to **Luke** gives a similar but slightly different emphasis of the crowd welcoming Jesus. In Luke 9:37 and 38 we read,

<sup>37</sup>Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the *disciples* began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen,  
<sup>38</sup>saying:

“‘Blessed is *the King* who comes in the name of the LORD!’  
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:37f)

Luke emphasizes that it was principally His disciples that welcomed His arrival as the promised King whom God (the Father) had sent to them.

And then the account in the Gospel of **Mark** reads,

And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna!  
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’  
<sup>10</sup>*Blessed is the kingdom of our father David*  
That comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11:8-10)

Mark also declared that Jesus was the promised Son of King David, who had arrived to establish His reign over the restored kingdom of Israel.

And lastly we read the account in the Gospel of **John**.<sup>2</sup> Here is his description and depiction of the triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup>The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup>took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

---

<sup>2</sup> We gave attention to this passage in our study of this Gospel on Sunday, October 13, 2019, which was FBC Sermon #1016.

“Hosanna!  
‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’  
***The King of Israel!***”

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

<sup>15</sup>“Fear not, daughter of Zion;  
Behold, ***your King is coming***,  
Sitting on a donkey’s colt.”

<sup>16</sup>His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

And then we read these words of Jesus that He spoke to His disciples:

<sup>24</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. <sup>25</sup>He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>***If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me***; and where I am, there My servant will be also. ***If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.*** (John 12:12-26)

These accounts set forth the truth that on that Palm Sunday Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Son of David, had arrived to Jerusalem where He would be coronated the king over the promised kingdom of David. This kingdom of Israel, over which the Son of David would reign, was the inaugurated kingdom of God. God had promised this kingdom throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, having given great emphasis to this coming kingdom in the writings of the prophets. The people of Israel had long anticipated the establishment of this kingdom. And it was on this occasion that the disciples of Jesus and the people of Jerusalem recognized and acknowledged that the promised event had arrived. Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Son of David who would begin His reign as King.

But after His triumphal entrance as the Son of David, it did not appear to anyone that in the subsequent days that Jesus acted in a manner that they had anticipated of their Promised King. Yes, He performed some miracles during these days. He continued to proclaim the Word of God faithfully and thus fulfilling His calling and His commission by His Father. But the week ended in His betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion and burial. Upon His crucifixion even His disciples were sorely disappointed, for they had thought that He was the Promised One, but He had died. Two of them expressed their discouragement and disillusionment, “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (cf. Luke 24:21). No one had then understood that God had actually glorified His Son upon His cross that would qualify Him to assume His regal throne in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now it is not surprising that those Jewish disciples had initially thought that their expectations had gone unrealized and that their hopes had been dashed. They were deeply distraught when He died upon His cross, even though our Lord Jesus had repeatedly told His disciples what would happen to Him upon His arrival in Jerusalem, still

Consider these statements of our Lord to His disciples instructing and preparing them for what they would witness when they arrived in Jerusalem. We read in Matthew 16:21, “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”<sup>3</sup> In Matthew 17:12 Jesus had declared to them, “So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands.” In Matthew 20:18 and 19 we read Jesus’ words, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.” And then in Luke 17:25 Jesus said of Himself, “But first He

---

<sup>3</sup> This is also recorded in Mark 8:31 and Luke 9:22.

must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”<sup>4</sup> But in spite of our Lord’s repeated and clear instruction to His disciples, His death brought them a sense of defeat and disillusionment because they thought that their hopes and desires had been unfulfilled.

No, it is not surprising that ignorance and error characterized them in those days. Of course their errant perceptions of the manner in which He would ascend His throne and the nature of the kingdom over which He reigned underwent a total transition upon our Lord’s resurrection, His post-resurrection instruction to them, and with the gift of the Holy Spirit that came upon them at Pentecost. They came to see that He had indeed been glorified in His death on the cross and that in His resurrection and ascension, His enthronement in heaven over the kingdom of God had been realized.

