

## REQUIREMENTS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Matthew 16:24-26

*The Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be My disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"*

Heavenly Father, through Your Spirit, amplify for us the words of Your Son, so that we may understand, and even beyond understanding, appropriate and after appropriating, apply it in our lives. to that end, fill every home with Your beautiful presence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Before we begin to look at this particular verse where Jesus says, "If anyone wants to be My disciple, then he should deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me," I think we need to move back to a place where we acknowledge a Creator-creation relationship. Otherwise, this verse by Jesus has no meaning. To whom is He talking? To everybody? To Christians? To you and me? To believers? All of that is up for grabs, in a sense! So, as we look at ourselves, we need to understand that there is a Creator God; that He spoke and all things came into existence.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS WE NEED TO MAKE:**

**1. Our God is Creator God.**

We acknowledge that He, the God whom we are worshiping right now – He is Creator God. He spoke, and the heavens and the earth were formed. He spoke, and light and darkness were separated. He spoke, and there were creatures on land, in the sea, in the air. Then He created us – humanity.

**2. We are His creation.**

We need to acknowledge that we, you and I, are His creation, that He crafted us. The bible tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that He is the potter and we are the clay. We need to understand that relationship that we are the ones who have been fashioned by Him. He is the Creator; we are His creation.

**3. He has a purpose for His creation.**

When God made the things that are around, He had a divine purpose, infinite wisdom. We see that purpose in a very general way, captured in Genesis 1:26-28 where it says: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our own image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea, and the birds in the sky, over the livestock, and all the wild animals (purpose here). And over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

So, God created us with a purpose. He didn't just fashion us and place us there and say, "All right! Have a fun time here." And leave us. He gave us a very definite purpose – to be able to work the land, to be able to look after and be His manager, to be stewards of His creation.

#### **4. What does that purpose mean for me personally?**

We see this at a macro level. Genesis 1:26-28 outlines a purpose for humanity, but we must ask ourselves: what does it mean for me? And we get the answer that we are to manage the earth. We are to be fruitful and multiply. We are to reflect His glory. And then specifically for me to do His will and to fulfil the reason for my existence. We're not talking of humanity here. We're talking of you and me. What is our purpose? Why did God make me? Why did He make you? Why did He place you at this time, in this location, in these circumstances that He knew would prevail at this time? What is His explicit purpose for me?

And then the fall happened. Sin entered the world and there was a break between the purpose that God had for His children and us. We began to follow the things of the evil one. Satan came to Adam and Eve and he broke that relationship that we had. He introduced sin, disobedience to God.

Then it took the incarnation; Jesus came to pay the price that God had said was the penalty for sin. He paid the price with His life and then began to restore to us our purpose. How did He do that? He called us to be His disciples; called each one of us to come to know Him, to accept the fullness of His work at Calvary. And then while we are still here on earth, to follow Him, follow His teachings, to be His disciples, to live like Him, to live according to His will for us and to fulfil our potential and our reason for living. All of that would come back into play as we became His disciples. While there was estrangement when sin entered the world, Jesus once again brought reconciliation, once again brought back to us that we are not aimless beings, just living life as if nothing mattered, but that we are His children.

We are followers of Him, and into that equation, as we look at ourselves as a disciple of Jesus, we need to look through that lens at what Jesus said about being His disciple. What did He say? He said, "If you want to follow me, you have to deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow Me. Let's look at these two aspects and see how they lend themselves to actively following after Jesus.

#### **DENY OURSELVES.**

What does that mean? To deny ourselves in the original was to lay something down. we are to deny everything that is contrary to the purposes of the Creator for you and for me. If we find something that is not what we think is a purpose for us, we have to deny that particular thing. What are those things? Let me give you four or five areas in our lives that we could find ourselves in a bit of trouble if we don't deny them.

1. Our abilities. We are all gifted in different ways. But there may be some areas as we exercise those abilities where we will need to deny ourselves. take for example, leadership. We are called to lead. We are able to do that well. But leadership, as we have seen in many, many cases, can also lead to exploitation – exploitation of the underprivileged, exploitation of the poor, the uneducated. Leadership can also be an area for us to abuse the purpose that God has placed us in leadership. So, when we get into that space, we need to deny ourselves.
2. Service. We are called to serve people, and we're able to do that. We love to serve and the bible tells us that we do everything as unto the Lord. But then, as we keep doing it, we feel that we want to take the glory. At that point, we need to deny ourselves. once again focus on the fact that God has placed these abilities to lead, to serve (or whatever else you can think of) in a wholesome way. When it stops being wholesome, we need to be able to deny it.

