

# *Courage For Commitment II*

by  
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## **Nature Of Discipleship**

Do you realize that being a disciple of Christ is not so much a matter of remembering what He said, as it is a matter of yielding to Him as He is now?

In continuing our study of "Courage For Commitment" we are now taking up the general topic of the nature of discipleship. Being a disciple of Christ means being yielded to do His will. That may sound simple enough but it involves a drastic operation. The word "disciple" is the basic element in the word "discipline." Every one of us knows what that means. It includes the idea of some sort of control, some sort of restriction. The word "discipline" means to "make a disciple," to make a person who is yielded to the truth that is being set forth. Now our study on this subject is focused upon three different passages in the Gospel of Mark.

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:34-38).

This is straightforward talk. It sounds simple. "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." And it is simple. It is as simple as dying. That is simple too. But that is very profound.

Jesus of Nazareth explains the basic principle involved when He uses these words: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." That sounds almost like double talk. But it is really quite simple. Let us go to the garden and see it illustrated. If I want beans, I must plant beans. And you know what that means? I must take beans, which I could have used for soup, I could have eaten them, and take those beans out and put them into the ground. Those beans will waste away. It will be as if I were actually losing those beans. I am putting them out. But that is what it takes to have plants grow. In order to have the bean plants grow I need to do just that. This is for myself spiritually. I can follow that so simply. I need to deny my interest in what I am and my special interest in what I have, when I am denying myself. In one form or another, stronger or weaker, bigger or smaller as the case may be, that means that I am going to die. I die in this world to live in that world.

The truth is really quite simple. Whoever wants to save or keep his present earthly life will never have eternal life. But whoever yields, gives up, his present earthly life in serving the Lord will receive eternal life. Then Jesus of Nazareth argued why this is better. And we are so familiar with these words: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The world, you see, is temporary. It is finite. Oh, it is very real, and when you are right in it, it is right next to you. But it

will not stay. The soul is eternal; it is infinite. It involves things that are forever. So He argued "give up that which is for a little while, and get that which is for always."

Actually the Gospel offers the hearers a deal, heaven for earth. Earth, we have; heaven, we can get. But this presents an initial problem at the very beginning of it. If I am going to enter in on this deal, the very thing I have to start with is the denial of self; self-denial. I have things of this earth. I have my body, I have my personal life in this world; and if I were to yield that to get more, the issue involved would mean denying myself. That requires strength.

By way of motivating this action of self-denial, giving me an argument that will strengthen me to do it, Jesus of Nazareth gave a warning. This was His warning: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." I think that word "adulterous" primarily means "worldly." Of course it may include the actual exercise of adultery as we understand it, but according to the biblical use of the word "adultery," it means anything that is not from God.

There is a day of judgment and separation coming. This argument was put in there for us. The basis of that separation which is coming will be the choice that is made here now about the Gospel. So when we say that the Gospel offers the hearers a deal, that is not so simple. That is not so innocent. This is an option that is vital. I do or I do not. And mind you, if I am not willing to give up earth, I will never have heaven. Since I will not be able to keep earth anyway, if I choose that I will lose out all around. There is a related principle in this study which is set out in the second Scripture portion we shall now consider.

And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me (Mark 9:33-37).

This is the principle, "Except you be as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." And being as little children would mean that you would not have such a close attachment to the things of this world. You would be more ready to receive what was being offered to you. "Except you be as little children you cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Later He stated this even more clearly:

But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them (Mark 10:42).

That is the way it is with us in this world. That is the way we look at it. The people we call great and big are the ones that are in control.

But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister (Mark 10:43).

Now that word "minister" means "servant." And I do not mean in any pretentious way. I mean a humble servant, willing to be the least.

And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be the servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:44-45).

You will remember He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." And when we are thinking about this whole matter of the nature of discipleship, we might very well keep in mind "the servant is not greater than his Master."

## Jesus The Teacher

Can you understand that a person must know what God has promised to be able to believe unto blessing?

Jesus of Nazareth is often called the Master Teacher. No comparison has ever been recorded in Scripture in which He was compared with anybody else. He is not better than someone else. He is Himself. So to us when we are thinking about this, He is the Master teaching. When we just look at Him we see Him.

The first teachers in the world are parents. Perhaps the mother is the first of all. Teaching is a procedure by which one person leads another person into knowledge or attitude or skill. And the basic formula of all teaching is "such as I have, give I thee." If the teacher does not have it, the teacher cannot give it. The teacher must know his subject. It will help if the teacher knows his pupils. And it is absolutely necessary that he know their language.