However, it is quite a surprising and, frankly, rather alarming reality that many, many Christians continue to have aberrant views of what transpired through that Passion Week that resulted in our Lord’s crucifixion, His resurrection, and His enthronement. For there are numbers of Christians who continue to deny that Jesus Christ was enthroned as the Son of David over the promised kingdom of “Israel.” In spite of the many clear descriptions and proclamations of the impending enthronement of Jesus as the Son of David reigning over the promised kingdom of God, there are many Christians (due to the influence of dispensational teaching) who believe that though Jesus had presented Himself as the promised Son of David, the king of Israel, Jesus had actually failed to ascend to the throne of His father, David. They believe that because of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as their king, the reign of Jesus Christ as the Son of David failed to take place. They teach that Jesus will not be seated on the throne of David until His second coming. Then He will be enthroned, they claim, on a literal throne of David in Jerusalem at the onset of a future 1,000 year Davidic kingdom on earth.

Here are some statements that reflect their errant views of the Davidic kingdom. John R. Rice wrote, “The Jews rejected Christ their King, and the kingdom was *postponed*.”<sup>5</sup> Another declared, “God...made the *attempt* to set up His kingdom on earth, *but* the Jews rejected it, so the kingdom has been withdrawn until the second coming.”<sup>6</sup> Here is another statement of this position:

Jesus was set aside as King at His baptism, then He validated His messianic claims by His authoritative teaching, signs, and miracles. The nation refused to respond in faith and obedience to Jesus’ claims and ministry and lost the blessings that could have been theirs. (Remember that blessings can be lost by disobedience without invalidating the promises of the unconditional covenant.) The Davidic kingdom was not inaugurated and Jesus did not begin to rule.<sup>7</sup>

The same writer describes his understanding of a future earthly Davidic kingdom of Israel:

This aspect of the kingdom of God is yet future and, as the name implies, will last for a thousand years. This facet of the kingdom will fulfil the great eternal, unconditional covenants of the Old Testament, particularly the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7). As was discussed in previous chapters, this kingdom will be on earth, where Jesus Christ will physically, literally rule after His second coming. This aspect of the kingdom of God is sometimes called the messianic kingdom, since the ruler will be the Messiah.

This is the kingdom that John the Baptist declared was “at hand,” and this is the kingdom that was offered to the nation of Israel by both John the Baptist and Jesus. It was this aspect of the kingdom that was rejected by the nation when they spurned the Lord Jesus. But in the future time of the tribulation, Israel will once again be offered this kingdom. At that time they will accept it, and Jesus will rule on the throne of David.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The first announcement of His death was in Matthew 16:21-28, Mark 8:31-38, and Luke 9:22-27. The second announcement of Jesus was in Matthew 20:17-28, Mark 10:32-45, and Luke 13:31-34. The third occasion that Jesus told of His impending cross was in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9.

<sup>5</sup> John R. Rice, **Christ’s Literal Reign**, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Clarence Larkin quoted by Ralph Woodrow, **His Truth is Marching On** (Ralph Woodrow Ministries, 1977), p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Paul N. Benware, **Understanding End Times Prophecy** (Moody Publishers, 1995, 2006), p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.

This is terrible error. They believe and teach that the kingdom that God promised to the Son of David would not be inaugurated unless and until unbelieving Jews chose to accept it. But the apostles declared forthrightly that in spite of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, God the Father enthroned Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. When Jesus Christ returns, there will be a full manifestation of the kingdom, but it will be of the kingdom over which He now reigns, which was inaugurated when He rose from the dead and was seated on His Father's throne in heaven.

