

Conference for Missionaries-1988- Discipleship - Part 1

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of individual discipleship and the power given to believers in their mission to spread the Gospel.

Duration: 45:10

Scripture: Luke 9:1-3, Luke 9:5-17, Galatians 2:4-5

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of discipleship and investing in others. He shares a personal experience of being asked to conduct a funeral early in his ministry and feeling unprepared. The speaker highlights the power of God to use ordinary and despised things for His glory. He also discusses the need for Christians to be mindful of their use of money and possessions, particularly in the context of missions. The sermon concludes with a reminder that living according to Jesus' teachings brings more glory to God.

Transcript

I always think of attending this conference, which seems to be an annual event, the word privilege always springs to my mind, because it really is a privilege to come here at a fellowship with so many servants of the Lord whom we esteem so highly in love for their work's sake. Tremendous privilege. Privilege to be here and meet young people moving out to the field.

I think one of the greatest joys of my life is to see young people on fire for the Lord Jesus, forsaking all to follow him. He's really worthy. I think it's a tremendous privilege to be here with the brothers and sisters from CMML and MSC, Missionary Service Committees, and see these living examples of servanthood.

People who are doing everything in their power to serve the Lord, to serve his people, and to show us the kindness of God for Jesus' sake. It's tremendous. And it's a privilege to be here and meet again the Christians from the area who have a heart for missions and who show it by their interest and by their prayers and by their sacrificial gifts.

I think one of the most humbling things that happens to me in the Christian life is when somebody comes to me and says, I pray for you every morning. And I know that many of the missionaries have that

experience. I pray for you every morning.

It's tremendous, tremendous privilege. So we just want to express that note at the very outset. When I announce the chapter we're going to be studying, some of you are going to have cardiac arrest because you're going to fear that you already heard it here.

We were on chapter six of Luke, but we're going to graduate to chapter nine tonight. Chapter nine of Luke's gospel. And I'd just like to read tonight the first fifteen verses.

Luke chapter nine, verses one through fifteen, reading from the New King James. Then he called his twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.

And he said to them, take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bags nor bread nor money, and do not have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.

So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. Now Herod the Tetrarch heard of all that was done by him, and he was perplexed because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. And Herod said, John, I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things? And he sought to see him.

The apostles, when they had returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them and went aside privately into a deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And when the multitudes knew it, they followed him, and he received them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing.

When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country and lodge and get provisions, for we are in a deserted place here. He said to them, You give them something to eat. They said, We have no more than five loaves and two fish, lest we go and buy food for all these people.

For there were about five thousand men, he said to his disciples, make them sit down in groups of fifty. They did so, and made them all sit down. We'll read the next two verses.

Then he took the five loaves and the two fish. Looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke them, gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.

Before looking at the word, I'd just like to say I had a strange experience studying this chapter. I found whenever I was reading about the disciples, whenever they were on center stage, I became uneasy because I couldn't be sure what they were going to do next. But whenever I read about the Lord Jesus in this chapter, I was perfectly composed, because I knew he would always do and say the right thing.

Maybe some of you will have that experience as we go through the chapter these nights. And we're at the close of the Lord Jesus' Galilean ministry. Pretty soon, he's going to wind his way down to Perea on the east side of the Jordan, and then the journey up through Jericho to Jerusalem for his passion, his death,

his resurrection.

Once more here, he's going to be sending out the disciples to proclaim the message glorious. And we know that this was a special mission on which the twelve were sent. We know that some of the Lord's instructions were later reversed.

Luke chapter 22, verses 35 and 36. Luke 22, verses 35 and 36. Then he said to them, when I sent you without money bag, sack, and sandals, did you lack anything? So they said nothing.

Then he said to them, but now he who has a money bag, let him take it, likewise a sack, and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. And so some of these instructions were reversed later on, and yet these verses are part of the inspired text of the scripture. They must have some message for us today, and we want to look at them and see what we can find of practical value in the verses before us.

What might the Lord be saying to us through these verses? Before I get into that, I'd like to say something about the Lord's method. We must constantly remind ourselves of his strategy. He had taken twelve disciples, only twelve, and he was going to train them on an individualized basis.

He was going to teach them the principles of the kingdom of God. He was going to live with them, and he was going to take them out on on-the-job training. If he saw flaws in their character, he'd tell them about it, so that when he sent them forth, they were equipped for the task to which he sent them.

