“Characteristics of a True Disciple”
March 7, 2010
Matthew 10:24-42

I. Introduction

Because we enjoy many of the winter sports, Linda and I watched a lot of Olympics when they were on a couple of weeks ago. In each event there were many competitors who did their best even though everyone knew that only one person would get a gold medal. To be an Olympian one needs an extra measure of determination and hard work and sacrifice. Many of them had to leave home and live near a practice facility and a coach. They had to change eating habits and their daily schedules. They focused on one thing: practice. There was no time for family, friends, or even many “non-sport” related activities. Some even changed citizenship. Their mindset was to be able to do the best they could in the Olympic Games and not to embarrass themselves or the country they represent; whether or not they got “the gold.” For each of them, this was a fight to the finish whether they were the 1st or the 21st to cross the line. These are some characteristics of an Olympian—these are also characteristics of a true Christian.

In this morning’s Scripture—the 2nd half of Jesus’ discourse on missions, Jesus lists some traits or characteristics of His disciples—true Christians. We may not all be Apostle Paul’s or Billy Graham’s, but Jesus makes clear what is expected of each one of us; regardless of our position or stature in life. Let’s look at these 6 characteristics of a true disciple.

II. Six Characteristics of a True Disciple

A. A true disciple imitates his Master.

The ultimate goal of every disciple is to be like his master. In Luke 6:40 Jesus said, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” John put it this way in 1 John 2:6: “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” A true disciple’s single, prime purpose is to become a duplicate of his teacher. Every Christian’s main goal must be to become more Christ-like every day.

Jesus said that the logical result of being like Christ is to be treated like Christ. Men persecuted Jesus Christ when He was on the earth, so should we expect anything different? The true disciple cannot expect to be accepted and loved by the world when His Lord and Savior was rejected and crucified by the world. Turn to 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul doesn’t try to sugar-coat the truth as he writes.

The call to be a disciple is a call to be like Christ, including being treated like Him. The more we imitate Christ and His qualities of love, joy, peace and kindness, the more we will be attractive to
those God is calling to Himself. But the more we will become unattractive to those who reject God. Because they want nothing of Him, they will want nothing of us. To be like Christ is to be treated like Him. Jesus also said that . . .

B. A true disciple does not fear the world.

In verses 26-31, Jesus gives 3 reasons why His disciples should not fear the world:

1. God will bring everything to light. We have nothing to fear because one day the Lord will reveal the secrets of men’s hearts. Turn to 1 Corinthians 4:5. Today the world puts the best face on sin and wickedness and the worst face on righteousness. Let me give you an example, The International Planned Parenthood Federation, the umbrella organization for Planned Parenthood organizations around the world, recently released a report called “Stand and Deliver: Sex, health and young people in the 21st century.” I don’t have time to read much of it to you, so let me quote one sentence: “Currently, many religious teachings deny the pleasurable and positive aspects of sex—and limited guidelines for sexual education often focus on abstinence before marriage.” This is putting the best face on sin and the worst face on righteousness. Jesus said that the Lord will reveal the truth. This enlightenment will happen in the future, but it also happening today.

In John 9:5 Jesus said, “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” In Matthew 5:14 Jesus told His disciples, “You are the light of the world.” As imitators of Jesus, we must shine light in the world so that the truth can be seen. We should not—we must not—be concerned about what the world says now but about what God will say in the final day. When God gives truth to declare, the business of a disciple—a Christian—is to make it known—not to hide it because he is afraid. The disciple’s perspective should be God’s perspective. At the end, all motives and goals will be revealed.

2. A 2nd reason not to be afraid is that the eternal destiny of Jesus’ disciples is secure. Verse 28 is a call for courage in the face of persecution. Physical death is the worst possible harm that Satan and/or the world can possibly bring, but they cannot touch the soul—they cannot determine where one will spend eternity. God’s judgment and what one has done with Jesus Christ determine if a person will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. The faithful disciple—any reasonable person—values his soul much more than his body and he will gladly sacrifice that which is only physical and perishable for the sake of that which is spiritual and imperishable. Jim Elliot, one of the 5 missionaries who were killed in Ecuador when they were reaching out to the Aucas, wrote “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

3. Finally, there is no reason to fear because God cares for His own. Jesus assures His disciples that they are dear to their heavenly Father—God loved them so much that He sent Jesus to die
on the cross in their place. If God cares about sparrows which are relatively cheap, He will certainly care for His own who are serving Him. They are of far greater value than the sparrows.

God’s knowledge of us is so detailed and His interest is so high in each one of His children that the very hairs on our heads are numbered. Did your mother ever count the hairs on your head? God did! If He notices when 1 hair falls from a person’s head, how much more will He be concerned about spiritual matters of far greater importance? There is no reason to fear, no matter what comes—God is aware and in control. He cares for His own.

C. A true disciple confesses the Lord.

In addition to imitating Jesus and not fearing the world, a true disciple confesses Jesus before the world. To confess Jesus means more than making a statement with the lips. It also means to back up that statement with the life and actions.