The Apostle Peter declared this truth on the Day of Pentecost, that God had enthroned Jesus, the Son of David, as Lord and Christ (Messiah). Here is Acts 2:22ff:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— <sup>23</sup>Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; <sup>24</sup>whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. <sup>25</sup>*For David says concerning Him:*

‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face,  
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.  
<sup>26</sup>Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;  
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.  
<sup>27</sup>For You will not leave my soul in Hades,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.  
<sup>28</sup>You have made known to me the ways of life;  
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’

<sup>29</sup>“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup>Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him *that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne,* <sup>31</sup>*he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ,* that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. <sup>32</sup>This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. <sup>33</sup>Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

<sup>34</sup>“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

‘The LORD said to my Lord,  
“Sit at My right hand,  
<sup>35</sup>Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’

<sup>36</sup>“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that *God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*” (Acts 2:22-36)

Peter declared that the crucified but risen Jesus was the promised Son of David who was now the enthroned King over the kingdom of God.

But here is another comment that reflects the errant view that the Davidic kingdom is a future reality only after the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not sitting on His throne now, but He will sit on the throne of David at His second coming. Not in the rapture of the saints when we go up in the air to meet Him, but after our honeymoon in Heaven when Jesus comes visibly, bodily, literally, with all His holy angels to reign on this earth, “THEN shall He sit upon the throne of His glory.” Certainly that kingdom is in the future, not the

present. Do not be discouraged, dear Christian, for all God has promised He will do, and the Savior shall have the kingdom that rightfully belongs to Him and shall reign on the throne of David on the earth.<sup>9</sup>

And here is another claim that the kingdom that Jesus will rule over was offered to Israel but was postponed because of Israel's unbelief:

Now let us review: Jesus came to Israel as her Messiah. But He taught such lofty spiritual principles that He was rejected by the Jewish leaders. This meant that the kingdom of Old Testament prophecy could not be established at that time. As this unbelief moved toward its climax, Jesus began to prepare His disciples for His crucifixion, His resurrection, and the church age. Then, He died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose again to break death's power. Someday He will return to bring in the postponed kingdom and to reign over the earth in glory.<sup>10</sup>

But these writers are not only wrong as to when the Lord Jesus began His reign as the promised Son of David, but they are also wrong in the manner that Jesus attained His throne. They teach that Jesus failed to become King at His first coming *because* He suffered and died on His cross, but that He will become king at His second coming *because He will come with power* to overthrow and destroy those who would attempt to prevent His kingly rule occurring. But this is wholly wrong. It is not Christ coming on a white horse conquering His enemies that entitles and enables Him to rule as the promised King, but it was through His denial of self, His absolute submission and compliance to obey His Father even unto His death on the cross, that qualified Him and opened for Him the throne that His Father had set before Him. As is set forth repeatedly in John's Gospel, the glorification of Jesus Christ, that is, the exaltation of Jesus Christ as King was due to His being lifted upon His cross. Jesus Himself declared with respect to His cross, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:30f).

Let us understand and affirm that...

## **II. Christ's denial of self in service to His Father was the path to glorification.**

The Holy Scriptures teach clearly and repeatedly that it was due to our Lord's denial of Himself, His desire and willingness to obey His Father though it resulted in His death, which qualified Him to be seated upon His throne. These well-meaning Christians who deny our Lord's present reign over the promised Davidic kingdom teach, "Whereas in His first coming He came to die to redeem His people from their sin, when He comes again He will come to reign." In doing so they essentially say that the manner in which Jesus taught and lived that resulted in His crucifixion failed to achieve for Him His kingly authority. It is only when He comes again in power that He will then forcefully enter into His reign. This is a denial of the most basic of biblical principles, that it was through our Lord's humble obedience unto His Father unto death that qualified Him to become King of kings and Lord of lords. It was not through the conquering power of the sword that He comes into His reign, but through His denial of Himself, His suffering and dying upon His cross. It was for this reason that the Father raised Him and gave Him a name above every name.

When our Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He did so as the faithful Servant of God His Father. The Lord Jesus did not seek to further His own name, to secure His own advancement, to gain popular support of the people or the Jewish leadership in order to acquire His throne. Jesus did nothing to acquire or achieve the exaltation of Himself to be popularly proclaimed King. Every word He spoke and every action that He took was designed to honor His Father and direct the people to do the same. On the day after Palm Sunday, Jesus entered the temple and overthrew the moneychangers. He charged the people in the temple for desecrating His Father's house. Throughout the week the Lord confronted those who opposed Him, who had sought to discredit His teaching before the people. In all that He did He did as the faithful

---

<sup>9</sup> John R. Rice, **The Coming Kingdom of Christ** (Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1945, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Vander Lugt, **God's Plan in All the Ages** (Zondervan, 1979), p. 156.