There is no doubt that learning goes on unconsciously; there is no doubt that some individuals actually teach without being aware of it. As for example we teach our children our mother tongue. They learn English from us, or German as the case may be, or French, or Spanish. They learn those things from us without any conscious teaching on our part. They learn our customs. They learn to do as we do, and they learn our procedures. We may be more or less aware of these things, but even if we were not aware of them, the children soon learn anyway.

In any teaching the process begins with what the pupil knows, we start with that. What is being communicated is shown to him in terms that are known to the pupil. If the teacher talks to the pupil about things he has never seen or heard, he will not be able to understand.

Our Scripture indicates some of the procedures that were used by Jesus of Nazareth. Of course His whole life was a demonstration. His very being here was a manifestation of the truth of God. But there were ways that He followed, procedures that He followed, that we can note.

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished as his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee (Mark 1:21-28).

Among the Jewish people their culture had produced synagogues, which were places where people came to learn, to teach and to learn, where worshippers heard the Scriptures read and interpreted. They heard the law of Moses read; they heard the writings of the prophets read; and they heard the interpretation of these readings by the teachers. In this way they learned the promises of God. They learned what the promises were in so many words, and then they also learned what the promises meant in the consequences. The people were astonished at the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth for He taught them as One having authority, and not as the scribes.

The scribes were the scholars. They were the highly educated people. The scribes would be able to tell where one authority says this and another authority says that; and another man's writing says this, and another one who wrote said that. Bringing together all these various opinions from the literature which they had read and studied, they could say "maybe this and maybe that." That was teaching like the scribes. But Jesus of Nazareth did not do that. He told them what it meant in so many words. By the way, that is the way a mother tells a baby. She just tells the baby. It will not do any good to tell the baby, "Now one person says this, and another person says that." I have heard parents dealing with younger children, appar-

ently trying to get the children to grasp the reason for things. And I have not been surprised that the children did not do what they were told, because they had not been told anything. They had been given discussion.

Now let us notice what followed here. There was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." Then Jesus of Nazareth said to him, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him." The unclean spirit obeyed. Afterward the people responded by saying, "What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." He had authority. We can learn from this. When it comes to dealing with people, with little children or with anybody, if we want to share the things of the Gospel, we should not try to say too much. We should say only what we know. When we say it because we know it, we will not have to argue it. We need not give three or four or five other opinions.

The next passage of Scripture to note is in the 4th chapter of the book of Mark, in verses 1-20. We will not take time to read through all of this. But as you read it you will see that it shows that He taught by using parables.

And he began again to teach by the seaside: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land. And he taught them many things by parables (Mark 4:1-2).

Parables are illustrations. In this first case He used the illustration of the sower and the seed. In verses 21-25 He used the illustration of a candle and a candlestick. In verses 26-29 He used the illustration of casting the seed into the ground and the seed springing up and growing. And in verses 30-32 He used the illustration of the mustard seed, a plant where the seed is very small compared to the plant which grows grows up to be so very large. He used these illustrations which they knew.

But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples (Mark 4:34).

In other words, Jesus of Nazareth used illustrations to convey the truth that He had in mind. But He used other methods as well, as we find when we turn to Mark 7:1-23. Here He is dealing not with children and not with the general public, but with special people. In answering the Pharisees and scribes He used Scripture. They understood Scripture. They knew the Bible. And so He used it to teach. But when He called the multitude to deal with the same issue, He used natural principles. They did not know the prophets, but they knew natural events, so He used those.

In the portion that we have in Mark, chapter 12, where He is expounding to the people the significance of His own coming, He used a parable to convey the meaning of the Old Testament prophecy, "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner." When questions were asked by the Pharisees, He answered by using reason. When questions were asked by the Sadducees, He answered by using reason. When the questions were asked by the scribes, He answered by using Scripture. But when He was dealing with the common people, He used natural parables to illustrate the truth that He had in mind.

## **Enduring To The End: Mark 13**

Is it clear to you that the Scripture reveals the certainty of the end of this world?

The Bible reveals the origin and the destiny of the world and of man. In the course of our studies here of "Courage For Commitment" we are now going to be looking at an aspect of the truth that many times escapes our attention. Each of the Gospels deals with it but it is set out here in the 13th chapter of

Mark. These are things that have to do with the end of the world.

