

7. Preparation for Discipleship

Biblical material: Matt. 5-7; 10:1, 10:5-11:1; Mark 3:1-19; Luke 6:12-16.

Quotes

- Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death. The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life. *Lao Tsu*
- Be infinitely flexible and constantly amazed. *Jason Kravitz*
- Nothing is really lost by a life of sacrifice; everything is lost by failure to obey God's call. *Henry P Liddon*
- Salvation without discipleship is "cheap grace." *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*
- Discipleship is more than getting to know what the teacher knows. It is getting to be what he is. *Juan Carlos Ortiz*
- The Christian ideal has not been found tried and found wanting, it has been found difficult and left untried. *G. K. Chesterton*

Questions

How do we as disciples "let the light shine"? What are we preparing for? How are apostles different? In what way does the sermon on the mount define Jesus and his mission? What kind of disciples are we preparing to be? How do we prepare? What do we want to say about who we follow as disciples? How is the sermon on the mount relevant here?

Discussion

Matthew 5-7, the sermon on the mount, is identified in the lesson as "a manifesto of discipleship." In what way? It's important to read this through and understand what Jesus was really meaning.

Matthew 10 records the words of Jesus as he sends out the Twelve. Here are the disciples' specific instructions. What do we learn from these specifics, which need to be re-contextualized in our present situation.

Luke 6, the sermon on the plain, parallels the sermon on the mount. The key aspects are the reasons for blessing, and how God's principles are expressed in our daily lives. Notice that the disciples are specifically identified at the beginning, along with the wider circle of disciples.

The first point is the need to prepare for discipleship. Most would simply see discipleship as a desire to follow. But in representing Christ, recognizing we are a spectacle to angels and to men, we need to think what we really *are* representing. What kind of God are we sharing? So some considerable reflection on God as revealed in Jesus is required. In fact that may be the most important part of preparation. For if we are representing an erroneous picture of God, we are doing more harm than good, and we are not truly Jesus' disciples.

Then we also need to ask what we are preparing for. Jesus gave his disciples just one message—the kingdom of heaven is near. What does this message mean? What is contained here? And one wonders what the hearers understood by this message. If we were to literally adopt such a commission, how would we be understood?

Preparation must also focus on methodology, for some methods are alien to the message. We are not following formulas, as if everyone were made from the same cookie cutter. It's interesting that Jesus relates to every individual he meets in a different way, recognizing unique and specific issues and traits. Similarly as we approach discipleship and preparation we must

allow for differences of perspective. Certainly one of the most significant aspects is time. Think of the time that Moses spent in preparation as an Old Testament example, or Paul in the new. Each had much to learn—or perhaps more correctly, much to unlearn! (Consider what.)

Sending out the seventy (Luke 10) was to prepare people to meet Jesus. Jesus took a risk in so doing, since the disciples could well have misrepresented him. How could they prepare so that this would not happen to a great extent? Only by watching and learning from their Lord, and seeking to develop the same principles and values in their own lives. So what are the lessons for us as we in turn seek to prepare?

Comment

“Many Christians have what we might call a “cultural holiness”. They adapt to the character and behavior pattern of Christians around them. As the Christian culture around them is more or less holy, so these Christians are more or less holy. But God has not called us to be like those around us. He has called us to be like himself. Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God.” *Jerry Bridges*

Ellen White Comments

Our teachers need to be constant learners. The reformers need to be themselves reformed, not only in their methods of labor, but in their own hearts. They need to be transformed by the grace of God. When Nicodemus, a great teacher in Israel, came to Jesus, the Master laid before him the conditions of divine life, teaching him the very alphabet of conversion. Nicodemus asked: “How can these things be?” “Art thou a master of Israel,” Christ answered, “and knowest not these things?” This question might be addressed to many who are now holding positions as teachers, but who have neglected the preparation essential to qualify them for this work. If Christ’s words were received into the soul there would be a much higher intelligence and a much deeper spiritual knowledge of what constitutes a disciple, a sincere follower of Christ, and an educator whom He can approve. {6T 154-5}

Here is a precious promise; the purposes and plans of God are to be opened to His disciples. What is a disciple? A learner, ever learning. Coming events, of a solemn character, are opening before us, and God would not have any one of us think that in these last days there is no more that we need to know. This is a continual snare of Satan. He would have us meet coming events without that special preparation which is essential to guide them through every difficulty. He would have all stumbling their way along in ignorance, making self-conceit, self-esteem, self-confidence, take the place of true knowledge. The more satisfied anyone is with himself, and his present knowledge, the less earnestly and humbly will he seek to be guided into all truth. The less of the Holy Spirit of God he has, the more self-satisfied and complacent he will feel. {5MR 50-1}

We have only a little longer time in which to prepare for eternity. . . . The whole body of believers needs to be vitalized by the Holy Spirit of God. We should study, plan, economize, and set in operation every means possible whereby we may reach and bless suffering and ignorant humanity. The light which God has given to us as a people is not given that we may treasure it among ourselves. We are to act in harmony with the great commission given to every disciple of Christ, to carry to all the world the light of truth. {HP 317}

...the best way to recommend the truth is, not by argument, not by talk, but by living it daily, by leading a consistent, modest, humble life as a disciple of Christ. {SW, May 8, 1906}