We think of this today as personal discipling, and I think it's good for us all, including myself, to ask ourselves, is this the way you're carrying on the work of the Lord? I would say the attitude was, all right, you're saved now, you're baptized, you're received into fellowship, your responsibility is to attend the meetings of the assembly regularly. That's the way you'll get your training. That was good, that was good.

And over a period of time, it's wonderful, the doctrine you receive, the teaching you receive. But, today's generation of young Christians, I think, have hit on something that goes back to the method of the Lord Jesus, and that's individual discipling. When a young person gets saved, an older Christian is to hold of that person, meets with him regularly, goes over the word of God with him, gets to know him on an individual basis, gets to know character deficiencies and speaks to him about it, gets to know things in his life that might not be Christ-like.

They talk together about it and work on it. And then takes them out on practical Christian work. And it's really wonderful to see how young people grow under this type of nurture.

This is what the Lord Jesus did. He wasn't just satisfied to preach to crowds and teach them in that way, he chose twelve and poured his life into them, inculcated in them these great principles of the kingdom, and involved them in preaching, teaching, and other branches of Christian service. I'll never forget when I was asked to take a funeral.

I was very new in the work of the Lord, and they said, Oh Bill, Mrs. Jones died, would you take her funeral? My legs turned to India rubber and my lips turned to blubber. I had no idea how to take a funeral. Nobody had ever taken me out and explained to me how to tailor a funeral for the individual who had gone home to be with the Lord.

Certainly there were no books of changed sermons to use at such a time. But I'm glad to see young people who graduated from that and who are interested in working with individuals, seeing them grow

under the authority of the word of God. Some time ago we had a young lady named Charlema saved in our assembly.

She was saved, I think, on Sunday and Wednesday night. She turned up at the meeting with a head covering, Wednesday night. And I said to her young brother, I said, How does she know about a head covering between Sunday and Wednesday? Oh, he said, Sandra is discipling her.

The elders never had to say a word, it was a person who was discipling her that did it. And of course, Sandra, that girl who did the discipling, she's down in Brazil tonight with her husband, Eric Shortman. Saved six years, the two of them, and down on the field tonight.

So I think at the outset of this chapter, we might very well ask ourselves, Am I discipling individually those whom I'm leading to the Lord? Am I spending time with them every week, giving them individualized training, on-the-job training? Am I working on their character? Am I seeking to bring them up to their full maturity in Christ? I'm sure we're all familiar with J.B. Phillips' paraphrase of Colossians 1, 28-29, it's really beautiful, worth the price of the whole book. He says, so naturally we proclaim Christ. We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can all that we know about him, so that if possible, we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ Jesus.

That is what I am working at all the time, with all the strength that God gives me. Now, let us just turn to the text and look at some of these first verses. Luke chapter 9, verse 1, we see that the Lord gave the twelve power and authority over demons and diseases.

Has he given us power and authority? Yes, he has. What is the source of our power? The source of our power is the Holy Spirit of God, received at the time of our conversion. What is the extent or scope of that power? It is the power which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

Dear friends, that to me is awesome, that this power is available to us. The greatest display of power that has ever occurred in the universe is the power that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. In the Old Testament, of course, the Jews look to the deliverance from Egypt as a great display of power.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus eclipses that. Although the Bible does not say it in so many words, it seems that at that sepulcher outside the walls of Jerusalem, all the hosts of Satan and hell were encamped there to prevent the Lord Jesus from ever rising from the dead. God stooped, reached down in this tremendous power, and brought the Lord Jesus out with the power of an endless life, the first one ever to rise from the dead to die no more.

That's the scope of the power that's available to us. And it makes us ask ourselves, why do the chariot wheels of God drag so heavily if that power is available to us? Why don't we see marvelous demonstrations of that power, the salvation of souls and maturity of saints? What are the instruments of power? The instruments of that power are prayer, the word of God, love, faith among others, prayer. The poet said, We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power! Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong, or others, that we are not always strong? That we are ever overborn with care, that we should ever weak or heartless be, anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer, and joy and strength and courage are with thee? We've said before that man holds the balance of power in the world through prayer.

That man never comes closer to omnipotence than when he prays in the name of the Lord Jesus. Why are we ever powerless? Man can move the destiny of nations through prayer. What cannot be accomplished by prayer? Another instrument of his power is the word of God, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

If you want to think of the power of the word of God, think of what it has done in your life. I think of what it's done in my life. No book has ever exposed me to myself like the word of God.

