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The Call to Discipleship

1236-A

Series: The Four Callings of God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The Call to Discipleship

Father,

We thank You for another beautiful day and for the sunrise of Your glory that shines in our hearts and for the power of Your Spirit that enables us to live the Christian life. Thank you for the grace You give us to bear the tests and trials of life, for the mercy You give us that cleanses us and renews us, and gives us a fresh start.

May we, Father, just fall at Your feet afresh and anew, and acknowledge we are not the ones who can. We simply have a God who can, and we are the ones who can worship Him. So, we worship You, Father, and ask for Your soothing, calming, healing hand to be upon us. Pour Yourself into our lives afresh; cleanse us from the filth and debris that has settled in the crevices of our hearts and give us a fresh beginning.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to imagine this in your mind—you have to have an imagination to even be in this class—imagine that you are a news reporter for station W-O-R-D in Jerusalem. You have been assigned the task of following along behind some new religious fanatic who has appeared on the scene suddenly and who has seriously shaken up the status quo. Now, you're not a very religious person yourself, so this whole scene seems to you to be a bit unreal. I mean this guy is so unlike the other television evangelists that you've covered in the past. He just appeared out of nowhere.

One day when you were still on the social beat, you were assigned to cover a wedding in Cana of Galilee. There you discovered, not a big deal, but the wine had run out, and this stranger, this one who so seemingly, without any credentials, turned this vase of water into wine. Now, you weren't sure what kind of tricks he was pulling, but one thing you knew, there was a quality about this man you had never seen before, in anyone. Here is what you write to your friends back home.

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He had this awesome kind of authority, but he was so humble. When he would speak, it was as though the very elements would bow in submission, and yet, he was not harsh, or condemning or dictatorial. In fact, whenever he would see a little child, or an invalid, or a blind man, he would stop his message—which I must admit annoyed his followers tremendously—and he would go over and pick up the little child, or touch the lame or the blind, and they seemed to be healed.

I was so intrigued with the difference in this man that I went back to the network and asked if I could cover him for a while, you know, a special feature story the way they do those presidential candidates back in the states. You know, to follow along behind him and photograph his every movement and record his every word. Sooner or later, I figured he'll slip and we'll find out what his angle really is.

Well, news is a bit slow these days and the network gave me permission, so I've been walking along behind this stranger of Galilee for months now. One day, when I was walking along beside him, an incredible thing happened—I have to tell you about it. He was walking with his staff that day, with the guys who worked for him, and they passed a young man who had been born blind. Now, all of us in the area knew this young man; we had seen him many times. I had my tape recorder on and I happened to catch an interchange between this preacher and two members of his team. One of them turned to him and said, "What did this guy do to deserve this? I mean, was it his fault or his parents'?"

Now, you talk about a loaded question. You'll never guess what this preacher said. He said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." It was like it was a gift, a blessing. Then he went over and spit on the ground. Our TV cameras caught that one. It was the lead story on the 10:00 news that night. And he made clay out of the saliva and put the clay on this blind man's eyes. One of the cameramen standing behind me said, "How gross!" But I was so taken up by what he was doing, it seemed almost beautiful to me.

And then, he told the man to go to the pool of Siloam and we split our news team up. I followed so I could interview him, and I couldn't believe what I saw. This man went to the pool, washed his eyes and he began to shout, "I can see! I can see!" People began asking him what happened. He didn't know what had happened. He just said, "This man, Jesus—that's the one I was telling you about—put mud in my eyes and told me to go wash in this pool."

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What a stir this brought about. To top it all off, you see, he had done this on the Sabbath. Give me a break, but I've never seen these Pharisees who were raising all this ruckus, heal anybody, anytime. But, anyway, it sounded more like professional jealousy.

I followed this Jesus fellow with even more intensity then. He kept calling the people around him and he would tell them stories. Oh, I liked those stories. I didn't always understand what he was talking about but they were so simple. He didn't seem to be trying to impress us with his knowledge, but rather with his love. There was no doubt about his knowledge. He possessed the very wisdom of the ages.

