

Disciples at a Distance

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Luke 22:54

There is a widely held opinion today about what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. That opinion promotes the idea that making a profession of faith is the same as being a disciple of our Lord. This is not true. The biblical teaching of discipleship by Christ Himself clearly intends more than just a bare profession of faith...even if that profession of faith is real. When we have made such a profession, and it is genuine, we have made a first step toward becoming a practicing disciple of Jesus, but we have not suddenly hatched full-blown into discipleship. Jesus defined the discipleship of Peter, James, and John early in His ministry, when He addressed them as they were engaged in their secular occupation. He said, "follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Now, although He does not define everybody's discipleship as being a vocation as "fisher's of men" I believe He nevertheless DOES define each believer's discipleship. And that definition always includes becoming involved in spiritual objectives. It involves action, both outward and inward action. It involves becoming a learner under Christ's teaching. It involves taking action based on what one has learned. The Lord's lesson on this in Mat. 16 gives us a good summary of this idea. In verse 24 (of that chapter) Jesus said to His disciples, "...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Discipleship then, means denying ourselves to become a follower. It means taking up our own cross. Of course, Jesus was talking about taking responsibility for our primary purpose in life...our primary mission as ambassadors for Christ and as citizens of His kingdom.

This obviously includes recognizing that we are not here on earth to pursue the ambitions of self, the fulfillment of self, the gain of self, the glory to self, the ease and comfort of self. All the things about self are to subserve to being a student and follower of Christ.

When Christ commissioned the church to "teach them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you..." I believe He set the stage for how discipleship would be directed and empowered. It is in observing all the things that Christ has taught that we grow into true disciples...true students and practitioners of the Christian faith.

In our text this morning we find the disciple Peter still being a disciple, although he is obviously keeping a very low profile. But, in how he behaves at this serious hour our Lord is going through, he gives us scriptural background for a most instructive message about discipleship. Because, we see Peter being a "disciple at a distance." The Holy Spirit has recorded for us this experience of Peter in this sad state and by doing so, He has given us words which we can use to warn ourselves about this kind of behavior within our own lives. May the Holy Spirit now guide us into a personal application of what we can learn from this account.

I. V.55: Distant Discipleship Puts Us In The Midst of the World (“...among them.”)

- Being among the citizens of this world in the sense of our text is not a good thing
 - It suggests that we are embarrassed to be identified as a disciple of Jesus
 - It suggests that we are ashamed of Jesus Christ
 - **Mar 8:38** **Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.**
 - It plainly indicates that we are thinking or acting contrary to discipleship
 - It puts us in an environment of temptation

- For disciples, being among the people of the world in this sense appears to be an overt act of camouflage
 - those of us who deer or turkey hunt put on camouflage; why do we do that? Ans. To make ourselves look like the trees and the grass, and the brush...the surroundings we are in. Distant discipleship can be a camouflage for a Christian; a technique that makes them look like all the folks around them who don't believe in Christ; those not interested in being a disciple of His.

II. V.56: Distant Discipleship Does Not Hide Our Identity

- There are identifying features about true believers that distinguish them from the rest of the world even when they seek not to reveal it
 - Joseph is a captive and a slave in Egypt. There he serves an Egyptian citizen. Notice what the Egyptian observed about him (Genesis 39:3 - “And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.”)

III. V.57-60 : Distant Discipleship Will Lead to Denial

- Denial can take many forms
 - Denial is tacit in the way distant disciples hide out (taking care to not be identified as a disciple is denial)
 - Living in camouflage will lead to being cornered by Satan and driven to deny Christ in what we say - or don't say about our Lord (it may not be something as blunt as “I know Him not.”)
 - Denial can even take the extreme form of defiling language (Mat 26:74 “Then began he [Peter] to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not the man...”)

IV. V.61: Distant Discipleship Will Bring Critical Scrutiny by the Lord

- We long for looks of approval from the Lord; but to have a scrutinizing look from Him because of our bad conduct (denial of Him) is not something we want.
 - (Psalms 34:15) The eyes of the LORD *are* upon the righteous and we want that for protection and preservation, but we do not want Him to have to look at us with a critical eye.
 - Psalms 11:4 The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD's throne *is* in heaven: **his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.**

V. V. 62: Distant Discipleship Will Bring Sorrow

- It was Peter's hanging out at a distance that created the environment to set him off toward denial. And the end result of it was bitter sorrow for how far his compromise took him.
- If we distance ourselves from the Lord, sorrow is sure to follow at some point down that road.
- Peter undoubtedly reflected on **his own cowardice** that led to this (it is often cowardice in the presence of the world that leads disciples to such a place as we find Peter)
- Peter without doubt came face to face with his own **failure to properly appreciate what his Lord had done for him**
- He also must certainly have realized how this compromise had made his personal testimony **look like** nothing more than **hypocrisy** (remember what he said in Mat. 26:35 "...Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.")