

True Discipleship

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[0 : 0 0] Great. Thanks, Derek there. And my name's James. I'm on the staff team here at St. Silas. And a big warm welcome to you sitting here this evening and to any of you watching at home this evening.

It's my privilege, really, to preach to us and encourage us from this wonderful passage this evening. But before we begin, let me pray for us. Father, we thank you for this great prayer of Paul that's given for our reassurance.

Please, won't you work within us now to fill us with the knowledge of your will, with all spiritual understanding. Amen. And if you're seated here, you might find a little pink slip that will give you a bit of a steer through the passage and at least should give you some hope that we're nearing the end.

And before I worked for the church, I had a job with the Marines. I was with the Marines and I remember we went on one operation overseas and we climbed this hill and hid in this bunker on the top of this hill.

And the idea was to catch, to observe the enemy and try and spread peace, as it were. And we spotted this one chap coming in to a known firing point.

[1 : 1 6] We knew he was most probably an enemy. But the issue was he was not armed. He had no rifle. And so my boss who was commanding me said, Come on, Lapo, fire some warning shots.

Nudge, nudge, wink, wink. And that situation was slightly awkward because our rules said that we couldn't engage anyone who was not armed.

To do that was to go against the rules. And so as a Christian, I was wondering, How do I balance that situation? How do I obey my earthly master and still honor my heavenly king?

Well, safe to say, our friendly fellow managed to live another way and I got a bit of a scolding. But you don't have to be a soldier to go into that situation.

You could be a GP like Warren who was playing the guitar earlier. To face a situation where you are in a pluralistic world who believes all sorts of things and have really tough situations.

[2 : 1 8] You might be a teacher or a nurse or a Christian worker and you might have an awkward conversation where the values of following your heavenly king clashes with the values of the world around us.

And the question that really drives this prayer, this wonderful prayer that we have this evening, is in a pluralistic world, for a follower of Jesus, what does true discipleship look like?

In a pluralistic world, where anything goes, as someone who follows the king, King Jesus, what does true discipleship look like? And we remember that Paul, he's in prison and as he's writing in prison, he's evangelized this guy, Epaphras, who's gone off and told his friends about the good news of Jesus.

And Epaphras has come back and he's told Paul about this young fledgling church in Colossae. It's a bit of a run-down town in Turkey. And they're doing well in the gospel.

They're doing really well. But they are under pressure. And they pressure from the world around them, from the cultures and the pressures and the pagan world around them.

[3 : 27] They pressure from within. Folk from within are telling them that there's a radical new message that they should be engaging with if they want to be fully qualified as Christians and if they want a fuller understanding of all the riches they can have in Jesus.

And so Paul writes to reassure them to continue trusting in Jesus and in the message that they have been told from Epaphras and that Paul has told Epaphras and not move on from it.

And so this prayer tonight, this wonderful prayer, is enormously relevant for us this evening in whatever situation we are in. Maybe retired folk, maybe as policemen, maybe as other jobs workers.

And the logic of the passage is quite easy to follow. So he says, he wants them, he prays for them that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will so that they might be able to lead worthy lives pleasing God.

And then he gives some examples of what that might look like. And then finally he says, why should they do this? Because they've been rescued by Jesus. So our first point there is, true discipleship means growing in the knowledge of God's will.

[4 : 47] And we get that from verse 9. So if you've got your white sheet, if you've got your Bibles, that's right, let's just read that. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

And the temptation perhaps for many of us is as we hear this encouragement and we hear God's will, we think, well, that's something unknowable.

that's something in the future got to do with what job I should take next, who I should marry, the extraordinary bits about the future that I can't possibly ever know.

But it also, we might also be tempted to think, well, we just need to learn the book and know that and then we'll know God's will. And while it's not less than that, it certainly is something more than that, than just that rope learning.

[5 : 49] And what he means here by growing in the knowledge of God's will is that we try to live Christian lives as true disciples of the King as wisely as we can with whatever it is that we know about God.

And so, maybe you've got a friend and they might say to you, well, I really want to know what God's will is for my life and then I'd be happy and then I'd feel content and loved by God.

And Paul says, well, if you want to know and grow in the knowledge of God's will, then simply put into action what you already know about God. And so, growing in the knowledge of God's will here is something very ordinary.

It's very practical, but it's immensely helpful for wherever we are in whatever situation we are in. And the truth be told, growing in the knowledge of God's will, living wisely as a disciple, sometimes can be quite complicated, can't it?

Even in the most unsuspecting situation. So, I remember going to a Christmas meal a couple of years ago and I was with a friend there and I'd been talking to them about the gospel and in the middle of the Christmas meal, I'd used this illustration of how you can't be saved by what you do with another friend of ours who is a lovely, delightful person who is exceptionally good and in the middle of the meal, my friend that I was evangelizing turned to me and said in a loud voice, are you saying they can't be saved and go to heaven because they are doing lots of good works?

