

NOW CONCERNING SPIRITUAL THINGS

an historical account of one man's walk with God

Jim Ash letter No. 124

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Boldly declaring **the new things** of Isaiah 42:9 and **the greater things** of John 14:12 in this generation

DISCIPLESHIP

The followers of Jesus were called disciples as recorded in the four Gospels and the book of Acts. The New Testament word "disciple" is translated from the Greek word *mathates* (math-ay-tes', Strong's #3101) and defined as, "A learner, i.e. pupil, from Strong's #3109, *manthano* (man-them'-o), to learn (in any way). KJV – learn, understand." A disciple of Christ today may be described in the words of Farrar, as "one who believes His doctrines, rests upon His sacrifice, imbibes His Spirit, and imitates His example." Jesus called those who followed Him disciples (Matthew 10:24) and even new or unlearned followers were called disciples (Acts 19:1).

While these definitions may imply a certain meaning, Jesus gave His disciples numerous examples of what it means to follow Him. Come with me and let's examine some of these examples and see how we measure up to His standards.

Something that may be a *surprise* to you is when Jesus spoke of or described *disciples* who followed Him, **He was first describing or speaking of Himself and secondly speaking of His followers.** Jesus, Himself, was a disciple of the Father. Nowhere is that better seen than by examining the words Jesus Himself said during His three and one-half year visible ministry.¹ This is treated in some detail in Jim Ash letter No. 93 dated 2/15/07. In that letter I quoted twelve statements of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Here is a *brief summary* of those quotations from the mouth of Jesus:

(1) He came not to do His own will but the will of the Father who sent Him.

(2) He could do nothing in and of Himself, and He spoke only as the Father taught Him.

(3) His doctrine was not His own but that of the Father who sent Him.

(4) No one could come to Him unless the Father drew him.

This means that Jesus did not even choose His twelve disciples, the Father did so by drawing them to Jesus. When the Father's drawing was sufficient, He (the Father) through the Holy Spirit announced the selections to Jesus who then called them. That is why they answered His call.

Jesus, Himself, was given an assignment by the Father. That assignment was to become submissive and

¹The reason I specify the "visible" ministry of Jesus is because for only three and one-half years He was in His *visible* ministry limited to a small geographical area, whereas since the first Pentecost after His resurrection (about 2000 years), His *invisible* ministry has encompassed the earth.

subservient to the Father **as a disciple** for three and one-half years to prove Himself to the Father. That was one of the purposes of His visible ministry. As cruel as it may seem, the cross was His final exam to prove His discipleship to the Father. In Jim Ash letter No. 122, I describe in brief the activities of Jesus following His death on the cross.

In only one incident, according to the biblical record, did Jesus appear to act outside of the Father's direction during His three and one-half year visible ministry. Since this may be another surprise to you, here is the bible record of the incident reported only by John in Chapter 2 of His Gospel:

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2 Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.

3 And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

4 Jesus said to her, "**Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.**"

5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the water pots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it.

9 When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until Now!"

11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His *disciples* believed in Him.

I call your attention to the answer of Jesus to His mother when she requested Him to provide wine for the wedding party. Notice He did not say, "Hallelujah! Glory to God, Mother! What a wonderful idea you thought of!" **No! Instead, what he said to her was a rebuke.** Mary was not addressed as mother but as woman. It is very clear that the wine idea did not

originate with the Father, nor with Jesus, but with a woman's concern to see to needs that were the host's responsibility.

The reason Jesus complied with the woman's concern about the wine is because He lived and died under the law of Moses. The fifth Commandment required that a Jew honor his mother and father that his days may be long on the earth. Jesus, the Jewish rabbi, responded to the *woman's* (His mother's) *concern* for wine to honor His mother and to comply with the law of Moses under which He lived and under which He died. It was neither the Father's nor the Son's desire to do something that the Wedding host should have seen to before the party began. The host of the wedding party did not count the cost (consider adequate planning) for the party, a principle on which Jesus taught later in His ministry.

This is the only biblical record of something Jesus did which appears to be outside of His discipleship training *by the Father*. It is clear that Jesus *rebuked the woman* but complied with the request *of His mother* to obey the law of Moses.

This incident occurred early in the ministry of Jesus. Thereafter, He appears to distance Himself from fleshly, family ties in favor of spiritual ties or relationships, except at the cross, when He asked John to care for His mother after His death.²

Here is an example of those whom He considered to be His family: Jesus was ministering in a crowded area when His mother and brothers appeared outside and wanted to speak to Him. When this was reported to Him, He said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" Then He stretched out his hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."³ The obvious conflict of fleshly or family ties with the will of God is again pointedly referenced twice in the bible concerning Adam and Eve and Abram and Sarai.

