

BACK TO THE BASICS: What is Discipleship? Matthew 16:24-27¹

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is great to see you. For those of you that are guests with us today, whether you are in the room or joining us online, we say a very special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to be able to connect with you. You can let us know you are here in a couple ways. You can text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, a reply text will be sent with a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you.

Or you can stop by the information center in the lobby area. We have a gift we'd like to give you there. Again, we look forward to connecting with you.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

Today we are beginning a new teaching series entitled, "Back to the Basics." We are going to take the summer to walk through foundational observances and practices that are given to The Church by God, founded in the Scriptures. Today we are going to answer the question, "What is a Disciple." So, grab your bible and turn with me to Matthew chapter 16 as we work our way this morning through verses 24 and 27.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Baseball Fundamentals

Many of you know that I have the privilege of coaching a local high school level homeschool baseball team. We wrapped up our season a few weeks ago and we finished 11 and 11. Not a winning record, but .500 isn't a losing record either! Don't blame the kids. I promise it's their coach.

But, at one point in the season we went through a slump and all I wanted to do was get back to .500 on the season. But we were struggling and in practice I was trying to correct the mistakes we were making on the field, and it didn't seem to make any difference. We were rehearsing complex plays, situations, and baserunning scenarios and it seemed to only confuse the guys more. So, I

remember thinking to myself, let's just go back to the basics, the fundamentals of baseball and see what happens.

So, we started working ground ball drills, outfielder footwork and positioning, and hitting off the tee. We didn't worry about 1st and 3rd scenarios or hit and run situations or complicated baserunning signs. We just worked on the fundamentals of the game.

After a few practices, things began to turn around. We started working our way out of our slump. The guys grew to be more confident in their approach to the ball wither at the plate or in the field. Pitchers felt free to rare back and really throw the ball because their trust in their teammates increased. And we ultimately worked our way back to even on the season and finished third in our district. I remember thinking at that time, how important it is to focus on the basics.

So, as that translated to church life, I think the same is true. We often need to go back to the fundamentals of what we are to be doing as a church, what God has called His bride to be and do. So, that's the purpose of this series.

Over the course of the summer, we are going to talk about what it means to pray and fast, what it means to live on mission, the purpose of The Lord's Supper, Baptism, worship, so forth and so on. This summer we are going to get back to the basics. And it is my prayer that we are able to refocus on what it is that God has called us to do and practice. I'm excited about this series. I hope you will join me as we really press in.

Today we are answering the question, "What is discipleship? What does it mean to be a disciple?"

BACKGROUND:

After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He spent 40 days with His disciples before He ascended into Heaven. And in those 40 days, Jesus really charged them with what to do next. And when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, that Acts 2, the church was born. And the disciples, turned apostles, began executing Jesus' charge.

There are 2 key passages of Scripture that highlight Jesus' charge to the disciples and these two passages continue to be the marching orders of the

Church. Matthew 28:19-20, known as the Great Commission and Acts 1:8 are those two passages. Let's look at them as we begin our series this morning. This is Jesus laying out the fundamentals of His Church.

Matthew 28:19-20. *¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* And Acts 1:8. *⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

The foundational call of The Lord Jesus on His bride, The Church, is to make disciples everywhere. That is the mission. That is what we must do. And notice that Jesus didn't say, "Go and make Christians." Nor did he say, "Make converts." Now, certainly that is a part of making disciples, but the charge is to make disciples.

So, I see that, I get that, but let's define what a disciple is. What does it mean to be a disciple? Well, Jesus answers that in our text of study this morning. We are going to see 5 aspects to discipleship.

MESSAGE:

Look with me at Matthew 16, verses 24 through 27. This is Jesus defining what it means to be a disciple. I want to read the passage in its entirety and then pick it apart as we look at these 5 aspects to being a disciple.

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. The first aspect of discipleship we see here is...

1) Repetition.

Verse 24 says that this was spoken to His disciples. *²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples.* Jesus does not differentiate between a Christian and a disciple. For Him they are the same, it is a repetition of words. This is important because I think we have a tendency to separate the two.