[7 : 25] And it's an incredibly awkward situation and gratefully my friend bailed me out by giving a perfect explanation that you're not saved by what you do but by living to please God.

And so wherever we go, we need wisdom if we are to live well. And Paul prays this prayer for them so that they might be able to live wisely in all their moments of life.

And so we move on to our second point there. True discipleship means living worthily to please God. Verses 10 to 12.

So let's just pick that up and let's just read that then. So that, and there's so that, we know it's a because word, you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, of the will of God, being strengthened with all power and according to His glorious might so that you might have great endurance and patience and giving joyful thanks.

And at first, when you read that, that's slightly discouraging, isn't it? It says there that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way.

[8 : 46] And I think back to my past week and to be honest, it hasn't been exactly that statement there. I think of all the faults that I've had. And it's an impossible standard.

So you might feel slightly discouraged when you hear that. But it's a verse that's written to encourage us to warm our hearts, worthy of the Lord, please Him in every way.

And it suggests that despite our foolishness, despite our brokenness, despite the messed upness of our lives, we can live in a way that's worthy of the Lord and please Him and can be a joy and a delight to the Lord despite all our brokenness.

and that's a great thing to be encouraged about, that we can have the God of the universe be pleased and delighted in us. And we need that, don't we?

We need to know that. So I've got another friend, she's a lung doctor in London, so she's been busy over the last six months. But before the recent COVID crisis, she had, she used to tell people that they've got lung cancer.

[9 : 57] And so from seven to eleven one morning, she had this list of people that she had to tell who had terminal lung cancer. And if you go through a morning like that and whatever day you've gone through, and it's horrendous, you need to know that God can be pleased and delighted with you.

And so true discipleship means living worthily to please God. And then he goes on to give us four characteristics of what that might look like. It's not an exhaustive list. But it's a helpful, typical list.

The first one there is that we might bear fruit in every good work. And there's lots of good works that we can do, but perhaps in the context of Colossians, verse six, that we looked at last week, and the context of Glasgow, where so many people need to hear the good news.

He's probably talking about gospel telling and sharing here. And then he says that we should grow in the knowledge of God. And we've touched on this a bit already. But we might, so when we think about the knowledge of God, sometimes we might think, well, I need to go on a retreat, and I need to sit back and meditate on God, and then I'll know that God's will is better.

But Paul says here, as we try to live God's way, then we'll know Him better. And the outcome of that is, as we know Him better, then we'll try and live His way more, and then we'll know Him better.

[11 : 21] And then we'll try and live His way more, because we know Him better. And then we'll add infinitum. And if you've ever read Christian biography, the thing that strikes me about Christian biography is just how busy the folk were.

So you think of Whitefield. I get quite tired if I preach. Whitefield would preach six hours every day on an easy day for 35 years, eight hours on the busy day, nonstop.

And then you think of Luther, who gave a Sunday sermon twice or three times, lectured full-time during the week, wrote how to do church all over for everyone.

You think of Owen, an English reformer, and how he had a phenomenally terrible personal life, which I won't, it was so bad, I won't share it with you this evening.

But in the midst of that, he was busy writing these glorious books on the glories of Christ. And being the chancellor of Oxford and that kind of stuff.

[12 : 22] And then the next attribute that he gives here is being strengthened with all God's power. And again, the temptation here, when we read being strengthened with all God's power according to his glorious might, we might look for something spectacular, something out of the ordinary.

But look at the purpose of God's power that he lists here, working through the Colossian believers. is very ordinary, isn't it? So that they may have great endurance and patience.

And so living as fallen people in a pluralistic world, they can live with wisdom as true disciples of Jesus. And that is going to take great endurance, isn't it?

So Paul's prayer for all God's power is that they may have endurance with all God's power because they need it. We need it. None of us would keep going in the gospel unless God's power was working within us.

And then finally, giving joyful thanks. And that's the mark per, the excellent mark, the highest mark of what it looks like to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus.

[13 : 32] And giving joyful thanks wherever you go and whatever you're doing, whatever Monday morning looks like, tomorrow morning, maybe you're on a Zoom chat. And the reason for all of this on wanting to live this worthy life, pleasing the Lord in every way, is that true discipleship means realizing that you have been qualified, that you've been rescued, and that you have been redeemed.

And so, qualified there, we read, giving joyful thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light.

And one of the issues in Colossae was people were saying they weren't qualified. The Colossians weren't qualified. They needed something extra. They needed Jesus. They needed the gospel plus something else.

