

The Disciples of Christ

by

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The Second Coming

1 – What is a Disciple?

One of the earliest acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, on starting His great mission to mankind, was to challenge and call those who would be willing to become His followers. As a result they became known as His disciples. They are frequently described in this way in the four Gospels.

Towards the end of His mission, some three years later, one of His final acts was to commission these disciples to go out into the world in His Name. They were to “make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” They were to teach these new disciples to obey everything that the Lord Jesus had commanded them; and He gave them this promise, “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age”. You can read this in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 28 verses 19 and 20. Today we thank God that for almost two thousand years His willing servants have faithfully preached this message across the world. As a result of this, sinners are still responding to the call of Christ, and are becoming His disciples.

The New Testament of the Bible was written originally in the Greek language and the word disciple is very interesting. There are three Greek words used to describe it. The first of these is *akolutho*. This means to follow or to accompany. The second word is *mathetes*, and this means to learn, just as you would as a scholar or student. The third Greek word used to describe a disciple is *mimomai*. This has the meaning of mimicking, or imitating, or to wish to be like someone.

So, a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is one who learns from his teachings; is one who follows in his footsteps, and who, as a result, becomes one who imitates Christ’s way of life. In simple terms, I like to see it this way. A Christian disciple is an individual who, by personal choice, responds readily to the Lord Jesus Christ having heard His sweet call.

Then a Christian disciple is one who follows faithfully having recognised the Leader. Jesus Himself said “I am the light of the world, whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” You’ll find that in the Gospel of John chapter 8 verse 12.

Next, a disciple is one who learns lovingly, having found the perfect teacher. And the last characteristic of a disciple is one who imitates intensely, having seen in the Lord Jesus Christ the ideal example because He lived the only perfect life the world has ever seen. His was the only life which was well pleasing to God.

In the Gospel of John chapter 8 verses 31 and 32, the Lord Jesus said to the Jews who had believed on Him: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”. What a lovely, encouraging promise this is from the Master Himself. It’s just as true and as important for us who follow him today as it was then. We must note, however, that like many promises in the Bible, this one is conditional. He said “If you hold to my teaching”. In other words: You must - hear it, apply it, and live it out in your lives. Then you will be seen to be my disciples.

As we study the principles of discipleship, you will learn many practical lessons for your life as a Christian. Lessons to help you as you witness and work for our Master. Followers of Jesus were never promised an easy time. The Lord Himself trod a difficult pathway as He always sought to do the will of His Father Who had sent Him.

There are two more important things to learn about Christian discipleship. The first is THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLESHIP. Jesus Himself said, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 16 verse 24: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me".

The second important thing we learn about Christian discipleship is THE COMMITMENT AND COST that it calls for. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 18 verse 22 it tells us what Jesus said to a young ruler who came to Him enquiring as to how he could obtain eternal life. The Lord said to him: "Sell everything you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come follow me". That young man counted the cost involved and was not willing to pay it. He decided not to become a disciple and he went away sad. Someone once said: "To BECOME a Christian will cost YOU nothing, because the Saviour paid the full price of our salvation by the shedding of His precious blood on the cross of Calvary. BUT, for you TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE will cost you everything."

However, as well as the Challenge, Commitment and Cost of being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are many compensations. For the true disciple there is the experience of his presence as we follow him closely. There is the satisfaction and joy of seeking to bring glory to his name as we live for him, and there is the blessing that comes from knowing that we serve the Lord Christ.

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2 – Followers

Last time I explained some of the meanings of the word disciple as it's used in the Bible. We discovered that a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is, first of all, one who follows him. Then a disciple is one who learns from Christ, and lastly a disciple is one who imitates Christ. We learned that to imitate Christ is to model our lives on his life.

We are going to consider now the first of these descriptions in more detail as we look at being followers. In God's Word, the Bible, there are some very good examples of some who, by responding to God's call, willingly became His followers, or who followed the great servants of the Lord as they themselves followed Him. These worthy men and women followed lovingly and faithfully.

The first of these who comes to mind is Abraham whom we read about in chapter 12 of the book of Genesis. There it says that God told him to leave his country, people and family, and go to the land that God would show him. He was to leave not knowing where it was he was going to. But why? He was going because he was prepared to accept God's instruction and leading without question! God's promise to Abraham then was, "I will bless you and make you a blessing". Now God always keeps His promises, and so it is that we read in Genesis chapter 24 concerning Abraham when he was old that, "the Lord had blessed Abraham in every way". "God honours those who honour Him in every generation".

Another example is one of the twelve spies sent out by Moses to spy out the Promised Land. His name was Caleb and you can read about him in Joshua chapter 14 where he is speaking to Joshua, the new leader of the Children of Israel. He says: "I was 40 years old when I was sent to explore the land, and I brought back a report according to my convictions, but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people sink. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly". Because of this faithfulness Moses promised Caleb a special part of the land as an inheritance. Someone has said: "Oh to be like Caleb! One who followed the Lord with his whole heart!" May that be your prayer and mine today!

Perhaps the most striking example of dedicated following is seen in the story of Ruth the Moabitess. Her story is recorded in the Old Testament book which carries her name. Ruth married Mahlon, one of the two sons of Elimelech, a man of Bethlehem in Judah. Because of a famine Elimelech took his family into the country of Moab. This was a country whose people worshipped many different gods. It was whilst they were living in Moab that the two sons of Elimelech married. Naomi, Elimelech's wife, was a godly woman, and it is obvious that she introduced her daughter-in-law, Ruth, to Jehovah, the one true God. Sadly, during the ten years in Moab, both Elimelech and his two sons died. Because of this Naomi decided to leave Moab and return to her own land of Judah. Ruth and her sister-in-law Orpah determined to go with Naomi. On the journey back to Judah, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law "Go back each of you, to your mothers' home". At first they both resisted the idea, and weeping said to her, "No, we will go back with you to your people". But Naomi continued to plead with them not to accompany her any further.

