

Discipleship and Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] We come back tonight to a series, I think, that's been happening all month on the one another commands throughout the New Testament. We just read the famous one from Ephesians 4.32, which has three different one another commands there.

It says, show kindness, compassion, and then forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you. And historically, if you read about these commands in kind of older theologians and older texts, they have historically called these the graces of Christ, the one another commands, putting on the graces of Christ.

Another way to say it is it's a command to put on the very character of Jesus Christ in your own life. And there are three that you see there in Ephesians 4.32. There are six that show up in Colossians chapter three, a number more of these graces.

But we talked about kindness this morning. And we said that God's covenant kindness is the quality that God demonstrates of love to his enemies.

And you think about being compassionate or tenderhearted. And compassion here is the quality that God demonstrates to his enemies. And you say, forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.

[1 : 21] And we say forgiveness is the quality that God demonstrates even to his enemies. And the message is really simple. If one another commands, it's be like God and put on the character of Jesus Christ in your life.

And it's really a follow on from the original command of Genesis chapter one. You were made in the image of God, so go into the world and image God.

And Jesus Christ comes into the world and says, Jesus Christ has remade you. And so go into the world and image Jesus Christ by putting on the graces of Christ from top to bottom. Now, I wanted to look at a passage as well that fit this morning together with these graces in this evening.

And I think that that's John 21. John 21 in some ways is the preconditions of putting on the character of Jesus Christ.

And it's really the same exact same thing as just simply saying, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Not only becoming a disciple once, but being a disciple day in and day out and what that looks like.

[2 : 23] And so we'll see that here in the 14 verses we read from John 21. At the end of every single one of the gospels, Jesus always comes to the disciples at the very latter portions where they call, where he calls them back to himself and then he commissions them.

And you see a slightly different version of that call and commission in every single one of the gospels. And the same thing happens here. Jesus, the resurrected Christ comes to them and he then sends them out.

And if we had two hours to talk about this, John doesn't waste a single word in verse one to 14 here. And every single word serves a purpose as like a symbol or a connection or a metaphor that is picked up from the Old Testament and all sorts of other places.

But there are four elements I think here that you can see really clearly. Conditions for just being a disciple, conditions for developing the character of Jesus in your own life, a forgiving spirit, a loving spirit, in order to be able to do that with one another.

And this is what they are right out of the passage. First, we learn that disciples must be empty-handed fishermen. And secondly, disciples must be people who have been encountered.

[3 : 44] And third, those who have heard the command to cast your net on the other side. And finally, who have heard the invitation and heeded it to come to breakfast on the beach.

So let's look at those four elements. These are the conditions of being a disciple and of putting on the character of Jesus. So first, disciples are empty-handed fishermen.

All right, the commentators are divided. When you look at the end of the book of John on John 20 and 21, they're divided about the relationship between the two chapters.

Because if you happen to have a Bible, you can see in John 20, 21 that Jesus comes to the disciples and they're all huddled up in the room, remember, right after the resurrection hiding. And he comes and he proves himself into doubting Thomas. And just before that, he commissions them and he says, as the Father sent me, so I am sending you out into the world.

[4 : 42] And when he said this, he said to them, receive the Holy Spirit and he breathes on them. And he says, if you go out and you forgive the sins of anyone, their sins are forgiven. And people have pointed out many times that this moment looks like Pentecost.

Jesus actually breathes upon them and it says they receive the Holy Spirit. And then he says, go out into the world in the power of my name and forgive sins as I have forgiven your sins.

And immediately after that, he turns and says, okay, now Thomas, let me show you that I really am resurrected from the dead. And so he comes to them and they're huddled down together, hiding from the world.

And he commissions them and says, forgive people in the power that I've given you, because I've forgiven you for so much, and then he proves himself to a doubting disciple.

And if you come to chapter 21, verses 1 to 14, what we just read, Jesus comes again in his third resurrection appearance to a huddled group of disciples and he again comes to meet with one of them in particular who is struggling.

[5 : 52] You know, Thomas struggled with objective doubt. I don't know if I can believe a person was really raised from the dead. And then in 21, Peter is struggling with subjective doubt saying, I committed treason against the Lord three times.

I don't know if I'm still in this. I don't know if I'm still a disciple. I don't know where I stand before him. And so there are actually parallel passages in different places between the second appearance of Jesus Christ and the third appearance of Jesus Christ after the resurrection.

In other words, it's saying to us, you've got to read them side by side to actually understand what's going on here in chapter 21. And so let's look at that. The context here is that the disciples are 95 miles north.