I'll never forget his story about the good shepherd. He talked about how shepherds lay down their lives for the sheep. Then he told these people he was the good shepherd. Then he said he was "the Son of God." Boy, did that stir up a hornet's nest.

Soon the whole religious establishment was out to get him. I've got a hunch I'm on to a big story here. Just yesterday, Philip, one of his key guys, approached him and said, "There's a couple of Greeks over there who want to talk to you." And this is what he said to Philip.

"The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified."

(John 12:23 NKJV)

I wonder what he means by that? He has used that phrase so many times, but in the past, he has always said, "My hour is not yet come. My hour has not yet come. Now He says, "My hour *has* come." What does he mean? He's going to speak again. Let's listen. He said:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."
(John 12:24)

You know, that's a great way to describe death and life. Oh, I don't understand what he means, but maybe he'll explain it. Listen, he's going to speak again. He's saying,

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."
(John 12:25 NKJV)

Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.

Father, glorify Your name."
(John 12:27,28a NKJV)

It was then that it happened. There was this thundering sound from the heavens. It was a discernible voice. I know this sounds crazy to you, but it was just like a voice. And the voice said something like:

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“I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.”

(John 12:28c NKJV)

My cameraman behind me said, “That was just thunder.” The guy next to me said, “No. An angel spoke.” I don’t know what it was, but Jesus turned and looked us straight in the eye and he said:

“This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”
(John 12:30-32 NKJV)

Well, you can imagine my surprise. And that’s why I’m writing to you. You are “evangelical Christians,” I understand, if anybody should understand what he meant, *you* should. You *do*, don’t you? Well, why don’t you let me know what it means. I have a feeling I may be onto the biggest story of my career. The letter is signed,

Eddie Exclusive,
Reporter, W-O-R-D.

This guy wants an answer. Do you have it? Do you fully understand what Jesus meant in John 12:20-36? Do you understand the callings of God in John, chapters 12, 13 and 14? If not, let’s travel along together for the next four weeks as we walk beside the Master and let’s answer this man’s letter. This mini-series will be called, “The Four Callings of God.” Today, we look at the first of those callings, “The Call to Discipleship.” It’s in five parts:

I- The Priority of God’s Timing (John 12:23)

II- The Priority of Our Dying (John 12:24)

III- The Priority of Our Choosing (John 12:25)

IV- The Priority of Our Suffering (John 12:27)

V- The Priority of God’s Dying (John 12:28-36)

THE PRIORITY OF GOD’S TIMING

It’s found in verse 23, at the beginning of the section, and I don’t think anything Jesus ever said to us was more challenging than this, but we pass right over it. Do you realize what He said? He said, “My hour has come.” And do you realize that until His hour came, He was able to pass right through these crowds of enemies that surrounded Him, wanting to do Him in, and He was untouched. The disciples, if you’ll recall, really had a problem

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with that. They were worried. Every time He would move into enemy territory, they would tell Him to stop and they were afraid of being captured. But He was unruffled, because His time had not come. The Scripture says in Psalm 116:

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.

(Psalm 116:15 NKJV)

Kenneth Taylor adds:

...and he does not lightly let them die. (TLB)

Do you get that? But, beloved, when the Cross loomed on the horizon and death seemed to be the will of the Father, Jesus made no effort to prolong His life at the expense of the Father's will. He simply said, "Hey, My time has come." The Apostle Paul understood. He reached a time in his life when he said, "Wait, the time of my departure is at hand." Hallelujah. But, until God was finished with Paul, he was invincible. God needed him in prison before He needed him in glory.

Until Jesus stood before Pilate and was mocked, and they railed at Him and gambled over His garments and fulfilled all that prophecy, He could not be called home. But, when the moment was right, He was ready to be with the Father.