The Bible story then tells us that “At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.” Will you note the contrast! Orpah kissed Naomi and went back, but Ruth clung to her and went on. Orpah went back Moab, to her people and to their gods, but Ruth went on to a new people and the true God of Israel. The detail of all that Ruth said to Naomi really sums up what true discipleship is. What she said was a statement of total commitment.

Let me quote her words to you: “Where you go - I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried with you.” And as if to emphasise this total commitment, Ruth said to her mother-in-law, “May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me”. The Bible then tells us that when Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her to return to Moab. Ruth was reaching out in faith to God and was prepared to take the tough demanding action required to be a true follower. Eventually, through her marriage to Boaz, Ruth became a channel through which God brought into this world His precious Son, the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. So, we see in the experience of Ruth, how God is prepared to bless those who listen to His Word and dedicate themselves to His cause.

True disciples of Jesus are those who are prepared to follow Him -even to give their lives for Him. Let me remind you of the words of the Lord Jesus Himself as recorded in Matthew chapter 16 verse 24: “If anyone will come after me, he must deny himself and follow Me”. May you, like Abraham, Caleb and Ruth be determined to wholeheartedly follow the Lord as His disciple.

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3 – Learners

Last time we centred our thinking upon the importance of following faithfully as disciples, having found in Jesus Christ the perfect leader. We looked at Abraham, Caleb and Ruth as examples from the Scriptures of those who followed the Lord diligently.

This time we look at the importance of LEARNING, remembering that Jesus said in Matthew chapter 11 verse 29: “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me”. For His followers HE was the total source of all knowledge and truth. You may remember that, in a previous talk in this series, we discovered that one of the words used for disciple in the original Greek of the New Testament was MATHETES. This means a student or a scholar. In

the case of a disciple of Christ this means one who is being taught by the supreme teacher. One of the Gospel writers, Mark, graphically describes this perfect teacher in his first chapter verses 21 and 22: “And when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at His teaching because He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the Law”.

In John’s Gospel chapter 3 we read about Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler who came to Jesus at night-time. He started his conversation with the Lord in this way: “We know that you are a teacher who has come from God”. Now both of these commendations speak for themselves. I expect, that like me, you have met good and bad teachers! But here the Word of God is describing the One Who is the master communicator.

The Bible also records the words of some who said of the Lord Jesus, ‘Never man spake like this man!’ So, the teaching of this master will always be -perfect - pertinent - purposeful - and - productive.

Having thought about the teacher, what about the things he taught? What IS the “curriculum of his school”? It has to do with such things as -humility - compassion - meekness - godliness - diligence and service. Its lessons are not just academic, they are practical! These lessons need to be practised in your daily life. You don’t necessarily have to be academically bright, or of a high intellectual standard to benefit from the lessons of Christ the supreme teacher. Let me quote what someone once said about this: “The dullest natural intellect may be, and is, rendered keen and perceptive towards God, by the indwelling Holy Spirit”. Before the Holy Spirit came at the time of Pentecost, the Lord Jesus Christ made this wonderful statement about His work: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching, My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father Who sent Me. All this I have spoken while still with you, but the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said to you”. That’s John 14 verses 23 to 26. What a wonderful promise this was to His disciples both then and now! And how we all need that ministry of God’s Holy Spirit!

As you seek to live as a Christian disciple, you will often find the way difficult as your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, and as he places obstacles in your way. Sometimes the circumstances of life can hinder us and cause us to falter and fail. It's because of this that we need the strength,

the sustenance and the guidance found in the Scriptures, God's Word. This lovely book is the only place where we are shown the One Who is the way, the truth and the life. I hope then, that you will realise, as a student in Christ's school, that He provides in His Word all that you need to help you in your endeavours to follow and to learn of him. As well as the Word of God, with its many lessons, we have as our tutor the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. He is described by the Lord Jesus in John's Gospel chapter 16 as being the Spirit of Truth, the One Who "will guide you into all truth. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is mine, and making it known to you".

Our learning in the school of Christ is an ongoing exercise. No student ever completes his or her studies! The wonderful thing is that the more we learn about our master, the more we will want to know. The apostle Peter, that well known early disciple and servant of Jesus Christ, had many lessons to learn in his life. Some of these he had to learn the hard way. His experiences taught him many things. Towards the end of his life Peter wrote these words to encourage others in the faith - "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ". That is indeed sound advice for all of us.

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4 – Imitators

This series of talks on the subject of Christian discipleship has taught us that a disciple is one who follows the Lord Jesus Christ faithfully and learns about him lovingly.

Now we are going to discover the third meaning of this word 'disciple' - the Greek word *Mimeomai*, which means to imitate. We actually get the English word 'mimic' from this word *Mimeomai*. In seeking to imitate

the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians try to pattern their lives on His life. A true disciple of Jesus then, will be one who imitates his life intensely. This can only come about as a result of following him closely and learning about him regularly. As the master's disciples, Christians are His representatives here upon earth. So, in your witness for Him you will need, as well as speaking about Him, to show Him in the way you live.

There's a song by Albert Orsborn which describes this well in these words:-

"Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me - all His wondrous compassion and purity. Oh, Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine, Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me".

In the letter to the Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 3 we are told that the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ) is "The radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of His being". The Amplified Version of the New Testament puts it this way: "He is the perfect imprint and very image of God's nature". Philip, one of His disciples, said to Jesus one day, "Lord, show us the Father", and Jesus replied "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father". I believe that, just as our Master portrayed the image of His Father, so we should endeavour to be like HIM. In this way others will see our Saviour as they look at us. We often hear it said that a child is 'the image of his father or mother'! I wonder do you, do I, reflect the very image of the Lord Jesus Christ as we try to imitate Him?

I once read about a Christian leader, a servant of Christ who was known for his devoutness and gracious manner of life. One day he called at a home on a pastoral visit to the family. His knock on the door of the house was answered by a little girl. On opening the door, and seeing the stranger she looked at him and then immediately ran inside saying "Oh mother come, Jesus is at the door!" That Christian man was, to quote from Second Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18, "Reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord and was being changed into the same image, from glory to glory". Paul, that great apostle to the Gentiles, wrote to the Corinthian believers in his First Letter chapter 11 verse 1: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ", or, as the Amplified Version of the New Testament has it:-"Pattern after me. Follow my example as I imitate and follow Christ the Messiah".

