

We Proclaim Him: The Substance of Discipleship

Colossians 1:28–29

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Introduction

Well, what a joy it is to be back together again in GraceLife’s rightful home here in the Family Center. Normally, we say that after we’ve taken a break for a month for Sundays in July. But it has been seventeen months since GraceLife met as a fellowship group here in the gym. March 8th, 2020 was the last time. None of us could have imagined what the Lord had in store for us over this past year and a half. But it is wonderful to be back together, back to normal, in another area of life, even after so much has changed.

And as I considered what to preach during this time of “new beginning,” of course many things came to mind; I decided probably ten different times to preach ten different series. But my mind and heart kept getting drawn back to the foundation of what we seek to do here in GraceLife. At a time when there are so many new members of Grace Church—and, as evidenced by our photo directory and membership roster: so many new members of *GraceLife*—at a time when a new semester is upon us and fellowship groups and Bible studies are starting back up again, I thought it would be profitable to revisit a short series I preached several years ago on discipleship from Colossians chapter 1, as we sort of hit reset and go back to the fundamentals of what our fellowship group is all about.

If you were to go to the Grace Church website and click on the page dedicated to GraceLife, you’d find this description: “[The name] ‘GraceLife’ is a reminder that God’s grace is the source of our salvation and the foundation for our Christian lives. Our overarching aim is to proclaim God’s Word faithfully with a view to presenting everyone complete in Christ for the glory and pleasure of God. Every ministry conducted in GraceLife works to that end.” Our overarching aim is to proclaim God’s Word faithfully with a view to *presenting everyone complete in Christ*, for the glory and pleasure of God. That phrase—that purpose clause that describes the fundamental goal for GraceLife—is lifted from Colossians chapter 1 verses 28: “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” And that describes the process of discipleship, which is fundamental to everything we do here in GraceLife.

As the resurrected Lord Jesus stood atop the mountain in Galilee, He gave His eleven disciples their marching orders for following Him in this world. Matthew 28, verses 18 to 20: Jesus said,

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and *make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” In these verses, the church—all those followers of Jesus who would come to believe in Him through the proclamation of the apostolic Gospel—the church receives her Great Commission. This is what Christ has left the church on earth to accomplish. This is the task for which Christ has sent the church into the world. And at the very heart of this Great Commission is the command to make disciples of all the nations. Discipleship is the mission of the church.

And if there was anyone apart from the Lord Jesus Himself whose life embodied the most passionate commitment to discipleship, it was Paul the Apostle of Christ Jesus. His faithful devotion and commitment to the ministry that the Lord had entrusted to Him is unparalleled. And I say that because Paul suffered immensely for the sake of carrying out the commission the Lord gave Him. He was well-acquainted with affliction that comes as a result of ministry. Those of you who were here for our study of 2 Corinthians remember those catalogues of suffering. Just as an example, take 2 Corinthians 6 verses 4 and 5, where Paul lists what characterizes his ministry. He says, “In everything, commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, [and] in hunger.”

Discipleship takes work! The ministry of presenting every one complete in Christ is always going to be attended with the suffering inflicted by a world hostile to Christ and His Gospel, and inflicted by a church that still struggles with the presence of remaining sin in the flesh. But what drove Paul to endure all of this affliction? What animated him, that he would give so much of his time, and effort, and strength—that he would lay down his very life, so that his whole existence would be devoted to the church, even unto afflictions, hardships, and imprisonments? What was the great purpose for all of these labors?

Well, we find that Paul answers that very question in Colossians chapter 1, verse 29. He writes, “*For this purpose* also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.” For *what* purpose? Back up to verse 28: “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, *so that we may present every man complete in Christ.* For *this purpose* also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

This is Paul’s philosophy of ministry. This is what his life is about. This is his purpose. This is the animating principle behind all his endurance in ministry even in the midst of the sorest and most burdensome afflictions. He wants to see every Christian made complete in Christ—every Christian brought to perfect maturity and complete conformity to the image of Christ. Discipleship is what animated him.