Step one in the calling of a disciple, is to understand the sovereignty of God over the movements of Satan. God granted Satan permission, you remember, to harass Job and to visit him with disease and suffering and sadness. But He said; "Satan, you can't touch his life. Not until I am ready. Got that?" Satan said, "Oh, alright." Loose translation. Without the Father's permission, Satan was helpless to take his life. And it is true of your life and it's true of my life. Jesus said, "My time has come. The hour has come."

THE PRIORITY OF DEATH TO SELF

We need to come to understand that the basic premise of discipleship, once we understand the sovereignty of God, is to understand the principle of dying to self; to our dreams, our plans, our expectations. Until we die, Christ cannot live.

The reality of death to self, which was once a doctrine that people seemed to grasp in the church, is being lost in this "me, too" society. Death to self isn't that self-martyrdom, "I'll give that up for Jesus" routine. I'll tell you how you know. Someone who

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is dead doesn't elevate self by calling attention to its absence. I mean, can you imagine walking by the cemetery and all these bodies are waving at you, saying, "Hey, I'm dead. Look at me!" But that's what we do as Christians. We say, "Oh, I'm dead to self. Beloved, when you are dead to self, you don't have to say anything. Something that's dead doesn't call attention to itself.

Here's how it works. When the flesh cries out for recognition or gratification, you just ignore the cry. You say to yourself, "I can't hear that. I'm dead." I mean, have you ever tried to talk to a dead man? You don't get a lot of response. If you do, run. But the muffled call of the flesh needs to be translated into the language of the Spirit instead, and you can hear that. You are alive in the Spirit, and through the Word you respond. That's what Paul meant when he said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless, I live." And that's what Jesus meant when He said:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. [But, if it's willing to die, wow—fruit.]

(John 12:24 NKJV)

Jesus is saying that if you *really want to be a disciple*, you must understand that even nature demonstrates the procedure, which precedes life, which is death. The old life must die, be buried, and left alone. You can't have it both ways. You can't! You can't be dead to self and still cling to desires and appetites and the things God doesn't want you to do and have. You don't even have that option. Dead people don't fight change. Have you noticed that?

THE PRIORITY OF OUR CHOOSING

The third principle is the principle of choice. And this is where so many of us get confused. God does it; we choose to let him and we get confused. Death to self has to be practical and applicable to work. Here is what you do. I don't know how many of you have done this before, but if you need an assignment, and you don't, and you won't, but I'm going to give it to you. Take some time this week, take a piece of paper and write out the rights of a dead man. Write them out, and then apply those rights to your life when you have choices to make.

For instance, you have a habit or a thought pattern that really has plagued you for a long time and you don't like it and those

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temptations come at you and you don't know what to do. Well, I'll tell you what to do—a dead man doesn't enjoy those thoughts. He doesn't even hear them, and you're dead. So, every time those thoughts come in your mind tomorrow, you say to yourself, "Wait a minute! I didn't hear that. I have been crucified with Christ." Dead people can't hear. "But, wait a minute, Christ is alive in me, and Christ hates those thoughts. Therefore, by the power of the Spirit, I take the Word of God, and I choose to acknowledge that self is dead, Christ is alive, and those thoughts have no place in me. Hooray! The victory is mine." Then you begin to meditate on Philippians 4:8, "Think on these things." And you do it over and over, and soon it becomes automatic. And choices are made based on the Word of God, not on the emotions of a dead man. Self is dead. Leave him. Christ is alive.

and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

(Ephesians 4:24 NKJV)

THE PRIORITY OF OUR SUFFERING

The third priority is even tougher. What will this new life be like when you put on the new man? What's it going to be? Will it be filled with prosperity and health and the absence of problems; continual happiness on our way to heaven? Not if we're talking about the life Jesus talked about. The life Jesus talked about to his disciples if they wanted to really follow Him, was a life that was filled with trials and persecution and hardship and suffering. In John 12:27—I don't know if you have ever memorized this verse, but please do. It's one of the most beautiful verses in all of Scripture to claim when you're about to panic. Now, I know that doesn't happen to you, but it might someday. You come across something you really don't know how to deal with, and here is what Jesus said.