On one of his great missionary journeys Paul took the gospel to a place called Thessalonica. As a result of his visit many found the Saviour for themselves. Writing to these believers some time later, Paul said to them: "You know how we lived among you, for your sake, and you became imitators of us and of the Lord; and so you became examples (or a model) to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you and your faith in God has become known everywhere". This passage of Scripture,

which is found in the First Letter to the Thessalonians chapter 1 verses 5 to 10, establishes a pattern for our evangelical witness. You will remember that the Lord Jesus said "You shall be witnesses to me". So let's discover the pattern given to us in this passage:

First: You welcomed the message given by the Holy Spirit.

Second: You turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God.

Third: You became, in your lives, imitators of the Lord.

Fourth: You sounded out the Lord's message to others.

Fifth: Your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Let me summarise this for you in this way:

YOU HEARD OF CHRIST - YOU BELIEVED IN CHRIST -YOU ARE SEEKING TO LIVE

LIKE CHRIST and YOU PREACH CHRIST.

Paul's words in verse 8 of this chapter are a wonderful testimony to the effectiveness of following this pattern: "We, the preachers, have no need to say anything about your faith, and your witness, for in every place these things have been seen". May our prayer today be, that others may see OUR faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we may be faithful in our witness to His saving power and grace.

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5 – A Conversation

We are going to look at an important and interesting conversation that took place between the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples. This conversation is recorded for us in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16 verses 13 to 26. If you have a Bible or a New Testament, you'll find it helpful to have it open at that passage.

There are four things for us to discover together in these verses, and here they are:

- Verses 13 to 19: A vital question

- Verse 21: A clear explanation

- Verses 22 and 23: Peter's misunderstanding

- Verses 24 to 26: Jesus' Explanation

So, first of all let's look at verses 13 to 19 and see the VITAL QUESTION that Jesus had for his disciples.

We read in verse 13: "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi He asked His disciples..." Do note the term 'His disciples' - it's used four times in this section. We must always be aware of the privilege and the responsibility of being known as 'His disciples'. Now to the question that Jesus asked them: "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" In replying to the Lord, the disciples quoted the answers given by others. So in verse 15 Jesus says: "But who do YOU say I am?" Peter then gives this wonderful answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". This was a very personal acknowledgement, appreciation and acceptance by Peter of the true identity of his Lord and Master. Peter as an individual could see what the nation of Israel could not see, as our Saviour lived and worked among them.

The reply that Jesus gave to Peter is important: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven". If you would be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, you must start at this point! In the Gospel of John chapter 20 verse 31 we read: "These are written that you might believe that

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His Name".

If, as you read this little booklet, you are not yet a Christian, but would like to become one, may I give you the words of the apostle Paul found in his letter to the Romans chapter 10 verses 9 and 10:

"If you will confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved".

So, we see the importance of answering this vital question the Lord Jesus asked His disciples : “Who do YOU say that I am?”

We come now to verse 21 of Matthew chapter 16, and the second thing to be discovered in these verses.

Here the Lord is giving to His disciples a clear explanation of his true mission. This was a mission undertaken in obedience to His Father, God. In the three years of His work as the perfect servant of His Father, Jesus lived as no other could live. He taught as no other could teach, and He healed and restored life as no one else ever could. But He now gives to His disciples the main reason for His leaving His Father and coming down to this world. The Lord uses three strong sayings to make the disciples understand the importance of His true mission.

First, He said: “The Son of Man MUST go to Jerusalem”.

Then, He said: “He MUST suffer many things, at the hands of the Elders, Chief Priests and Teachers of the Law”.

And lastly, He said: “He MUST be killed and on the third day be raised to life”.

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinful people was an absolute necessity. His death was a sacrifice by which He took our place as our substitute and by which He made atonement for our sins. The death of Christ was the only way that the righteous demands of God could be fully met, and the sins of the world taken away.

So, here is another vital lesson for you to learn if you are a true disciple of the Lord Jesus. He was about to demonstrate once again, that if you would serve God faithfully you must do so in total obedience to his will.

We come now to verses 22 and 23 of Matthew chapter 16 and to our third point. This is Peter’s reaction to the Lord’s statement. In verse 22 we read: “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ‘Never, Lord,’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’”. Having lived and worked with his Master for almost three years, Peter could not bear the thought of losing Him, and certainly not by such an awful death. But notice the swift reply of the Lord to Peter: “Get behind me Satan!” He was addressing Satan directly, and telling him not to tempt Peter by putting such thoughts into his mind. The Lord knew that Satan was directly opposed to Him going to the cross so that He might die for sinners. Satan knew this would result in total victory over him, and over sin and death.

Jesus then emphasised to His disciples the importance of always understanding the essential difference between God’s thinking and man’s thinking. Peter needed to learn that lesson, and so do we! Eventually Peter did come to a full understanding of the death, burial and resurrection of his Lord and Master. Many years later he wrote in First Peter chapter 4 verse 18: “For Christ died for our sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God”.

What a wonderful statement with which to end this study!

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6 – The Disciples' Charter

If you have a Bible or a New Testament will you turn with me again to Matthew's Gospel chapter 16. Today I'm looking at verses 24 to 26. In this chapter we have recorded an important conversation which Jesus had with His disciples. In verses 24 to 26 we read these words:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it".

In this statement the Lord Jesus was presenting to His followers his charter of discipleship. It was in itself a very clear challenge to all who were willing to hear it, and it comes over just as clearly to each one of His followers today!

This CHARTER OF DISCIPLESHIP indicates four particular requirements for those who would be true disciples. Here they are:-

First: "If anyone will come after Me" - that calls for DECISION.