And you say, “Sure, Mike. Paul was an inspiring guy. But what does that have to do with me? I’m not an apostle. I’m not called to be a missionary to the known world like Paul was. I’m not even in full-time vocational ministry. I’m just a layman—just a member of my church, raising my kids, and trying to be faithful to Jesus.” But you see, what it means to be faithful to Jesus, what it means to be a member of your church, is to be called into ministry to one another, and to the unbelieving world around you.

In 1 Peter 2:9, the Apostle Peter says of Christ’s people that we are “a royal priesthood”—a kingdom of priests. And what do priests do? They intercede to God on behalf of His people, and they minister blessings to God’s people on behalf of God Himself. If you belong to the Church, you are a royal priest, ministering the blessings of God’s salvation through sacrificially serving your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, and proclaiming the availability of those blessings—the Gospel of reconciliation—to the lost who stand in need of the Savior. You are all called to ministry.

And therefore, your philosophy of ministry—your understanding of what ministry is and how it is to be accomplished—ought to be the same as Paul’s philosophy of ministry. And there is perhaps no other text where Paul so explicitly identifies his philosophy of ministry than in these two pregnant and power-packed verses at the end of Colossians chapter 1.

These verses show us that Paul’s philosophy of ministry revolves around discipleship—around the goal of presenting every Christian complete in Christ. In them, we find **five elements of Christian discipleship**—five elements of Christian discipleship that will equip us to faithfully engage in the work of the Lord’s Great Commission to make disciples of all the nations.

And I’ll give you those five elements up front, so you know where we’re going. In Colossians 1:28–29, we find (1) the **scheme** of discipleship, (2) the **substance** of discipleship, (3) the **scope** of discipleship, (4) the **strain** of discipleship, and (5) the **strength** of discipleship. The scheme, the substance, the scope, the strain, and the strength. And I trust the Lord will help us as we work through these. But this morning, we’re only going to get through the first one and a half.

I. The Scheme of Discipleship (v. 28c–29a)

So let’s jump in. The **first element** of discipleship that we find in this text is one I’ve already introduced a bit. And that is, number one, **the scheme of discipleship**. You could also call it the *goal* of discipleship, or the *purpose* of discipleship, or the *aim* of discipleship. And we see this, specifically, in the last part of verse 28 into the first part of verse 29. Look with me again: “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, *so that* we may present every man complete in Christ. *For this purpose* also I labor” This note of purpose is

absolutely clear: “*so that*,” “*for this purpose*.” Presenting every man complete in Christ was the driving purpose in all of Paul’s ministerial labors.

But what exactly does it mean to be “complete in Christ”? Is there something incomplete about our salvation? Aren’t we complete in Christ the moment we’re united to Him by faith? Don’t we lay hold of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ the moment we are in Christ? Well, it’s true that every spiritual blessing is comprehended in Christ, and that the moment that we are united to Him by faith, everything that is His becomes rightfully ours as well. So Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” The moment we are placed into Christ Jesus, all of those blessings become ours by divine right.

But we come to actually possess those blessings in different ways. When we turn from sin and trust in Christ, He becomes our righteousness in justification—not by actually making us righteous, but by declaring us righteous on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ. Immediately upon conversion, we possess justifying righteousness perfectly and completely. But the way Christ becomes our sanctification is a bit different. We are not perfectly or completely sanctified all at once at conversion. No, God has ordained that our sanctification be a process, progressing through stages of ongoing transformation throughout our Christian life. So 2 Corinthians 3:18 says we’re being transformed into the image of Christ “*from glory to glory*,” or, “*from one degree of glory to another*.” We make progress over time. And that progress will finally culminate in perfect sanctification, but only when we see Christ face to face (cf. 1 John 3:2). And so it’s in that sense that we are “incomplete.” Our sanctification is incomplete. We are not yet perfect.

