

Lesson 6 – 5 December 2010.

Disciples of the Heavenly King

Lesson Scope: [Matthew 16:21-28](#); [19:13-30](#); [20](#)

Lesson Focus.

This lesson builds around three separate scenes. In chapter 16 Jesus was at Caesarea Philippi. For the first time He shared with His disciples that He would suffer and die at Jerusalem. Jesus had hinted at this before but never said it plainly. Peter objected, prompting a rebuke from Jesus, who then went on to outline the terms and costs of discipleship.

By chapter 19, Jesus had traveled to Perea, east of Jordan, where the rich young ruler brought his important question. Jesus' response to his request again outlined the requirements of discipleship. Jesus further revealed to His audience that discipleship is costly to the flesh; anyone not completely surrendered cannot enter the kingdom of God.

In the course of Jesus' westward travel to Jerusalem (chapter 20), He once more foretold His imminent death, explicitly mentioning the cross. In light of Jesus' words, the sons of Zebedee sought to capitalize on a perceived opportunity for position following Jesus' resurrection. Jesus again pointed out that discipleship means suffering and servanthood—not power and position, willingly identify with Him and forsake the world. This issues into a life of self-denial, obedience, and service: that marks a child of the kingdom.

This lesson is best understood when the three separate occasions on which this lesson is built are also understood. On two of the occasions, Jesus spoke in conjunction with the declaration of His own approaching suffering and death.

There is a difference between self-denial and cross bearing that should be explained. These two aspects overshadow all three incidents and should receive a thorough study. The aspect of suffering is especially noted in Matthew 20:22-23. These verses are in the scope but not in the text. They are, however, the background for Jesus' words in Matthew 20:25-28.

A lesson like this should cause every one of us to evaluate the depth of our own commitment to Jesus Christ and what it is that one really holds dear in their own experience

Lesson Aim: To identify involvements of practical discipleship.

Theme Verse: [1 Peter 4:13](#). “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

Lesson Text:

"Let Him Deny Himself"

[Matthew 16:24-27](#)

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. ²⁵For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

"Come and Follow Me"

[Matthew 19:16-30](#)

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? ¹⁷And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. ¹⁸He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, ¹⁹Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ²⁰The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? ²¹Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. ²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

²³Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. ²⁵When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? ²⁶But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

²⁷Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. ³⁰But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

"Let Him Be Your Minister"

Matthew 20:25-28

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Questions for Study

"Let Him Deny Himself"

1. Explain the meaning of self-denial and cross bearing. How are they related?
2. Why is the simple truth of Matthew 16:25 so difficult to live out?
3. What forms of cross bearing do we face today?

"Come and Follow Me"

4. What are the involvements of being "perfect" Matthew 19:21?
5. What was Jesus teaching about riches in Matthew 19:23-26?
6. How can we know that we have forsaken, for Christ's sake, the things mentioned in Matthew 19:29?

"Let Him Be Your Minister"

7. In what ways did Jesus exemplify the ministering that He taught?
8. How should we apply the ministering concept today?

Analyzing the Passage

Jesus, in defining the essence of discipleship, used simple yet forceful language. To deny self (Matthew 16:24) is to utterly disown or renounce self. The flesh revolts at such a total surrender to Jesus Christ.

The cross in Jesus' day was the ultimate form of suffering, reserved for the worst of criminals. The Romans would not mention the cross in polite society. In fact, Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion. To the Christian then, the cross is a symbol of suffering that results from his choice to identify unreservedly with Christ in this world.

We cannot place a value upon the soul of man, because it is priceless (Matthew 16:26). To comprehend the true worth of the soul, one must exchange one's own interests for those of Jesus Christ.

Jesus apparently meant His illustration of the camel and needle's eye (Matthew 19:24) to be taken literally, based on the disciples' exceeding amazement in verse 25 and on His own statement of human impossibility in verse 26. However, God is able to effect a change in the heart as He did with Zaccheus.

Minister (Matthew 20:26) denotes a servant. Servant (Matthew 20:27) means "slave." Understanding these words helps us to identify the servants of Christ as opposed to the power-hungry Gentile rulers.