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." (John 12:27, 28a NKJV)

Jesus was facing the Cross. Everything the disciples imagined that He was working for was about to dissolve in a frenzy of misunderstanding, false accusation, obstruction of justice, mob madness, peer rejection, and unjust execution. Doesn't sound much like heaven on earth to me. And, Jesus understood our feelings. He was tested in all points as we are. And He admitted:

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“Now is my soul troubled.” Now, I don’t know about you, but I think that is a very honest statement for God to make. What Jesus was saying is, “You know guys, the choices facing me are not good choices. I can do the Father’s will and be beaten, humiliated, shamed, mocked, and murdered. That’s choice number one. Or I can miss the Father’s will, and that’s choice number two. Those were the only two. But, beloved, as a dead man, He didn’t have any rights. It really didn’t matter if pain and suffering awaited Him. A dead man can’t feel any pain. And how can a dead man be humiliated?”

So, the choice was made. But, for *our benefit*, He asked a question. He said, “Father, how should I respond to this. What do I do? I have two choices: I can say ‘Father, save me from this hour. Lord, deliver me from this prison house of pain and suffering. Don’t let Your anointed One be misunderstood or mocked or abused. I can pray like that.’” “Or,” Jesus said, “I can relax and say, ‘Wait a minute, Lord. Here’s my life. It’s Yours. And the Cross is why I am here, and suffering is part of my calling.’” So, instead, Jesus said, “Father, for this cause came I unto this hour. Just glorify Your name.” And guess what? The Father did. And the Father answered Him and said, “I have glorified it, and I will again.”

What a verse to claim when the skies overheard turn dark and problems begin to face you in the weeks to come, and the crises on the horizon cause us to cry out in anguish, “Lord, no!” Why not, instead, pray, “Father what should I say, deliver me from this hour? There’s a reason You brought me to this hour. Just glorify Your name.”

Do you know what He will do? In sweet tones He will respond from His Word to you, “I have glorified it, and I will again.” And the Word will comfort your heart and remind you of why you are alive. You are not here to enjoy life or to become successful, or to be free from pain and suffering and hunger and loneliness and trial. If you were, how could Jesus be your example on planet earth? You are here to glorify God.

If passing through the valley of death glorifies God, then for that cause God brought you to this place. If being misunderstood and responding in love glorifies God, then for that cause God brought you to that hour. If a life of pain and incurable illness most glorifies God by demonstrating His awesome grace, then

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for that purpose came you to this hour, and He will bring you through that hour that He might glorify His name. And if that is why you are here, why even listen to the arguments of a dead man? Just cry out in victory, “Lord for this cause came I to this hour. Glorify Your name!”

If you would like a one-line description of a disciple, you might even write this definition down:

A disciple: one whose sole goal in life is to glorify God.

Now, how many of you would still like to be a disciple? If so, remember the priority of God’s timing. It means Satan can’t take your life until God is ready.

Understand experientially what it means to be dead. Dead men don’t have a reputation to care for. Dead men can’t vote on where they get to work. Dead men don’t tell somebody what they want to eat or how rich they want to be. Dead men don’t make those decisions. And dead men don’t cry out for acceptance or praise. If you’re dead, you couldn’t hear the applause anyway. But when you get to heaven and the Master whispers in your ear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” then you’ll hear. Remember, thirdly, that being a disciple means that dying to self is a choice.

Fourthly, it means the priority of suffering in the Christian life. Think about what Jesus called the Christian life.

Matthew 10:22 says:

“And you will be hated by all for my My name’s sake.”

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.”
(Matthew 10:22a,24 NKJV)

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”
(Luke 9:23 NKJV)

He who loves his life will lose it, (John 12:25a NKJV)

That’s discipleship. It means suffering. It means giving up what you thought was important so God can use you to do what is important. And the only way to do that is to die.