They're around the Sea of Galilee and some amount of time has passed. We don't know how much. And the tone of the text is in verse two. It says that they were, quote, together.

And what it's doing in parallel with 20 is as soon as Jesus resurrected from the dead, the disciples went and hid themselves and they were together and they were huddled down. And Jesus has commissioned them and said, you've got the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

[7 : 02] Go and get to work. And in 21, the very next story, they've moved 95 miles north, but they're still huddled down together. And Jesus, sorry, Peter says, I'm going to go fishing.

And they say, okay, we're coming. We're coming with you. And so they go fishing. And so what is happening here and commentators are divided about this because some will say they've gone back to their hometowns.

That's to be expected. They're hungry. These are hungry men and they just, they're going out fishing because they need a bite to eat. They need food. But John, John is putting this here for a very specific reason.

And he's putting this here in parallel with 20 to show that once again, after they were huddled and doubting and commissioned and received the Holy Spirit, they are back to huddled and doubting, going back to their day job, sitting on their hands, not doing any of the things that Jesus had commanded, not forgiving people in the power of the name of Jesus, not bearing the name of Christ into the world.

And you know, you might say at best, they don't yet understand the power of the commission. They don't yet understand the mission impact of Jesus' resurrection. But one commentator says that going back to fishing was dangerous.

[8 : 20] It was like being lulled to sleep. And one of the reasons that we think that is because this passage is, you might remember, is parallel exactly to Luke chapter five, which the readers of John, John would have expected the readers to have read.

John comes later than Luke in the history of writing these texts. And then Luke five, Peter was called in the same exact way. Peter and some of the disciples, the future disciples were out fishing and Jesus shows up and he says, have you caught any fish?

And they say, no. And he says, well cast your net on the other side. And they cast their net on the other side and they haul in a whole load of fish. And then he says, well now you're going to be fishers of people. And come and they followed him.

And now we get the exact same story in reverse. And it's saying exactly that, that the disciples are going in reverse. They've gone back to what they were before they ever knew Jesus Christ.

And they've neglected the commission to go and forgive people as they've been forgiven. And look, on the one hand, the point, the point on the one hand, this is a call to every single person who reads it to all of us tonight that Christian disciples can never go into maintenance mode.

[9 : 38] And we have that in the parable of the talents when Jesus gives out in the parable or the master one talent and two talents and five talents and ten talents. And one of the men buries their talent and just waits for the master to return.

And he returns and the master says, you are a wicked servant. You did not do much with the resources that I've given you. And the point of the parable was a disciple of Christ can never go into maintenance mode.

There are always ministers of the gospel were always on mission. We're always, we have to decompartmentalize, decompartmentalize our lives at every turn for the sake of the call of Jesus Christ.

But I don't think that's actually the the point here because I think what John is doing is actually showing us the conditions of true discipleship and of what it looks like to put on the forgiving character of Jesus Christ.

And they are lost men and they've seen the resurrected Jesus and they've been breathed on and they've been called and commissioned and they are sitting on their hands and they're lulled to sleep and they're lost.

[10 : 43] And actually that's exactly the point because in the text John marks it off by saying it's night time and it was dark.

And these are signals in the gospel of John of exactly where we are. In other words, what he's trying to get at is to be a disciple not only once but every single day we actually have to come as empty handed fishermen.

And no, and we have to get to a place in our lives where every single day we can wake up and say without Jesus I can do nothing. I am empty handed.

I don't have the resources and the power within myself to forgive as he forgives or to love as he loves or to go out my door another day and try to be on mission for Christ in a city where most people don't believe.

I do not have the, we have to actually every day disciples have to come again and say I'm an empty handed fisherman. I don't have anything apart from them.

[11 : 48] And I think one of the examples of this is to remember how Saul Paul was called, was converted, came to faith in Jesus. This reminds me of the Saul story.

Remember in Acts chapter nine, it says that Saul breathed threats and murders against the Christians. And actually in the Greek text, the language there is that he was spitting anger against the Christians.

He hated them so much it's the verbs of animality. He hated, he was so against Jesus Christ that he was like a slobbering wolf every time he saw the Christians.

And you know, when you read that and you see what happened to him and you see that he got knocked off his horse. And you've got to say this man was the most unlikely convert to Christianity in all of human history.

And you come to John 21 and you see Peter. Peter had committed treason against the Lord publicly before him three times. And then he's seen the resurrected Christ. And the resurrected Christ has breathed on him and said go and do ministry.

