

Thinking it Through & Talking it Over

A Study Guide for Small Groups
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A Study Guide of the Texts of the Bible From the Common Lectionary

Year A, Week 30

June 22, 2008

*"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."
Psalm 119:105*

Sermon Title: *Hard Words of Jesus - "Whoever Disowns Me"*

Sermon Passage: Matthew 10:24-33

Lectionary Scripture Passages:

Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10 and 16-17; Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 10:24-33

Warm-up

Author Dallas Willard raises some pointed questions in his book entitled *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper San Francisco, 1998) including these: "Who teaches you? Whose disciple are you, honestly?" We are all the result of being someone's disciple. We have all learned to live from someone else. The influencers who have taught us include teachers, friends, role models, mentors whom we have known personally or who mentored us through books or other means. Who have been some of your teachers/influencers? Whose disciple are you, honestly?

Introduction

In the Matthew 10:24-33 passage before us in this study we hear Jesus issuing a strong - and hard - word about being his disciple. The passage reminds us that being a follower or disciple of Jesus (disciple appears 269 times in the New Testament while the word Christian appears only 3) is to be a present reality not just a faith in a future, eternal life in heaven. Jesus calls men and women to follow him, to learn from him and to learn of him, to be like him. As you look at the hard words of Jesus in this study you might want to continue to ask yourself the question - "what kind of disciple (or apprentice) of Jesus am I?"

Exploring the Texts

Read Matthew 10:24-33.

1. Look at verse 24. Why is it "enough for the student to be like his teacher ... and the servant like his master?" What point is Jesus making in this verse? How is aspiring to be like one's teacher or master different than aspiring to be greater than one's teacher or master?

Note: The expectation was that students or disciples would learn from and follow the example of their teachers with the hope that they would ultimately become a master teacher themselves. Slaves or household servants also aspired to attain the status of their masters.

If a slave were owned by a “freedman” (one who had paid their debt and purchased their freedom from slavery) they could attain equal status – becoming free and attaining wealth like their former master. This is a picture of those who commit themselves to Jesus becoming like him. I think the concept of an apprentice is very helpful. An apprentice (or disciple if you prefer) succeeds when he or she aspires to be like the skilled person who is teaching them the trade or skills. Followers of Jesus are to become like him.

2. Verse 25 is an interesting one. It further makes the point that verse 24 makes, but in this case the imagery is a household. If the head of the house has been called “Beelzebub” how much more will the members of that house be called the same thing? Jesus uses a term that is derived from two possible sources. One is the Aramaic word “Be el” and the Hebrew “zebul” which, when put together means “master of the house.” This way the verse reads “if the head of the house is called “master of the house” how much more will the members of the house be called the same thing?”

The second possibility is that Beelzebub is a Greek term that mocks the Philistine god “Baal Zebub.” The term is a mockery of this god’s name and came to mean something like “god of the flies” and also to mean “Satan” or the Devil. If this is accurate then the verse reads “if the head of the house is called “god of the flies or Satan” how much more will the members of the house be called the same thing?”

Again, what point does Jesus make about being his disciple by this imagery of a household?

3. To understand verse 26-27 begin by determining who the “them” in verse 26 refers to. Look back to verses 17-22 to do so. What would cause Jesus’ disciples to be afraid? What is their task according to verses 26 and 27?

4. Look now at verse 28. Why are followers of Jesus to not be afraid of physical death? Why can a disciple of Jesus not be afraid of the “them” you identified in the previous question? Conversely, who is it that should be feared?

Note: Jesus differentiates between the body and the soul. The soul refers to the inner person. It is the center of one’s being from which comes desire, values, identity – the true self. Jesus issues a stern warning. You need not fear mere physical death at the hands of those who hate you. Physical death opens the way for the soul to enter the presence of God. The soul and body will be reunited at the resurrection of the dead (see 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and Philippians 1:23-24). Instead, the real concern is the One who is able to end the existence of both body and soul – God alone, who can raise the body to eternal life or death (see Matthew 25:46)

5. In verses 29-31, Jesus is quick to point out that the One who can banish both body and soul to death is sovereign over all things. He refers to sparrows – sold for a penny (actually an “asserion” or 1/16th of a denarius – about ½ hour’s worth of work for an average laborer).

Sparrows are the least valuable birds, the costly food item yet God watches over them. What does this say to you about your worth to God and his care for you? How does this encourage you?

6. Here are the hard words – verses 32 and 33. “Whoever acknowledges me before men (the meaning is “others” – men and women, young and old, tribunals, family members, etc.) I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others ... I will disown before my Father in heaven.” Ouch!

Note: Jesus may have in mind the rabbinical concept that on the Day of Judgment the testimony of righteous persons for or against another would bear weight with God. Here, however, Jesus says his advocacy before the Father bears more weight than anything else in all creation.

7. With this in mind, what does it mean to “acknowledge” Jesus before others? What does it mean to “disown” (or deny) Jesus before others? How are you inclined to do this?

8. How would you connect acknowledging Jesus with being his disciple? Do you think Jesus is saying something like this: “If you just believe in me yet fail to become like me, then you are in essence denying that I am your master?”

Going Deeper

1. In Romans 6:1-11 you will find a deep, theologically rich picture of our belonging to Jesus – through faith, sealed in baptism, buried with him and raised to new life. What do these verses imply about being his disciple? About living a new life?

2. Disciples are those who are united to their teacher/master. How does Paul describe our being united to Jesus in these verses?

3. David expresses a disciple’s heart in Psalm 86:1-2, “I am devoted to you ...” he avows. How is devotion different than merely believing? Can you echo David’s bold statement, “I am devoted to you ...” with reference to Jesus?

“... a disciple, or apprentice, is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is ... as a disciple of Jesus I am with him, by choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God.”