Let me give you an example. Often when we enter into a specific study of the bible with someone or a group of people, and we will say of that group, that I am being disciplined by so-and-so. Or, I'm involved in a discipleship group. It is almost as if discipleship is a higher level of Christianity. Do you see what I mean? But Jesus doesn't make that distinction. To be a Christian, to be a follower of Jesus, is to be a disciple. They are one in the same. The words are actually a repetition.

If fact, the word "Christian" doesn't come into play until long after Jesus ascended into Heaven and the Church was taking off. Acts 11:26 says, *"And in Antioch **the disciples were first called Christians.**"* We see here that disciple and Christian are one in the same.

I point this out because it is dangerous for us to separate the two. To somehow say that I am a Christian but not engaged in discipleship is an oxymoron. Remember, Jesus didn't call us to make Christians, but to make disciples. To follow Jesus is to be a disciple.

Years ago, Kyle Idleman published a book entitled, "Not A Fan.ii" In that book he talks about the difference between being a fan of Jesus versus being a follower of Jesus. He points out that there is a big difference between the two. We can be fans of people and not really know them. But to be a follower assumes a personal relationship with someone.

The 12 men that followed Jesus closely, who we call the Disciples, understood what it meant to be a disciple. It meant, to them, to follow a rabbi, a teacher, and listen and observe how that person applies what he teaches. Then, disciples do what their rabbi does. What Jesus is saying in this passage that a call to following Him is a call to being a disciple of His.

So, the first aspect of discipleship we see is that Christian and disciple are a repetition of words; no distinction. The second aspect is...

2) Rejection.

Jesus goes on to say, in verse 24, *²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself**..."* This is where Jesus really begins to describe the cost of being a disciple. And He says that the foundational attribute of being a disciple is rejection of self.

The word translated as “deny,” means to completely disown.ⁱⁱⁱ This is the very same word used to describe Peter’s denial of Jesus as He was heading to the cross.^{iv} It is a picture of separating oneself from themselves. How do you do that? This sounds like some kind of multiple personality disorder.

Jesus is not talking about identity. Scripture says that we are all image bearers of God, and He has created us that way. Nor is Jesus suggesting that we are to deny things for ourselves. He is not saying that you need to deny yourself dessert, or a vacation, or something you’ve been saving for. Jesus is not talking about self-asceticism here.

The reason that is important is because the denial of those things are often equated with self-righteousness. I am more spiritual than others because of what I deny myself. Remember, we do not earn our salvation.

Now, there may be times in our lives that we want to pray and fast for a particular season and therefore deny ourselves something in order to devote ourselves to The Lord. But that is not what Jesus is talking about here. That sermon is next week, by the way, prayer and fasting.

The self that Jesus is referring to in this case is the old self. The natural, sinful, rebellious unredeemed self.^v The New Testament often talks about the old self versus the new self. That prior to placing your faith in Jesus, you walk in your old ways. That is your old self. 1 Corinthians says that when we come to Jesus, when we are saved, we are new creations. The old, unredeemed, unregenerate self is done away with, and we are born again, given a new self.

Another way the Bible illustrates this is the flesh versus the spirit. In our old self, we walked in the flesh, pursuing the sinful desires of our flesh. However, when we come to Jesus, surrendering our lives to Him, we are given, sealed, with the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God in the life of the believer enables us to no longer walk according to the flesh, but instead according to the Spirit. In order to do that, we must separate ourselves from the old self.

When we reject, or deny, the old self, we are yielding the right to live our own lives to living them according to Jesus. We are acknowledging that there is nothing good in me, for I am a sinner, and my ways lead to destruction. However, there is life and truth in Jesus so I instead follow Him and His ways.

The aspects of discipleship described by Jesus is repetition and rejection. Thirdly, ...

3) Release.

Jesus continued in verse 24. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross...”*

When Jesus said this, the 12 disciples hearing it had zero confusion about what He was saying. When we read it, we think about it differently. We have a tendency to go to the saying, “It’s my cross to bear.” Meaning, a trial or an inconvenience. But when Jesus said this, they knew what taking up a cross meant. It meant a release of their life to be willing to pay any price for Christ’s sake.