[12 : 58] And now he's going back to his day job and saying I'm still not in. I don't know that I can do this. And you've got to say Paul and Peter, these are the most unlikely disciples that could put on the character of Jesus Christ and be forgiven in all of human history.

And you know, on the one hand that tells us that there is no unlikely convert. That there is no person in the world that's an unlikely disciple. But it's the first element of being a disciple, of being able to put on the graces of Jesus Christ is knowing it is for the dead and the undeserving and that is me.

And every day I have to wake up and say I am an empty handed fisherman. Jesus Christ always counters the human will. Now the second element and more briefly, the second element is that Christ like disciples are people who have been encountered.

When you see it right here in the midst of the text, you can see it that it says twice he revealed himself to them at the beach.

And that word is really important because it's not saying simply that Jesus just showed up and said hey, it's a word that appears all the time in the book of John.

[14:14] The first time it appears is in the wedding at Cana. He reveals himself. He reveals his glory through the miracle of the wine and people didn't know what to do with it.

He reveals himself at the Transfiguration Mountain and people have to hide their faces. Another moment is in the Garden of Gethsemane. When the soldiers come to arrest him, he unveiled himself.

He said who do you come for? And they said Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth and he said I am. He spoke the divine name and he revealed and pulled back the curtain on a momentary glimpse of his glory and the soldiers fell down on their faces and worshiped.

And that's exactly what this word means. It says it twice in the same sentence. He revealed himself to him and this is how he revealed himself to him.

Now, it's such an important word in John. Remember when they're on the beach with Jesus, they say that they want to ask him, is it really you?

[15:18] But they dared not because they at the same time knew it was him. And what is going on there when it says they knew it was him but they wanted to ask him, is it you?

And it's because Jesus Christ was resurrected, John 20, he shows up and there's Mary and she was with him for seven years. He had cast demons out of her and she could not see him.

And then he was on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples and they walked so far with him and they did not know who they were speaking to. And now again, he's appearing to them for a third time and they're saying I see him, I know it's him but I also want to ask him, is it really you?

And that's exactly John's point saying that look, the second condition of discipleship, of discipleship, of growing in the graces and character of Jesus Christ is coming and knowing every single day that to be a disciple is to be a person who has been encountered.

And it's a person who's been encountered by a God in Christ that we did not expect and that we could have never created on our own.

[16:33] And who comes in and reveals, unveils a glimpse of his glory and kicks us off of our horses and makes us hide our faces where we have to say I just want to smash my idols before him because he's unveiled himself before him.

I've seen a glimpse of his glory and putting on the character of Jesus Christ in forgiveness means being encountered by Jesus Christ and it means smashing the idols in our lives because we've seen the resurrected Christ as he's revealed himself.

Just to close this briefer point, if John wastes no words in the story and I don't think he does, when Peter's encountered, when Peter realizes what's happening, it says that he put back on his garments because he was stripped for work and he dove into the sea.

You have to ask if you're going to dive into the sea, why do you put your full garment back on? And this is the language of Jonah and whenever Peter sees Jesus and he realizes this is the one, this is the Lord, I'm being encountered, he has to clothe himself because he's exposed and he dives back down into the depths of the ancient seas, the sea of Galilee knowing that that is an image of death of Jonah going into the waters of death that he deserved because he ran for God and there's Peter doing the same thing and when we are encountered by the resurrected Jesus Christ, discipleship is saying, I am an empty-handed fisherman and I'm exposed before him.

I don't deserve his presentation. I don't deserve his revelation. I'm poor. I'm lost apart from his grace. It's an everyday encounter that is the condition of being able to put on the graces of loving one another and forgiving one another.

[18:37] Now the third of four elements then here is that Jesus then speaks and he opens his mouth and he both calls them and he commands them and just a couple of things here.

He calls them and he says, children cast your net on the other side and there are two things that happen here in order to open the disciples, in order for our eyes to be open to who he really is. You remember I mentioned already back in John 20, Mary thought that Jesus Christ was the gardener and how did he reveal himself?

He said Mary and the scales fall from her eyes and she hugs him and she comes in and she embraces him and John 10, my sheep hear my voice and when I cry out to them, I call out to them, they come to me, they run to me and when he reveals himself and when he speaks to you, you can't help but come to him and right here that's exactly what's happening.

The text says that he says children which is a very literal translation but the Greek scholars will say that the word children here is colloquial so it's almost equivalent to saying like lads or my friends.

[19:51] He calls out and he says my friends come to me and as soon as they hear him, this is Jesus Christ saying I no longer call you servant.