One thing is set forth for sure, the world is not eternal. But the Bible tells us about Someone Who is eternal: God. And a place that is eternal: heaven. The Bible tell us so far as we are concerned, while we were made of the dust of the earth and we live in this world, limited here as we are, through Christ Jesus we actually can get a vision of eternity, and eternal things. By the grace and mercy of God we have this marvelous promise that we can have these things by accepting Christ Jesus.

In this chapter we will be looking at the world in which we live. This world had a beginning and it will have an end. That is not so different from us so far as you and I are concerned. I had a beginning and I will have an end. My life down here is not eternal.

In a similar way the work of Christ has a beginning and will have an end. In the Old Testament Scriptures there was a very clear prediction of the coming of Messiah, the Chosen One, the Anointed One of God, Who would fulfill the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with David. The covenant with Abraham included this truth: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." This meant that so far as Abraham was concerned, in his seed, and we understand that Jesus of Nazareth is counted as the seed of Abraham, all families of the earth would be blessed. That was the promise. The covenant with David was set forth in II Samuel 7:12: "I will set up thy seed after thee . . . and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever." That was the promise given to David. And Jesus of Nazareth came to fulfill the covenant with Abraham that all families of the earth should be blessed in Him and the covenant with David that a son of David should sit on the throne forever. So the Scriptures present us with this truth that Messiah would come, Christ would come, establish His Kingdom, turn it over to the Father, and that would be the end.

In all the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth this world was not all there was. The way of wisdom is to put this world in its place. Believers in Christ do not belong here finally. They have other relationships. From time to time in the Scripture there was predictive prophecy when the prophet would tell what was going to happen. This was to be understood as a sign of the reality of God. Idols could not prophesy anything because they do not do anything. But God could tell what was going to happen because He is going to do it. Because God was going to act, He would know what He was going to do, so He could foretell this. Thus the servants of God could tell what was going to happen. This can be felt in the Scripture we are considering.

"And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" The people of Jerusalem were rebuilding the temple at that time and this was a fast construction project. "And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." This was a way of predicting that Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem, would be destroyed. This actually happened later, though at His time it stood before them, like any other city: large, strong, permanent, solid. The disciples had said, "Look at this building being built. Look at these great stones being used." He answered, "Do you see all these things? There will not be one stone left upon another."

In verses 3 and 4 two questions are raised. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" "When shall these things be?" raises one question that deals with the matter of the destruction of Jerusalem. At that time these buildings would be torn apart, stone from stone. This actually happened when the Romans in their destruction of Jerusalem carried out their vow to not leave one stone upon another. They were so provoked because of the resistance of the Jews.

The second question was: "What shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" This referred to everything that had to do with the promises of the future. In the Gospel according to Matthew where this same incident is reported, you will find there that there were three questions actually.

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (Matthew 24:3)?

I am inclined to see this story that we have in Mark, chapter 13, something like this: Mark 13:5-13, I think has to do with the matters of the end of the world.

And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you (Mark 13:5).

It is a good thing to keep in mind with reference to all interpretation of prophecy, that it is an easy place to get fooled.

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows. But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost (Mark 13:6-11).

I think all that has to do with the end of time.

Verses 14-23 have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem.

But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains: and let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house (Mark 13:14-15).

This portion through verse 23 has to do, I think, with the destruction of Jerusalem.

Verses 24-31 I think have to do with the end of the world. "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light," and there follows a description of what will happen.

When all this has been set forth about the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of the Lord, and the end of the world then Jesus of Nazareth warned against carelessness. He told a parable that tells its own story.

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is (Mark 13:32-33).

After telling the simple parable He said, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." With reference to the end of the world, it will come. As to when we do not know, but for any of us, it will come anyway, so far as you and I are concerned, when we are called out of this world. The main thing is "Watch."

## **Passion Week: Women Were**

There If you had been in Jerusalem during the last week in the earthly career of Jesus of Nazareth, what would the record show about what you did?

We have four direct accounts of what happened in the last week of Jesus of Nazareth. They are to be found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. John tells us:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book (John 20:30).

So we do not know all that happened. We only know what is written.

This is why we say the Gospels are not history. They are not biography, because in that case they would have to tell us everything that happened. But each presents selected items. They do not present picture like snapshots, or camera photos, where everything is included. But they present portraits, hand drawn as it were, with selection made of features. So we will examine the items that are listed in our Scripture selection, knowing full well that more things happened than these; but these are written for a purpose, and we want to see what it is.

