

Theme: The “D’s” of Discipleship

1. Desire 2. Denial 3. Death

Text: Matthew 16:21-26

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. 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

Do you remember playing the game “follow the leader” as a child? It is a very simple game in which you, well, follow what the leader does. If the leader said “Raise your left hand,” you raised your left hand. If the leader said, “Touch your nose,” you touched your nose. If the leader said, “Bark like a dog,” well, you guessed it, you barked like a dog, and so on. What he said, you said. What he did, you did.

Being a disciple of Jesus is essentially like playing “follow the leader.” In fact, that’s what the word “**disciple**” means: **follower**. As disciples of Jesus we say what Jesus says. We do what Jesus does. Simple, right? Well, not so much! Jesus’ disciples found this out for themselves in our text.

First of all, they were shocked at the path their Leader said He was about to travel. **“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” (v. 21)**. The disciples had become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah sent from God so they probably figured that one day He would travel to Jerusalem, but for the purpose of taking over the reigns of power from the Romans and restore the nation of Israel to glory, not to go to suffer and die! This didn’t seem to make any sense to them. Peter actually **rebuked** Jesus for saying such a thing (which is definitely not the right thing to do if you are trying to “follow the leader!”). **Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (v. 22)**. Jesus harsh response to Peter’s rebuke showed His disciples just how far off their thinking was about who Jesus was as the Messiah and what He had come to do, and just how far off their thinking was about what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, their leader. To their minds the suffering and sacrifice Jesus spoke about was a terrible thing. Jesus had to harshly remind Peter that this type of thinking was actually a temptation from Satan to walk away from God’s plan of salvation, **But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (v. 23)**. He then went on to instruct them as to what it truly means to be a disciple, a follower, of Jesus **(v. 24-26)**.

The words of these verses are also meant for us modern-day disciples (followers) of Jesus. Jesus wants to instruct us as to what it truly means to be His disciple. Like the disciples in our text we may be a bit shocked at what Jesus has to say. That is because, like His twelve disciples, we as sinful human beings are thinking of the “things of men” rather than being **“mindful of the things of God” (v. 23)**. To help us understand and remember what our Leader calls us to be and do as His followers we will look at some of the qualifications for discipleship in our text—all beginning with the letter **“D.”**

The first **“D” of Discipleship** is found in v. 24 of our text,

Desire - Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone **desires** to come after Me..." (v. 24).

This first **“D”** makes sense, doesn't it? In order to be a disciple, a follower, of Jesus you have to first *want* to be one! What we need to remember is that even the **desire** to be a follower of Jesus is something that God Himself works in us. We can't "want to" be a follower of Jesus or a doer of God's will on our own. **Philippians 2:13** tells us, **“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”** It's often this **desire** to be a true follower of Christ that is lacking in us, isn't it? The question is, how can we increase our **desire** to follow Jesus more closely and be more focused on the **“things of God”**? The answer is once again found in God Himself. Turn to His Word. There you will find the **“things of God.”** There you will find His promises and His amazing **desire** for you! The Bible tells us that **“God our Savior...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3).** That means His **desire** is to save you and to lead you into a deeper knowledge of His truth found in His Word. The more we are in His Word the more our **desire** to follow Him will increase, the more we will want the things that He wants. His **desires** will become our **desires**. The Bible promises us in **Psalm 37:4**, **“Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”**

That brings us to the second **“D” of Discipleship**:

Denial - Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him **deny** himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (v. 24)

If we **desire** to be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Christ, then we must **deny** our SELF. SELF is the enemy of true discipleship. Consider the variety of words prefixed by SELF that illustrate how SELF can dominate us: Self-righteousness; self-centeredness; self-interest; self-confidence; self-importance; self-indulgence; self-reliance; self-satisfaction; self-seeking; etc, etc. Many times, unfortunately, we "follow the leader" of **SELF**, not Jesus! That is why being a true disciple of Jesus means a **denial** of SELF. This means saying "no" to our natural self. It is a drastic change from self-love, self-gratification, and self-advancement to **self-less** love for God and others.

Again, this is a change which we can never bring about or even desire on our own. Only God can effect it within our hearts. Through Baptism He puts to death our old self and re-creates us as His own special people who desire to follow Him above all else. Now, it's not just a **denying** and a putting off of our sinful flesh and SELF, it also involves a **“taking up.”** Jesus says in our text, **“let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (v. 24).** Our **“crosses”** are the difficulties, sufferings, and persecutions we are called upon to endure as a result of faithfully following Christ.

This leads us to the third **“D” of Discipleship**:

Death - "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (v. 25)

If our **desire** is for this life, the things of this world, we will lose the full, abundant, eternal life that Jesus came to give us, both in this life and the next. That is why God speaks so seriously in His Word about not just **denying** our sinful flesh and our sinful SELF, but actually putting it to **death!** Listen to these Words from the Apostle Paul:

- ✠ **Romans 6:6 - For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin**
- ✠ **Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

† Galatians 5:24 - And those *who are Christ's* have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Desire, Denial, Death. When we look at Jesus' words here in our text we may begin to wonder whether following Jesus is really a good idea at all. I mean, look how hard it is to put Jesus' words into practice! Look how many things He calls us to "give up!" The true reality is, however, that we really aren't losing out on anything, and Jesus is giving us *everything!* That is why the final "D" of Discipleship is: **Deliverance.**

We need to remember what the disciples obviously overlooked when Jesus was telling them what He was about to do. After telling them about the suffering and the painful death He would endure Jesus also predicted He would "**be raised the third day**" (v. 21). Jesus death and resurrection assures all of His followers that they too will be **delivered** from the sufferings and troubles of this life and even the horrible prospect of eternal death itself. He promises us, "**Because I live, you will live also!**" (John 14:19).

Yes, the demands of discipleship are great. It is not always easy to "follow our Leader," Jesus Christ. But rest assured the rewards though, far outweigh the demands. Peter once said to Jesus, "**We have left all we had to follow you!**" "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "**no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life**" (Luke 18:28-30). We can trustingly "follow our Leader" because He not only knows the "way," He is the "**Way, the Truth, and the Life!**" (John 14:6). May God's Spirit help us all to "follow our Leader," Jesus, always! Amen.