Second: "Let him deny himself" - that calls for DISCIPLINE.

Third : "And take up his (or her) cross" - that calls for DETERMINATION.

Fourth : "And follow Me" - that calls for DEDICATION AND DEVOTION.

So, we have: Decision, Discipline, Determination, Dedication and Devotion. Let's look at these requirements thoughtfully and in some detail as we are discovering what it means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus called first of all for DECISION. He said "If anyone will come after Me". The dictionary says that 'to make a decision' is to make a deliberate choice. When the Lord started His mission on earth, He called and challenged men to become His disciples. The call of the fishermen brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, is an example.

Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee one day and he said to them: "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men." And the Bible says, "At once they left their nets and followed Him". In other words, they made a decision, or a deliberate choice. I sometimes marvel at the immediate response of these ordinary men to the call of Christ. We must remember that Jesus never forced Himself or His teachings on anyone. He clearly described who He was, and what He had to offer to those who would believe in Him. He left the decision to them, as to how they would personally react.

There's a very good illustration of this in the book of the Revelation chapter 3 verse 20. The Lord is speaking to the church in Laodicea and He says to that church: "Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat

with him and he with me". So, the decision on whether to open the door or to keep it closed always belongs to the hearer! Inviting the Lord Jesus Christ into your life is the most important decision that you can ever make! If you haven't yet made that decision you can do so now. Acknowledge that you are a sinner, and that Jesus gave His life upon the cross to save you. Reach out in faith now and receive Him, and if you make that decision, write to us and we will gladly send you a free booklet to help you further.

After calling for decision, Jesus went on to say: "Let him (or her) deny himself". So DISCIPLINE is the second requirement of Christ's charter for discipleship. Matthew Henry, a well-known Bible commentator of the past, once said that "self-denial is the law of admission into Christ's school." If we are honest with ourselves, we all know that self-denial is one of the most difficult disciplines to practice. Naturally, we find it easier to assert and project ourselves, often at the expense of others. We can learn a great lesson on this from John the Baptist.

He understood the principle of self-denial, and he practised it to the full. In John's Gospel chapter 3, speaking about the Christ, he says:-"The One Who comes from above is above all. He must become greater than I, and I must become less". This position of humility before the Master is one which every disciple must assume.

In looking at the Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect example for His followers, Paul, that great bond-servant of his master, says in his Letter to the Philippians chapter 2 verses 4 and 5:- "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude (or mind) should be the same as that of Christ Jesus".

This passage of Scripture, which speaks about the wonderful humility of God's Son, is one that every disciple of His should read. It is one that you should use regularly as a 'blueprint' or plan for your Christian life. Paul writes about the Lord Jesus, "Making himself nothing - taking the position of a servant - humbling Himself, and becoming obedient to death." No wonder the passage goes on to say:- "Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place, and gave Him the Name that is above every Name." We serve as Christian disciples a truly wonderful Saviour and Lord!

So, we've discovered that in His charter of discipleship, the Lord Jesus Christ calls for decision and discipline.

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7 – Taking up the Cross

In my last talk we looked at the Lord Jesus Christ's 'Charter of Discipleship' as found in Matthew chapter 16 verse 24. We saw that in His statement "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," the Lord was calling for five things: Decision, Discipline, Determination, Dedication and Devotion.

Having looked at the first two of these, we now come to the third one which is DETERMINATION, and linked with this the phrase: "and take up his cross." This will be the real test for anyone who would be a disciple of the Lord Jesus because it has to do with: Sacrifice, Hardship, Persecution - Rejection - Submission and Suffering.

I once read that Jesus Christ loves His followers far too well, to hide from them the cost and consequence of discipleship. So He never veils the hardness of the way, nor tones down the moral requirement, in order to gain followers. So we hear Him say, in Matthew chapter 10 verse 38, "Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me, is not worthy of Me." And, in Luke chapter 14 verse 27, "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple."

To the Lord Jesus Christ, the cross meant essentially His total submission to the will of God His Father. He said in John chapter 6 verse 38, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent Me." And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, anticipating the awful prospect of the cross of Calvary, we hear Him say: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me; yet not as I will, but as you will." Taking up the cross then to the disciple of Jesus can mean taking up the will of God - even if it leads to suffering or even death. Some of the disciples listening to Jesus on this occasion, including Peter and John, would eventually lay down their lives for Him.

Some years ago I read this statement which has been a help to me: "Every disciple must take up that which the wise God has made his cross. we must not make crosses for ourselves, but must submit ourselves to those which God has made for us. our rule is not to go a step out of the way of duty, either to meet a cross or to miss one, but we must be prepared to take them up when they are laid in our way."

Before we leave this important point, we need to remember that in bearing the cross Disciples of Christ follow His supreme example. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 puts it this way, speaking of the Lord: "Who endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God. Consider Him, who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

We now come to the final challenge in Christ's Charter of Discipleship. Two words of great importance spoken by Jesus: "Follow me." They remind us again that our discipleship centres totally upon Him. He is the one who said: "Come to me" - "Learn of me" - "Abide in me"-and "Follow me." I have suggested that this calls for dedication and devotion, and these are two words which are closely related to each other. The word dedication is defined in the dictionary as 'devotion to a vocation', or 'having single-minded loyalty.' So, the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians chapter 1, says, "For to me to live is Christ." In

other words Christ is my total motivation; everything I am, have and can do is dedicated to His cause. Such single-minded loyalty is in itself devotion. What a word this is! It means to consecrate - give up oneself, one's life and efforts to a person, purpose or pursuit. To be devoted is to be zealously loyal or loving.

