

## AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP – LOVING ONE ANOTHER

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**Scripture:** John 13:34-35

We've been looking these last 5 weeks at how we can be authentic in our walk as disciples of Jesus. We've looked at different aspects, different facets of discipleship, and we said that we start with submission. We submit to Him, acknowledging that He is our Master and that we are disciples who are following Him.

Then we said that obedience to all that He purposes for us, that our will becomes aligned with His will and that we are completely obedient to His will and purposes. And then we said that being a disciple must bear fruit as well, and that fruit must be visible.

Then the last two weeks we've looked at longevity saying that we need to stay the course, we need to be able to finish well. We need to be able to say, like Paul, "I've run the race and I've finished the course and I've kept the faith." And how important it is that we keep the faith, that we don't just check out and leave the race but stay in, however difficult it might get.

Today we wrap up this series on Authentic Discipleship. And I'm not at all suggesting that this has been all that we need to think about. There's so much more as we look at the Word, to understand what it means to be an authentic disciple. But I leave that to you. But for today we have to talk about something that Jesus Himself said in terms of discipleship. And John 13 tells us in vv. 34-35, two verses that give us an important insight into how Jesus looked at the things that are important for us as disciples.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

He says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." Then He expands it and says, "Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." In other words, how has Jesus loved us, in that way we need to love one another. But then He goes on and says, "And the way that you love, by this, when people see the way you love one another, then they will know that you are my disciples."

Those are pretty strong words! If we take them to heart and ask some of the hard questions: Do I love like that? do I reflect Jesus? Does the world see me and say that I am a disciple of Jesus by the way that I love? So, lots in just those two verses. And I'd like for us to unpack it and see what we can glean from other passages of scripture that will help us understand this one.

### **If Jesus says "Love as I have loved," how did Jesus love?**

That's the first question that we need to ask ourselves when we see a verse like this. How did Jesus love His disciples.

So let's look at four or five vignettes in His sojourn here on earth. These are not chronological; I've just picked them out randomly.

#### **1. He washed their feet.**

In John 13:1-17, we have that account. But in v. 3 it says: <sup>3</sup>Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, <sup>4</sup>rose from supper, He laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. <sup>5</sup>Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

Washing of people's feet is not something that happens very often today. At least not in some of the cultures that we are aware of. It happens a lot more in African cultures. But feet washing in the time of Jesus was something that was very common. The only thing was that it was done by the servants. It was considered a menial job, something that the least person would do for guests who came over. The host would never wash the feet of his guests. And yet, that's what Jesus did. It seems like He rose from supper, laid aside His outer garments and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water and began to wash the disciples' feet.

As we look to see what kind of love this is, it's a love that showed that there is nothing too low or nothing too demeaning that could be done with someone that you had to love. That's a tough one! All of us have an understanding of the way we love. But we also have a particular range in which we will love. We will not go beyond a particular range in which we will love, nor will we go below a particular bar that we may have set. Within that range, we will love. But Jesus is saying that there is no lower bar. The lowest thing that you can think about is something that you do. The lowest thing, the thing that you think is too much, it's below your dignity to do, is the thing that needs to be brought into a loving relationship.

## **2. He restored Peter.**

"Then they seized Him and led Him away, bringing Him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl came, seeing him as he sat in the light, and looking closely at him said, 'This man also was with Him.' But he denied it saying, 'Woman, I don't know Him.' And a little later, someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I'm not!' And after an interval of about an hour, still another insisted saying, 'Certainly this man also was with Him for he too is a Galilean.' And immediately Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you're talking about.' And the rooster crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered what the Lord had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly."

Of all the lines in this passage, the one that really gets me is the one that says: and the Lord turned and looked at Peter. What a visual that must have been for Peter – to deny the Lord and then have to look into the eyes of the One whom he has denied. And yet we see he went out and wept bitterly at that.

