

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 6 March 2005

No. T0356

Speaker: Mr. George Bell

Belonging to Jesus: My Disciples - John 8:31; 13:35

It should be the ambition of every Christian to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. It might surprise us that the Bible tells us that Jesus Himself was a disciple. He was a disciple of God His Father. This called for obedience. Every believer in Jesus knows that He was always obedient. The full extent of this was seen in *"the death of the cross"*. Isn't it a wonderful consideration that whatever we might aim to be in our Christian lives, He did that perfectly.

Let's look at the word 'disciple' for a moment. The word means 'taught' or 'trained one'. It is also easy to see from the form of the word that there is a connection with discipline – disciple/discipline. This conveys to our mind a teaching situation. Some of us may have to go back varying lengths of time to remember our school days, maybe with mixed feelings. However, we were taught the discipline of listening and learning which gave us a pattern for life that has remained with us

Let's look now at an Old Testament scripture that describes the life of discipleship as it was seen in its perfection in the Lord Jesus. There are some very striking sections in the second half of the prophecy of Isaiah. These are often referred to as the 'Servant songs'. These are found in chapters 49, 50 and 52-53. Chapter 53 is known best to most Christians. However, let's listen to Isaiah 50:4-5, *"The LORD God hath given me the tongue of the instructed that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, to hear as the instructed. The LORD God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back"*. Those who have knowledge of the original languages of the Bible tell us that the Hebrew word for 'instructed' is as near as possible to our word disciple. The verses just before the above passage speak of His unlimited power as God over all. Yet, while here as a man, He began every day of His busy life seeking instruction from His Father. This was all part of that great work He came to accomplish. We might have read on further in Isaiah 50 to find these words *"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked of the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting"*. This was the cost, His obedience to His Father ran alongside the reproach of men. So it was to the very end, *"the death of the cross"*. This was the cost of discipleship to Jesus. He, the Son of the Living God, learned the cost of obedience through His sufferings.

Today, there is still a cost connected with discipleship. We still live in an unbelieving world where the true Christian faces opposition. We must be prepared to meet the cost. Let's not hold our faith lightly as many professing Christians do. We certainly feel at ease in the presence of other believers, nevertheless, opposition to Christ and Christianity is never far away. However, there are resources and encouragement available for us.

We are going to think about a home situation where we will learn a little more about the discipline of being listeners. We read about this home in the Gospel of Luke. This home was in Bethany, a place where Jesus was always welcome. Let's listen to Luke's account of the family who lived there. *"Now it came to pass, that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word"* (Luke 10:38-39). They also had a brother named Lazarus of whom we hear in other parts of the Gospel record. For the moment, the focus of our attention must be upon these two sisters. Our attention must be in the first place on Mary who very clearly illustrates the matter of discipleship as we are thinking about it. The word is right to the fore. We have already thought of the Lord Jesus taking the place of the instructed, and this is exactly what Mary is doing here. Much has been written about this scripture. Martha was very busy about the house, maybe preparing a meal for the company. Into this placid family scene enters a little disharmony, Martha thought she had been left with all the work to do. Just listen to what she says, *"Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me"* (verse 40). Jesus tells Martha not to be troubled about these many things, The Lord's word to her is well known, *"But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her"* (verse 42). This is very good advice, but let's put a word in for Martha. Let's go back again to verse 39, and read it carefully, *"And she had a sister called Mary which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word"* (verse 39). Did Martha never sit at the Lord's feet and listen to His word? It would appear from this little word "also" that she did. We need to be fair in our judgement of others!

Our next three scriptures all give us characteristics of discipleship. They are all found in the Gospel of John and are well known to most Christians. There is however, a unique feature of this Gospel that will become evident as we look at the three chapters concerned. The chapters are 8, 13 and 15. In each of these chapters the incident recorded at the beginning throws light upon the subject in hand. The three subjects are as follows.

- Disciples indeed – John 8:30-32 (The truth shall make you free)
- My Disciples – John 13:30-35 (Love one to another)
- My Disciples – John 15:8 (Bear much fruit)

Disciples indeed – John 8:30-32 (The truth shall make you free)

John 8 begins with the incident of the woman being brought to Jesus by the scribes and the Pharisees. They accused her of adultery, caught in the very act. Their motive was that they might have reason to accuse Jesus. He cited the Law of Moses that had stated that such should be stoned. These wicked men reasoned, if He upholds the law they accuse Him saying, 'where is the grace you speak about'. If on the other hand He set her free they would accuse Him of despising the Law of Moses. They thought they had Him trapped. They did not consider the greatness of His person, or the power of His word. Let's listen to the way He answers their accusation, "*He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her*" (verse 7). He then wrote with His finger on the ground. Some people believe that He was writing their names. In Jeremiah chapter 17:3 we read, "*O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters.*" The result was that the scribes and Pharisees went away one by one, in order of age, convicted by their own consciences. At this point, Jesus was left alone and the woman standing in the midst. Let's listen to the rest of the passage, "*When Jesus had lifted up Himself and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, no man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more*" (verses 10 and 11). It wasn't the law that condemned them, it was the light that shone in Jesus. He goes on to say, "*I am the light of the world*". The guilty woman was set free. This was free giving grace.