The Roman cross was the instrument of crucifixion. Ultimately, Jesus gave his life, in our place, upon a cross. It is estimated that during the lifetime of Jesus, on earth, some 30,000 crucifixions were performed by the Romans.^{vi} So for the 12 Disciples, they knew full well what Jesus was talking about.

And we know from Church History, that most of the Apostles were martyred for their faith. That is that they gave their lives because they followed Jesus. And there are brothers and sisters, in our day, across the globe, that worship this day in fear of their lives. They, too, know what Jesus means when He says to come after Him means a willingness to take up their cross.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor and seminary professor living in Germany in the 1930s^{vii}, once wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*, **“When Christ calls a man, he bids him, come and die.”**^{viii} I can see what conversation at lunch is going to be like. “So, how was church for you this morning? Oh, it was good. Pastor said to follow Jesus means to die. It was awesome. How was church for you?”

Please hear me. The suffering and persecution one endures, because of their faith, varies from person to person, place to place, and time to time. Not all the apostles were martyred. Not every disciple is called to give their lives for their faith. But it does mean that there must be a willingness to follow Jesus to such an extent that if it demands my life, I choose Jesus over my life.

Discipleship is costly stuff. And as Bonhoeffer’s book title suggests, discipleship is terribly expensive. Following Jesus is easy to say but tough to carry out.^{ix}

We've talked about repetition, rejection, and release. The fourth aspect to discipleship is...

4) Relationship.

Jesus continued. Matthew 16:24. ***24**Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me**.* Only after a person had denied himself and taken up his cross is he prepared to follow Jesus.^x Follow means to walk the same road.

ILLUSTRATION: Traveler vs. Tourist

A guy by the name of Mark Buchanan wrote a book entitled, "Your Church is Too Safe."^{xi} How's that for a title?! It is a book about what it means to follow Jesus. But in the book, he talks about the difference between a traveler and a tourist.

He says, "the word traveler comes from one who travails, who labors, one who suffers." A traveler immerses himself in a culture. They learn the language, they dress to fit in, they eat according to the culture, and they are gone for an extended period of time.

A tourist is different. Tourists visit places briefly. Just sampling the culture and the food. They buy a souvenir, take a picture, buy a t-shirt and go home.

The point he is making is that many of us approach following Jesus like a tourist instead of a traveler. The relationship we have with Jesus fits our terms and depth. But what Jesus is calling us to is to follow him like that of our traveler. To build a relationship with Him. To go where He goes. To do what He does. To say what He says. You see the difference.

Often times, remember I preach to myself up here, you guys are just in the room. We compartmentalize our relationship with Jesus. We come to church, and we partake in church programming, we are involved in Bible studies. But do those things transform us into Jesus in everyday life? The purpose of those things is to make us like Jesus. Following Him means everywhere we go, we take Him with us. Where we work, live and play.

So, we've talked about the fact that discipleship is not differentiated from being a Christian. They are repetitive words. We are to reject our old sinful self. We are to be willing to release even our lives to following Christ. And we are to

cultivate our relationship with Jesus so that he is a part of everything we do. Fifthly,...

5) Reward.

While there is a definite high cost to following Jesus, there is also a great reward. Look at verses 25-27. ***25**For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake **will find it**.* ***26**For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? **27**For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then **he will repay each person according to what he has done**.* There will be a payoff. You and I either choose our reward now by pursuing the indulgence of our flesh, or we choose our reward later by following Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION: Dallas Cowboys

I am a Dallas Cowboys fan. I have always cheered for the Cowboys and probably always will. But I also want to quit mid-season every year. Anyone else know what I mean?!

I feel like Jerry Jones sold his soul for three Super Bowl rings. Anyone else feel that way? Man, the 90s were awesome years to be a Cowboys fan. But the last 30 years have been terrible!