And that’s how some of the English versions translate the Greek word *teleios* in Colossians 1:28. As I read to you, the New American Standard says “complete.” The ESV has “mature”—“that we may present everyone *mature* in Christ.” The New King James and the NIV have: “that we may present every man *perfect* in Christ.” And so there’s a question as to how we understand this. Is this maturity, which is attainable in this life, or is it perfection, which is only attainable in the next?

Well, on the one hand, Scripture uses this word to speak of one who is “wholly devoted” to the Lord. In 1 Kings 8:61, as Solomon’s blesses the congregation of Israel at the dedication of the temple, he exhorts them, “Let your heart therefore be *wholly devoted* to Yahweh our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments.” And in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, our word *teleios* is translated there as “wholly devoted.” Elsewhere in the Old Testament, *teleios* speaks of blamelessness and blemishlessness. In Genesis 6:9, Noah is called *teleios*—*blameless* in his time as he walked with God. In 1 Corinthians 2:6, Paul says he speaks

wisdom “among those who are *mature*,” *teleios*. And so there are several contexts where the word is used to speak of something that does seem to be attainable in this life.

But then there are several other contexts that indicate *teleios* refers to the genuine perfection that will only be attained when Christ returns to gather His church to Himself. For one thing, it’s the word used in Matthew 5:48, where Jesus says, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect—” not something we attain in this life. Further, though the word isn’t used, the same concept is at play in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, where Paul says that Christ will “establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father *at the coming* of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.” And again in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul prays, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved *complete*, without blame *at the coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And this understanding of completeness, or perfection, in Colossians 1:28 is only strengthened when you consider the connection to Colossians 1:22. There, Paul speaks of the reconciliation Christ accomplished on the cross, as well as the ultimate end of that reconciliation. He says, “He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.” You see, Christ has not saved us so He could leave us in the state that we were in when He saved us. He has justified us so that He can sanctify us and eventually glorify us in His presence. And the purpose for which the Lord has reconciled His people is the very same purpose for which the Lord’s servants labor in ministry: that all Christ’s people would be presented before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—that every man would be presented complete in Christ.

This goal of complete sanctification is never attained in this life, but it is most certainly pursued in this life. Paul says that very thing of his own fight for holiness in Philippians 3:12. He says, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect,”—Paul says, “I’m *not teleios!*” And if there was ever anyone we could ever expect to be the kind of “complete” that you can be before glorification, it’d be the Apostle Paul. But he says, “I haven’t obtained that.” “But I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” And then he repeats himself: “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This was all-consuming in Paul’s life. He knew he would never be perfected before he went to heaven. But that thought didn’t at all hinder him from the most aggressive pursuit of completeness in Christ.

This is sanctification. This is what Paul is after. This is what he spoke about in Romans 8:29: “For those whom [God] foreknew, He also predestined *to become conformed to the image of His Son*.” Sanctification is becoming increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. It is increasing likeness to Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 summarizes sanctification as well. It says, “But we

all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” Beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus, we are transformed into that same glorious image, from one degree of glory to the next. And Paul relentlessly pursued this transformation into the image of Christ.

And not only does he press after it in his own life, he aches for it in the lives of Christ’s people. He tells the Ephesians that this is why Christ has given them the gifts of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:12: “For the equipping of the saints for the work of [ministry], to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *mature* man,”—there’s *teleios* again—to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” This is what we’re all after in the church! And then in Galatians 4:19, he tells those believers, “I am in *the anguish of childbirth* until Christ is formed in you!” Do you see how this consumed him? Paul wasn’t content to get “decisions for Christ” and move on to his next evangelistic campaign! He wasn’t satisfied with making mere *converts*! The passion of his life was to see those who had been brought to faith in Christ strengthened in their faith in Christ! To see them brought to maturity! To see them grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 3:18. This wasn’t, “Ok, you believed. You’re in. I’m on to the next project.” No! His heart pulsed for the sanctification and complete maturity of Christ’s Bride! He wasn’t satisfied with entry-level maturity!