It was the word of God that showed me what I was, and all my filth and sin and degradation. It was the instrument that God used in the salvation of my soul, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. The word of God is an instrument of his power.

It's amazing, isn't it, how nations of the world are afraid of the Bible and do everything they can to keep it out. Yet there it flows on majestically in underground rivers, as it were, and man cannot stop the word of God. Paul may be bound, but the word of God is not bound.

Love. When we were in Luke chapter 6, we saw the Lord unleashing this weapon in his spiritual arsenal, telling his disciples to go forth and demonstrate to the world an unearthly love, an otherworldly love, a love that repays every insult with kindness, a love that turns the other cheek, a love that goes out to those who don't deserve it whatever. The Lord as much as said, if you only act on a worldly level and love those who love you, what reward have you? Love those who don't deserve it.

This will make an impact on the world, and it's still doing it. And then faith is an instrument of his power. Faith is a victory that overcomes the world.

I used to think about that thing. How can faith overcome the world? That's a good question, first of all, to think about. The answer is that faith sees beyond the facade of the world.

The world is make-believe. Faith deals with reality. Faith sees the difference between a prayer meeting and a football game, doesn't it? Faith sees things in the light of eternity.

Faith sees, for instance, that it's the soul that counts, not the body. To faith, the future is real, very, very real. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Jesus gave them authority. He gave them power and authority. What is our authority? I think we have it in the Great Commission, don't we? in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Ah, that's wonderful when you stop to think of it. We go out as representatives of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We speak and act for Him.

Brother, that's authority, isn't it? Going forth as His messengers, going forth as His ambassadors in the all-prevailing name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave them authority over demons and diseases. F.B. Myers says, here we seem to encounter the origin of medical missions.

They're objects in healing body and mind. Their authority in the command of our Savior. Their claims for support.

George Eliot once said, the tale of divine pity was never yet believed from lips that had not been first moved by divine pity. Let me say that again. The tale of divine pity was never yet believed from lips that had not first been moved by divine pity.

By human pity. And then it says He commissioned them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Do we preach the kingdom of God? Yes we do.

We find the kingdom of God in different phases or different aspects in the Bible. You have the kingdom of God prophesied in the Old Testament. You have the kingdom announced as present in the Gospels.

The kingdom of God is among you. The kingdom was present in the person of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. Then when you come to Matthew chapter 12, you have the kingdom rejected.

The rejection by the religious leaders in Matthew chapter 12 signaled what the nation was going to do. The leaders were out in front, and they accused the Lord Jesus of performing His miracles in the power of the elves above, and thus committed the unpardonable sin. The kingdom prophesied, the kingdom present, the kingdom rejected, the kingdom in an interim form, Matthew 13.

That's where we are today. The kingdom is still here. The kingdom exists wherever the rule of God is acknowledged, but the king is absent, the right hand of God today.

Then of course you have the kingdom in manifestation when the Lord Jesus comes back to earth again and reigns sitting on the throne of David with Jerusalem as his capital. And finally you have the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we're in that interim form of the kingdom today, and we do, yes, we do preach the kingdom.

And it says, and to heal the sick. The New Testament was not available in those days, and these disciples went out and people had the right to say, how do we know that what you're saying is true? God says, all right, I'll give them the power to perform miracles, to accredit the ministry, to authenticate the ministry. God bearing witness both by signs and wonders and divers gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We read in the book of Hebrews, chapter two. What about the miracles? Well, the Lord Jesus predicted that when he went back to heaven and the Holy Spirit was given, his followers would perform greater miracles than he performed, isn't that right? Now, John chapter 14 and verse 12, John chapter 14, verse 12, most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also in greater works than these he will do because I go to my father, do we perform greater works than the Lord Jesus did? In a very real sense, we perform greater miracles today. The Lord Jesus healed men with unclean spirits.

We heal them from the uncleanness of sin. The Lord Jesus healed physical fever through the preaching of the gospel. We healed from the feverishness and restlessness of sin.

The Lord Jesus healed lepers through the gospel. We heal from the loathsomeness of sin. The Lord Jesus healed paralysis, but the servant of the Lord today goes forth with a message that delivers from the helplessness of sin.

The Lord Jesus healed withered hands, and the disciples did too, and we heal the uselessness produced by sin. They delivered demoniacs, and we deliver from the misery, violence, and terror of sin. They raised the dead, but those people died again.