Going on to the passage we are concerned with concerning discipleship the connection with this incident will become clear. There were those who had believed in Jesus and it to these He speaks. Let's listen to the words of Jesus, "*...If ye continue in My word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (verse 31 and 33). This word 'continue' is often found in the Gospel of John; in various forms. On some occasions it is given as 'abide', in other places as 'remain', in every case it suggests permanence. This is good advice for us in our day. To continue is to keep going, it is the mark of real disciples. However, there were those who believed in Jesus, but they were far from happy to be told that they needed the truth to make them free. They turned to their Jewish ancestry and *boasted* that they were Abraham's children and in bondage to no one. They had a very great lesson to learn. The bondage to which Jesus was referring was bondage to sin from which all need to be delivered. This is the reason why Jesus spoke about 'disciples indeed'. Mere outward profession is of no value if the question of sin is not learned first. Jesus answered their boasting in this way, "*Whosoever committeth sin is a servant of sin*" (verse 34). This is why Jesus came to earth, not only to bear our sins on the cross of Calvary, but also to deliver us from the bondage of sin. Jesus goes on to stress the greatness of His Person, "*If the Son therefore make you free, ye shall be free indeed*" (verse 36). To be disciples indeed we need to be 'free indeed'. It should not be difficult to see the link with the incident in the beginning of the chapter.

My Disciples – John 13:30-35 (Love one to another)

The second characteristic of discipleship is in the Gospel of John, chapter 13: "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (verse 35). As in our previous example it will help to refer to the incident recorded at the start of the chapter. It was the occasion of the last Passover attended by Jesus shortly before his death. This occasion is often referred to as the 'Upper Room Discourse' in which Jesus prepared His disciples for this event and its consequences for them. It was a sorrowful occasion for all who were there. A dark shadow was upon them. The betrayer was about to do his terrible deed. The Lord's words to Judas were so full of pathos. Let's listen to verse 27: "*...Satan entered into him, Then said unto him, That thou doest, do quickly*"

However, the chapter begins with an expression of the love of Jesus, "*...when Jesus knew that His hour was come that he would depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end*" (13:1). This sets the tone of the chapter as is also verified in verse 34, "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*". The whole action in this chapter is to this end. Just think of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. When he would leave them to return to His Father, He knew full well the opposition they would meet with, as well as the defiling influence of the world. The action of Jesus cleansing their feet was an illustration of what He would do in a spiritual way when they faced trials during His absence. The water speaking of the cleansing power of the word. Jesus is recorded to have said elsewhere, "*Ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you.*" He instructs them to wash one another's feet – that is, to use the word of God to remove defilement and refresh fellow believers. Listen again, "*If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you*" (verses 14 and 15). This is one of many ways in which love to one another may be seen and experienced. There is always some Christian we know of who is going through some trial or difficulty to whom we may

pass on a word of encouragement from the scriptures or perform an act of kindness. It is worth pointing out that this it is not optional, it is a matter of obligation in love.

This important service in which every Christian should be involved is said to be a new commandment. It is altogether different from the commandments given to Moses in the Old Testament. The Apostle Peter speaking on one occasion, described that law as a yoke, *"which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear"*. The new commandment was 'new in kind'. We should remember some words of Jesus when he was on earth, Let's listen well, *"For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:10). The Christian wants to be obedient because we have a new nature that desires to please the Lord. It is a proof of discipleship. People around us are looking on, but what do they see? What better testimony to the love God could there be? It should be demonstrated with utmost clarity. John, the same writer in his first letter puts it very clearly, *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another"* (1 John 4:11). How striking, take notice, it reminds us of the well known John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*. We trust that all who have heard this wonderful Gospel text have received this life. The solemn alternative is to perish! Keeping this verse in mind, how great the believer's responsibility to show this in the way we conduct ourselves as fellow believers in the Lord Jesus. It has been well said that love is:

- The badge of discipleship (Luke 14.25 and 33)
- The banner of witness (Acts 1:8) and
- The baptism of sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2).