And friends, we must ask ourselves as well: Does your heart beat with Paul’s heart? Do you long for the sanctification of the church? Do you know anything of the anguish of childbirth because you long to see Christ fully formed in your brothers and sisters? Do you know anything of that daily pressure of intense concern that feels the pain of spiritual weakness in the body of Christ as your own weakness? As if it was your responsibility? Even in just the next few sentences in Colossians, starting in chapter 2 verse 1, Paul says, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf! Until you attain to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” That’s what Paul wants for his people. And that’s what your elders want for you. We don’t want you satisfied with entry-level understanding. We want you plunging into the depths of the mystery of God, into Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And by God’s grace, we have a great struggle on your behalf until you attain to all the wealth of knowledge that is in Christ.

Do you know anything of that great struggle? Do you devote your time to investing in the Bride of Christ, to training her, to equipping her, to strengthening her to battle temptation, to put off sin and to press on in practical righteousness? If so, you’ll have a passion for discipleship—for coming alongside one another and helping each other come after and follow Jesus better, helping each other become more faithful followers of Christ, committed to obeying all that He has commanded us. That’s discipleship.

That is precisely what Christ has called us to as ministers of the New Covenant—as servants of His Church, as members of His Church, as elders of His Church. “For *this* purpose we labor and strive, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

II. The Substance of Discipleship (v. 28a)

So how does Paul do that? We’ve seen that the scheme of discipleship is the sanctification and maturity of the church—to present every man perfect in Christ. And we’ve seen how that mission has totally consumed Paul’s life and ministry. But how did Paul go about pursuing this great passion of his life? What did he do to ensure that every Christian would be constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, becoming increasingly conformed to Christlikeness?

We find the answer to that question in verse 28, bringing us to the **second element of Christian discipleship** that we find in this text. We’ve seen first, the scheme, and now we come, number two, to the **substance** of discipleship. Look with me again at verse 28: “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.” What do we do so that we may present every man complete in Christ? We proclaim Him! We preach Christ!

There is a seemingly infinite number of facets, and tasks, and responsibilities in the ministry of the church. There is the Sunday gathering; the administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; the corporate worship of God’s people praising Him in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. There’s the faithful, consecutive expository preaching of the Scriptures so that the Lord of the Church might be heard in His church through the preaching of His Word. There’s the ministry of prayer, as we serve one another by bringing each other’s needs before the Lord. There’s the ministry of counseling one another, sharpening one another. There’s Sunday school and Bible study and Children’s ministry and youth groups. There’s evangelism and outreach. There’s all the logistics and administration: what’s being printed in the bulletin, who’s making announcements, who’s hosting the next fellowship time, who’s bringing what to the potluck. On top of all that, there are even legal matters to consider—as we have learned quite a bit about these last 18 months! But even the “regular” legal stuff: church bylaws, articles of incorporation, property regulations. The responsibilities of the church are seemingly endless.

But amidst all of that, Paul boils down the essence of his ministry to this one thing. And it is, “We proclaim Him.” And we shouldn’t be surprised by this. When Paul wanted to summarize for the Corinthians the essence of his message, the very Gospel that he preached, he encapsulated it by saying in 1 Corinthians 1:23, “We preach Christ crucified.” In Philippians chapter 1, he speaks of rival preachers in Rome who aim to cause him distress in his imprisonment. And his

response in Philippians 1:18 is: “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice.” The very bottom and foundation of his joy is in the proclamation of Christ.

Friends, in all the activity of our ministry—in all the activity of our life in the body of Christ, in all our efforts to present every man complete in Christ—the very sum and **substance** of that ministry of discipleship is: “We proclaim Him!” Most fundamentally, that is what discipleship is.

People do a lot of things to horrifically complicate discipleship. There’s got to be a certain small group, and a certain number of meetings per week, a certain Christian classic or contemporary best-seller you’re reading, and a certain number of accountability questions asked and answered. Friends, all of those things have their place. But when Paul sums up the entirety of his multi-faceted ministry of laboring for the sanctification of the saints so that he can present every one of them perfect in Christ, the *sine qua non*, the irreducible minimum, the thing you must retain though you lose everything else is: “We proclaim Him!” The very **substance** of Christian discipleship is: “We preach Christ!”