Adam & Eve – the curse of sin

Here is the background for the following scripture: After Adam's sin, God pronounced curses on the serpent, Eve, Adam and the whole ecosystem of the earth. Here is the curse pronounced on Adam and the earth as recorded in Genesis, chapter 3:

17 Then to Adam He said, "**Because you have heeded the voice of your wife**, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.

19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till

you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Notice that it was the sin of Adam which cursed (wrecked) the complete ecosystem of the earth (paradise) God had provided in the garden of Eden and gave man thereafter the responsibility of bringing forth food from the cursed ground. **This curse, as well as the one pronounced upon Satan and Eve, all occurred because Adam heeded the voice of his wife instead of the voice of God.**

Abram & Sarai – the birth of Ishmael

Now let's look at a similar situation which occurred between Abram and Sarai as recorded in Genesis chapter 16:

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.

2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her."

And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.

3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.

4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

Notice that Abram did the same thing in principle that Adam did. Hence two men, by heeding the voice of their wives instead of the voice of God, **have caused all the ills of mankind**. Adam's disobedience was the most destructive. Abram's disobedience is the source of much of the unrest in the Israel/Palestine/Arab part of the world which will become the powder keg of Armageddon.

Here are three conclusions drawn from our study of Jesus, Adam and Abram:

(1) God's mandate to Adam and Eve to replenish the earth through procreation was passed on to all their descendants since they were God's prototypes for mankind. Hence the Adamic sin nature and the Adamic sin curse of death was included in God's mandate.

(2) Jesus avoided the mandate of procreation as well as both the Adamic sin nature and the Adamic sin curse of death (all three) because the Spirit fertilized the egg (seed) in Mary's womb. That's why He was called the Son of God. He was called the Son of man because He came forth from the womb of woman. All three mandates are inherited by everyone born of woman when the egg is fertilized by the sperm of man.

(3) **It is inevitable** that one who is totally consecrated to God's service will experience a time or times when that one cannot simultaneously heed the

²See John 19:25-27.

³See Matthew 13:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21.

voice (will) of God and the voice (will) of a family member or friend so that a choice must be made. This is confirmed by the experience of Jesus, Adam and Abram. That is one reason Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.”⁴ That is also why Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”⁵ The significance of that statement lies in the fact that in His personal ministry, Jesus distanced Himself from *family ties* and responsibilities except for the one incident with the wedding party wine. That, and being excluded from the procreation mandate, left Him free to live without the conflicts of a wife, His mother, His sisters and brothers. It appears that His step-father had died before His visible ministry began since there is no biblical record of him beyond the time that Jesus was twelve years of age.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: there are times when God’s will for one consecrated to Him may conflict with the will of a family member. That happened to Jesus, Adam and Abram. That is one reason why Jesus came without the mandate to procreate and why in His ministry His spiritual family became more important than His fleshly family. He was totally unencumbered so as to be wholly subservient and submissive to the Father in all things at all times and thusly prove His Discipleship to the Father. The only exception to that statement is *the woman’s concern with the wedding party wine*.

Now that we know something of Jesus as a disciple of the Father, let’s look at a few measures of our becoming His disciple.

Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”⁶ This means that there is a cross for Jesus and also a cross for everyone who chooses to follow Him. The cross of everyone who follows (becomes a disciple of) Jesus serves the same purpose as the cross of Jesus – death – death to **self**. Self must be **DOA** to serve the Lord in the kingdom.

Here is the explanation, which shall be brief, since I have written on this principle in a recent letter. When one is born again, he is born a second time into the kingdom. In the kingdom, those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. Therefore, as one who is born the second time into the kingdom and is led by the Spirit of God, that which he accomplishes will glorify God.

On the other hand, if one is born again into the kingdom, who then initiates something himself without the leading or the approval of the Spirit, even though that endeavor may be imminently successful and blesses many people, it is of filthy rags in the kingdom because

(1) it glorifies **self** and (2) it opens the door to pride and (3) pride then walks right through that open door and great is the fall thereof. The enemy’s deceit glorifies self, the god of Satan, who then becomes your father.

The way the Lord has taught me to avoid this trap of the enemy is to outline my day to Him first thing in the morning. That means to give Him the details I know of and thereby surrender the next twenty-four hours to Him. I then, through the Holy Spirit, ask for His approval. He then will usually respond in the affirmative. This means that my next twenty-four hours have been approved by the Holy Spirit and that I am therefore led (approved) by the Holy Spirit as a son of God in the kingdom and everything done that day will glorify Him.

Additionally, the Lord has said that throughout that day, if something comes up unexpectedly, cover it then. If it doesn’t come to your mind, you are covered. Here is the blessing of this Spirit led life. If I begin my days like this, the Lord has said that I will be under His umbrella of protection and there is no need to plead His blood as protection from the enemy. In this case the enemy will be shut out of my life and no harm shall come near my dwelling.⁷ And that is real security.