We see people delivered from spiritual death to life eternal. We hear people talking today a lot about resurrection from the dead. I hope if I die, nobody tries to raise me from the dead.

To go through the article of death once is enough, you know? Far better to be with the Lord whom I love. Why all the fuss about resurrection from the dead today? We're looking forward to the resurrection when we hear the shout and see the blessed Lord Jesus. They healed the deaf and the dumb.

We cure the inability to hear God's word and to speak forth in testimony from Him. They healed the blind, and we heal the blind and beggarly state to which sin reduces a person. Then the Lord Jesus said in verse 3, Take nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money, and do not have two tunics apiece.

Now we can think about that, we can think about it in detail. What's that all about? And how does that apply to us today? Does it have an application for us today? Well, instead of looking at it in detail, why don't we just put it all together and say that these instructions can be summarized in two words. Simplicity and faith.

And incidentally, the two go together. The Lord Jesus here is teaching a lifestyle of simplicity for His servants, and He's teaching a life of faith. It was important that these disciples go forth in dependence on the Master.

And I'd like to go over several reasons why this is very, very important, and it's important today, too. Number one, to go forth well-heeled and living in luxury would be contrary to Scripture. Jesus said, Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

It would be completely in opposition to all that the Lord Jesus taught. To go forth in His service living high off the hog. Two, to go forth with material prosperity would give a completely false view of the one they were representing.

The one who could say, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. I never get tired of quoting Denny, because it's a sentence that has a profound influence in my own life. He said, The only perfect life ever lived on earth, he owned nothing and left nothing but the clothes that he wore.

The only perfect life ever lived on earth, he owned nothing and left nothing but the clothes that he wore. Pause here and think how the organized church in the world today has misrepresented the Lord Jesus. Stanley Jones tells of going into a cathedral in Rome, and there was a statue there of the baby Jesus.

And they had draped strings of jewels over the bambino. This is how they were representing Jesus to the world. The baby Jesus covered with the most expensive jewels.

And then Jones went out into the streets of Rome and he saw the children gaunt, pale, hungry and begging. And he thought, I wonder if the bambino is enjoying his jewels. And he said, I decided that if he was, I could no longer enjoy the thought of the bambino.

Soren Kierkegaard tells of going into a church once. He sat on the velvet pew. He watched the sun rising through the stained glass windows.

The minister dressed in a velvet robe came out. He opened the gilded Bible, marked it with a silk marker, and read, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. Whatsoever he hath give to the poor, take up the cross and follow me.

Kierkegaard said, I looked around and no one was laughing. But the world has plenty of opportunities to laugh, doesn't it? You think of the evangelical church in the United States for this last year. You think of the heyday that the media has, going over the television evangelists, living in luxury, comfort and ease with palatial homes and air-conditioned dog houses and several of the most expensive cars available.

The world has plenty of reason to laugh. Number three, it brings more glory to God when His servants live as Jesus directed. Somebody has said this, the more primitive the material and the more limited the resources, the less credit to us and the more credit to God.

That's good, remember that. The more primitive the material and the more limited the resources, the less credit to us and the more credit to God. I've used the illustration before of days when we were at Emmaus and the Van Ryn brothers were there.

The Van Ryn brothers had come over from Holland and they had known, they knew how to take primitive materials and make nice things about them. We would ask them to make something at the school and they would go down to the pile of lumber, you know, old lumber, old wood down there in the basement, and they would get some of that old wood and they would bring it up and they could make beautiful bookcases and other things out of it. We also had students at the school, good fellows, and they had studied in high school and in trade schools and they were professional carpenters.

And we would tell them to make something and they'd go down to the lumber yard and make some beautiful things with the lumber from the lumber yard. But it was more credit to the Van Ryns, wasn't it? To be able to take junk wood and make something good out of it. And this is true of the work of God.

God loves to use the poor, the base, the despised, things that are not to bring to naught, things that God may get the glory in it all. Hudson Taylor said, What we greatly need to fear is not too little money, but too much unconsecrated money. Number four, we're all aware of the effect on nationals of developing countries when Christ's representatives go forth and they look like a miniature Macy's store.

You've all seen that out of the mission field. You've seen people go out to the mission field and they look like an annex of Sears Roebuck with all the furniture, appliances, transportation, and all the rest. And what is the result? People readily profess faith in Christ with a motive of bettering their own standard of living.

They become right Christians. And oftentimes the nationals develop a beggar mentality, asking and sometimes demanding some of the booty. The work of God is wrought by jealousy and infighting as one seeks to outdo the other materially.