Do you recognize what an astoundingly radical statement that is? to say that the way this supernatural sanctification process works—the way that the hearts of sinners are supernaturally transformed so that they hate sin more and more and love righteousness more and more—the way you help someone become a more faithful follower of Jesus, ever-increasingly conformed into His image—is to proclaim Christ to them? That the mere proclamation of the person and work of Christ to someone actually makes them more holy? How glorious must Christ be if the proclamation of His person and work changes the hearts of sinful men and women!

Once again: 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into that same image of glory. The mere sight of Christ—spiritually, with the eyes of the heart—supernaturally causes us to increase in holiness! Why? Because Jesus is so delightful, so beautiful, so satisfying, that the sight of the glory of His character causes us to admire Him, to be satisfied by Him. And because He then becomes our treasure, we don’t go seeking satisfaction in lesser, sinful pleasures. The glory of Christ captures our affections and causes us to love what He loves, and to hate what He hates. Then, our renewed affections—our new loves and desires—inform and excite our will. We want to do what we love, and we want to get away from what we hate. And then, when our wills are thus properly informed by sanctified affections, we do what we want—we joyfully obey all that Christ commanded us.

And so the question is: Where is the glory of the person and work of Christ displayed? If beholding glory is how I get transformed, where do I go to see Him? Answer: in the Scriptures—

in the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God wherein God has revealed His Son to us, wherein the beauty and glory of His character is proclaimed to us. If we want to see the transforming glory of Jesus put on display, we must go to the Scriptures where His person and work are infallibly proclaimed. The sanctifying glory of the Living Word, Jesus, is mediated through sanctifying power of the written Word, the Scriptures.

And so Paul says, “The heart and soul of my ministry—the means by which I aim to accomplish this great purpose of my ministry, to present every man perfect in Christ—the very **substance** of discipleship is “We proclaim Him!” At the very heart of all the discipleship that takes place in our church—whether discipleship from the pulpit, or discipleship in the Bible study, or discipleship in the one-on-one counseling session, or discipleship in a conversation at the fishing hole or at the coffee shop or in the kitchen—the heart of all discipleship is the proclamation of Christ to one another. Because it’s as we proclaim the person and work of Christ from the Scriptures that His glory is revealed to believers, and it’s as we behold the glory of the Lord with the eyes of faith that we are transformed, sanctified, built up, matured, into that same image of Christlikeness.

What do you talk about with one another? You spend time with one another, but what do you spend time talking about? Friends, proclaim Christ to one another! It would be a profitable use of your time—with your dinner guest, with your friend you’re catching up with after a while—to just celebrate the character of Christ and the work He’s accomplished on our behalf. “What have you been studying recently? What aspect of the Lord’s character has He been making plain to you? What truth are you treasuring? What promise are you finding sweet, lately?” Encourage me! Show me my Savior! That’s discipleship! Our conversations should be riddled with the proclamation of Christ to one another.

And so in the time that we have left this morning, I just want to celebrate the glories of the person and work of Christ with you, giving examples of the kinds of topics that ought to occupy your conversation as you engage in discipleship.

We proclaim Him who is God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, eternal God of very God. In John 1:14, we learn that the Word became flesh. But in the beginning, verse 1, “In the beginning *was* the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” From before the beginning of time, the Word *was*. The Word was existing. Jesus did not come into existence at His incarnation. No, He *was* in the beginning with God, verse 2. He was *with* God, which shows that He was distinct from God the Father; if you’re with someone you are not that someone. But not only was the Word *with* God—that is, with God the Father—the Word *was* God Himself. This Christ is the eternal Son, the One who from all eternity was fully subsisting in the divine nature. He is the image of the invisible God, Colossians 1:15—the very radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, Hebrews 1:3. And so He is the possessor of

all the attributes and prerogatives of God. All of the fullness of Godhood dwells in Him no less than in the Father or the Holy Spirit.