But Jesus didn't leave it there. We read in John 21 that He restored the relationship with Peter. Those must have been terrible days for Peter knowing that Jesus was alive and yet knowing that he hadn't yet dealt with this whole idea of the denial. To carry that with you every time he met the Master and to know that he had denied Him! Jesus hadn't asked him about it till that day on the shores of Galilee, when the only question He asked is: Do you love me? Three times he denied Jesus, and three times Jesus asked him: Do you love me? In other words, the kind of love that Jesus showed was a love that accepted being hurt as a part of building a relationship. A love that forgave easily and a love that restored fellowship. Love that was able to take in hurt and say: I still value the relationship.

## **3. He gave Thomas a second chance.**

John 20:24-28

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

<sup>26</sup> And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" <sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. <sup>28</sup> And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

What kind of love? A love that offers second chances, that takes the trouble to deal with unbelief and doubt. I want to tell you, as we go through these different facets of love, that we're going to turn it on its head and look at ourselves in light of the way Jesus loved. And I want you to look at it in terms of your immediate family, your immediate circle of friends or relatives or colleagues. Don't worry about people who you don't know, although the love that Jesus is talking about extends to them as well. but for now, just think of the people that you know, the relationships that you have.

When you think of Thomas, we don't very often give people a second chance. It's not in our nature. Once we've been hurt or once we've had somebody do something. The old adage says, "Once bitten, twice shy." And that line has come because we are not willing to restore, to forgive. And Jesus could easily have walked away and said, "I'm tired of Thomas. if he can't believe, he can't believe. That's it!" ho, He took the trouble to deal with Thomas. Love that gives second chances, that takes the trouble to deal with doubt and unbelief.

#### **4. He had patience.**

We read in Luke 24 of the two disciples who were on the way to the village called Emmaus, and it says Jesus joins them and says to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad? O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and then to enter into His glory?" And then, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning Himself. And they said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the scriptures to us?"

This was not the first time that Jesus was doing this. He was with the disciples for three years. He taught them every day and yet they weren't able to connect the dots. They weren't able to see that the things that He had taught them from the Old Testament were things that talked about Him. They couldn't make the connection. And even after He was resurrected, they didn't know. And yet Jesus was so patient with them; called them foolish ones first, but I guess we can give Jesus that. But then He taught them, explained things to them until they say, "Didn't our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the scriptures to us?" A love that is patient, a love that continues to keep coming back, a love that doesn't give up on people.

#### **5. He showed us how we ought to love our enemies.**

Luke 22:47-51 says,

<sup>47</sup> But even as Jesus said this, (that is He's coming out of Gethsemane He had just spoken to His disciples) it says a crowd approached, led by Judas, one of the twelve disciples. Judas walked over to Jesus to greet Him with a kiss.

<sup>48</sup> But Jesus said, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

<sup>49</sup> When the other disciples saw what was about to happen, they exclaimed, "Lord, should we fight? We brought the swords!"

<sup>50</sup> And one of them struck at the high priest's slave, slashing off his right ear.

<sup>51</sup> But Jesus said, "No more of this." And He touched the man's ear and healed him."

Imagine! He touched the man's ear and healed him. I'm sure if I was there, I would have looked at that ear and thought: Well, good for you! You're going to be the one-eared man as you walk around from now on. Can't fight all of you but at least you don't have one ear." Enemy! Somebody who's against Jesus, and He actually puts the ear back. I'm sure that man was changed for life. Every time he touched his right ear, he was thankful it was still there, and he remembered why. He must have. Jesus showed us what it means to be compassionate even to those who are against.

If we had to take Jesus' words to us, and He says: "I want you to love as I have loved," then we need to look at all these five vignettes and say, "Okay, how do I make that work in my life?" as a disciple of Jesus. Jesus says, "When people see the way love is the way I love, then they will say that that's a disciple of Jesus." And we're looking at Authentic Discipleship. So how do we look at this?

### APPLICATIONS

1. A love that showed that there's nothing too low to do, nothing too demeaning. I wonder whether it's worth looking at our own lives and asking the question: Is there something that I will not do for a person I love? Then challenge that position with the words of Jesus and see if that is appropriate for a disciple of Jesus. There's something that I won't do. That's something I cannot do.

