

Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc.

1789 Iglehart Ave., St. Paul, MN 55104-5215 : www.dtminc.org : Info: Phone (651) 283-0568

What Does It Mean To Follow Jesus? What Does He Expect Of Us?

by Dan Trygg

"Then Jesus said..., 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'" Matthew 16:24

"Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' ³³ They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, "You will become free"?' ³⁴ Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin... ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'" John 8:31-34,36

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16

"I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. ¹⁰ He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Luke 16:9-13

"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:19

"Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart..." Luke 18:1

"...make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..." Matthew 28:19-20

Following Jesus is a serious business. It is not a religious game. God takes it *very* seriously, and will hold us accountable for *His* expectations of those who would follow Jesus. It does not matter what we may *think* is OK for a Christian to do, nor does it matter what other so-called Christians may do or justify. What matters is, "What does God expect?" **What are the standards that He will be holding us accountable to?** Above are listed a smattering of passages from Jesus' own lips concerning this issue. Note what He is expecting of those who choose to follow Him.

The first passage clearly declares that if anyone would desire to come after Jesus, he must deny himself, take up His cross, and follow Him. From this we learn that **Jesus expected His followers to give up their own agenda and self-identity in order to become what God wants them to become.** This is a very radical picture. Remember the original gospel preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus? "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" Repent meant to change your mind, ...change your entire perception of your life, the world around you, and what existence is all about..., in order to be able to see and accept God's way of viewing reality, your life and your purpose in His plan. *This means that we have to deny the self we thought we were, and be willing to accept His evaluation and plan for us.* We have to take up our cross to follow Him. Our cross? What is that? That was the most horrible, agonizing, extended way to be put to death that first century people knew of. The implications were that the self was not going to die, or be denied, easily. It will take extreme measures to deal with it, and it will struggle to reassert its self-centered will against the purposes of God in our lives repeatedly. This will be an extended, drawn-out struggle, but it is an essential part of entering on the road of following Jesus. Note that *the death of self does not have to be complete for us to begin following Jesus.* In fact, it is *not* complete, according to the statement of the Master. Rather, it is our *purpose*, our *intent*, to *put selfishness to death*, ...just as if we were to take up a cross and drag it out of the city to the place of crucifixion. Note, too, that we are following Jesus Himself to the place of self-denial and crucifixion. He asks no more of us than He was Himself willing to bear. If we are to follow Jesus, know that we are on the road to death to self-will.

In the second passage (John 8:31-36), Jesus is confronting some who had come to recognize who He was, the Messianic King, sent from God. They intellectually believed this, but there was something missing. It wasn't enough to *know* who *He* was. What mattered was how that would affect their life choices. He said that if they would continue in, live in or dwell in His word, then they were true followers of His, and they would come to perceive the truth, and the truth would set them free. It was simple enough. **Jesus expected His followers to learn His teachings, ponder them for insight, and apply them in their lives.** His promise was that, if they did this, they would gain insights that would set them free. Free from what? Free from sin in their lives. **Jesus expected His followers to gain freedom over sinful attitudes, behaviors and habits in their lives.** This means that we ought to keep pursuing a growing victory over sin in our lives. Note that this does not come by self-effort or by sheer self-control. Rather, it comes from seeing the truth. It comes from exposing the lies we have believed about the sins we struggle with, and the lies we have believed about ourselves. It means coming to know the truth about who God is for us, and what He will do for us. Knowing the truth and applying it will give us success in our battle against sin.

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus taught that we, His disciples, are the light of the world. The world is a place of darkness, brokenness and evil. We are to show the light of God's character and love by serving others in deeds of

charity, kindness and love. **Jesus expected His followers to be actively engaged in doing good deeds for others.** If we are not actively serving others in beneficial acts of kindness or service, then we are not following Jesus. This may be a growth area for you. Know that if you haven't been reaching out to serve others, you have been out of step with the Holy Spirit. It is His nature to show love to others in practical acts of service. Now, we are not told what exactly these good deeds will be. God will show you how to serve in ways that fit your surroundings and abilities, but He *will* lead you to serve others. Count on that! Watch for the opportunities that will come into your life. He brings those service opportunities across our path so that we can live out our faith in practical ways (Eph. 2:10). Good deeds and acts of service are an important part of the ministry of God's people. They open the hearts of people toward God, and they create an environment where people become curious and open to learn more about Jesus (Acts 2:45-47; Gal. 6:9,10; Tit. 3:8).

