

Discipleship

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the radical demands of discipleship and the transformative power of following Jesus' teachings through the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 26:15

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, George Verrero discusses the lack of passion and commitment among Christians today. He shares a letter he received from a young person who longs for a deeper, more sacrificial life for Christ. Verrero emphasizes the need for Christians to prioritize their devotion to God over worldly pursuits and comforts. He highlights the revolutionary teachings of Jesus in Matthew chapter 6, calling for a rejection of self-centeredness and a pursuit of true reality in the Christian life.

Transcript

I would like to suggest to you that the Lord Jesus was really a revolutionary. A lot of people are affronted when you say that, because they picture an armed terrorist bent on destroying the government, and that isn't the kind of a revolutionary the Lord Jesus was. His was a revolution of love, not hatred, of service, not tyranny, and of salvation, not destruction.

But when we say Jesus was a revolutionary, we mean that his teachings were the most radical teachings that have ever hit this planet. And we mean that if those teachings were followed and obeyed, they would produce tremendous changes. For instance, there's nothing in all literature like the Sermon on the Mount.

The trouble is, we've become too used to it. We read it, and you say, yes, yes, that's what we all do. But it isn't what we all do, and I think we'll see that before we're through.

I don't think any other leader ever laid down such stern demands of discipleship as the Lord Jesus did, and no other teachings ever produced the spiritual and moral and ethical changes that the Christian faith has produced. We've become so used to the words of Jesus that, for us, they have lost their revolutionary character. It's a tragedy.

It's really a tragedy when we can read his teachings and still be comfortable, because they were never designed to make us comfortable. They were intended to transform our lives and send us forth as burning and shining lights for him, as heralds of a flaming passion. I think we've mentioned this before.

We often think it must have been a lovely experience to walk along with Jesus when he was here on earth, at a pleasant Bible conference from one end of the day to the other. And I've often suggested, I don't think it was that at all. I think it was a very scalding experience to be in the presence of Jesus, because the closer you are to him, the more you realize how inadequate and worthless you are yourself.

And anyway, he called them to a life of affliction and suffering and persecution and trial, and we don't like that. I would suggest to you today, if you can read the teachings of Jesus and still be comfortable, you've missed the point. His demands are humanly impossible.

I think that's good for us to realize. You and I cannot live the Christian life in our own strength. If I'm doing that, my life is no different from the life of the man next door.

The Christian life is a supernatural life. It's just as impossible for me to live the Christian life in my own strength as it is for me to walk on water. I can't do it.

But empowered by the Holy Spirit, I can do it. Like if Jesus said to me, walk on the water, I could do it. Let's say this at the beginning of our studies, that the life of discipleship is a supernatural life, and it can only be lived by the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

Now, we have taken the teachings of the Lord Jesus, and we've robbed them. We've been able, in a clever way, to rob them of their true meaning, so that when we get through with them, there really isn't very much left of the teachings. Instead of taking his words literally, we can think of 60 theological reasons why they don't mean what they say.

Believe me, we can. I'll show it to you before we're through. And the result is that there's a very great difference between the Christianity you see about you and the Christianity of the New Testament.

I think we'd all really got a tremendous shock to be exposed to the Christianity of the New Testament. Today, what is Christianity? Well, it's attending church. It's putting money in the collection, and it's giving Jesus your spare time.

Do you think that's what he taught the disciples? Is that true Christianity? No. True Christianity is a life of sacrificial service and of total commitment to the Son of God. He said, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

I like what A. W. Tozer said in his book *Born After Midnight*. He said, Christ calls men to carry a cross. We call them to have fun in his name.

He calls them to forsake the world. We assure them that if they just accept Jesus, the world is their oyster. He calls them to suffer.

We call them to enjoy all the bourgeois comforts modern civilization affords. He calls them to self-abnegation and death. We call them to spread themselves like green bay trees, or perchance even to become stars in a pitiful fifth-rate religious zodiac, as only Tozer could say it.

He calls them to holiness. We call them to a cheap and tawdry happiness that would have been rejected with scorn by the least of the Stoic philosophers. In another book that he wrote called *That Incredible Christian*, he said, our Lord called men to follow him, but he never made the way look easy.

Indeed, one gets the distinct impression that he made it appear extremely hard. Sometimes he said things to disciples or prospective disciples that we today discreetly avoid repeating when we're trying to win men to him. But that's true, too.

We never go out on the campus and say, if any man come after me and forsake not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple, do we? We say, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. We say, God has a wonderful plan for your life. But the Lord Jesus showed them all the berries in the box.

He didn't put the best berries on the top. He showed them all the berries in the box. What present-day evangelist would have the courage to tell an inquirer, if any man come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it. Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. You don't find that in any book on personal evangelists.

