

Marks of Discipleship

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible
Reading ■ Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In &
Beyond the Church

October 6, 2019

Day 1: Matthew 5:3

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Poor does refer to literal poverty and the sense of one's own need. "Poor in spirit", is a characterization of the true people of God. The true people of God know that they do not control their own lives, but are dependent upon God. Though poverty is not ignored by Matthew the emphasis is not economics but the identity of the people of God.

Question: What reason can you think of for Jesus to go up to a hill to give His talk?

Challenge: Create a "Depend On" chart. This can be a chart that grows. List the things you need in life and put down if you get these needs from self? Others? God?

Scripture: Isaiah 30:18-26, 32:16-20

Day 2: Matthew 5:4-5

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

Those that mourn are they that lament that God's Kingdom is not fully experienced by all the people. The sense of the verse is that they who mourn (truly feel bad that God is not experienced by all) will find comfort because God allows them to participate in the Kingdom now even if it is just partially. Meekness or gentleness is not a formula for success or reward. Love and humility, not power and pride, are the foundation upon which God's Kingdom is built. The inheritance of the earth refers to the giving of the land to the children of Israel. The Land was the means by which they would find life. In this context inheritance means that they will have a key place in God's Kingdom.

Question: What is your impression of the term "meek" used in this verse?

Challenge: Think of someone this week who is having trouble hoping in general. Try to help them experience the hope you have.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-11

Day 3: Matthew 5:6-7

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.'

Righteousness is a state that a person finds themselves in when the judge has declared them innocent. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are longing for the coming of the Kingdom. They hunger and thirst because they have tasted of God's love and want more, not just for themselves, but for all people. Mercy is a sign that God is present. We all want to be treated mercifully because we know that if we received justice we would not be very happy.

Question: Are they "blessed" because they are filled or because they hunger and thirst?

Challenge: If one aspect of mercy is forgiving someone when they are guilty, have you ever shown mercy?

Scripture: Hosea 6:1-6, Matthew 18:23-33

Day 4: Matthew 5:8-9

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Purity of heart is a single-minded devotion to God. It is devotion that is undivided and moving in tune with the plan God has for the redemption of the world. Augustus' rule was sometimes called the Pax Romani or the peace of Rome. There was peace in the region but it came as a result of conquest and was kept in place through fear. Jesus is proposing that "peacemakers" bring about peace through reconciliation, not fear or conquest.

Question: When you first read "pure in heart" what did you think it meant?

Challenge: What is the relationship between reconciliation and forgiveness?

Scripture: Psalm 86:11, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Psalm 138:1-6

Day 5: Matthew 5:10-12

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

Blessed means privileged, in a fortunate circumstance. The people of God are in fortunate circumstances because they will be vindicated in the Kingdom of God. In Jesus' resurrection He showed the future of all believers. They would receive a new body and live with God and all God's children in eternity. They are fortunate even in the face of persecutions. This is not a martyr complex but a simple statement of the joy that comes from knowing, by experience, the love of God.

Question: Can you identify any of the prophets Jesus is talking about?

Challenge: Where are Christians persecuted for Jesus' sake?

Scripture: Romans 4:23-5:8

Day 6: Matthew 5: 13

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.'

In the Bible salt connotes loyalty and covenant; it was seasoning, used for purification and a sign of relationship. Salt loses its saltiness by becoming impure. If it becomes mixed with other elements it loses its function and usefulness. The disciples (and all who call themselves Christian) are warned that they too will become useless if they deny their mission. God's will, will be done, and if the ones God has first chosen do not act as God wants then others will be found to serve God. The function of light is not to be seen but to allow other things to be seen clearly. An act of love can be seen and stands out in the midst of an environment of hate and death. We are not the ones to be seen but the ones to illuminate things around us so that what is real can be seen.

Question: Matthew uses the term "earth" instead of world. Do you think he means to say something different by using earth instead of world?

Challenge: Look up the Bible references below. Write down what salt was used for and what it meant.

Scripture: Leviticus 2:12-13, Ezekiel 43:24, Ezra 4:14, Numbers 19:19, II Kings 2:19-22, Job 6:6, Colossians 4:5

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October 13, 2019

Day 1: Job 10:1-3

1 I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. 2 I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. 3 Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the schemes of the wicked?