The passage in Luke 16 emphasizes that we are to serve God with our money. This goes so counter to the values of our flesh and of the world around us. We are taught to earn money *so that we can spend it on ourselves*. We can purchase material goods for *our* comfort, pleasure and security. Or, we are taught to store up money *for ourselves*, so that we will have security in the future. Jesus taught some things that run counter to these principles. First of all, He clearly taught that *we are not the owners of what we have, but merely the stewards of what God has given to us*. He is the one who has enabled us to earn what we do on our jobs (Deut. 8:17,18). **Jesus expected His followers to view themselves as stewards of God, with regard to material things. As such, they are to carry out God's purposes for their material goods and resources.** A steward is like a manager. He is to manage the goods, property and resources entrusted to his care according to the desires and purposes of the owner. In other words, he is not to help himself to the goods that have been entrusted to him, as if they were his own. If we are choosing to follow Jesus, ...to deny self, take up our cross..., then we cannot be living to please our fleshly desires and selfish interests. **Jesus expected that His followers would use the material resources they have to build relationships that will lead people to God. He also expected His followers to help the poor, and to support the work of people preaching the Good News** (Matt. 6:2,3; Lk. 10:7). Jesus warned people not to labor for food that perishes, ...or to lay up treasures upon the earth, where they can be lost or ruined. Instead, we are to work for things that are eternal (Jn. 6:27; Matt. 6:19-21).

The next passage, Matthew 4:19, is Jesus' call to His disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." As we pursue Jesus, and walk in His footsteps, He will motivate us and teach us how to evangelize other people. It is clear that it is God's purpose to bring the Gospel message to every corner of the earth. This could never happen simply by sending missionaries. *The only way for evangelism to reach the masses is if the people who come to know Jesus will then share their own story with others and spread the word.* This was God's plan all along. He gives us the Holy Spirit to give us what to say (Matt. 10:16-20). He reminds us of what Jesus said, and He will Himself work through us to testify to others (Jn. 14:26; 15:26,27; Acts 1:8). **Jesus expected that His followers would actively testify about Him to others, and learn to lead people to Him.** This is not just for the religious professionals, or those who are naturally outgoing. It is for all of us. We need to learn how to share our faith, and be actively doing so with the people God brings into our lives. Learning to be effective at this is a skill to be developed through study, prayer and practice.

Jesus expected His followers to be people of prayer. The Lord's prayer, meant to be merely a *model* for prayer, is preceded by the instruction, "Pray, then, in this manner..." (Matt. 6:9). *We* are to pray! Then, the Luke 18 passage makes clear that *we should pray at all times, and not grow weary, give up, or despair*. This implies that prayer can be difficult and discouraging work, sometimes. That is why Jesus taught about persistence in prayer (Lk. 11:1-13; 18:1-8). Jesus' example testifies as to how important prayer is. How much more do we need to be devoted to prayer!

The final passage, sometimes called "The Great Commission", clearly expresses Jesus' marching orders for the church. **Jesus expected His followers to be actively training up serious-minded, obedient disciples.** This is a responsibility that belongs to each one of us. Again, it is not just relegated to religious professionals. Notice the two aspects involved in this work: (1.) Baptizing people into the Name. The verse mentions the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We find in the book of Acts that the apostles understood this to mean "into the name of Jesus" (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). That name literally means, "Yahweh saves", and therefore embodies the full plan of God. Baptizing people signified identifying them with Jesus through a death-to-self enactment in a water burial and cleansing, and a resurrection-as-a-new-person enactment coming from the water. (2.) Teaching the disciples to obey *everything* Jesus commanded. There is no room for a cafeteria approach to obedience. We can't pick and choose. We are responsible to teach absolute and complete obedience to everything Jesus stands for. **Jesus expects obedience. We are to seek to do His will in every area.**

This is what it means to follow Jesus. This is what He expects. This is where we are heading, if we follow Him. *This is not a legalistic set of rules. These are the end results of a process of growth, which He Himself will bring about in us, as we walk with Him.* Don't play with sin, or deceive yourself, however. To follow Jesus means death to self, and a radical change of purpose for your life. **You can't follow Jesus, and stay the same.**