3. Emotions. We are called to love, as He has loved us. And yet, love can (as we look at the other end of the spectrum) move towards something that is so unholy. It can move to lust; it can move to abuse. That's where denial must come in. We deny that emotion in ourselves and move back to love.

Anger. The bible says, "Be angry, but do not sin." Anger is an emotion that God has given us, like the valve on a pressure cooker. It's a release valve. But we need to make sure that we don't sin, that we don't let that emotion lead to behavior that is inconsistent with our purpose and the will of God. So we deny that part when it happens.

4. Talents. Maybe you're a talented singer, artist, actor, orator, athlete, good at sports. Or maybe you have a great inheritance and it's just come to you. How do you handle it? How do you handle success and fame? Do you handle it with pride? Or do you handle it with humility, acknowledging that God is the giver of all good things, and that we are not called to be proud of these things that God has blessed us with. We need to watch: Is that an area that I need to deny myself?
5. Personality. We all have unique personalities. Broadly speaking, maybe either extroverts or introverts. As we exercise our personalities, be who we are, we need to look at ourselves and say: Am I allowing my personality to get out of hand? Do I need to deny its expression in some way – not be overbearing or pushy, or just have my agenda. But to be able to move back and say, "I need to back off a little."

Or to be moody and passive-aggressive, or un-cooperative. Be able to say, "Wait a minute. That's part of who I am, but I need to use it in a better way rather than in a way that is harming people, and not allowing my purpose to unfold."

So, all of these, including the position in life that you have got. Are you using your influence well, or is there an area in your life where you need to be able to say, "No. I'm letting my flesh get the better of me? I need to deny that area." So, just in terms of all of these things that we've looked at, we need to be able to say, "I deny that. I will not allow that part to grow or allow that part to be exercised, or allow that part to manifest itself, because it is contrary to the purposes of God for me, and my purpose here on earth."

### **TAKE UP HIS CROSS.**

What does that mean? Jesus is not talking about His death here. This is before He goes to the cross. The cross was a very well-known area of punishment during that time.

John McArthur writes, "The cross was a very concrete and vivid reality. It was the instrument of execution reserved for Rome's worst enemies. It was a symbol of the torture and death that awaited those who dared raise a hand against Roman authority. Not many years before Jesus and the disciples came to Caesarea in Philippi, hundred men had been crucified in the area. A century earlier, Alexander Jannæus had crucified 800 Jewish rebels at Jerusalem. And after the revolt that followed the death of Herod the Great, two thousand Jews were crucified by the Roman pro-consul Varus. Crucifixions on a smaller scale, were a common sight and it has been estimated that perhaps some 30,000 occurred under Roman authority during the lifetime of Christ."

And Jesus is taking that analogy and saying that we need to crucify ourselves. deny ourselves; pick up our cross which meant crucifixion, which meant death – that there are some things in our lives that must be put to death, that they cannot coexist with the purposes and will of God for us. What do we crucify? We are to crucify anything that would thwart the purpose of God in your life and

mine. A cross – it's not just a place of suffering; it's a place of death. And we intentionally need to put to death those things that would go against the will of God for us. In other words, put to death, or consider dead, those things that would thwart or hinder or impede the purposes of God for you.

For example, thoughts that are unholy. Paul says in Philippians, "Take every thought captive." There's a sense of force, of intent, as Jesus talks about this whole area of taking up the cross. It's savage, in a sense, and yet it is very deliberate. When you take every thought captive, you're not putting your arm around the thought and saying, "Would you come with me. Let me have a good look at you." Captive! It's taking a prisoner. And that's the way Paul says we need to deal with our thoughts.

Then look at sin in your life and mine. Our old self – we need to make sure that it is put to death. Addictive behaviors – we need to make sure that they don't have a new life in us. We're supposed to consider ourselves dead to sin.

#### Galatians 5:16-24

*I advise you to obey only the Holy Spirit's instructions. He will tell you where to go and what to do, and then you won't always be doing the wrong things your evil nature wants you to. For we naturally love to do evil things that are just the opposite from the things that the Holy Spirit tells us to do; and the good things we want to do when the Spirit has his way with us are just the opposite of our natural desires. These two forces within us are constantly fighting each other to win control over us, (remember me telling you about the valves) and our wishes are never free from their pressures. When you are guided by the Holy Spirit, you need no longer force yourself to obey Jewish laws.*

*But when you follow your own wrong inclinations, your lives will produce these evil results: impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, spiritism (that is, encouraging the activity of demons), hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticisms, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group – and there will be wrong doctrine, envy, murder, drunkenness, wild parties, and all that sort of thing. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

*But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; and here there is not conflict with Jewish laws.*

*Those who belong to Christ have nailed their natural evil desires to His cross and crucified them there.*

These are the things beloved, that need to be nailed to the cross, that we need to be dead too. this whole list that we see in vv. 19-21, and I would ask you to maybe spend the day just going over that list, checking and saying: Is that part of me? Am I seeing envy in me? Am I seeing jealousy, anger, eagerness for lustful pleasure? Are any of these things surfacing? Then say, "I need to crucify those things to the cross."