Job still thinks of death but is now beginning to show signs of wanting to live. He wonders if perhaps he can find some answers by making his plea to God in the form of a legal case. When we are confronted by a very difficult situation we can begin to deal with it if we can recall a time we had similar problems and recall how we dealt with them. Because of the Law in Judaism thinking through problems with a courtroom in mind was a helpful way to think through an issue. The “wicked” are all those who are not followers of the one God whose’ gods are captious and unjust. In verse 3 Job wonders if God is aware that the wicked will look at Job’s misery and think that his God is captious and spiteful.

Question: Why does Job assume that he is the work of God’s hands?

Challenge: Paul says the Church is the body of Christ. Think of some times when this body did not look so good and times when it did.

Scripture: Psalm 143, Psalm 139

Day 2: Job 10:18-20

‘Why did you bring me forth from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me, 19 and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave. 20 Are not the days of my life few? Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort 21 before I go, never to return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, 22 the land of gloom and chaos, where light is like darkness.’

Job continues to lay out his case. In verse 3 he reminds God that he is God’s creation and that his fortunes reflect upon God. In these verses he makes the point that as his days are few ought not he to be left alone? He is saying, do not single me out for special treatment. Job would say, “I have only one life, it is short, and then I die and spend the rest of eternity in darkness, so what have I done to deserve this pain now?”

Question: What is Job referring to by *the land of deep darkness*?

Challenge: think back on the last time you were in a real depressed time. How did you get out of it?

Scripture: Psalm 88

Day 3: Job 11:1-4

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered: 2 ‘Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and should one full of talk be vindicated? 3 Should your babble put others to silence, and when you mock, shall no one shame you? 4 For you say, “My conduct is pure, and I am clean in God’s sight.

Zophar is the last to speak. He will take a different tack than the other two. Where Bildad hints that the children might be at fault for Job’s distress and Eliphaz tells Job to forget the past and be blameless in the future so he will have hope, Zophar tells Job he is to blame for his current misfortunes. Zophar accuses Job of not only being in the wrong but being full of hot air. Job claims that his conduct was pure and Zophar says that if Job’s statement was true then great misfortune would not happen to him.

Question: Jesus said “you shall know them by their fruit.” How is this different than Zophar saying if you hurt you must have done something wrong?

Challenge: Think of the difference between being punished and being corrected.

Scripture: Psalm 90

Day 4: Job 11:5-6

But O that God would speak, and open his lips to you, 6 and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For wisdom is many-sided. Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.

Zophar now believes that Job’s punishment is less than he deserves! Zophar is so upset by Job’s questioning of God that he forgets what Job had gone through (see Job 1:13-22). Because of our monotheistic belief our Judeo-Christian understanding of suffering has had two major problems: 1) If God is benevolent and all powerful why then is there suffering for those who are innocent? and 2) An unwillingness to accept that random acts do occur that cause pain to the innocent.

Question: Why do you think Zophar believes Job is getting off easier than he deserves?

Challenge: Think back on your last five years. Have the problems you have encountered been your fault or random occurrences?

Scripture: Psalm 94

Day 5: Job 11:7-9

‘Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? 8 It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? 9 Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.

Zophar’s tone turns to one of mocking. He makes a series of rhetorical questions to treat with great disrespect Job’s words of pain and questioning. We must always be on the alert that we do not make fun of something that another takes very seriously. In Job’s questioning of God he in fact is trying to find the “deep things of God.” Zophar does not hear Job’s words of pain around the fact that his world has collapsed; he only hears what he is listening for - Job’s questioning of God’s actions. Zophar believes God needs defending.

Question: Where is Sheol?

Challenge: Does God need defending or does the Church need defending? Or does the Faith need defending?

Scripture: Psalm 8

Day 6: Job 11:10-11

If he passes through, and imprisons, and assembles for judgment, who can hinder him? 11 For he knows those who are worthless; when he sees iniquity, will he not consider it?