Servant of the Lord. When He was alone with His disciples, He said to them, “For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:27). His behavior and His teaching led to and resulted in His arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

It was due to our Lord’s denial of self, His willingness to serve His Father and all others rather than Himself, that led to and resulted in His coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords. We read of this in **Isaiah 53:10-12** in which Jesus is set forth as the faithful Servant of the Lord:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;  
He has put Him to grief.  
When You make His soul an offering for sin,  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,  
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.  
<sup>11</sup>He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.  
By His knowledge *My righteous Servant* shall justify many,  
For He shall bear their iniquities.  
<sup>12</sup>*Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,  
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
Because He poured out His soul unto death,  
And He was numbered with the transgressors,  
And He bore the sin of many,  
And made intercession for the transgressors.*

It was through our Lord’s active and passive obedience unto His Father who directed Him to die upon His cross in order to redeem His people, that Jesus became qualified to become Lord over all. When Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden, it was a supreme act of selfishness on their part. Adam served himself above serving God and his wife. In contrast to that first Adam, the last Adam, Jesus Christ, merited our salvation through His own faithful submission and obedience to His Father’s will, choosing not to serve Himself, but to serve His Father unto death, in order to save from death the ones that the Father had given Him. Jesus Christ did not live for Himself, but for His Father and for His people the Father sent Him to redeem.

### **III. Christ’s path to His glorification is the path of true disciples of Jesus Christ.**

As our Lord Jesus taught the Jewish crowds in the temple in Jerusalem, even as He also engaged and refuted the Jewish leaders who had attempted to discredit Him before the people, we read that many believed on Him. We read in John 8:30, “As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.” Now we might assume that at this time these people became true Christians, that because they “believed”, they had become justified before God through faith in Jesus Christ. But although that may have been true for some of them, it was not necessarily the case for all of them. For then Jesus told these “believers” that they must prove themselves to be His true disciples. We read **verse 31**, “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.’*” They would prove themselves to be the disciples of Jesus Christ by *abiding*, or *continuing* in His word. Or to say it another way, the only way that these “believers” could legitimately show themselves to be Jesus’ true disciples was if they continued to hear, believe, and do His words--to order their lives according to His will. If they demonstrated in the way they lived that Jesus Christ was their Lord, then they would be His disciples indeed.

Now it is important for us to understand that although these people had “believed” on Him, only those who were truly His “disciples” would receive salvation from their sin. All true believers in Jesus Christ are true disciples of Jesus Christ. Again, we read in verses 31, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

In Luke 9:23ff Jesus declared that salvation belonged only to His disciples.

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. <sup>24</sup>For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. <sup>25</sup>For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? <sup>26</sup>For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.

According to the Bible, to be a Christian is to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. To be a true disciple is to be a Christian. A disciple of Jesus Christ is not an especially dedicated believer, one “who is sold out for the Lord.” A true disciple of Jesus Christ is a true Christian. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is not the result progressive sanctification; it occurs decisively at the outset of the Christian life. The commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is concurrent with saving faith itself—they are inseparable. And so, the life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ is the way of life for the true believer, the one who has salvation through Jesus Christ. All who claim to have faith—to believe on Jesus, but are not demonstrating that they are true disciples of Jesus Christ, do not possess or manifest saving faith. They will not inherit salvation. Their faith is dead, being alone. As James wrote, “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17).

The reformed pastor and writer, **James Montgomery Boice** (1938-2000), wrote of this matter. He is now with the Lord. But in his ministry he served faithfully at the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He published over 50 books and he was a model leader among reformed pastors throughout the English speaking world. He wrote these words about the nature of true saving faith and discipleship.