That’s why Paul said his one goal in life was to enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. And some of you here in this room, today, understand what that means. But when you enter into the fellowship of His sufferings; you are promised to

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enter into His glory, which is to follow. So, Jesus is saying, “If you’re not willing to die, don’t ask God to use you. If you’re not willing to suffer, don’t ask God to use you. If you’re not willing to give up everything you hold dear in order for God to give you everything that is dear, don’t ask God to use you. That’s John 12 in a nutshell.

Beloved, the disciples didn’t get raises and new cars and fancy homes for joining the team. You say, “Well, what did they get?” They got exiled and stoned and shipwrecked and beaten. They lost their families, lost their homes, lost their ambitions, and lost their acceptance. They became nothing so God could give them everything. That’s discipleship, beloved. And that’s what God has called us to.

THE PRIORITY OF GOD’S DYING

I believe, in closing, we ought to summarize the Christian life in one word—Cross. Until you understand that word and what that word means, you cannot be a disciple. Unfortunately, beloved, it’s a word that’s used less and less and less, as we come to the end of this age. You say, “Why is that?” Jesus told us why. It is a stumbling block to the Jew and foolishness to the Gentile. It’s nonsense, and it gets in the way. The Cross says, God had to die or you couldn’t live. Can you buy that? The Cross says, apart from God you can’t please God; you can’t even come to God. In fact, the Cross says that the best you can do apart from God is sin. That’s because you’re a sinner by birth and a sinner by choice, and sin makes God sick. He hates it. But He loves us. And that Cross stands as a reminder of the depravity of man and the helplessness of man apart from the grace of God.

It’s not difficult today, beloved, to find churches that teach men to enjoy God and to worship God as a loving friend. It’s not difficult to find messages of hope and messages of comfort. That’s the way it should be. But, beloved, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find churches that still preach the Cross.

The Cross offends people. It interferes with drawing crowds. It requires men to make a choice between the philosophies that herald the goodness of man and the depravity of man. It requires us to see ourselves as nothing in this age of self-improvement and self-importance. The Cross makes a mockery of our ability to improve ourselves and improve society and build a better world. It decries the “good works” of “good men” who build churches

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and empires on how sweet and kind God is without regard to His righteousness and His judgment and His wrath.

The Cross is at the center of the controversy between religion and discipleship. It always has been and it always will be. That's why Jesus completed this discourse the way He did. He said, "Did you hear the Father's voice? It was for a reason. He's trying to tell you what He is planning to do, so that He can glorify His name.

What is He planning to do?

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

This He said, signifying what death He should die.

(John 12:31-33 NKJV)

You say, "Uh-oh. That's what He meant by glorifying His name." That's not what we meant. He meant *God was going to judge the world*. He meant that Satan was going to be put aside forever; that *Jesus was going to be lifted up on a Cross and God was going to die*.

That's not what they wanted to hear. It still isn't. And here's how they answered Him:

The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

(John 12:34 NKJV)

They caught on pretty quickly. He wasn't talking about building a kingdom, sitting on a throne and living happily ever after. He was talking about dying the death of a common criminal. They said, "We must not have understood you. Who is this Son of Man? It can't be Messiah. He's going to live forever. Give us a sermon about the love of God or the power of God or the grace of God. But don't talk to us about death and dying and crosses and crucifixion. We don't want to hear it!" And they still don't.

Jesus basically said to them, "You don't understand, beloved. Unless I be lifted up, unless God dies, you can't live. *But if I be lifted up*, I will draw all men unto Myself." And, beloved, without the Cross, men can have happy times thinking about God, pleasant times singing about God, wonderful times writing

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about God, rewarding times preaching about God; but they have missed it because they are not talking about the true God.