We proclaim Him who is the Creator of all things. Colossians 1:16: “For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.” And He is the Sustainer of all creation, Colossians 1:17: “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Hebrews 1:3: “He upholds all things by the word of His power.” As its Creator, He is therefore the owner of all creation. In Job 41:11, the Triune God says, “Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.”

We proclaim Him who is the eternally glorious One. Christ speaks in John 17:5 of “the glory which [He] had with [the Father] before the world was.” First Corinthians 2:8 calls Him “the Lord of glory.” Isaiah sees “the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple,” and the angels are exclaiming, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!” The Apostle John quotes this passage in Isaiah 6 and says in John 12:41, “These things Isaiah said because he saw *His* glory, and he spoke of *Him*.” Isaiah saw the *Son* seated on the throne of heaven! He saw the train of the *Son*’s robe filling the heavenly temple! And it is to the glory of the *Son*’s name—no less than the Father’s name, no less than the Spirit’s name—that the seraphim sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy!”

We proclaim Him who, though being rich, yet for your sake became poor—who, though He was eternally existing in the nature and essence and glory of God, emptied Himself by taking on a human nature in His incarnation. The infinite, eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient, almighty God takes upon Himself the nature of finite, temporal, dependent, mortal humanity. And He does so without shedding His divine nature!

The uncreated Creator assumed a created human nature, and was born of a woman. The Sustainer of the universe was Himself being sustained in the womb of a teenager. The infinite God was clothed in finite humanity. The eternal stepped into time.

The omnipresent One who fills all space, whom the highest heaven cannot contain, confined Himself to the single space of Mary’s womb, and then the cattle’s trough, and then Calvary’s cross, and then Joseph’s grave.

The immutable One—who is perfect, and so couldn’t change either for the better or for the worse—is said to have increased in stature.

The omniscient One—the one in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge—*increased* in wisdom, Luke 2:52, and *learned* obedience through suffering, Hebrews 5:8.

The omnipotent One, who commanded the winds and the waves with a word, knew what it was to grow weary from a day's journey. The eternal God who neither slumbers nor sleeps slept in a boat on the sea.

In the incarnation, the infinite God and the finite man are united together in One magnificent Person: the God-Man, Jesus Christ. The eternal majesty of God wedded to the frailty and indignity of humanity! Two natures, the Creed says, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ." We proclaim Him who is Himself the miracle of all miracles!

And we proclaim Him who as a man showed us what perfect humanity looks like. And He was marked preeminently by compassion. "Let the children come to Me; do not hinder them" (Mark 10:14). He takes a child in His arms and says, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me" (Mark 9:37). The young girl lies dead in a house of weeping and wailing mourners. And Jesus says, "Why are you weeping? She's just asleep." And taking her tenderly by the hand, He says in a voice that must have been ever so gentle, "Little girl, I say to you, get up" (Mark 5:41). And He gives that sweet girl back to her family. The leper—who knows he's a social outcast, who knows that the Law of Moses strictly forbids him to get anywhere near a rabbi—throws caution and custom to the wind and falls on his face and begs Jesus, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" (Luke 5:12). "You can end my shame! You can purify my uncleanness! If You're willing!" And without a moment's hesitation, Jesus stretches out His hand and touches the leper! He touches the untouchable! and says, "I am willing; be cleansed."

And we proclaim Him who is not only the God-Man, but the Mediator between God and Man—God become Man in order to fulfill the law man broke, and to pay the penalty of man's sin. Romans 5:19: "For as through the disobedience of the one [Adam] the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One [Christ] the many will be made righteous." Matthew 3:15: Jesus says He has come "to fulfill all righteousness" on behalf of sinners. Jesus came to live the life that you and I were commanded to live, but which we failed to live. His perfect record of human obedience is then imputed to us through faith, and becomes the ground upon which the Holy God can declare guilty sinners righteous.

