

6. Discipling the “Ordinary” (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

Biblical material: Luke 2:21–28; Matt. 15:32–39; Matt. 16:13–17; Mark 1:16-18; Luke 12:6, 7; 13:1–5; James 2:1–9.

Quotes

- The “show business,” which is so incorporated into our view of Christian work today, has caused us to drift far from Our Lord’s conception of discipleship. It is instilled in us to think that we have to do exceptional things for God; we have not. We have to be exceptional in ordinary things, to be holy in mean streets, among mean people, surrounded by sordid sinners. That is not learned in five minutes. *Oswald Chambers*
- Fortunately, God made all varieties of people with a wide variety of interests and abilities. He has called people of every race and color who have been hurt by life in every manner imaginable. Even the scars of past abuse and injury can be the means of bringing healing to another. What wonderful opportunities to make disciples! *Charles R. Swindoll*
- There are no shortcuts to maturity in discipleship; it was, is, and always will be learned over time and under pressure walking in union with Christ. *R. Alan Woods*
- So many people come to church with a genuine desire to hear what we have to say, yet they are always going back home with the uncomfortable feeling that we are making it too difficult for them to come to Jesus. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Questions

Why do we tend to overlook “the ordinary”? What do Jesus words and actions tell us about his attitude to ordinary people? What does Jesus’ calling of Peter and the other fishermen tell us? Is it true that Christians live in a “classless society”? How do we feel when we consider ourselves “ordinary”? How do we rightly represent God?

Bible summary

Luke 2:21-28 records that Jesus went through the early ceremonies just like any other child. Matt. 15:32–39 details Jesus’ care and compassion for the people. In Matt. 16:13–17 Jesus asks who people say he is. The calling of the fishermen to be Jesus’ disciples is given in Mark 1:16-18. Jesus explains in Luke 12:6, 7 that five sparrows are sold for two pennies, but God still cares for them—and we are more valuable than sparrows! In Luke 13:1–5 Jesus tells the people that the victims of the tower collapse were not more evil than anyone else! We are not to show favoritism, because God does not (James 2:1-9).

Comment

Jesus came with no pomp or show, born into a humble carpenter’s family. His disciples similarly did not come from the higher classes, but from the low—fishermen, tax collectors and so on. It’s recorded that the “common people heard him gladly.” Jesus recognized the uniqueness of every individual, and wished to reveal the truth of God to everyone.

“So often Jesus sought people who were considered to be ordinary because, lacking self-sufficiency, they were prepared to trust God completely for their success.” (Monday’s lesson). The danger of having a position in society, or superior education, or wealth, is that we can feel “above” the commonplace needs. But in reality we all need the healing salvation that only God can give.

In addition, Jesus spoke ordinary language to ordinary people. He used stories and illustrations that they would be familiar with. He did not resort to learned theological terms and speak over their heads. This is something we need to be reminded of, for the danger is of confusing people, so that the good news of God’s salvation is no longer easily understood: “But I fear, lest by any means... your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:3 NIV).

So as Jesus’ disciples, why not try to make it simpler? When Jesus spoke, the consensus was that “No one ever spoke the way this man does” (John 7:46 NIV). He used simple terms and familiar illustrations to speak the deep things of God. Talking to Nicodemus, Jesus didn’t say “Except you accept the Reformationist concepts of Forensic Justification and Substitutionary Atonement, you cannot see the kingdom of God.” No. Simply “Unless you are born again...” Simple, yet so profound.

So instead of saying “justify” with its heavy legal overtones, why not “set right”? Instead of “sanctify”, why not “kept right”? To make them into technical terms tends to destroy their vitality—they lose their power to make an impact on us personally. You can sum up God’s salvation in words of one syllable:

“Jesus died and rose to show us what God is like, and to set us right and keep us right with God. In this way he wins us back to love and trust him. And in the end he will save all those who have shown their trust in him.” Does it sound too simple? It is simple. The practice may be hard, and we get in the way of what God wants to do for us and in us. But the truth is so clear and easy to understand. Why make it difficult?

Ellen White Comments

When Christ came to speak the words of life, the common people heard him gladly; and many, even of the priests and rulers, believed on him. But the chief of the priesthood and the leading men of the nation were determined to condemn and repudiate his teachings. Though they were baffled in all their efforts to find accusations against him, though they could not but feel the influence of the divine power and wisdom attending his words, yet they encased themselves in prejudice; they rejected the clearest evidence of his Messiahship, lest they should be forced to become his disciples. These opponents of Jesus were men whom the people had been taught from infancy to reverence, to whose authority they had been accustomed implicitly to bow. “How is it,” they asked, “that our rulers and learned scribes do not believe on Jesus? Would not these pious men receive him if he were the Christ?” It was the influence of such teachers that led the Jewish nation to reject their Redeemer. {4SP 414}

All the truth that has been given to the world through patriarchs and prophets shone out in new beauty in the words of Christ. But the scribes and Pharisees had no desire for the precious new wine. Until emptied of the old traditions, customs, and practices, they had no place in mind or heart for the teachings of Christ. They clung to the dead forms, and turned away from the living truth and the power of God. {DA 279}