The true God is repulsed by sin. The true God cannot look upon sin. He is a God of holiness and righteousness and truth. He will not compromise that holiness or cancel that righteousness or counterfeit that truth. Yes, He is a God of love, and because He loves us so much, He won't leave us in our sins. So, He tells it like it is.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
(Romans 3:23 NKJV)

there is none righteous, no not one; (Romans 3:10 NKJV)

Beloved, if you are here today, until and unless you see yourself as God sees you, a sinner eternally separated from a holy God by the filth in your life; and until you see yourself as unable to reform or be changed apart from something supernatural, you are lost! You don't just get better. You don't just heal yourself. You don't just decide to "become a Christian" by joining a church and trying to live a good life.

It's a gift. It's free. But you have to take it. And the problem is, to get it you have to come to that offensive, uncomfortable place we call "The Cross." Now, you still want to be a disciple? You see, that will be your message. Not sweetness and light and peaches and cream. Death. Dying. Suffering. A Cross. Agony.

I have to ask if you've been there? Has there ever been a time in your life when you gave up the claim to your life and threw yourself at the mercy of God and said, "Save me!" You see, that's where discipleship begins. And one reason so many people are paralyzed in their attempts to live for Christ is that they are trying to live for Christ. You can't live for Christ until the indwelling Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you and lives through you. Until "He be lifted up," you cannot be a disciple.

If you are not certain that at some point in your life, you've come to God on God's terms and asked Christ to come into your life, you have neglected the first calling of the Christian life; to be "born again" from above. Until that happens, living for God is a religious substitute for the real thing, and Satan will let you do it, and the churches will let you do it, and you'll be dead. "There will be many," Jesus said, "who come to Me in that day and say 'Hey, I taught Sunday School, and I led singing, and I've been a deacon or an elder. And I was even in the ministry.'" And He will

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have to say to them, “Depart from me, I never knew you, because you never came to the Cross.”

I believe, beloved, that’s why more than anything else, the church must return to the preaching of the Cross. Yes, it offends. It’s a stumbling block to some; it is foolishness to others. But to those who believe, “It is the power of God unto salvation.” Which would you rather have? A church filled with people who think they are believers, acting out their faith in the flesh? Or a handful of people inhabited by the Spirit and motivated by the Word? Which would you rather have: a brand-new Porsche with no motor or a ten-year old Chevy that runs? And churches all over this world are filled with powerless Porsches who are giving money, serving on committees, and teaching classes, but are lost.

They have no more power than the Pharisees did. And they have no more hope than the Pharisees did. If you want to know how Jesus felt about the Pharisees, it’s all over the place, but Matthew 23 is the best one. He said:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.”

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.”

“Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”
(Matthew 23:25,27,33 NKJV)

Now, that wasn’t a very delicate sermon, was it? It didn’t build a following. It didn’t make the hierarchy happy. It didn’t satisfy those who were keeping the rules, but had never come to Christ. But that was the gospel when Jesus preached it.

The numbers game, beloved, is a hoax. Jesus never played it. Remember John, chapter six? Jesus was preaching about sin, salvation, and discipleship. The crowds responded, “This is too tough. Give us something easy.” In verse 66, we read that from that time on, the exits were filled. People were leaving in droves. The disciples were panicking. They said, “Ease up a little, Lord. They’re leaving. And Jesus turned to them and said, “Hey gang, do you want to go with them?”

Then said Jesus to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”
(John 6:67 NKJV)

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“The bus is leaving. I can do without you, but I cannot change the message.” And then, you remember Simon Peter’s memorable words.

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. (John 6:68b,69 NKJV)

The call to discipleship today is the same as it was two thousand years ago. It’s the result of the Cross; it’s the message of the Cross.

So, in John, chapter twelve, Jesus painted a picture of what life was like as a disciple. It was understanding the timing of God; understanding the priority of death to self; understanding the priority of suffering; and understanding the priority of the Cross, as the only basis for preaching, teaching and living. It is the only thing to build the church on. You soften the message of the Cross and you shield men from the truth the Scripture says, and their blood is on your hands. “Now, how many of you want to be a disciple?” That’s what Jesus was asking. The crowds in John, chapter twelve, were confused. They said, “That’s not the same kingdom. That’s not the same king.” But, it’s the heart of God’s ministry on planet earth.