There is a fatal defect in the life of Christ’s church in the twentieth century: a lack of true discipleship. Discipleship means forsaking everything to follow Christ. But for many of today’s supposed Christians—perhaps the majority—it is the case that while there is much talk about Christ and even much furious activity, there is actually very little following of Christ Himself. And that means in some circles there is very little genuine Christianity. Many who fervently call Him ‘Lord, Lord’ are not Christians (Matthew 7:21)... There are several reasons that the situation I have described is common in today’s church. The first is a defective theology that has crept over us like a deadening fog. This theology separates faith from discipleship and grace from obedience. It teaches that Jesus can be received as one’s Savior without being received as one’s Lord... Discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity, as if one first became a believer in Jesus and then, if he chooses, a disciple. From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian... Is ‘faith’ minus commitment a true biblical faith?... If faith without works is dead—how much truer is it that faith without commitment is dead... True faith involves these elements: knowledge...heart response...and commitment, without which ‘faith’ is no different from the assent of the demons who ‘believe...and shudder’ (James 2:19).

In one of Jesus’ most important sayings about discipleship...the Lord pictures discipleship as putting on a yoke. This suggests a number of things, but chiefly it suggests submission to Christ for His assigned work. It is the picture of an animal yoked to others as well as to a plow. A yoke is also the connection between submission and subjection. ‘Submit’ comes from the two Latin words *sub* (meaning ‘under’) and *mitto, mittere* (meaning ‘to put’ or ‘place’). So submission means putting oneself under the authority of another. ‘Subject’ also comes from two Latin words, in this case *sub* (meaning ‘under’) and *iacto, iactare* (meaning ‘cast’ or ‘throw’). It means being put under the authority of another. In other words, although the first word has an active sense (I put myself under another’s authority) and the second word has a passive sense (I am placed under that authority), the idea is nevertheless essentially the same. Moreover, it is connected with ‘yoke’ in this way. In ancient times it was customary for a ruler, when he had conquered a new people or territory, to place a staff across two upright poles, perhaps four feet off the ground, and require the captured people to pass under it. By this act they passed under his yoke or submitted to his authority. When Jesus used this image He was saying that to follow Him was to submit to Him. It was to receive Him as Lord of one’s life.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice, **Christ’s Call to Discipleship** (Chicago: Moody, 1986), pp. 13, 14, 16, 19, 21.



When one becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is due to having exercised true repentance from sin and turning to the Lord in faith and submission to Him. When a person exercises saving faith in Jesus Christ, he becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. He is committed to follow Jesus Christ in faith and obedience throughout life. His end or destination will be eternal life that the Lord Jesus has promised and secured for His followers.

And so, the Scriptures teach that if you are not a disciple of Jesus, you are no Christian. A believer, to be a true believer, must be a submissive, obedient follower of His Lord. Faith in Him must have its fruit toward Him. A fruitless life is a faithless life, for the fruit of obedience is the evidence of the life that He imparts to His followers. If Christ is known truly, obedience will be evident clearly. If submission and obedience are not present, you do not have and you will not have eternal life, regardless of what you claim to believe. This is foundational. The “disciples” were first called “Christians” at Antioch (Acts 11:26). You must be a disciple before you can legitimately claim the title, “Christian.” Over and over again the Lord Jesus made it clear that to hear and obey Him—to be His disciple--would result in entrance into life, but to disobey Him would result in exclusion and damnation.

#### **IV. Our life as disciples of Jesus Christ is one of denial of self and of purpose to serve the Lord and others above our own interests and concerns.**

The life of the Christian is a transformed life. The disciple of Jesus Christ no longer lives for himself and his own interests above all else. He desires and purposes to live for and before the Lord Jesus who loved him and gave Himself to die for him. Paul wrote of the experience of all true Christians (who are thinking rightly):

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; <sup>15</sup> and He died for all, *that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.* (2 Cor. 5:14)

The true Christian affirms the truth that Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 6:19f:

<sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For *you were bought at a price*; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, *which are God’s.*

Not only does the Christian live for the Lord, but the true Christian also lives in sincere service for his brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. This is why it can be said, “No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). And Paul could write of the Christians in the church at Thessalonica: “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9).