Love is that nature which always seeks the highest good for its object. Its characteristics are found in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. The test of love is seen in practical terms in 1 John chapter 3. There provision is made for those in need. The privileges of love are found in John 14:21-24. They include, the Father and Son making their abode with the believer and Christ making Himself known to His own.

My Disciples – John 15:8 (Bear much fruit)

The third occasion in which the term 'My disciples' occurs in chapter 15:8, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* This time notice how the chapter begins. It is the Lord Jesus who says, *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman"* (verse 1). In the Old Testament that fruit is the only purpose of the vine, the wood is of very little value. Israel as a nation is referred to as a vine. God planted them to be pleasing to Him, but they turned to the worship of idols instead. One of their prophets writes of them, *"Israel is empty vine, he bringest fruit unto himself"* (Hosea 10:1). There was nothing there in which God could find pleasure. Let's go back to the words of the Lord Jesus, 'the True Vine'. Very often some forward-looking businessman, eager to claim that he sells the very best on his premises, will put a notice in his shop window to say, 'We sell the 'genuine' article. The interest for us is that the word true may be replaced by the word 'genuine'. The Lord Jesus is the 'real' thing. The fruit in His life always gave pleasure to his Father. He was obedient and devoted to doing His will. The expression, *"my Father is the husbandman"* is an indication of the constant care of His Father. He always enjoyed his love in every circumstance, abiding in Him.

Let's think of what fruit really means - it is not service, it is LIFE as found in the letters of the Apostle Paul! He often mentions the subject of fruit. One very well known passage is in the letter written to the Galatian believers. This will help us. In chapter 5 of that letter, we read of the *'the fruit of the Spirit'*. Let's listen to it; *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against which there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22 and 23).

It may be said that:

- Love is the work of faith;
- Joy is love exulting;
- Peace is love resting;
- Longsuffering is love enduring;
- Gentleness is love acting;
- Goodness is love giving;
- Faith is love standing;
- Meekness is love serving;
- Temperance is love controlling.

Taking a good long look at this list it will remind us of the life of Jesus in all its perfection when He was on earth. The indwelling Holy Spirit is the power to produce this fruit. He is, as it were, the sap that runs through the vine. We will never achieve such fruitfulness through our own strength. We should be very thankful that if we are Christians we have this indwelling power. However, the source of fruit bearing, as described in our chapter, is abiding in the vine.

This means, putting it simply, keeping close to the Lord. The power and vitality is in the roots. Evidently the vine needs washing regularly in order to provide 'more fruit'. This tells us of the necessity of the reading of the word to give practical cleansing. There is also the possibility of 'much fruit'. Listen to verse 5 of our chapter, *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."*

As disciples, we are branches attached to the main stem of the vine, Christ. There is no life apart from Him. We are entirely dependent upon Him for our sustenance and, therefore, our ability to bear fruit. Furthermore, it is not only necessary that we are dependent upon Him, but also that His words abide in us. In verse 13 of chapter 14, we find these words of Jesus: *"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."* There can be no closer communion than this. It is formed through the obedience of love. It is of little wonder then that Jesus goes on to say, *"...Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."* The result of this communion is a sure knowledge of the will of God. To this end our prayer is made and the promise of a positive answer is assured.

Jesus goes on to say that as the Father has loved Him, so Christ loves us. We are loved with a love that knows no measure except that of the Father's love for His only-begotten Son. Amazing!

We might say that keeping the words of Jesus is the response of love, but the keeping of His commandments is the duty of love. Jesus said, *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."* Here is another measure, do we keep the commandments of Christ to the same level as obedience as He showed towards the Father? What a responsibility! His obedience was perfect. He then gives us a command to love one another as He has loved us. This is a third measure. Do we really love one another as Christ loves us?

The Lord Jesus then indicates that the greatest human love is reflected in that a man would be prepared to die for his friends. He then calls His disciples His friends if they obey Him. He states that a friend is greater than a servant inasmuch as he is informed of the motive behind the command. On the other hand, a servant obeys without question. The section concludes with the words in verse 16: *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye should ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."*

When we consider the greatness of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the fact that He is pleased to call us His disciples, then we realise the immense privilege that we have. Therefore, let us:

- read the word that we might be cleansed and instructed;
- come to the feet of Christ regularly as learners,
- love and obey Him,
- pray in the will of God our Father,
- glorify the Father by bearing fruit in our lives – that is to say, to be like the Lord Jesus.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.