Another definition of the word 'devotion' is : Strong attachment out of ardent love. The lesson then is very clear. We will only ever follow the Lord faithfully and effectively, if love for Him is our priority. Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, had to learn this lesson the hard way, by painful experience. In Matthew chapter 19 verse 27, he said to his Master, "We have left everything to follow you." In Matthew chapter 26 verse 35, just before the Lord Jesus was arrested, Peter also said to Him, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." A little later, in verse 58 we read that when they took Jesus away, Peter followed at a distance. But, when he was really put to the test, just as the Lord had predicted, "Before the cock crows you will disown me three times." The clear lesson from this, for you and me, is that promises are easily made, but carrying them out can be something quite different! The Bible goes on to tell us that after this Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Shortly afterwards the Lord Jesus gave His life on the cross for sinful mankind. He was buried, and on the third day was raised triumphantly from the dead. Then he appeared to the disciples on a number of occasions, and one of these appearances is recorded in John chapter 21. In verses 15 to 19 the Lord speaks directly to Peter. Three times He asks, "Do you really love Me?" Some say that here the Lord was graciously giving Peter the opportunity to put right his three denials of his Master. Peter twice replies, "You know that I love you!" The third time he says, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!" The Lord then says to him, "Feed my sheep." He is to become a shepherd to his Master's flock. He is given a pastoral role in Christ's church.

Then the Lord describes how Peter will eventually lose his life for his Lord, and He tells him that "in this you will glorify God."

The Lord's final words to Peter are those two important words we thought about earlier: "Follow me."

True, dedicated following will never come about out of a sense of duty or obligation to the Lord. It must be the result of undying love for Him Who loved you and gave Himself for you.

The Second Coming

8 – Characteristics of Dorcas

We have looked so far in our study of Christian discipleship at its Challenge - its Charter - its Cost and its Commitment. I would like us now to consider some of its Characteristics. One dictionary definition of this word tells us that these are:- “The distinctive qualities of a person, thing or group. They are in themselves distinguishing features which are obvious to others.” A Christian disciple should stand out - never to bring honour or glory to himself, but rather to the One he follows. The disciple will be known for his particular way of life. He or she will have priorities and perspectives which are different to the ambitions of this world.

In His wonderful sermon on the mount - recorded for us in Matthew chapters five to seven - the Lord Jesus describes in detail those qualities and practices of life which His disciples should evidence in following Him.

In a previous talk about learning in the school of Christ, we thought about the curriculum of His school. We discovered that this had to do with the Christlike qualities of humility - compassion - meekness - godliness - diligence and service. That these lovely characteristics were seen in the immediate disciples of the Lord Jesus is evident from the Gospel records and from the Acts. His teachings had clearly borne fruit in their lives, as well as in the lives of others. We have two wonderful examples of this in Acts chapter 9. The first is a man called Ananias, and the second a woman called Dorcas. Both of these were dedicated followers of the Master, and are highly commended for their faith and way of life. In Acts chapter 9 verse 10 we read that: “In Damascus there was a DISCIPLE named Ananias.” And in verse 36: “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, or Dorcas.” So, in both instances they were privileged to be known as disciples.

Now, we must recognise that privileges in the Christian life will always carry with them clear responsibilities. In His teachings Jesus once said this: “By their fruit you shall know them”, and that is always the case. How then did these two disciples, Ananias and Dorcas, portray true discipleship in their lives? This time we'll consider Dorcas whose story is told in Acts chapter 9 verses 36 to 43. It's a sad story to start with because it is recorded that she became sick and died. Peter, the apostle, is in a nearby place, and he is sent for. When he arrives Dorcas is raised from death under the hand and power of God. The story has a happy ending, and as a result many others believed in the Lord Jesus.

The account of this sweet lady's life as a disciple is most instructive. Verse 36 says that “she was always doing good and helping the poor.” Another version says “she was full of good works.” Here then was a disciple who showed the strength of her faith by her works. James, in chapter 2 verse 17 of his letter, tells us that faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. Dorcas was like a tree that is full of good fruit. You know it is often the case that many of us in the Christian church can be full of good words, but empty and barren when it comes to good WORKS. Dorcas was a great doer rather than a great talker. The old saying that “Actions speak louder than words” is very true.

We also discover in this passage that Dorcas is commended not only for what she GAVE to those in need, but also for what she did for them. She was commended not only for her

godliness, but also for her compassion. All this flowed from her love as a Christian for her neighbours. Note too that she was always doing good. Hers was a persistent, an ongoing, activity for the good of others. The result of this was that she made a tremendous impact, as a Christian disciple, upon the people amongst whom she lived. It says in verse 39 that when Peter was taken up to the room where Dorcas lay dead, that all the widows stood around him, and showed him the robes and other clothing that she had made while she was still with them. How like her Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, this lady was. Peter, in a sermon recorded for us in Acts chapter 10 verse 38, says of Christ: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him." I have the distinct feeling that Dorcas, a true disciple of her compassionate Lord, by her practical testimony and love for others, preached the gospel so effectively that many of her friends and neighbours believed in her Saviour and became His disciples too. May you learn from the life and work of Dorcas, such a compassionate and dedicated disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Second Coming

9 - The Characteristics of Ananias

Now we are going to look at the record of the man Ananias, a disciple from Damascus. His story is found in Acts chapter 9 verses 10 to 18, and in Acts chapter 22 verses 6 to 16. I recommend that you make a prayerful study of both these passages yourself at your leisure.

So, what can this godly man, Ananias, teach us today about discipleship in practice? To discover that, we'll observe five things which characterised him as a disciple of Jesus Christ. First of all we see that he was a "Witnessing Disciple". In Acts chapter 22 we have Paul's account of his own wonderful conversion. He tells how during the three days after he was made blind by the brilliant light from heaven, he was visited by Ananias of Damascus. Now note carefully how Paul describes this disciple. "He was (says Paul), a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there." In other words he lived his life by God's book, and earned the respect of his neighbours by his godly living. Let's always remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in

Acts chapter 1 verse 8. He said to His disciples, who were about to witness His ascension into heaven, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Ananias was a good example in witnessing first in the place where he lived, so that all knew where his allegiance lay. So, we see that Ananias was a witnessing disciple.