Principles and Applications

"Let Him Deny Himself"

1. Discipleship requires personal cross bearing (Matthew 16:24). Jesus emphasized the personal aspect of cross bearing to His disciples. Today, as then, it is a reality for every follower of Jesus. It can take other forms besides physical persecution. Some of the greatest cross bearing today results from interchange with close relatives and friends who have chosen a less disciplined church life and a more casual attitude toward life in general. Are we willing to eliminate the "casual" part of our wardrobe? Are we ashamed to go to town in our church-regulated attire?

2. To be a disciple requires self-denial (Matthew 16:24, 25). Self-denial will never feel good to the flesh. The sooner we realize that the Christian life is not about feelings and comfort, the easier it will be to deny the flesh. When self is crucified, we will joyfully conform to God's will for our lives, whether that is disappointment, sacrifice, service, or suffering. Obedience to Christ and the church will characterize one who has dealt with the problem of self.

3. Man's final destiny will hinge fully on whether or not he has been a disciple of Christ (Matthew 16:26-27). Our conduct as a disciple will depend on our view of the worth of a soul. Just as disciples are expected personally

to bear the cross, so they will be personally rewarded at Christ's Second Coming.

"Come and Follow Me"

4. Discipleship requires more than the letter of the Law (Matthew 19:18-21). It involves living in the spirit of it. The rich young ruler was very conscientious in observing certain commandments, but he failed to see that his deepest affections were earthly.

When volunteers are needed for church work projects, do we wait until we are asked, or do we volunteer? Can we support ministerial decisions that give practical direction to the discipline? How we respond reveals if we abide by the spirit or by the letter.

5. The terms of discipleship mark decisive lines regarding our possessions (Matthew 19:21-24). Jesus' terms search the heart and draw lines in many areas. Can we furnish our homes in accordance with Gospel simplicity rather than according to our unique tastes or financial ability? Do we willingly contribute to brotherhood assistance offerings, or would we feel safer with an insurance policy? Do we treasure the privilege of our Christian day schools, even though we "pay twice" for our children's schooling? We should also keep in mind that God has ways of touching what is dearest to us just as He did with the rich young ruler.

6. The terms of discipleship are not met in human strength (Matthew 19:25-26). To be a disciple and live like one appears impossible from the human perspective. But we have a God with whom all things are possible! The Issue of our soul's salvation and working it out certainly can be a reality for those who are willing to surrender their life and commit their all to the Good Master.

"Let Him Be Your Minister"

7. The true disciple must lay aside all carnal ambition (Matthew 20:25-26). The carnal man seeks position and recognition. James and John desired to sit on a throne. But Jesus peeled away that hollow shell to reveal that discipleship is contentment with being a servant and a slave.

Willingly contribute in church life without looking for praise. Do not aspire to be on the boards, committees, and panels. If you have talent, God knows where you are when He has special work to be done. Meanwhile, be content to clean the church, be a friend to the stranger or limited person, and be a warrior in prayer.

8. The disciple seeks to emulate his Master in giving of himself for the

good of others (Matthew 20:27-28). Jesus gave His life—the greatest sacrifice that anyone could ever give. We may not all need to give our physical life, but we need to spend and be spent to help our families make it safely to the heavenly shore. Do we view the church as the body of Christ and worthy of our energy and sacrifice, or would we rather labor to see our children established financially? How much do we persevere in prayer for those we know have special needs? Are we truly following in Jesus' steps?

Important Teachings

1. Discipleship requires personal cross bearing (Matthew 16:24).
2. To be a disciple requires self-denial (Matthew 16:24-25).
3. Man's final destiny will hinge fully on whether or not he has been a disciple of Christ (Matthew 16:26-27).
4. Discipleship requires more than the letter of the Law (Matthew 19:18-21).
5. The terms of discipleship mark decisive lines regarding our possessions (Matthew 19:21-24).
6. The terms of discipleship are not met in human strength (Matthew 19:25-26).
7. The true disciple must lay aside all carnal ambition (Matthew 20:25-26).
8. The disciple seeks to emulate his Master in giving of himself for the good of others (Matthew 20:27-28).
9. To enter into life we must keep God's commandments (Matthew 19:16-17).
10. Discipleship involves more than lip profession (Matthew 19:18-21).
11. Every true disciple will be amply rewarded (Matthew 19:27-30).