There are many ways to acknowledge Jesus’ Lordship and there are many ways to deny Christ without verbally renouncing Him. It is possible to deny Christ before men with silence, by failing to witness for Him and trying to be a closet Christian—someone whose friends and neighbors and, perhaps even family, would never suspect of being a believer. It is possible to deny Christ by actions, living like the rest of the world lives, with no higher standards or values. It is possible to deny Christ by words, using the world’s profanity and vulgarity.

However, anyone who denies Jesus on the earth may be forgiven. Peter denied Jesus 3 times. Later He was forgiven and restored. We all can rest on the promise of 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Proverbs 29:25 says, “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.” But the disciple who attempts to avoid ridicule or persecution by public denial of Jesus and doesn’t repent reveals that he really isn’t a true disciple and his eternal security is not built on the blood of Jesus Christ. He is not a Christian—a child of God—and he is bound for an eternity in hell.

D. A true disciple is willing to forsake his family.

A 4th characteristic of a true disciple of Christ is the willingness to forsake everything including one’s own family, if necessary, for Christ’s sake. Don’t misunderstand what Jesus is saying! A Christian is to love his family with self-sacrificing love—agape love. Christian husbands and wives are to love each other and their children with complete devotion. Christian children are to love, respect, and care for their parents as unto the Lord. But a believer’s commitment to Christ is to be so intense and so overpowering that any relationship that endangers ones witness and work for Christ will be sacrificed.
Becoming a Christian requires affirming the lordship of Christ to the point where you are willing to give up everything else.

**E. A true disciple offers his own life.**

The “cross” in verse 38 is the willing sacrifice of everything one has, including his own life, for the sake of Christ. It means to confess Christ as Lord in actions as well as words and to obey Him in spite of any shame or suffering that may come. As Paul wrote in Romans 6:11 “count yourselves dead to sin” this means to die to self daily and let Christ live through us.

Verse 39 presents us with only 2 alternatives: spare your life or sacrifice your life. There is no middle ground. If we protect our own self-interests, we will be losers; but, if we die to self and live for Christ’s interests, we will be winners. The real war is inside—selfishness versus sacrifice.

**F. A true disciple receives a reward.**

The 6th characteristic of a true disciple is not what he does or is, but what he receives. A true disciple receives a reward. Every Christian who brings another person to Christ is God’s instrument of salvation and will be rewarded. A person who receives a Christian and his testimony also receives Christ and will be rewarded—every Christian is one of God’s ambassadors.

God not only rewards a prophet or a righteous man for his faithfulness, He rewards anyone else who receives His ambassadors for they are His people. Even the simplest gift or help given to the simplest disciple, like a cup of cold water, will bring its own reward.

**III. Conclusion**

The theme of this last section of Jesus’ sermon on missions has been discipleship, not sonship. We become the children of God—His sons—through faith in Jesus Christ. If you have never done that; if you have never said, “Jesus, I am a sinner. Please forgive me of my sins and become my Savior and my Lord,” than today’s message isn’t for you. Before you can become a disciple of Jesus, you must admit that what He said is true, including verses like John 14:6 which says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Or John 3:16-18.

On the other hand, if you are His disciple then you must faithfully follow Him and obey His will. Sonship doesn’t change, but discipleship does change as you walk with Christ and become more like Him. Look at these 6 characteristics of a true disciple—how are you doing—are you growing or is your growth stunted?
A. Do you imitate the Master? Do people know you are a Christian by what you do and what you don’t do; by what you say and what you don’t say? Are you ready to be treated like Jesus was?

B. Do you fear the world? Are you afraid of what people might say or do—if they knew you were a Christian?

C. Do you confess the Lord? Do you walk the talk or do you blend in with everyone around you?

D. Are you willing to forsake your family? Is Jesus really number ONE in your life. Does God and His expectations come first or finish a distant second or third or somewhere else farther down the line?

E. Do you offer your own life to Christ? Is everything you are and have available to Him? Or are there some things that you keep for yourself?

F. Are you going to receive a reward from God? When you stand before Him, is He going to say “Well done thou good and faithful servant”? Or are you going to hang your head in shame and try to sneak away before He sees you?

If an Olympian is willing to make all his sacrifices for a perishable gold medal, how much more should we be willing to do these things for an imperishable eternal reward. The choice is yours.

Let me close in prayer by praying part of a Puritan prayer: “O Lord, our Lord and Savior, You have appointed a cross for each one of us to take up and carry, a cross before You give us a crown. You have appointed it to be our portion, but self-love hates it, carnal reason is unreconciled to it; without the grace of patience we cannot bear it, walk with it, profit by it.

O blessed cross, what mercies do you bring with you! You are only esteemed hateful by our rebel will, heavy because we shirk the load. Teach us, gracious Lord and Savior, that with our cross You send promised grace so that we may bear it patiently, that our cross is Your yoke which is easy and Your burden which is light.” Amen