One wonders if verse 11 refers more to Zophar and not Job. Zophar has not heard Job’s pain, only his questioning of God. Zophar’s understanding of God has been called into question and he cannot deal with the implications of admitting that Job’s distress is not because Job is guilty of something. Job is moving beyond the world view that if great distress comes it must be because of the person’s sin and the distress is the punishment. Job is examining himself to see if he needs to repent and ask for forgiveness or if his current distress is not because he sinned. If he has not sinned then looking for a solution in that area will do him no good. He will come to the conclusion that God is not in the problems but in the solutions.

Question: Is Zophar correct - could Job’s problems be a result of his sin - even if he did not know he sinned?

Challenge: Think of the worst thing you have even done wrong. Did the punishment fit your “crime” and did you deserve it?

Scripture: Psalm 10

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October 20, 2019

Day 1: Job 19:1-3

Then Job answered: 'How long will you torment me, and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have cast reproach upon me; are you not ashamed to wrong me?'

Job accuses his friends of verbal violence and of using language that is used by those who want to slander another. In the New Testament James warns about the abuse words can cause. A word of gratitude and affirmation can change a person from being depressed to feeling positive about themselves again. Words from officials in leadership can strengthen the resolve of a people to endure hardship. A word from a pastor or counselor can free a person from unhealthy guilt. A word of, "I am proud of you," from a parent can send a child into the future with confidence. The words, "I love you," from the one you love can make your life complete. The word from God, "your sins are forgiven," releases a person from the fear of death. With so many good words to share why do people want to share words of hurt?

Question: Why do you think the friends were harsh with Job?

Challenge: Think of a time you were affirmed and one where you were put down. How did you feel?

Scripture: James 3

Day 2: Job 19:4-5

And even if it is true that I have erred, my error remains with me. If indeed you magnify yourselves against me, and make my humiliation an argument against me,

Having a cold or flu is bad but feeling bad about feeling bad is worse. We often get down when we are ill but when someone else accuses us of doing it to ourselves the illness can become unmanageable. Job is the one wronged but his friends are saying that the fact that he is brought so low means that he is in the wrong. It is similar to telling a woman who was sexually attacked that she is responsible for the attack.

Question: Why would humiliation be an argument against someone?

Challenge: Is there anything you can do to stop feeling bad about feeling bad? How can we stop from making a bad situation worse?

Scripture: James 1

Day 3: Job 19:21-23

Have pity on me; have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me, never satisfied with my flesh?

The image of the praying hands conveys to us a God to whom we can call upon for help in dire circumstances. One of our favorite verses is, "cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you," however this is not Job's experience of God. He was turning to his friends, who have been unhelpful, instead of God for pity. He is saying that God is the one causing the pain and only from my friends can I receive pity.

Question: How would the friends show pity to Job? What would they do for him?

Challenge: When have you felt God touching you in a helpful way and when have you felt it in a harmful way?

Scripture: Psalm 39

Day 4: Job 22:1-4

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered: 'Can a mortal be of use to God? Can even the wisest be of service to him? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless? Is it for your piety that he reproves you, and enters into judgment with you?'

In this speech Eliphaz begins with the assumption that Job must be a blatant and willful sinner. He comes to this conclusion because Job has rejected the principle of divine retribution. Job has noted in chapter 21 that the wicked do not always "get what is coming to them." By pointing this out Job questions the moral foundation upon which his friends live. The friends believe they have just two choices - to either agree with Job or declare him a wicked person.

Question: Can a person be of use to God?

Challenge: Think back on those who have been teachers for you. Did you learn the most from a harsh, easy going or tough teacher?

Scripture: Galatians 4

Day 5: Job 22:21

'Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you.'

'Agree with God' means submit our conduct to God. Although we cannot benefit God through any conduct, submitting to God is the source of all that is good in life. Job questions whether it is God's nature to punish the wicked or is it our desire to see those who are wicked be punished. Job wonders if we are not taking our wants for retribution and making them God's. Job's question is one that we today struggle with - is there a benefit to being good?

Question: Eliphaz thinks Job is not submitting to God. In what way is he not being submissive?

Challenge: What would it mean for you to submit to God?