The second thing we discover about this man Ananias is that he was a "Waiting Disciple". In Acts chapter 9 verse 10 we read: "The Lord called to him in a vision - 'Ananias!' Yes, Lord, he answered." Another Bible version puts it this way: "Behold I am here Lord." I believe there's another important lesson here for all who follow the Lord Jesus. We must make sure that we are available for the Lord when He wants us. It's possible that sometimes we are so busy in our lives that when the Lord wants to use us in His service we can't be found! It was not so with Ananias. He was waiting, ready and willing when the Lord called him. So, we see that Ananias was a "Waiting Disciple".

Thirdly we discover that he was a "Wary Disciple". In verse 11 of Acts chapter 9, we are told that the Lord told him to go to the house of one called Judas, and to ask for a man from Tarsus, named Saul, for he was praying. In verse 13 Ananias answers: "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to saints in Jerusalem. He has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

Now I'm using the word 'wary' to describe Ananias because it means to be careful or guarded in one's actions. There are times when, as disciples with the Lord's work to do, we need to stop and think carefully, and consider the situation before we act. Someone has called this the practice of spiritual common-sense! We see then, that Ananias was a "Wary Disciple".

Next, will you observe that Ananias was a "Willing Disciple". Still in Acts 9 and at verse 15 we read: "But the Lord said to Ananias 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel.'" Will you note the strong commission of the Lord here - "GO!" No more questions or doubts! Ananias reacted

immediately. Verse 17 tells us: "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it." Having received total assurance from the Lord, he was prepared willingly to comply. The Bible has many examples of those who showed willingness when the Lord called them. In Acts chapter 8 verse 26, Philip the evangelist was working for the Lord in Samaria. An angel appeared to him and told him to leave what he was doing and to go south to Gaza. Verse 27 says: "And he arose and went." As a result of his willingness an important statesman from Ethiopia was wonderfully converted. May you and I be prepared to respond readily to the Lord's directives in our lives! I trust that you will be a willing disciple of Christ.

We come now to the fifth characteristic of this man Ananias, and we will discover that he was a "Warm Disciple". Verse 17 of Acts chapter 9 says: "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, Who appeared to you, has sent me so that you may see again, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again."

What an occasion and experience for both of them! Ananias recognised in Saul a new babe in Christ who would need warmth and tender care. The lesson for us is clear. We all have the responsibility to help and encourage by love and example, those who are young in the faith. So, may you and I be warm disciples of our loving Master.

The Second Coming

10 – Some More Teaching

For the remainder of our study on “Christian Discipleship” I want you to look with me at the final teachings of the Lord Jesus about this very important subject. These will be found in the Gospel of John chapters 13 to 16. Chapter 12 of John’s Gospel records the end of the public witness of our Saviour. Sadly we read in verse 37 of that chapter that “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe.” How this reminds us of John’s words in chapter 1 verses 10 to 13: “He was in the world, and though the world was made by Him, the world did not recognise Him. He came to His own but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become the children of God. Children, born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

As you read through this study are you a believer? It’s possible to know all about the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet not know Him personally. In John chapter 3 verse 16 we read those wonderful words of our Saviour “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” You can become a believer, and a disciple or follower of the Lord Jesus right now - just where you are. You do this by confessing to God that you are a sinner, and are willing to turn away from your sin. Recognise that Jesus died on the cross to save sinners, and that He is waiting with arms outstretched to receive you as you come to Him by faith.

So, we come now to the Lord’s last instruction to His own disciples, as recorded in John chapters 13 to 16. This is often called “The upper room ministry.” By way of introduction can I suggest that in Chapter 13 we discover “The Master’s Example”, and in Chapter 14 “The Master’s Enlightenment.” In Chapter 15 we discover “The Master’s Expectation”, and in Chapter 16 “The Master’s Encouragement.”

As we go through these chapters, in which the Master is teaching His disciples privately, we’ll find that He is preparing them in four ways.

First, for the lives they were to live after his departure.

Second, for the testimony they were to maintain in a needy world.

Third, for the service they were to carry out as His representatives.

And fourth, for the problems and persecutions they would experience as his followers.

Let’s consider now the first of those headings: “The Master’s Example”. You’ll find this in John chapter 13 verses 1 to 17. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus knew that His hour was come. In other words, here was the whole point and purpose of His unique, all embracing mission to mankind. The shadow of the cross was before Him. He was about to depart from this world to return to His Father. Verse 3 goes on to say, “And knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands...” What a statement that is! It includes: All authority - All power - All honour and All exaltation. And yet the verse continues and tells us that Jesus got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist and after that,

He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet. He, the Master, stooped to serve His servants! We see then that Jesus commenced His teaching with an act of incomparable humility, selfless love and exemplary service.

The washing of feet like this was an old Jewish custom. It was also a ceremonial feature in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple service. This washing by the Lord Himself was designed to teach the disciples two things about the Christian experience. First, the need for cleansing from sin. Second, the need to serve one another with humility. We are reminded by John in his first letter chapter 1 verse 7 that: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses or purifies us from all sin." That cleansing is a once for all action, and it comes about at the time of new birth. However, you must also remember, that even as you seek to live for our Lord and Master, your feet, as it were, will be soiled every day with sin. So you need regularly to be washed by the water of the Word of God. You and I must recognise the vital importance of reading and applying the Scriptures to our lives every day.

Before we leave this lovely example of our Master, listen again to His words in verse 12: "Do you understand what I have done for you", He asked them. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master. Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them."

Finally we discover in verse 34 these words of the Lord Jesus: "A new command I give you - love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." With these challenging words of Jesus Christ I close this talk, trusting that God will bless you as you seek to be a faithful disciple.

The Second Coming

11 – Enlightenment

We look now at Chapter 14 and at the “Master’s Enlightenment”. Someone once said “It is a chapter of precious promises.” Promises for the future, and promises for the present. We discover first of all in the opening statement of verse 1 the loving concern of the Master for His own disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and also in Me.” I cannot think of a better basis for our trust than placing it in God and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus then goes on to give a clear promise that one day He will come back again for His own people. In this lovely statement in verses 1 to 3, there is comfort- “Let not your hearts be troubled”; there is certainty - “If I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL come back and take you to be with Me”; and there is also consummation (or completion) - “That you also may be where I am.” What a wonderful prospect there is in this promise for every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ - a future eternally secure!