The general thrust of the Gospel records is not so much about how Jesus of Nazareth came and how He lived, but how He died. Mark begins his account with the ministry of John the Baptist at which time Jesus of Nazareth was about 30 years of age. It is commonly held that Jesus of Nazareth spent 3 years in public ministry. Mark tells about that public ministry in 10 chapters of his book. And then he spends 6 chapters telling about the last week. Our Scripture portions for this study touch on several different aspects of His teaching during this time.

Mark 12:41-44 is a familiar portion. "And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury." Some people are not at all sure about the propriety of taking up an offering in church services and worship services. They are inclined to feel that it is really out of place because God could not care about the money. But that is just idle talk. Do you realize that? Here you have it that Jesus sat over against the treasury and beheld. He noticed how the people cast money into the treasury.

And many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance: but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living (Mark 12:41-44).

By this incident He teaches us that it is not a matter of how much I give in comparison to others. It is a matter of how much I give in comparison to what I have, to what I have received.

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her (Mark 14:3-9).

This is a very striking comment. Such is not said about anybody else in the Gospels. There is no other incident where the Lord Jesus drew attention to the action of anybody, and stressed it as something to remember. This is the only case of something that He picked up in a special way. He did things for other people to notice, as for instance when He washed the disciples' feet. When He told them, "I have set you an example. If I have done this, this is what you should do." But in no case did He ever take a single action of anybody else and hold that up and say, "Do it like that." But this woman, her action, was picked up in this way.

When you think about that could you have any idea as to why that would be the case? Consider this an illustration of what others should do to Him. He could not demonstrate that because then He would be doing it to Himself. But this illustrates how others should do to Him.

Consider first the woman's act. And you will recognize at once she took something very precious, expensive, the best that she had, and she brought it to the Lord Jesus personally as a gift. Now that is what it was. Now notice her rating. And she had two ratings, one from the disciples, who criticized her. They felt that her action was overly done, extreme.

How often in connection with the worship of the Lord do we find that people tend to criticize each

other. The disciples criticized her in that they said it was too expensive. She just did too much. But now notice the other aspect of this, as the Lord Jesus said, "Let her alone, I know what she did. She did something for me. So far as you are concerned, if you care about the poor you can help them at any time. She cares about me and she is doing for me just now." It is all there in the account.

What was the woman's secret? How did she know that this action of hers was going to be so important to Jesus of Nazareth? And the answer is she did not know. That is not why she did it. She did not do it in order to be talked about. She did it because she wanted to. And why did she want to take the very best that she had and bring it to Him personally as a gift? Because she loved Him. This is the woman that sat at His feet and heard His word. She understood from what He had taught, what He was going to do. He was going to die for her.

There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome (Mark 15:40).

This brings to our attention something very important. When everyone had run away, all had forsaken Him and fled, the fury of the mob was against Him. Those who had been His friends were gone. In the distance these women were standing there looking on. Of all His followers they were the last at the cross. "And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid" {Mark 15:47}. And so they were last at the grave, at the burial. They were there to watch.

And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great (Mark 16:1-4).

That is the story we have which shows that women were the first at the grave. In this way it is brought to our attention that during that last week, when things were coming to a climax in the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, women were found active. They were present. They shared in the activity and their record is something to notice and to appreciate.

## **Passion Week: The Cross, The Resurrection**

Have you ever considered that the purpose of the detailed report of the cross is not primarily a matter of record? It is actually a matter of guidance.

In looking at the cross and the resurrection, I should remember that it does not matter so much how it happened to Him, as it matters how it should happen to me. Our study in this chapter concerns the cross and then the resurrection. The Scripture supporting this covers a wide range of events. And we will not be able to examine each one, but we will note some general principles that are revealed in this climax of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

First the cross was in the will of God for His obedient Son. This was not the result of any deficiency on His part. This is important because sometimes when we have suffering, we are inclined to think we are suffering because of some fault on our part. The cross was not the result of any deficiency, not a result of any failure. Jesus of Nazareth did not fail. Nor was it because of any disobedience. "I do always the things that please my Father" (John 8:29). From this we learn that as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, following Him, we are to deny ourselves. This is not because of anything we have done wrong nor because of something we have not done right.

The cross was inevitable but it had very little to do with our past. It is true that it takes away the guilt, but that was not its real function. The cross is a preparation for something better. The simplest



illustration that comes to mind is when I am going out to get a pail of milk, with a pail that happens to be full of water. I empty the water out, that I might be able to get the milk. I pour out what is in the pail that I might receive something better, something that I want. The cross was in the will of God for His obedient Son because of what Christ Jesus came to do. He came not simply to save me from going to hell, but He came to bring me into the will of His Father in communion and fellowship with Him.