I don't care Peter what you've done, I don't care how much you've run from me, I come today to call you friend and John makes an interesting point, he stamps the time, it was night time when they were fishing but when does Jesus show up in verse 4?

It says as soon as the day broke, as the sun was coming over the horizon, there he was standing on the beach saying my friends and their eyes were open and Peter dives into the water and they come to him but there's also a second element here and that's that remember this moment is exactly parallel to Luke chapter 5 when Peter was first called by Jesus and then Jesus said to Peter cast your net on the other side and they say well you know we've been fishing all night we've got nothing and they did it and they filled up the boat and then it says when Simon Peter saw what had happened he fell down at Jesus' feet saying depart from me for I am a sinful man oh Lord.

Now in this moment they fill the boat up with 153 fish they say it's the Lord Peter dives into the water he swims to shore and we've got this moment this interlude in the text where we do not know what happened when Peter got to the beach to see Jesus again and the reason we don't know is because John is writing the story and John is in the boat about 100 yards off the shore but in Luke chapter 5 they filled the boat up and Peter turned and got on his knees and said depart from me Lord for I am a wicked and unclean man and you've got to imagine that when Peter swims to the beach and he comes soaking wet he I've got to think he falls down on his knees and he says depart from me Lord for I am a wicked and unclean man and he knows that this is the judge of all the earth before whom he should be judged and instead he has said you are my friend he's revealed himself he said you're my friend come to me because when you are when you're an empty handed fisherman before the face of God and the glory of Jesus Christ encounters you you fall and you say depart from me Lord I'm I don't deserve to be encountered I don't deserve to be called by you and he speaks your name and he says I have spoken your name and he calls you friend and he forgives you and he goes and says now go forgive as I forgive him and that that leads us then to the fact that we're commanded I heard one pastor recently tell the story of a man by the name of Simon Wyzenthal Simon Wyzenthal wrote a book he was a Holocaust survivor a Jewish man he wrote a book called the sunflower and it was about the possibilities and limits of forgiveness and at the very end of World War II in 1945 Wyzenthal was liberated from a concentration camp and there he came face to face at the very end of the war with a

German SS officer and the German SS officer was dying and the man grabbed Wyzenthal's jacket you know grabbed his shirt and pulled him close and he started to confess all of his sins and he poured his heart out and he said he told Wyzenthal that he had that he had done things like burn down an entire building full of Jewish men and women and all these other things that I won't even say out loud here and the whole book is Wyzenthal saying that in that moment he didn't know what to do and he explores in the text what are the limits and the possibilities of forgiveness and you know Peter had come to Jesus and said how many times do I have to forgive and Jesus said essentially told him through a numerical metaphor you've got to forgive all the way down from the top to the bottom and Wyzenthal wouldn't illustrate that we have to come to the man on the beach who has called out our name and we bowed before him and he said friend to you and we have to be there to say this is how far I've been forgiven this is the depths that Jesus Christ has come in stripping himself of his royalty and going all the way to the point of great cause for me because every time forgiveness happens it really costs something and we have to know that it costs the God man everything to the point of hell so that so that so that I so that we could be for so that I could have the and you could have the power in that he gives to forgive like he has forgiven and so that

means then that we are as we start to wrap up disciples then under this command to forgive as he forgives and part of that command shows up right here in the text implicitly Luke chapter five remember is the parallel and in Luke chapter five they said castranet on the other side and as soon as Peter does that we see we mention what happened and then the very next thing very famously what does Jesus do he commissions them and he says now are you are to go be as the King James puts it a fisher of men a fisher of men and women and boys and girls a fisher of people that's what Jesus says you're to go be a fisher of people and the difference in Luke Luke five and John twenty one is the death and resurrection and here we are again and the commission is implicit he's saying to them you are now Peter again to be a fisher of you are a man under command and you're you're going to go out into the world and you're you're to get busy and we've got what does it mean to be a fisher of people and here very important they're in the sea of Galilee and the symbol of the sea for a first century person for an ancient near eastern person was very clear it it was that the sea was the place of chaos and death and the