Thomas, one of the Lord’s disciples, then asks one of his keen, penetrating questions. Thomas is often criticised for his apparent doubting, but we need to remember that some of the Lord’s great statements result from Thomas’s questions. So, he says (in verse 5): “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me.”

This is one of the great texts of the New Testament which makes clear the way of salvation. The Lord Jesus is saying:

IF YOU ARE SEEKING - I AM THE WAY.

IF YOU WOULD BE SURE - I AM THE TRUTH

IF YOU WANT SATISFACTION - I AM THE LIFE

IF YOU WANT A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD - NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, EXCEPT THROUGH ME."

In John chapter 17 verse 3, Jesus said: “This is life eternal that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom you have sent.” So, in verses 6 to 14 of John chapter 14, as the Lord Jesus enlightens His disciples, we see “The Revelation of the Father”.

Now we come to verse 15 where the Lord says: “If you love Me, you will obey what I command.” He goes on to say - in verse 21: “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love Him, and show myself to him.” Here then, we have “The Revelation of the Son” to the Christian believer. You will note, won’t you, the two principal requirements for this revelation - LOVE ME and OBEY ME. So, if you desire to know your Master better, your love for Him must grow stronger, and your obedience to Him must be greater.

In verse 16 there is another promise. It is the promise of the gift from God of His Holy Spirit - the Comforter or Counsellor - to be with you for ever. Do note again that Jesus says “The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him, nor knows Him; but you know Him,

for He lives with you, and will be IN you.” The disciples already knew of the existence and work of the Holy Spirit, but it was at Pentecost that He would come upon them and live in them. You can read about this in the Acts chapter 2. In this connection we have another precious promise in verse 18 of John 14: “I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you.” Here then is the third revelation to the disciples: “The Revelation of the Holy Spirit”. The disciples would lose the physical presence of their Master, but in His place the Holy Spirit would minister to them. He would have a threefold ministry: A ministry of comfort -A ministry of guidance and A ministry of teaching. This would be an ongoing ministry. Verse 16 again - “He will be with you forever.” The Spirit of God is not just an occasional helper. He is One Who abides, and Who by His presence and companionship, gives encouragement, strength and support.

He is also called “The Spirit of Truth.” In a world of darkness, devilry and deception, man’s great need is the truth. The Lord Jesus had already said that He is the truth, and He came into the world to reveal the truth. We read in the first Letter of John chapter 5 verse 6, “It is the Spirit Who testifies because the Spirit is the truth”, and His great theme is Christ, Himself the truth!

We come now to the end of John chapter 14. It closes with a word of comfort - just as it opened with one. Here we have the promise of peace for the disciples. Verse 27 reads: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.” Jesus is not simply giving them a farewell message. The peace here is a bequest and not just freedom from anxiety. This peace that Jesus left his disciples has to do rather with all that makes for mental and spiritual welfare. Notice the emphasis on MY peace - the peace of Christ. This peace is from heaven and is independent of outward circumstances. Paul, in Philippians chapter 4 verse 7 tells us that it is the “peace that transcends all understanding, and guards the heart and the mind in Christ Jesus.”

So, we’ve discovered that John chapter 14 contains many precious promises for the disciples. Promises of comfort and consolation from their soon departing Master. His promises are just as applicable to you as a disciple of the Lord Jesus today.

The Second Coming

12 – Your Kingdom Come

For our next study I would like you to look in John's Gospel chapter 15 at some more of Christ's teaching for His disciples. In the previous studies we've looked at "The Master's Example in chapter 13, and at "The Master's Enlightenment" in chapter 14. Now, in chapter 15 we have the subject of "The Master's Expectation".

This expectation is seen clearly in verse 8 of John chapter 15 where Jesus says: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." The Master's expectation, then, is fruitfulness in the lives of His followers. I'm going to say more about this later, but first let us note the words of the Lord in verse 1: "I am the Vine and my Father is the gardener." The disciples, being of the nation of Israel, would probably have wondered why the Lord would make such a statement. They would have been taught that Isaiah the prophet had said: "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight." You'll find that in Isaiah chapter 5 verse 7. And, in Psalm 80 v.8, the psalmist writes of his God: "You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land." Here the psalmist is again speaking about the nation of Israel. But, if you read on in Psalm 80, verse 16 says: "Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire, at your rebuke your people perish." Sadly, the nation of Israel did not come up to God's expectations for them. However, in the Lord Jesus Christ God had ALL His expectations fulfilled. He is the true and perfect vine. So, in verse 5 of this chapter, Jesus says again to His disciples: "I am the vine, YOU are the branches." This is wonderful teaching!

As the vine, Christ is the only source of our lives as disciples. The Lord Jesus is the very essence of spiritual life, energy and fruitfulness. It is from Him alone that these can be possessed and produced. He goes on to say: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit." What does it mean to 'remain' or to 'abide' in Christ?

It means, exercising the will, and it is a voluntary and conscious perseverance.

Then Jesus makes another important statement. He says: "Without Me, or apart from Me, you can do nothing." Little wonder then that the apostle Paul says in one of his Letters: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." The disciples knew that the Lord was about to leave them. Their world was about to be turned upside down. So here the Lord says to them - Rely on everything I have told you. Stay true to Me. Live in my love, and if you do this your lives will produce fruit. In Romans chapter 7 verse 4 we are told: "You belong to Christ in order that you might bear fruit to God." In Philippians chapter 1 v.11 Paul prays that the believers there might be filled with the fruit of righteousness, that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." And Paul has a similar prayer for the Colossian believers in chapter 1 verse 10 of that letter. He prays that they might live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God." Someone has said, "No one can be a branch in Christ, or a living member of His body, who does not bear fruit." I find it very challenging to think about the statement in verse 1 of John chapter 15 where Jesus said "My Father is the gardener." This

statement tells me that God is interested in every plant growing in His garden. You see He has placed us there for HIS glory!