That is the way to deny **self** in order to become a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus also taught about the snare of mammon. He has taught me two things about mammon. Mammon may be righteous and may also be unrighteous, depending upon one’s viewpoint. Here are examples of both righteous and unrighteous mammon:

Righteous mammon

One day the Lord spoke to me and said, “Righteous mammon is the god of this world.” Think that through. He did not say righteous mammon is the god of the kingdom but *the god of this world*. This means that Satan, who rules this world, uses righteous mammon as a snare to entrap man. Here is an example to emphasize this point. Suppose word would get out that one of the richest *men* in the world, who just happens to be a US citizen, would visit the church you attend on Sunday morning and that he would take care of his own armed security entourage. What kind of reception do you think he might experience? Now suppose a *man* dressed in shabby, smelly clothing, walking with a limp, needing a shave and a bath, who had been living under a bridge in downtown Dallas, walked in at the beginning of the same church service. What kind of a reception would he get?

Righteous mammon is riches one has gained himself through his own efforts. **Remember, one may experience righteous mammon in the kingdom while being in the world.** Remember also that righteous mammon is the god of this world. The world (controlled by the enemy, the prince of this world) and too often, the Church, worships one, who through his

⁴Matthew 13:57.

⁵Matthew 8:20.

⁶Luke 9:23.

⁷See psalm 91:9-12 for God’s protective umbrella.

own *self* effort, has made an outstanding success in any field of endeavor, which appears to be within the boundary of law, ethics, honesty and morality.

Which of the *two men* would be more receptive to the gospel message? The common people at the lower end of the religious, political, social and economic spectrum were receptive to the message of Jesus while the leaders in those areas killed Him.

Unrighteous mammon

Unrighteous mammon is mammon (riches) *that will keep one from entering the kingdom*. Here is the example Jesus gave as recorded in chapter 18 of Luke's Gospel:

18 Now a certain ruler asked Him (Jesus), saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

20 You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

24 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful. He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!

25 *For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*"

The first thing that you should know about the kingdom of God is that no one entered it while Jesus was in His visible three and one-half year ministry. Both He and John the baptist said that the kingdom was nigh or was at hand, but neither said the kingdom of God had come or been established. Jesus had to live and die under the "law of sin and death" to fulfill it and nail it to His cross,⁸ so as to provide entry into the kingdom of God by being born again. Only after His resurrection did the kingdom of God become accessible by rebirth to everyone who received Him as Savior and Lord.⁹

Notice that the dialogue between the rich young ruler and Jesus started out with what the young ruler had to do to inherit eternal life and ended up with what he had to do *to enter the kingdom that was at hand*. The understanding of this is easier to accept in third-world

developing countries where poverty is the standard and not the exception as it is in the western world.

Notice also the conclusion of all of the dialogue between the rich young ruler and Jesus is in verse twenty-five and has to do with entering the kingdom and does not say that the possession of riches is unrighteous. However, the conclusion of verse twenty-five is that riches may possess one to the point that he may be unwilling to forsake everything in order to follow the Lord (become His disciple) to enter the kingdom, at which time riches become unrighteous or unrighteous mammon.

From experience, I do not believe one may make this decision *himself*. Only God can make it. Here is the way to know. If you have accumulated riches (mammon), whether great or small, whether earned *yourself* or inherited makes no difference. The first thing you must do is to become consecrated to God in the same manner as was Jesus. That means you must make an oral commitment to our Lord, from your heart, that you are willing to *forsake everyone and everything (meaning willingly put Him first in your life)*, including your wealth (mammon) whether large or small, your wife, husband, son, daughter, mother, father, sister, brother and all others, to follow Him. Then and only then, may one enter the kingdom and become His disciple. Then and only then, with everything surrendered to God, *will He make the decision as to what should be the disposition of your worldly wealth and what should be your kingdom relationship to your family and friends*. His decisions may frustrate you, may discourage you and others and at times may baffle you. But if you will stay faithful in the valleys and on the mountain tops, in due time, though there may be trials and misunderstood sufferings, as a kingdom resident, you will be presented with riches untold, received amid tears of joy unspeakable and rewards beyond your fondest dreams. You then will have become His disciple.

This is about maturity and preparation for riches and blessings greater than you can imagine. I know whereof I speak. It's real.

Shortly before He was crucified, Jesus ate the Passover supper with His twelve disciples. After the supper, He laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. He then filled a basin with water, knelt before each disciple, washed their feet and dried them with the towel.¹⁰ God Incarnate washed the feet of Judas Iscariot who then betrayed Him. That is the way to bless your enemy. Everything He admonished us to do, He demonstrated in His daily living. As He hung on the cross, He forgave His executioners.

The teaching of Jesus is, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me with his towel. A towel is the mark of servanthood, a disciple characteristic.

⁸See colossians 2:14.

⁹See John 20:22, 23.

¹⁰See John 13:1-17 for the complete account of this incident.