[26 : 38] Israelites didn't like getting into the ocean waters because of this all throughout their history and everybody had that when Jesus says I'm going to make you a fisher of people what happens when you fish you transfer fish from the kingdom of darkness under the water out into the kingdom of light on the shore and he's saying to be a fisher of people is to be a person who is so on mission that you're always looking in Christ to transfer people from the kingdom of darkness under the waters of death into the kingdom of light on the beach and we we do that by speaking the word of the gospel by good works and by putting on the character of Jesus Christ on display by forgiving people as God in Christ has forgiven us this in other words he's saying you're you are a person under command this is a duty that we've been called to be these people if we've experienced the grace of Christ in Luke chapter 5 it says that they left everything and followed him and that means that the possibility of being a forgiving person means that we have had we have to hear the call and command that breaks the consumer mentality and that helps to see that our life is not about our life and that our life is not our own and that we are and that we are called to forgive 70 times 7 and I was I was on Twitter recently and I saw a person who a teacher in the states who posted that one of her children wrote an essay I think they were you know p6 s1 type age and they wrote an essay and they started it out now just listen carefully they started it out like this in the in the in the late 1900s that's how they started the essay and you know immediately hopefully you you hear it in the late 1900s that's what the children are saying these days we're talking about 1999 just like we might say in the late 1800s in the late 1700s and this child said in the late 1900s and you know I remember in the late 1900s the 90s and some of you remember better than I do I I don't know if it's actually the same word I can't remember but you know we have everybody used to wear pagers right and I remember my mom and I think doctors still do wear pagers but everybody used to wear pagers all the adults had pagers back then and I remember going to the restaurants and my mom was an extra she was a radiologist and she would wear that pager and all of a sudden the call the beep would come through and she would you'd have to interrupt the dinner and you would go to the phone the restaurant phone and call and they would tell you exactly what your orders were where you were good where you were to go and where you were to be and you know when you have been called and encountered your life is not your own anymore and it's it's not just a life for us a fulfilling personal desires but the life of the imitation of Jesus Christ the life under command the life of putting on the grace of Christ and so the very last thing to say and we'll close the fourth element of being a disciple of being a person who's putting on the graces of Christ is that we've heard the invitation to breakfast on the beach and that we've come and it's right here at the end of the passage Jesus prepares breakfast for them and invites them to come eat with him on the beach and very quickly the commentators are also divided about what's going on here but one of the things we can say is this meals in the first century were such a big deal and meals today are such a big deal but in the first century eating a public meal with a person was a covenantal act it was saying I love you and I want to be with you and for you and that's why and they ate their meals by the way out in public the dining areas

of homes in the first century face the streets open air which is why in so many instances where Jesus is eating a meal with prostitutes and tax centers and tax collectors as the text puts it the Pharisees actually walk up to it and say what are you doing because they saw the meat it's a covenantal act it's saying I identify myself with you I'm for you I'm with you and Jesus did it all the time and here he is saying to this these treacherous trees and committing disciples of his come and

eat with me and I'm for you and I'm with you and rest here at this meal and the reason it was such a big deal and this is the last thing is that the contamination laws the laws of uncleanness in the Torah and in here in the first century for the Jewish Israelite people meant that if you ate with a person who was unfit to be at the temple through ceremony ceremonial contamination then you were unfit to be at the temple you could not enter into the presence of God and so even the disciples will say to Jesus don't eat a meal with public centers because you're not then you won't be fit to go to the temple and be with your father and every single time Jesus says no come and eat with me and he does not become unclean instead what happens is they become clean and when we're in we are in but we we have been called and invited to breakfast on the the beach with you the feast to feast at the Lord's table to feast on Jesus Christ himself through the revelation of Christ this is this is the public invitation for disciples every single day to come back to the feast to eat the celebratory reconciliation meal of resurrection and you do it by meeting in communion with Jesus Christ and that means that means that the conditions of putting on the graces of Jesus of loving one another of forgiving one another you know where can you get that power how can I forgive as Christ forgives and be compassionate and kind as he is and it means that each of us every single day over time it's a habitus a habituation an act of slow growth has to come daily empty handed and and allow ourselves to be encountered again by Jesus Christ in his word and we have to say woe is me and confess our sins before him and know the depths of forgiveness we've experienced and come afresh to the table of Jesus amongst his people and it has it has to be weekly it has to be daily it has to be habituated and we grow and we grow and we put on the graces all the more it's the slow formation the long obedience in the same direction of Christ likeness and this is its pattern let's pray together father we ask that you would make us like yourself and so we come to renew ourselves tonight and what it means to be a disciple and so we do ask for hearts that are empty handed and open and knowing what we don't possess the powers that we don't have we come to you confessing our sins we come to you hearing your call my friends we come to you tonight longing to be renewed and refreshed so that we can be on mission displaying forgiveness and love and grace like you forgave us at the cross and so we come tonight and ask for this heart among us we ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.