In Ephesians chapter 1 verses 8 to 10 we are reminded that it is by grace that we have been saved, through faith, and that is not from ourselves, it's the gift of God. It is not by works, so that we cannot boast. For we are GOD'S workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

God, then, wants to see the results of His grace in your life and in my life. These will be seen as we show in our lives what Paul calls 'The Fruit of the Spirit.' You will find nine examples of these fruits of the Spirit in the Letter to the Galatians chapter 5. They can be divided into three groups: The first three are basic GODWARD fruits, those of LOVE, JOY and PEACE. The second three are BENEVOLENT fruits, they are outward to others, and are LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS and GOODNESS. The last three fruits of the Spirit are MORAL fruits. These result from self-control and are FAITHFULNESS, MEEKNESS and TEMPERANCE. These, then, are to be characteristics of those who are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are fruits which, when seen in our lives, will bring pleasure to God and honour to His name.

And now a final thought on this subject of fruitfulness. Note again the words of the Master in verse 10 of our chapter: "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." Jesus summarises His teaching on being fruitful in verse 16 where he says: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit. Fruit that will last!"

In the Acts of the Apostles we have the record of the progress of the disciples who had listened to this teaching of Christ in John 15. As they spread the gospel, they saw thousands converted and brought into the Christian church as true believers in the Saviour. Those first disciples of the Lord Jesus did indeed bear much fruit to His glory. So may you also, listen to and obey His words, and seek to serve Him faithfully, and be fruitful as you follow Him as a disciple.

The Second Coming

13 – Encouragement

We've been looking at the teaching of the Lord Jesus as found in the Gospel of John chapters 13 to 16. In chapter 13 we discovered Christ's EXAMPLE, and in chapter 14 His ENLIGHTENMENT. In chapter 15 we saw that the Master taught His followers that His expectation of them was that they bear fruit in their lives. For this last study, we look at chapter 16 and discover how the Lord sought to ENCOURAGE His disciples. We will find that He does this through His teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus was about to leave them, and so the minds of the disciples were focused on this, rather than on the promised coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus encourages them and says to them: "I tell you the truth. It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you." In love and patience, Jesus promised His disciples that the intense sadness they felt with the prospect of His leaving them, would be only for a short time. After this, with the comfort of the indwelling Holy Spirit, they would be full of joy instead of grief, and full of power instead of weakness. He promised them that they would not be left as orphans with no one to care for them. That's in chapter 14 verse 18.

It has been well said, that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, not only ministers sympathy, but is the one who imparts strength. Not only does He bring pity in sorrow, He also brings power in service. So, having assured the disciples that the Holy Spirit would certainly come, Jesus goes on to describe what the Spirit would do. You will find this in verses 8 to 15 of John chapter 16. First, He taught them that the Holy Spirit would have a work in the world at large related to its sinfulness and need. Then He told them that He would have a special ministry for the disciples themselves in bringing them truth and assurance. Will you discover first of all, that aspect of the work of the Spirit of God which has to do with the world at large. In verse 8 Jesus said: "When He comes He will convict the world of guilt - in regard to sin, and righteousness, and judgement." What Jesus was really saying was this: You, my disciples, will receive the Holy Spirit, and through you the Spirit will undertake His mission of convicting, convincing and converting sinful, unrighteous men and women to Jesus Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we see this happening time and time again as these disciples witnessed to their faith, and as they preached the live-giving good news of Jesus Christ. Dear fellow disciple of Christ, remember that you are a present-day channel through which the Holy Spirit of God is able to work for the blessing of those who are dying in their sins. So, through you and me the Holy Spirit has a ministry to the world at large.

But He also has a ministry to the followers, the disciples, of the Lord Jesus. Note the Master's words in verse 13 of this chapter: "When He the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into ALL TRUTH." All truth is a very comprehensive promise. It has to do with all that you as a Christian will ever need spiritually. In an earlier talk

in this series, we discovered the wonderful truth that the Holy Spirit is a personal tutor Who lives in every disciple of Jesus Christ. In these verses the Master says of the Spirit: "He will speak only what He hears. He will tell you what is to come, and He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." I love that phrase - "He will bring

glory to me.” Jesus was about to bring glory to His Father by His obedience that would take Him to the awful death of the cross. So too, the Spirit would glorify Christ by making clear the great significance of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. There is a lesson for US in this that we should, in all we do for our Master, seek only His glory and never our own.

The Lord goes on to talk about some more encouragements that would ease the distress of His departure from them. In verse 16 He says: “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a while you will see me.” And in verse 22, “Now is the time of your grief, but I will see you again, and no one will take away your joy!”

Jesus was, of course, referring here to His resurrection appearances one of which John tells us about in chapter 20 verse 20: “He showed them His hands and His side, and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” I am certain that that sight of their risen Lord never left them! Like all Christians, those first disciples would live for the day when they would be in the presence of their Lord for ever. What a prospect that is for all who love the Saviour and long to see His lovely face! This encouragement then was that they would see Him again.

We find another encouragement in verses 23 and 24 of John 16. “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive.” Prayer is the great privilege of every Christian believer. God speaks to US through His word - the Bible. We speak to HIM in prayer. There is a hymn which puts it this way: “What a privilege to carry EVERYTHING to God in prayer.”

The final encouragement for the disciples is in verse 33. Jesus says: “I have told you these things so that in me you might have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world!” In His life on earth the Lord Jesus Christ had shown that in Him truth and righteousness had overcome the evil influences of the world. Very soon He would go to the cross and there totally defeat Satan, the world and death. His would be a total victory, and here He promises that HIS victory would be the victory of His devoted followers. This then is the victory that overcomes the world. What an encouragement for you today as a disciple of the Saviour!

So we come to the end of this series of talks about Christian Discipleship. My prayer for you is that you will continue to FOLLOW FAITHFULLY, LEARN LOVINGLY and IMITATE INTENSELY as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.