Don't tell them that. Might drive them away. Do we not do some tall explaining when somebody asks us what Jesus meant when he said, think not that I'm come to send peace on earth.

I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I'm come to set a man at variance against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. That kind of rugged sinewy Christianity is left for an occasional missionary or some believer behind one of the various curtains of the world.

The masses of professed Christians simply do not have the moral muscle to enable them to take a path so downright and final as this. The contemporary moral climate does not favor a faith as tough and fibrous as that taught by our Lord and his apostles. The delicate, brittle saints being produced in our religious hothouses today are hardly to be compared with the committed, expendable believers who once gave their witness among men, and the fault lies with our leaders.

They're too timid to tell the people all the truth. They're now asking men to give God that which costs them nothing. Our churches these days are filled, or one quarter filled, with a soft breed of Christians who must be fed on a diet of harmless fun to keep them interested.

About theology they know little. Scarcely any of them have read even one of the great Christian classics, but most of them are familiar with religious fiction and spine-tingling films. No wonder their moral and spiritual constitution is so frail.

Such can only be called weak adherence of a faith they never really understood." That's Tozer. And I like what E. Stanley Jones said. He has a book called Christ's Alternative to Communism.

He said, men do not reject Christianity, they simply render it innocuous. They would inoculate men with a mild form of Christianity so they'd be immune against the real thing. That's what's happened in the United States.

People are inoculated against Christianity with a mild form of it. They're immune to the real thing. What the Lord Jesus is looking for today is people who go to the Word and take his teachings literally, and obey them even if they don't see anyone else obeying them.

Now, most of us don't do this. Most of us look around, see what other people are doing, and model ourselves after other people. One of the students at Emmaus that I knew that made the best progress in the things of God was a young fellow that came.

When he was first saved, he was practically illiterate, and so bashful he could hardly meet people. He became a paratrooper down at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and he got saved down there, I think, in the Servicemen's Center. And he went to the Word of God, and if it said it, he was going to do it.

Whether anybody else was going to do it or not. And that guy went out overseas, and before you know it, he was preaching the gospel in French, Spanish, German, and a little Russian. Spent time in India, and really was greatly used of God.

He was illiterate when he was first saved, but he didn't stay that way long, and his life really packed a punch. The Lord is looking for people today who are tired of living self-centered lives, and who are aware that material things don't bring happiness. The Lord is looking for people who are aware that Christians are here for bigger business than to make money.

He's looking for disciples who hate the tyranny of the fashion parade, of the food fair, the social world, and the cult of the body beautiful. The Lord is looking for people who want reality in the Christian life. I think it's a sad thing that we often find more reality in the average communist than we do in the average Christian.

Isn't that right? George Verma says when he was first saved, he looked and looked and looked for men who were burning bushes, burning for Christ and not consumed, and he couldn't find any. That's what the Lord is looking for today. People are willing to do for political and social causes what they wouldn't do for the Christ of God, and they're willing to do for the dollar what they wouldn't do for Jesus.

People are willing to travel across oceans for standard oil, but they wouldn't cross an ocean for the gospel sake. It shows our utter lack of reality in the things of God. Some time ago, I spoke at a meeting and I was talking about young people overseas who had found reality in a life of commitment to the Savior, and after returning home, I received a letter from a girl that was sitting in the audience that day, and I asked her for permission to use that letter, and she said, sure, and she entitled the letter Reality.

How is it found? She said, during the past few days, we've been hearing of the courage, persecution, and sacrificial living of some young people in countries of Europe and Asia. They have found reality in the Christian life, and she capitalized reality and underlined it. They have found reality in the Christian life, something I and dozens of other young people have searched for for a long time, but I want that reality more than anything in the world.

Yet, I am trapped because we American young people have every luxury, every convenience, every opportunity to witness. There has ceased to be any challenge, if you know what I mean, nothing to fight for. I desire desperately, and she underlined the word desperately, I desire desperately to throw off all the things and selfish ambitions for the cause of Christ, but it seems a losing battle.

Do you know how this feels? It's a trap, a live devil-put trap which I can't seem to break through. I'm sick, sick, sick of living for self. I want and need a challenge, a chance to forget me and live for the Lord.

I'd give anything for the chance to be hungry for the sake of God, be imprisoned, persecuted, etc., anything, but here in the enlightened USA, there is no challenge, no opposition. Because of this, we young people can't help but be complacent and carnal. Please help.

There has to be all for God or nothing as far as I'm concerned. Is there an answer? Quite a letter, isn't it, to get from a young person in a assembly here in California in the 20th century. Okay, now I'd like to turn with you to Matthew chapter 6 and see some of the teaching of the Lord Jesus and see how revolutionary it is.

I don't guarantee you'll like it, but please don't be angry with me. I didn't say it, Jesus said it. Matthew chapter 6 verse 19.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye.