And so, how is this Christian life, the life of a true disciple of Jesus Christ to be lived? We are to follow our Lord Jesus in the same path that He has taken before us. And it was in John 12 that we read Jesus declaring to His own:

<sup>25</sup>He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>*If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me*; and where I am, there My servant will be also. *If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.* (John 12:12-26)

And we read in Matthew 16:24 our Lord’s clear instruction on how to live as His disciple, “*Then Jesus told His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.’*” How, then, does a true disciple of Jesus Christ live?

## 1. The disciple of Jesus must deny himself.

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after Me, *let him deny himself.*” What does it mean to deny oneself? Essentially, it means, first, *you deny the right (that you may feel you have) to be served by others.* We might consider the behavior of the Lord Jesus Himself, as Paul described Him in Philippians 2.

Jesus “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:7-11).

Jesus denied Himself of the rights of being worshipped and honored as God by becoming a man, the freedom and dignity of being a man by becoming a servant, the right to physical life by being willing to die, and even the right to die with dignity, by submitting to the death of His cross. He did not see being served these things as something to be grasped, but voluntarily denied himself of these things. And we are to have this same mind.

You cannot be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and go through life with the outlook and attitude, “I am going to do what I think is best for me. Me and my own are my priorities in life. You must deny yourself. You must purpose to serve, not to insist on being served.

**Secondly**, to deny yourself means that *you deny your claims of personal merit, honor, or recognition.* You deny yourself these things. They are no longer important. In fact, you shrink from these things if you perceive they detract credit (glory) from the Lord, giving it to you instead.

**Thirdly**, *you deny yourself the notion that you are lord of your own life.* You have a responsibility to obey your master, Jesus Christ. His priorities will be embraced and His directives will be followed even though they may conflict with our own desires or inclinations. And so, for example, your *love of money* is renounced, for one cannot serve money and the Lord. Your own *lusts* are denied, for they cannot govern your life if Jesus is your Lord. Even your *human relationships* are subordinated and governed by your relationship with Him. For you cannot love father or mother, spouse or children, or even your own life more than Him. This is the way it is. And you have happily given yourself to this.

Now again, this is the only way which a disciple of Jesus Christ, a true Christian, may follow. It leads to eternal life. And by refusing to do so, *you forfeit your very soul.*

## 2. The disciple of Jesus must take up his cross.

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and *take up his cross.*” Crucifixion was a common form of execution in the first century. It was a tortuous, extremely painful way to encounter death. Coupled with the physical suffering was the public shame which was associated with this form of death. All regarded the person who was sentenced to this form of death as having been cursed and forsaken of God. And to carry your cross on the way to the place of execution would be accompanied by public ridicule heaped upon you.

What then, is the Lord saying to you, if you desire to be His disciple? **First**, *you must be willing to endure shame and suffering in your life as a disciple.* A disciple must not fail to follow Jesus regardless of the cost to Him. Some cease to follow Jesus due to the *shame* they encounter. We need to be willing to be obedient even if it means enduring shame in doing so. Some cease to follow due to the *suffering* they encounter by following Jesus. We must be willing to endure all suffering in our lives of faithful following Jesus in faith and obedience. We are not to set aside the commandment of God simply because the result of obedience will result in pain.

Some people, who profess to be Christian, have failed here. They argue that there are limits to which we have to obey. “Surely God does not expect me to suffer so; therefore, I am free, why even right, to set aside the commandment of God!” Frequently it is worded in this fashion, “Yes I am to submit and obey, but

God does not want me to be a doormat!” And therefore they say essentially, “I have gone this far and I have suffered a great deal. Why, I have suffered more than most. But now I have determined that I have suffered enough; and so here I will lay down my cross and walk away. I am sure it is God’s will to do so. He does not want me to go on suffering like this.” They want the crown of glory that salvation will bring, but they are not willing to wear the crown of thorns that precedes that glorious crown. The pain becomes too great, and they turn away. What the Lord is saying here is that every disciple that desires to “save his life”, i.e. inherit eternal life, must forfeit his life here, if need be, in following Him.