And then, they'll know the full riches of God. And then, they'll be qualified but Paul says they're more than qualified. Why? Because God, their Heavenly Father, God of the universe, has qualified.

So, people may detract from them. Satan may deride them. But you and I, they have been qualified because they've heard and understood the message of God's grace.

[14 : 52] So, a couple of years ago, this is a bit of a silly illustration. I was at university and the students there started writing. It's in South Africa. They started writing. And the riot was because, and this is in the context of the exams that we've had here, it was started because one student had passed.

They said all students should pass the exam. We think that's a bit silly. But it's exactly right. Because Jesus has passed and because Jesus has fulfilled the criteria, we all have been qualified in Jesus.

And what's more, we've been qualified for something better and more imaginable, an inheritance with God's holy people and the kingdom of light. There's nothing more than God could ever give us, nothing greater than we could ever gain in this life.

And how has he qualified us? By grace in Jesus. And then we see that we've been rescued. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

And in a dark world, in a pluralistic world filled with superstition, there's lots to be afraid of, isn't there? In the workplace, with your friends.

[16 : 12] And the dark seems wild and untameable, doesn't it? Ask any four-year-old and they'll tell you that. But Jesus is that dim nightlight that illuminates and banishes the darkness and rescues us from slavery to those fears.

And all of this has been brought about, this great rescue, not because of anything we have done, but because of the Father's love for his son. We have been brought into the kingdom of the son who the father loves.

There's more possibility of God not loving Jesus than there is of God breaking his promise to rescue and qualify and care for us.

And then he goes on to finish there that we have been redeemed, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. And those who are pressurizing, who are putting the Colossians under pressure, they were saying they needed to be free.

They needed a gospel that was fuller and freer and gave them true freedom. But Paul says, in Jesus, in his death, they have been freed from their sins.

[17 : 26] So what greater freedom do you want than the one that the death of God's own son has brought for us? There's nothing greater. And so in Jesus, Paul is saying we have freedom and forgiveness, not from things that hinder our self-expression or from money worries or success, the pursuit of success or freedom from stress and anxiety or from anything else that the world tells us that the world pressurizes us will.

But from that vitally important thing, the only thing that really matters in life, he gives us freedom and forgiveness from sins, from when we've rejected God and haven't lived the way that God has wanted us to.

And all of these things we have that repeated word in Colossians in Jesus through God's kindness and his compassion and grace.

And in the gospel we have a message of this freedom that God gives us freely as a free gift. And so therefore we are free to live lives that please him.

And because of this great fantastic news, next week Robbie's going to unpack a great song that Paul sings, a poem that he gives us on how wonderful and amazing Jesus is.

[18 : 48] So in conclusion, the logic of this prayer that we have here, this great prayer of reassurance, straightforward. He prays, Paul prays that the Colossians and that ourselves would be filled with the knowledge of God's will and that we'd understand grace and that we'd put that into action day by day.

And by living worthy lives, trying to please God in all that we do, every little job we do, every task we get given, trying to do that to God's glory, trying to please him, every friendship we have.

And why? Out of joyful thanks, because of all that God has done for us in his enormous undeserved kindness towards us and Jesus. And working this stuff out is going to be an enormous challenge for us in our lives.

And I just want to flag up two challenges in conclusion as we think about this as we come into land. The first is this, do we understand God's kindness to us?

Do we understand grace? And so maybe you're someone who's looking into the Christian world tonight, do you understand that the Bible is not a rule book, but the story of God's great love for us in sending his son to die for our sins in our place.

[20 : 08] And that Christians, they don't live God's way to win God's approval, but out of delight and joy of a God who has loved them so much and sent his son.

And if we are here tonight and we are following the Lord Jesus, do we understand that God has already qualified us in Jesus? There's nothing more that he can give us.

There's no greater way than he can say that he loves us, that he delights in us, than through his son. The second application that we can take home from tonight is, are we working out God's will for us, becoming one of God's new people in Jesus?

That's the title of our series in Colossians, wherever we are. When we're writing our thesis tomorrow, when we're having tea with our friends, when we're at the chess club, wherever we are, are we working out God's will for us?

Are we faithfully looking to do what we should be doing? Or are we just simply ignoring what we know we should be doing and hardening our consciences towards what we know God's will is for our life?

[21 : 20] Great. Let's pray as we close. Father, we thank you for this enormous prayer of reassurance of what it looks like to be a true disciple of Jesus.

Please help us to live this way more and more each day. Help us to be delighting in Jesus. Help us to be drawing nearer to your Son in all that we do, knowing that we have the full knowledge of your will in Jesus.

Help us to put that into practice in all we do. In Jesus' name. Amen.