In the second place the cross was not for personal improvement, as a matter of discipline. Jesus of Nazareth did not need any improvement. And so far as I am concerned, someone might say, "Well you need to suffer because of what you are. You need to suffer for your sake, etc." But I could not profit thereby. I sometimes think that many of us in Sunday School and in our church experiences are inclined to think that the instruction we receive is intended to improve us. We go there for the purpose, we will say, of getting to be better people. And you will find how many earnest sincere people are trying, trying, trying to do something good and be something good in order that they might qualify. But this is a mistake. The fact is simply this: you cannot carve rotten wood. You cannot improve me. What I am is hopeless. The marvelous truth is that God's procedure is to take me out of it. I am to leave me in the grave. The cross was not for personal improvement as a matter of discipline.

In the third place the cross is to be faced, to be anticipated. In our desire to be blessed of God let us keep in mind: the cross is to be looked forward to. This will not be with any particular joy, because you will remember how Jesus of Nazareth looked forward to it. This takes you straight into the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus of Nazareth knew it was coming. He knew before He went to the Garden of Gethsemane, that this was going to happen. Earlier He started warning His disciples: the Son of man must be taken and put to death; on the third day He would rise again. The cross is to be faced. When I am saying this with reference to Jesus of Nazareth, I am speaking to myself inasmuch as a believer I am going to be in Him. This is for me.

There is one more word, the cross is to be accepted, not to be avoided, that I might have peace. I could pause there for a moment for any of us. In the course of living, there will be some suffering. And some of the suffering that we face, that we experience, is unavoidable, inevitable. We are going to go through with it. The way to go through with the cross is to yield, "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done." The cross is to be accepted that we might have peace. You will remember that after He had spent three hours in prayer in Gethsemane, He came out and said to His disciples, "My peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you."

In considering the resurrection there is first of all a very simple truth which is very profound. The resurrection is possible only for the dead. You may ask, "Why point that out?" I need to be reminded that unless I am willing to die in myself, unless I am willing to deny myself unto death, I cannot have the experience of the resurrection. In other words, keeping in line with what we have just been talking about, if I resist the cross and push it away, I will not be eligible for the resurrection.

The resurrection will involve a changed body. This I am sure many of us have not fully appreciated. When Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, the body that He had was not the same kind of body that was put on the cross. The body that He had was a spiritual body, but that does not mean it was only imaginary. The disciples could have believed they saw a ghost. In order that they would know that He was an actual corporeal being, you remember He asked them, "Have you any food, have you any meat?" And they brought Him a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb, and He took it and did eat before them. A ghost would not do that. He actually was literally there before them. But His body was different. He could appear in a closed room and disappear from their sight. And after spending forty days in which He appeared from time to time, appearing and disappearing, in full view of them all He was taken up into the heavens and taken away in a cloud, disappearing from their sight. It seems obvious that when one passes through this resurrection experience, the person is different. There may be old habits from the past. But he does not need them. He is free from them.

The resurrection brings the believer into a new relationship. Now he is a child of God. The human being, as a natural human being, is a child of man, a child of Adam. It is when he is born again and experiences the resurrection from the dead, that he becomes a child of God.

Finally the resurrection indicates the promise of the believer's future. I can be astonished about it, amazed about it, but I need to keep in mind that God has plans for me. His plans for me include something entirely different from what I had in this world. The resurrection indicates the promise of my future. In the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth and the records that are given to us in the Scripture, when we look at the cross, we see what there is for us in the will of God. We are to deny ourselves even unto death that we might experience by the power and the grace of God the resurrection from the dead in the newness of life. Living in His presence and with Him, helped by His Holy Spirit, we can rejoice in the Lord forever and ever.

## **Courage For Commitment**

Do you understand what is meant by commitment?

Many think a person must undertake to do something good in order to be blessed of God. The Bible records revelation of two different procedures in seeking God's favor. They did not emerge at the same time. The first procedure was featured by the law: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It was called the Old Covenant or the First Covenant. According to the Scripture record the law seemed to be a failure. Paul makes it very simple and clear when he says what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. But many people can be, I think, mistaken or misled by the fact that so much of the Bible in the Old Testament emphasizes doing things in the presence of God. As a matter of fact when you come into the New Testament, and even when you look at the Sermon on the Mount, you will find Jesus of Nazareth teaching what conduct would be acceptable before God. So often those of us who read and study and preach, turn to these portions of Scripture to find inspiration and guidance and encouragement to people to go out and do the very best they can, to do the better things, to accomplish something as it were for God.