Number five, it's completely contrary to human compassion to parade purple and fine linen in scenes of grinding poverty. It's completely contrary to human compassion to parade purple and linen, fine linen, in scenes of grinding poverty. Six, the lifestyle that Jesus called for here cast upon God in a life of faith.

Robert Little used to say, God's will for us is that our lives be a perpetual crisis of dependence upon him. That's where faith comes in, isn't it? God's will for us is that our lives be a perpetual crisis of faith in him. Now, the flesh doesn't like that, does it? It's contrary to all that the flesh wants.

But it's only when a believer does that that he can truly say, the Lord is my shepherd, I should worry. One of the leaders in the assembly movement in Italy in the early days was a count, Ricciardini. He was a very wealthy man, this count.

And when he died, he left an endowment so that ten national workers could be supported as evangelists in Italy for the rest of their lives. These men didn't have to work hard. They didn't have to live a life of support.

Everything was provided for them in advance. They became known as the ten laziest men in Italy. Maybe you thought it sounded good that the count was so generous.

It was a hindrance to the work of God in Italy. Richard Foster said, simplicity needs to be seen in the light of the whole. For example, there's an intrinsic relationship between simplicity and prayer.

Especially that central aspect of prayer, which is trust. My children love pancakes. And every so often I get up on Saturday morning, he said, and I cook up a batch of pancakes for them.

And he said, it's interesting to watch those boys. They wolf down pancakes as if they were an endless supply. He said, they're not worried one bit about the price of eggs or my ability to supply them with pancakes.

Not once have I seen them slipping them into their pockets, thinking, I don't know about Dad. I'd better put away a little stash so that I can be sure of pancakes tomorrow. As far as they're concerned, the reservoir of pancakes is infinite.

All they need to do is ask. And if it's in their best interest, they know that they will receive. They live in trust.

And without this spirit of trust, we will find it exceedingly difficult, should I say impossible, to live on the basis of prayer for daily bread. That's a lovely story, isn't it? Don't forget Richard Foster baking a batch of pancakes for his boys. And they don't stash them away in the bedroom, thinking there might not be some next Saturday.

Six, such a life of trust, as the Lord teaches here in verse 3, gives us the luxury of having few things to care for. I'm sure you're familiar with that paragraph in Jim Elliott's journal. He describes how life becomes complicated by the accumulation of material things.

I'll read it. I've been musing lately on the extremely dangerous cumulative effect of earthly things. One may have good reason, for example, to want a wife.

And he may have one legitimately. But with a wife comes Peter the Pumpkin Eater's proverbial dilemma. He must find a place to keep her.

And most wives will not stay on such terms as Peter proposed. So a wife demands a house. A house, in turn, requires curtains, rugs, washing machines, and so on.

A house with these things must soon become a home. And children are the intended outcome. The needs multiply as they are met.

A car demands a garage. Garage, land. Land, a garden.

A garden, tools. Tools need sharpening. Woe to the man who would live a disentangled life in this century.

I learned from this that the wisest life is the simplest one. Live in the fulfillment of only the basic requirements of life. Shelter, food, covering, and a bed.

Be on guard, my soul, of complicating your environment so you have neither time nor room for growth. It makes me think of Malcolm Muggeridge. He said looking back over his life, he realized that the happiest times of his life were when he was living in a simple cabin.

With a simple table, a simple chair, and some fruit on some leaves. The simple life is the best life. And it's this life, number seven, this is the life that makes the gospel credible to the world about us.

I've heard that when Fred Stanley Arnett was working in what is now Angola, that the paramount chief, Muschiti, told him once that he would have killed him if he hadn't come living in the simplicity in which he came. And number eight, finally, this lifestyle espoused by Jesus shuts us up to God and prevents us from doing things by the power of money that might not be his will at all. I think that the life of faith is a wonderful system of checks and balances, isn't it? If I'm doing the will of God, I don't have to worry about the supply of the needs.

God pays for what he orders, and you have proved that truth in your life. But if I go around and beg for funds, which I could very easily do, I could do a lot of things in the name of God that might not be God's will at all. But I sincerely hope that all of our missionaries will continue, and all the saints at home will continue to seriously take the words of the Lord Jesus, be content with food and covering, devoting everything above that to the work of the Lord.

That's it. Work hard for the supply of your current needs. Put everything above that, the work of the Lord, and trust God for the future.

Shall we pray?

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