That same thought, in my mind, is what Jesus is getting at in this passage. You can I can have our reward now and forfeit it in eternity, or we can forfeit it now, for the cause of Christ, and enjoy it for eternity. It's the great paradox.

The reward for the person choosing to be a disciple is eternal life. We are called to deny our sinful selves and possess a willingness to pay the ultimate price. But that is simply a temporary state. And Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:17, ***17** For this light **momentary** affliction is preparing for us an **eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**.* If we give our lives up for Christ now, then we will know happiness like we can never imagine for all of eternity.^{xii}

Back to the basics of discipleship. Five aspects. Repetition, Rejection, Release, Relationship, and Reward.

CONCLUSION: I want to invite the band to come back up and lead us in a time of response.

Have you considered the cost of discipleship? This passage is one of those passages that confronts us all, doesn't it? I don't know about you, but it causes me to ask questions of myself.

Am I serious about being a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is my walk with Him a daily thing? How am I denying myself? Am I willing to take up my cross? How am I allowing Jesus to transform my life every day? Weighty questions.

Have you counted the cost? Have you determined to be a follower of Jesus and not just a fan? Are you ready to be a traveler with Jesus or are you only interested in being a tourist?

If you are here today and you have never given your life to Jesus, I want you to know that in a moment I am going to pray, and our elders will be here at the front ready to receive you. We would love nothing more than to visit with you about how you can have a relationship with Jesus.

Others of you have already given your life to Christ. What areas of your life do you need to surrender to Him? Where do you need to deny yourself? What areas of your life do you need to give back to Him?

Let's get back to the basics. Surrendering our lives to Jesus. I'm going to pray and then let's respond.

[PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

- ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1988; Shortform Readers, *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Review accessed 6/7/22: https://www.shortform.com/summary/the-cost-of-discipleship-summary-dietrich-bonhoeffer?qclid=EAlalQobChMI8JXv4YGh-AIVKihMCh0qTQSbEAAYASAAEqKnhvD_BwE; Dr. Michael Youssef, “5 Ways to be a Disciple Maker,” article published by Leading The Way, May 5, 2020; Pastor Chuck Swindoll, “What Does Following Christ Cost?,” article published by Insight for Today, June 15, 2018; John MacArthur, “The Cost of Discipleship,” article published by Faith Gateway, May 26, 2020; Pastor Skip Heitzig, “What Does It Mean to Be a Disciple?,” sermon preached November 21, 2021, Calvary Church Albuquerque; John MacArthur, “How to Take Up Your Cross?,” sermon preached March 14, 2022; Alistair Begg, “What Is Discipleship,” published by Truth for Life, December 12, 1999; Will Toburen, “The Cost of Discipleship,” preached at Summit Church, September 1, 2019; Dr. Tony Evans, “Making Kingdom Disciples,” sermon preached at New Hope Church in Oahu, HI, August 5, 2013; Matt Chandler, “Vision Sermon,” delivered on June 5, 2022, The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX.
- ⁱⁱ Kyle Idleman, “Not A Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus,” Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2011.
- ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1988, page 47.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Ibid.
- ^{vi} Pastor Skip Heitzig, “What Does It Mean to Be a Disciple?,” sermon preached November 21, 2021, Calvary Church Albuquerque.
- ^{vii} Shortform Readers, *The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Review accessed 6/7/22: https://www.shortform.com/summary/the-cost-of-discipleship-summary-dietrich-bonhoeffer?qclid=EAlalQobChMI8JXv4YGh-AIVKihMCh0qTQSbEAAYASAAEqKnhvD_BwE.
- ^{viii} Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “The Cost of Discipleship,” Touchstone Press: New York, 1995 (first publish in 1937), page 99.
- ^{ix} Pastor Chuck Swindoll, “What Does Following Christ Cost?,” article published by Insight for Today, June 15, 2018.
- ^x John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1988, page 50.
- ^{xi} Mark Buchanan, “Your Church is Too Safe: Why Following Christ Turns the World Upside-Down,” Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2012.
- ^{xii} Alistair Begg, “What Is Discipleship,” published by Truth for Life, December 12, 1999.