He didn’t come to build religious empires or to change the face of the social or economic climates of our day. He came with a very simple message. “Come to the Cross and die, and let God have His way in your life. He will lead you down treacherous, rocky mountain paths. He’ll lead you into valleys of persecution and suffering. He will even lead you through the valley of the shadow death. But even there, you “fear no evil, for He is with you” (Psalm 23:4).

You and I have not been invited to a religious party with fun and games and fellowship. We’ve been invited to be inhabited by the living God so that He can lead us through minefields and cannon fire in the most intense spiritual warfare known to man, the struggle between Satan and God in the end times. He has promised us tribulation, suffering, rejection, and persecution. That’s a guarantee.

He has also promised us an inner joy the world can’t understand, an inner peace the world can’t have, and an inner hope the world can’t find. And when the battle is over (and it

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will be soon), He has promised that our Commander-in-Chief will come to us, and call for us, and wrap His arms about us, and escort us personally into the realm of eternity, where all of the pain, and all the suffering, and all the sorrow, and all the joy, will melt into an ocean of praise forever.

That's what Paul meant in II Corinthians 4:16, when he said:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

(II Corinthians 4:16,17 NKJV)

Paul said, "Beloved, you may not realize it, but your affliction is light compared to the glory that will soon be yours. Beloved, the cost of discipleship is heavy when weighed on the scales of life. But when weighed on the scales of eternity, it does not even register. Dear God, may we press on with the business of becoming the disciples we are. Let's pray.

Father,

We know Your Words have never changed. Your purpose has never changed. Your promises have never changed. May we leave this place today, with the confidence that because You have never changed, the task You have for the church today is the same as it was 2,000 years ago. But, praise God, the same power works in us that raised Jesus from the dead.

May we stop playing games, and may we realize afresh and anew, this morning, just what it means to be a disciple.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “My hour has come?” Can you find verses where He said, “My hour has not yet come?” What could Satan do to Jesus before “His hour had come?” Does God place a limit on what Satan can do to your life? Find Scripture to verify your answer.

2- Make a list on a piece of paper of the “rights of a dead man.” What are his rights concerning his reputation? His possessions? His ambitions? His acceptance? At the bottom of that page, write these words: “These are the rights I have as a disciple. I hereby accept that calling. Signed, (Your Name).” Put that paper inside your Bible where you can see it daily to remind yourself that you are not guaranteed happy times, affluence, the absence of pain, misunderstanding, and persecution. Make out a “Death Certificate” with your name on it. Consider yourself a dead man. Now make out a list of the “privileges” you enjoy as a believer: love, joy, peace, patience, etc. You have the privilege of suffering for Jesus’ sake. You have the privilege of a home prepared for you in glory. You have the privilege of a life to come where there will be no sickness, sadness, pain, or death. Focus your attention on these things.

3- Memorize John 12:27 and 28a:

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.

Father, glorify Your name.”

Meditate on it every day for a week. And as the crushing blows of life come your way, and Satan tempts you to cry out to God, “Why me?” or to ask God to remove these problems, claim that passage by whispering it back to God.

4- If you could summarize the message of the gospel in one word, what would that word be? Why does the world so hate that word? What has the church done in our day to accommodate the world? What has been the result?

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5- If you have a friend who is active religiously, but has never been “born from above” how can you explain to them the difference between Christian activity and Christianity? Why is the doctrine of the depravity of man so essential to the gospel? Why does Satan hate it?

6- Begin praying regularly for those you know in the ministry, that the message of the Cross would begin to be or continue to be paramount in their preaching and teaching. Purpose in your own life to never depart from the clarity of its message.

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