I remember many years ago, I was about 24 or 25 and we were getting ready for our first major concert. It was going to be held in an auditorium in downtown Mumbai and we had invited the GATT Quartet from Chennai, and so we had a choir. I was at a friend's place getting ready; ironed my shirt and got dressed. Then I looked down for my shoes and I couldn't find them. I was sure I had left them under the bed. I started looking all over when this friend of mine walked in with my shoes. He was actually two years my senior and was also the captain of the school. He had taken my shoes, polished them and brought them back. I couldn't imagine anybody taking my shoes and polishing them for me. Somebody who was older to me, and he was a naval officer. I've never forgotten that. It's always challenged me when I think about love and some things that you can't do; it's too low. I'm always reminded of this. So I wonder, as you look at your own relationships: Is there something that you won't do for a loved one?

2. A love that accepts being hurt as part of building the relationship. It's a tough one. Because we avoid people who hurt us. We cut them out of our lives. And yet it seems that even though being hurt and being resentful or angry with somebody, we see that that is something that we need to accept and say, "For the greater joy and the future of our relationship, I'm going to let that go. I'm going to seek the relationship; it has far more value than the hurt I've received. And to be able to do that.

In a situation like that, there's no place you can go with that hurt except to the Cross. You have to leave that hurt somewhere and the only place is at the foot of the Cross and say, "Lord, I've been hurt. Lord, would You take it? I don't want this to stand in the way of Your commandment to love." You've heard me say this, but resentment that is not dealt with leads to hurt. Hurt that is not dealt with will lead to anger. Anger that is not dealt with will lead to hatred and hatred that is not dealt with will lead to bitterness. And bitterness is the

most debilitating thing you can have in your heart. it's like rust; it eats from the inside and even the strongest steel will crumble. It hurts nobody but you. That's why we have to take the hurts to the Cross. Take it to the One who understands, who went through hurt. Jesus is saying: That's a love that I want from you as well, that you deal with the hurt and pursue the relationship.

3. A love that gives second chances takes the trouble to deal with doubt, unbelief. Maybe in a relationship of friends, family, someone has doubted you, and said things like: I don't think that person can ever make it in life, or I don't think that person can take care of a family. They may have said this even behind your back. And yet, Jesus talks about love that goes after and not leave things the way they are. We talk about all of these things and realize that our relationships are so fragile. Sometimes all it takes is one thing to break it, cut people out of our lives. And yet, Jesus went after Thomas. He could easily have said: Forget Thomas. He's on his own. But He didn't; and look what happened. Thomas came, as we believe, all the way to India. Who knows what a restored relationship can do for a person!
4. Then we see a love that is patient. Maybe you're in a relationship or a situation where you have repeated something or told someone ad nauseam that this is the way it should be, or this is the way you should act, or something. Now you're at a point where you're saying: I'm done with this person. It's just not possible to pursue this. I wonder whether patience is what the Lord is placing upon your heart today that says: I'm not done with you. And you shouldn't be done with anybody.
5. A love that has compassion even to those who are against you. That's difficult! We want to avoid people like that. The only way that we can have that kind of a love is to get it from God, because the kind of love that we have is a love that is causal. I love because there's a reason why I do this.

The agape love that Jesus is talking about is a non-causal love. It's a love that just loves. The only way that we can love in this manner is to ask the King of love to give it to us. The only way.

So I wonder this morning, as we make our way to the table, whether this can be a place where we do business with God, where we say Lord, I haven't loved the way You want me to love. I haven't restored. I haven't gone after a relationship or I haven't done some of the things that You mentioned. But Lord, You're placing this upon my heart. And I wonder as you come to the table, that you also spend just a quiet moment at the altar and say: Lord, I want to give up that. I want to leave a hurt behind. I want You to give me love for a person. I want You to help me in this restorative process. Whatever it is, and I'm sure that the Holy Spirit is speaking right now to each of us. Just placing His finger on areas in our life that we need to deal with. Today, and I really would like it as you partake of the Lord's Supper, that if the Lord is speaking to you, that you just say: Lord, I've heard You. I want to come. then come and kneel at this altar and exchange it for whatever He wants you to exchange it or walk away from here with fresh determination or confidence that He has met you.

Amen.