If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you, by worrying, can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin, and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not a raid like one of these.

Now if God so closed the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear, for after all these things the Gentiles seek, for your heavenly father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Now in this passage of scripture we have the very revolutionary teaching of the Lord Jesus about security. You might call it social security if you want.

And as far as this passage is concerned, for most Christians it might just as well not be in the Bible. You might just as well take a razor and cut it out of the Bible like the king in the old testament did with his penknife. He cut up the word of God.

For instance, Jesus said do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. So what do we do? We lay up treasures on earth. Why do we lay up treasures? Because you've got to be prudent.

Isn't that right? I mean you've got to use common sense, don't you? Common sense tells you to lay up treasures on earth. Jesus said don't lay up treasures on earth. Laying up treasures on earth is as contrary to the word of God as adultery or fornication.

The same Bible that forbids one forbids the other, doesn't it? But as I say, we've thought of 60 theological reasons why this verse doesn't mean what it says. Common sense tells us to lay up treasures on earth. Jesus tells us not to do it, so we go by common sense.

I'll never forget a prayer meeting in Belgium years ago, and dear Ray Lynch said that he said that when it comes to the things of God, common sense is often no better than rat poison. I thought that was pretty striking. I was brought up in a Scottish home, and you know the Scottish people have a reputation for thrift, and we were taught that wise bees save honey and wise men save money.

And you know it's amazing how that early instruction really sticks with you. And I went in the early part of my life realizing that the wise thing to do was lay up for the rainy day. You've got to do that, don't you? You've got to think of your future, and you've got to set aside money for your future, especially your years of retirement.

One writer said that God has no blessing for the man who esteems the rainy day above the present agony of souls. What does that mean? God has no blessing for the man who esteems the rainy day above the present agony of souls. That means if I go through life thinking more about my indefinite future than I do about perishing souls in the world today, God has no blessing for me.

And I think that's true. Another writer said, if we live for the rainy day, God will guarantee that we'll get it. Something to think about, isn't it? If we live for the rainy day, God will guarantee that we get it.

Jesus said, don't lay up treasures on earth. You say, but you know, I've got to have security, don't I? And that is a great word today, security. Well, if you look in the verse, the rest of the verse, you'll find that instead of having security, there are three nervous breakdowns in the verse.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. Three nervous breakdowns. I mean, you've got your treasure, and you should realize that when these words were spoken, that the people in Bible lands laid up their wealth in clothing.

Things haven't changed much. Clothing and money and coinage, you know. That's why he says, where moth doth corrupt.

A lot of people still do that. You go to a lot of homes today, and the closet looks like a miniature Peck and Peck department store, you know. Amazing, isn't it? People going on a vacation, and the whole back of their car is, there's a hanger on the back of their car, and it's suits and dresses from wall to wall.

How could they possibly use all that in a day? For moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. A good lesson for us to learn is, there's no security here in this world. As far as the world is concerned, there's no security.

Our only security is God. Once again, to go back to my boyhood, my mother got these little chrome banks for us, and we used to put our nickels and dimes and pennies in it, and when the bank was full, we'd traipse over to the local bank and deposit it. We built up a neat little sum of money, you know, saving our money.

Typical Scottish kids. And then the Depression came, and the banks all closed, and we lost it all. And my mother put her head down on the table and wept, and said she wished she had never thought of that.

It was really quite a lesson. It was a good lesson for me to learn early in life that this world doesn't hold security. And all those financiers who were playing the stock market at that time, they were jumping out of their offices on Wall Street and ending it all.

One day they were wealthy with a stock named Kruger and Toll, and the next day they realized there was nothing. There were no assets behind the stock. All they had was paper.

Worthless paper. And that's true today. Gold started going up, and so people all scrambled to buy gold.

And then gold started to go down, and people lost fortunes in gold. The same with diamonds. The same with silver.

Very erratic market. There's no security. You say, what about your money in the savings accounts? Every day your money's in the savings accounts, you're losing money with inflation.

At the present rate of inflation, they pay you, what, five and a quarter percent in a savings account, and inflation is what? Let's say ten percent. You're losing five percent every day it's in the savings account. Your money will buy that much less at the end of the time.

So Jesus says, don't lay up treasures. It's really very sound advice, as you would expect from the lips of the Holy Son of God. But we don't believe it is.

When you go to the average Christian assembly today, you'll find people are laying up treasures on a list. Hudson Taylor said he enjoyed the luxury of having few things to care for. And every year he used to take an inventory of his material things and see which ones he could dispose of, because people on a long journey should travel light.

We have certainly considered a very weighty subject matter today, and we have much to consider before the Lord. Now I'm sure some of you would like to hear that message again, and it is available to you on tape cassette. Please write to us for our free tape catalog at True Discipleship, Box 822, San Leandro, California, 94577.

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