But not only did we need a record of righteousness credited to our account. We also needed the penalty for our sins to be paid. And so the One who could say, "I am the truth," John 14:6, was slandered, accused of bearing false witness, and betrayed by His friends. The One who clothes the grass of the field and lilies of the valley was stripped bare. The One who healed the sick with a touch has His back torn open by the scourges of sinful men. The brow that should have borne

the crown of heaven was pierced by thorns. The One who upheld the universe is collapsed under the weight of His own crossbar, and needs the help of a man whom He had made, whose life He was sustaining at that moment, to carry His cross to Golgotha. In the majesty of Heaven, to look upon Him would have been to look upon the epitome of all beauty. But Isaiah, who told us in chapter 6 of the angelic worship He received in heaven, tells us in chapter 53 that on earth He had “no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men. And like one from whom men *hide their face* He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

The worshiped became the despised. The Master became the slave. The eternally blessed One became the man of sorrows. The fountain of all divine blessings became a curse for us, under the wrath of God. The unmixed holy fury of God the Father breaks over the head of His beloved Son, in whom He is well-pleased, as Christ bears the sins of His people as our substitute, and cries out in words that exhaust the depths of mystery, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” The Author of life died. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us . . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

And we proclaim Him who not only perished under the wrath of God for our sin, but who was raised from the dead on the third day in victory, eternally triumphant over sin and death! And we proclaim Him who ascended to the right hand of the Father in glory, and is now seated at His right hand, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come, where He ever lives to make intercession for His people before the Father, able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him!

We proclaim Him who is coming quickly, who in a short time will return from Heaven to gather His church to Himself, to unleash judgment on a wicked and rebellious world, to set up His kingdom upon the earth in which He will rule the world in righteousness, to cast all the enemies of righteousness into the eternal lake of fire, and to finally re-create the world into a New Heaven and a New Earth, where He will dwell forever with His redeemed and purified Bride in glory, love, and joy. Dear friends, this is the Christ we preach. We proclaim Him.

Conclusion

He is the **substance** of the Christian ministry of discipleship, the ministry whose purpose and goal is to present every Christian complete in Him. No matter what you do for discipleship—however it may be that you go about achieving that goal of presenting every man perfect in the body of Christ—it all must boil down to the proclamation of the glorious person and work of Christ one to another. It all must boil down to “We proclaim Him.”

Listen to all that glorious doctrine of His person and work. How pleasant and enjoyable and delightful it is to have our minds preoccupied with such a glorious Person as Jesus Christ! What subject is more enjoyable to speak about than Him? What topic is more worthy of your attention than He is? What theme is more satisfying, or more fruitful, than the One fairer than the fairest of ten thousand? the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? in whose presence is fullness of joy, in whose right hand are pleasures forevermore? Proclaim this Jesus to one another, friends. Display Christ to one another by speaking of Him and celebrating Him together.

But before you can proclaim Him, you must trust in Him. Before you can disciple others, you must be a disciple yourself. You must “come after” and “follow” Jesus in saving faith. If you’re here this morning and you don’t know this glorious Christ that we proclaim—if He is not your Master and Lord, if you are not His disciple, if you have no saving interest in the work of salvation that the eternal God became Man to accomplish—dear friend, turn from your sins and come to Him today, because He stands ready to receive all who lay hold of Him through faith alone. No work needed! Just come, admit your failure and your need, and receive Him with the open hand of faith.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23, “If anyone wishes to come after Me”—that is, if anyone wishes to come to Me for salvation and be My disciple—“he must deny himself,”—lay aside your own righteousness, lay aside your own preferences and comforts—“and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 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.” Dear sinner, lay down your claims to being lord of your own life. That’s the surest way to lose your life. But lay your life down at the foot of Christ’s cross, and follow Him in a life of repentant faith, a life of obedience to God and of service to His people, and in losing your life you will find that you’ve saved it, because you’ll gain Him. And then you can proclaim Him.