Answers to Questions

1. Explain the meaning of self-denial and cross bearing. How are they related?

Denying self is denying the flesh. It is crucifying or reckoning as dead the desires of the carnal nature within. Denying self refuses to give expression to feelings of pride, rebellion, deceit, and independence (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:7-10).

Bearing the cross is the suffering, scorn, or ridicule we might receive as a result of our choice to follow Jesus Christ. Bearing the cross is directly linked to the reproach we face for being a plain and separate people (Ro-

mans 12:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

They are related in that cross bearing is a natural result of a willingness to deny self. One will not be willing to bear the cross if he is unwilling to deny himself.

2. Why is the simple truth of Matthew 16:25 so difficult to live out?

Our natural inclination is to protect our life. Losing our life does not feel good, and it requires a conscious choice to do so. The Christian life is not for those who are weak of heart, because Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

3. What forms of cross bearing do we face today?

The world cannot understand why we refuse insurance. There is cross bearing in continuing to remain free from insurance today. An increasing number of our neighbors and community folks work on Sundays. Are we willing to obediently keep the Lord's Day holy and share our testimony when we can? Are we willing to limit our use of modern technology to safeguard the spiritual welfare of ourselves and our families? Perhaps the greatest cross bearing today comes in the form of an "identity crisis." Are we willing to be mocked for wearing simple, plain clothes and head gear?

4. What are the involvements of being "perfect" (Matthew 19:21)?

In this man's case, he needed to "go and sell ... come and follow" in order to be perfect. He was to detach himself from his riches, which were preventing him from following Christ. For others, the thing that needs to be "sold" may be different. The point is whatever stands between us and our Lord is what needs to be gotten out of the way before we can find rest and eternal life in Him.

5. What was Jesus teaching about riches in Matthew 19:23-26?

Riches are deceitful. They cause a person to feel self-sufficient when spiritually he is a beggar. Riches create a false sense of security; they can evaporate as quickly as they came. Rich people can be saved, but they need to repent and come to God for mercy—the same as any other man. Salvation is humanly impossible, especially for those who feel self-sufficient.

6. How can we know that we have forsaken, for Christ's sake, the things mentioned in Matthew 19:29?

Peter stated that he had forsaken all to follow Jesus, but he did not realize that he had not forsaken his selfish nature with its carnal ambition. He was deeply concerned about position, power and reward. The question is; do we

allow these legitimate interests or any others to hinder or prevent our doing what is right? If so, we have not forsaken them to the extent that Christ requires.

7. In what ways did Jesus exemplify the ministering that He taught?

By leaving heaven to live on earth as a man, Jesus offers the ultimate example of condescension and humility. His life was one of constant service, in spite of ingratitude, criticism, and unbelief. He exercised great patience with His disciples and with others who followed Him. Finally, He sacrificed His physical life on the cross for the salvation of all.

8. How should we apply the ministering concept today?

We could offer to clean church for another family who cannot easily take their turn. We can take our fair share of congregational responsibilities—teaching Sunday school, leading devotions, and serving as song leader, janitor, or trustee. We also apply it by being willing to labor without being recognized.

Summarizing the Lesson

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No: there's a cross for ev'ry one,
And there's a cross for me.

Disowned on earth, 'mid grief and cares,
He led His toilsome way;
But now in heav'n a crown He wears,
And reigns in endless day.

The consecrated cross I'll bear,
Till from the cross set free,
And then go home, my crown to wear,
For there's a crown for me.
—Thomas Shepherd

Research Guide

See Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:7-10; Romans 12:1, 2; and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 for additional teaching on self-denial and cross bearing.