Scripture: John 15

Day 6: Job 22:22

Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored, if you remove unrighteousness from your tents,

Eliphaz's statement - receive instruction - is ironic because the friends are the ones who refuse to listen to the words of God. They have assumed that Job just does not understand how God works but they are the ones who have closed their hearts to his suffering. They continue to ask Job to repent when he has done no wrong. Job does not have a problem with God and he does not need to repent - he needs someone to hear his pain and stay with him until he can again live. There are times when we need to repent in order to be whole and times when we need to be listened to and sat with. It takes a humble and discerning person to know what is called for.

Question: How does one receive instruction for "his mouth"?

Challenge: Has Job been wrong and his friends right? Has Job shown disrespect for God by questioning God's actions?

Scripture: Psalm 119

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October 27, 2019

Day 1: John 3:16

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.

The message of Genesis is that God created all life. The message of John 1 is that God created eternal life for us. We have a physical world and a spiritual one and God gave both of these to us. John 3:16 is a summary of God's work of creating life. It is also a statement of how much value God places on humans. God gave the greatest, most precious gift that could be given – His Son.

Question: What does “eternal” mean?

Challenge: What is valuable to you? What would cause you to give what is valuable away?

Scripture: John 1:1-14

Day 2: John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

This verse is a constant reminder that Jesus' preaching was not to frighten or to inflict an inordinate amount of guilt on people. Jesus invited individuals to have a closer relationship with God. I believe we lose sight of the invitational aspect of Jesus' ministry, when we try too hard to make people feel bad about what they have done. Guilt is a powerful motivator but love is even more powerful. It is the love of God that sent Jesus to this earth in physical form, not the anger of God. We need to keep John 3:16 and 17 in mind when we approach people about our faith.

Question: What would it mean if God condemned the world?

Challenge: Write a paragraph about how the world is saved through Jesus.

Scripture: John 10:7-10

Day 3: John 3:18

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

A way to begin to understand what this verse is saying is to think of gravity. Gravity is not something up for discussion, it is real and it affects us. If we say, “I don't believe in gravity,” and jump off a building to prove we do not believe in gravity then we will get hurt. If I try to step off a ladder ten feet in the air I will fall and hurt myself. In the same way those who say that Jesus is not the son of God will find out that their assumption is false and it will hurt them. The hurt is not God being petty but just a fact of life.

Question: What would it mean to condemn a person?

Challenge: Look up the word “Christ” to see what the name means.

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

Day 4: John 3:19

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

Romans 3:23 - “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” - is also a fact of life. Sin is not just bad things people do but it is a force that we cannot counteract by ourselves. Even after we have accepted Christ as Lord we still will do things that we do not want to do or not do things that we should do. By shining our light we push back the darkness. By pushing back the darkness we show folks that being in the light is a better place to live. We cannot destroy darkness; we can provide enough light so that the darkness recedes from people lives.

Question: Do you think the verse means real darkness, as in night time?

Challenge: How well do your belief and your behavior match? What do you do to bring your belief and behavior together?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:4-6, Romans 13:11-13

Day 5: John 3:20

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

Fear is what draws us to darkness. Fear that we will be found out, that our inner thoughts will become known. The deeds most of us do not want others to find out about are those that are in our thoughts.

Question: Do you think this verse is talking about secrets?

Challenge: When have you been afraid of being found out - of someone discovering you were in the wrong?

Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-20

Day 6: John 3:21

But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God”

Belief in the resurrection caused the early Christians to act as if they were living in God's new creation. They did not go around waiting for the kingdom to come, they went about living in God's new creation. They changed worship from the Jewish custom of Friday to first day (our Sunday). When challenged about their faith they told stories about Jesus and His life, especially the resurrection. They practiced mercy, forgiveness and love. The truth was that the light of God did come into the world and stayed in the form of the Spirit to guide and direct the church. They knew that the kingdom was not here completely but that did not stop them from living as if it was. They strove to live in the light no matter what the consequences.

Question: Why do you think early Christians called Sunday first day?

Challenge: Make a commitment to give credit to God the next time someone praises you for doing something good.

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:21-23, 2 John 1:3-5, Ephesians 1:12-14