The second procedure was featured by grace. The Scriptures set these two principles out over against each other, law and grace. The law was featured by the simple principle, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." And grace is featured by this principle, "Whosoever believeth in Him, shall be saved." This is the New Covenant. It operates in, through and by Christ Jesus. Now everything I have been saying can be easily understood if you think of this: if I wanted to get something, if I wanted to possess something, to have something, there are two ways in which I can get it. I can work for it and try to achieve it, produce it, accomplish it; or it can be given to me. The amazing thing is that when it is given to me, it is just as much mine as if I had worked for it.

The record of the Scripture is plain. The Old Covenant, the procedure of working for what I am going to have, doing what I can to get somewhere, will not serve the needs of man. But as Paul said in Romans:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

The Bible tells us that because the Old Covenant did not and could not succeed, God sent His own Son to establish a New Covenant. The New Covenant is actually very simple. Christ does it all for me, and I receive it. I think this is very important, when we are considering the whole matter of commitment. Basically in coming to God, I do not come to God because of how much I have done, and what I am going to do, and how I am going to do it. I come to God because of what Christ has done; what He had done is

perfect, and it was for me.

When I look back in my own personal experience and try to understand this whole matter, I realize that I did commit myself to Christ Jesus to serve Him, but I committed myself to Christ Jesus the way a drowning man commits himself to the person who is saving him. I clutched the hand of the Helper. Actually when I turned to Christ Jesus, I did not turn to Christ Jesus to become a good man. I did not turn to Christ Jesus to become a good father or to become a good husband. I did not turn to Christ Jesus to become a good teacher, nor to become a preacher, nor to go as a missionary. Frankly I did not turn to Christ Jesus that I might one day have the privilege of speaking over the radio. When I turned to Christ Jesus it was very simple, I wanted to escape hell. That is why I turned to Christ Jesus. I was doomed, and I turned to Him to be saved. I committed myself to Him, yes, that I might be saved.

An Old Testament example of commitment that is often held before us is that of Esther. Certainly she manifested courage when she went into the king's presence at the risk of her life. But when I study that incident, and think it all through, I do not think I am doing Esther any harm when I note her action was not because she wanted to do it. It was not because she had any great ambition. The courage that she showed seems to have been generated by desperation. She and all her people were in danger of being destroyed.

There are some instances of souls who committed themselves to Jesus of Nazareth recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In the first chapter we read about the leper. It is true he came to the Lord; but you remember how he came. He said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." The leper came to be cleansed. He had an incurable disease and he wanted help. Then there was the ruler who came because his daughter was dying. The reason the ruler came to Jesus of Nazareth was because his daughter was at the point of death. It was an emergency. It was a crisis. Now consider the woman with the issue of blood. When she crept through the crowd she was thinking: "If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole." She committed herself, yes. She reached over and touched the hem of His garment, and she was made whole. But why did she do this? What was the underlying reason actually that that woman came? She had an issue of blood, a hemorrhage that had been lasting for years. She was in distress. And now take the case of the Syrophenician woman who came and asked Him to help her daughter. When that woman came to Jesus of Nazareth it was because of the daughter. Consider also the blind man on the highway, when he called out, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me." Why did he call out? Why did the blind man commit himself to Jesus of Nazareth? He was blind! When the Lord Jesus said unto him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" the blind man said unto Him, "Lord, that I might receive my sight."

Another good instance of commitment can be seen in the case of Joseph of Arimathea in Mark 15:43. This rich man of Arimathea came to Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus of Nazareth that he might put Him in his own tomb. He committed himself, committed himself openly and publicly, because Christ Jesus had died.

There is one important principle that you and I should keep in mind as we think of courage for commitment: "Except ye be as little children you can not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Little children, babies, do not project any great performance. When the baby is in its mother's arms and reaches up to nurse at the mother's breast, the baby is committing itself to the mother, that is true, in order to be fed. And this is how I am to be. Actually so far as my life is concerned, in committing myself to the Lord I am to come to Him with the highest aim to be a servant.

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:19-20).

That is the way it is. You may notice how first and last it was the Lord. So that after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God, from whence He gives power to His servants. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."