But here's the thing. As we look at denying ourselves, and picking up our cross, it is painful. It may be inconvenient; it may make you unpopular. You could be at the receiving end of injustice, and life could be very difficult. That's why Paul reminds us after that list that we just read.

v. 25 says *"If we are living now by the Holy Spirit's power..."*

in other words, that's the only way that we can be overcomers, that we can deny ourselves, that we can take up our cross daily, put to death those things that have no business in our lives. The only

way is in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. then we won't need to look for honors and popularity which lead to jealousy and hard feelings.

Difficult? Yes. Uncomfortable? Yes. Inconvenient? But Jesus didn't promise us something that was rosy. He made it clear that it would be uncomfortable.

Matthew 8:19-20 *And one of the scribes came to Him and said, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."*

I'll follow you, and he would've expected Jesus to say: Of course, come on. But He says, "Count the cost. It's going to be difficult. So He made sure that they understood it would be uncomfortable.

He also made sure that He never lowered the standard. In Mark 10 we read that Jesus felt genuine love for this man as He looked at him – the rich young ruler who asked "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" "Keep the commandments and then love your neighbor." "All these I have done." And Jesus says, "You lack only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor. You shall have treasure in heave. Then come follow Me." And the man's face fell and he went away sad, for he was very rich. And Jesus had genuine love for him. But He wasn't going to lower the standard because of that love.

Also, Jesus knew that there would be failure in being His disciple. "One of you will betray Me. And you, Simon Peter, will deny Me three times." But the good news! He offers restoration. Do you love me more than these? The motivation is love, and the challenge, 'these'. What are the 'these'? These are the things that we need to deny and crucify in our lives. it's the 'these' that Jesus is asking Peter, "Do you love Me more than these?"

As we look at this passage, Peter asks a very pertinent question in Mark 10:28 "Then Peter began to mention all that he and the other disciples had left behind.' We've given up everything to follow You,' he said. And Jesus replied, 'Let me assure you that no one has ever given up anything – home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or property for love of Me and to tell others the Good News, who won't be given back a hundred time over – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land along with persecutions.'"

Jesus is saying, "Yes, it is difficult, but if you've given up for Me, you'll get back hundred times what you've given." But He says, "It happens in two ages – all these will be his here on earth, and in the world to come he shall have eternal life." Jesus is saying, "If you're a Christian and you're following Me, then whatever you've given up for me, you will get back.

There'll also be persecution. Jesus puts that out as well, 100 times over, both in this age and in the age to come. so the question for us, if we are Christians today, then we ought to be His disciples. Why? Because Jesus commanded the disciples in the Great Commission. He said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Go and make disciples! We are to be disciples before we can start making the disciples. That's the intent when we came to follow Him – accept His as our Savior and then place Him as Lord.

What does it mean to become His disciple? It means to obey Him, to follow His teaching, to learn of His teachings. And then deny, pick up your cross and follow. To be a disciple of Christ is to be continually following after Jesus. It must be a way of life. it becomes our pattern for living.

### QUESTIONS FOR US:

1. Are we denying ourselves?
2. Are we picking up the cross daily, putting to death those things that have no business in us?
3. Have we left everything to follow Him? And I don't mean just leaving everything saying, "I'm coming after You." But in our minds, to hold things loosely so that when the Lord says, "Leave it!" we leave it and move.
4. Are we learning from Him? Every day, are we learning something new? Are we being obedient to Him?
5. Are we emulating Him?

I love an old chorus we used to sing:

When the morning breaks and when I awake  
This my prayer will be,  
Lord today I would ask of thee  
More like Jesus that I should be.

Then I'll be like Jesus  
Only by His grace,  
More and more like Jesus  
Till I see Him face to face.

Beloved, I don't know where you are this morning. could be that you've lost your way, that you started off as His disciple with the zeal and fervor. Then somewhere along the way it got too hard. Love grew a little cold. Or whatever reason! Yet, the good news is that today, we end this service by coming to the table of mercy and grace. Here forgiveness is offered, cleansing is done. Your U-turns are allowed and confessions are received. Let's prepare our hearts to come to the table as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, looking for refreshing, renewal, restoration, forgiveness and renewed purpose and zeal.