**Second, you must regard your own life (apart from Him) as finished.** This is the meaning and statement of baptism. You are saying by your burial in the water that your former independent, self-directed life is over. It is finished. And by your being brought forth from the water you are declaring yourself to live life anew as directed by your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **3. The disciple of Jesus must follow Jesus.**

The Lord Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow Me.**” What does this mean? **First, it implies obedience.** To “follow Jesus” implies obeying Him in all respects. His teachings direct our lives. He is our Lord.

**Second, to follow Jesus implies that we only travel where our Lord has already been.** He does not ask us to do anything that He has not done. The Lord would soon leave Galilee and travel to Jerusalem where He would suffer and die. His disciples follow His leading and do likewise, if called upon by the Lord to do so.

**Third, to follow Jesus implies that He is leading us in our course.** He has gone ahead of us and we are following the course He has blazed for us. This is the idea behind the book of Hebrews. Christians are the wandering people of God, who are strangers in this world who are following our Lord Jesus through this life as we journey toward our heavenly Canaan where we may receive our inheritance, a place in the heavenly Jerusalem. As the Israelites followed the manifestation of God in the cloud and pillar of fire through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, so we follow our Lord Jesus through this life unto our heavenly Canaan. As the Shekenah glory led them, our Lord Jesus leads us. But as some fell in the wilderness because they refused to follow Him, so too, those who cease or refuse to follow Jesus will not inherit the promise. But again, the idea is that He is the One Who has gone ahead and has opened up a way for us to follow. And there is no step we might take in our journey that He has not already passed.

**And fourth, to follow Jesus implies immediate and complete obedience.** It implies **immediate** obedience. The Lord says essentially, “Begin to follow me now and continue to follow Me no matter what comes.” We are not to put off--procrastinate--in our obedience. We are to “follow” Him **now!** We are not to tarry. We are not to say as King Felix to Paul, “Go away for a time; when I find time, I will summon you.” No. We say, “Speak Lord. Your servant is listening and ready to respond.”

And then it implies **complete** obedience. We are not to procrastinate in obedience, but further, we are not to be selective in our obedience. Do not think that if you do this and that directive of the Lord Jesus you have somehow bought off the Lord and that you can excuse yourself from following Him in other areas. Partial obedience is no obedience. Partial obedience reveals that you are yet lord of your life and you are choosing what it is you will do and what it is you will not do. You do certain things because it suits you, or you see that it will bring some kind of benefit to you.

### **Conclusion:**

All that we have said about this matter is beautifully and clearly portrayed in the initial act of obedience of the disciple, in **the submission to baptism.** Our Lord said to His church, “*make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things*” (Matt. 28:18,19). Baptism speaks of the disciple having died to his own self-ordered existence, and in his baptism he resolves openly and publicly of his resolve to live the rest of his life for Christ. The baptism of the new disciple is a confession of his faith and reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ for his salvation. He confesses before all that he is trusting not in himself for his salvation, but in Jesus

Christ who died, was buried, rose from the dead, and ascended to sit on His Father's throne. The disciple in his baptism confesses that he resolves to live for Christ among other followers of Christ, before whom he is baptized. Do not claim to be a disciple if you refuse to be baptized. If you refuse and fail to obey the Lord in this first command, you can have little hope though you much other efforts.

In conclusion, when we resolve to be in the business of making disciples of Jesus Christ, we must first ask of ourselves, "Are we followers of the Lord?" "Are we His disciples?" If not then we are not yet Christians. Are you surrendered to Christ? Is there something specific in your life that you have not as yet yielded to the Lord? What is it that God has called you to do in His Word that you have refused to do? Set out with all of your resolve to set that matter in order. Trust Him to enable you to do so, to set it right.

\*\*\*\*\*