

True Discipleship Posture

Introduction

Hello everyone! Today we will be studying **Mark 9:30–50** and hearing a sermon titled **True Discipleship Posture**. Let's pray.

Hook

Does anyone remember their first track and field day?

I barely recall the ones from elementary school, but I do remember my first high school track and field day.

For the most part, I dislike individual sports. I want to be on a team and work together towards an objective. Because of my negative feelings towards these sports, I never really took track and field seriously, until... I was able to race on a relay team.

It was not soccer, baseball, or hockey, but it was still a team event with a shared objective.

In our passage today, we will hear Jesus discuss the way and strategies of a true disciple—or athlete—in the kingdom.

Scripture – Mark 9:30–50, NIV

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

38 “Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”

39 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us. 41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

42 “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. [44] 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. [46] 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where “‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ 49 Everyone will be salted with fire.

50 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

1. Trouble in the Text: *Worldly Ideas of Leadership*

Jesus returns to Galilee, not to do ministry in a public sense, but to instruct His disciples. He enters Simon (or Peter) and Andrew’s house in Capernaum, which many believe to be the home base for Him and the disciples.

Here, Jesus tells His disciples about His crucifixion for the second time. He reveals that He will be handed over by the Father to men. This is a deliberate act of God in order to accomplish His purposes.

Jesus spells out the fact that He will be killed and then raised. This causes the disciples to get eerily quiet. They do not know what to do with what Jesus has said. They either do not understand it, or they are scared to respond because of how Peter had been rebuked in the past.

In **Mark 8:33**, Jesus told Peter to “**get behind Him, Satan**” when he suggested that Jesus should not be crucified.

Jesus has revealed that He is going to lay down His life for His people and go to the cross—and the disciples completely miss the point and begin bickering about who among them is the greatest.

What is even more staggering is that after Jesus tells them that the greatest among them must be the least, and that they should be like children, John tells a story of how someone did not know they were "inferior" to the disciples and was casting out demons in Jesus' name.

The disciples rebuke this person—probably because they are insecure. As **Mark 9:14–29** reveals, they could not cast out a demon only a little while earlier. They likely wrestled with how someone who is not in their inner circle was able to accomplish this task, and figured that this man's behavior was suspicious.

Jesus addresses the disciples' competitive spirit and stresses that extreme caution should characterize their behavior. He is not happy that they are standing in the way of someone's attempt to be faithful.

That is why he warns about hindering or leading others astray. It would be better if they suffered a cruel death like the ones found within the Roman Empire than to hinder someone who is attempting to grow in faith.

Jesus goes even deeper and addresses the hearts of the disciples. He cautions them about the dangers of sin and using one's faculties to advance the cause of evil. Jesus uses intentionally hyperbolic language to call the disciples to run from sin—including the sin of envy and the trap of comparison.

If they are not careful in putting to death the sinful nature and maintaining their “**saltiness**,” the descent into further brokenness could lead them to Gehenna, which was a trash heap in which fire was constant and worms thrived. It was a place where detestable pagan rituals had occurred. Gehenna was a euphemism for hell.

2. Trouble in Life: Competition and Backbiting

Whether it be hockey, soccer, or a relay race, it is never good to be selfish in a team sport. If a player wants to get the attention of scouts or build their own reputation, it rarely looks good if they put their own wants or needs over the team.

While running a relay race, I remember getting really frustrated with our slowest member. (I know—it’s surprising I was not the slowest. I probably would be now.) I never said anything to him, but I wanted to tell him to train harder.

The problem was that I was so focused on his performance that I did not consider the fact that there were faster players on my team who wanted more from me.

The sad truth about the disciples—and about many Christians—is that we are far too preoccupied with the values of the world. We use worldly metrics over and above the values of Jesus.

A prime example would be the individualism that is rampant in our Western society. We are told that everything is about the self: self-expression, self-determination, self-affirmation, self-fulfillment, etc. This individualism runs counter to the values of Jesus, who calls us to self-sacrifice.

Not only are we caught up with the values of the world, but we, like the disciples, are also too preoccupied with how people around us are doing—and not in a positive sense. We compare ourselves to others and seek to outpace each other or make ourselves feel good instead of building one another up and working together.

Too often, we make our own fulfillment and ego the focus of our worship. We forget that we are ambassadors of God. We forget that people are watching us, and our every behavior is worship to one god or another.

3. Grace in the Text: *Jesus the Model*

As I mentioned before, Jesus—for the second time—is telling the disciples that He is going to lay down His life for His people and be killed. This is something He does willingly according to the plan and work of the Father. In fact, Jesus is in Galilee because He is moving towards Jerusalem to be crucified.

The reason Jesus asks about the disciples' debate on their journey is because He wants to illustrate that the kingdom has a different set of priorities—embodied in Jesus Himself.

Leveraging their love for Him, He calls upon the disciples to be servants and to be like children in their interactions with one another. Interestingly, the Aramaic word for “children” can also be used for “servant.” Jesus is tying these two concepts together.

A good servant and an obedient child were to function similarly in the first century, according to Roman household codes. They obey without challenge or an inflated view of themselves. They simply carry out their master's or father's requests.

Both a child and a servant also functioned as stand-ins or emissaries of their master in the ancient world. If one was good to a wealthy or important person's servant or child, it was seen as a kind act toward the wealthy or important person themselves.

Jesus is telling them that if they are kind and servant-oriented toward one another, they are, in effect, serving Jesus—for which they will be rewarded.

This is the charitable attitude the disciples should have had toward the one who was casting out a demon in Jesus' name. He is a fellow labourer who may not seem as important as the disciples, but he is to be served and treated with respect.

The fact that the demon is cast out proves that this person was not operating in his own strength, but with the strength of the Father. He was simply a servant or child operating in the power of his master.

Someone who operates under Jesus' banner—even if it is as small as serving someone water—is to be encouraged, because this is done through faith.

There is no room for jealousy, envy, or strife. There can be no backbiting or ungodly ambition in Jesus' economy. These kinds of sins must be dealt with aggressively so that a person's faith walk is not jeopardized or in question.

Instead, the disciples must be like salt. They must season the church in such a way that it does not see decay as a result of insidious sins and broken patterns.

4. Grace in Life: *Being a Witness to the World Through Service*

Ever been playing a sport and felt like things were going good and your team was operating like a well-oiled machine?

A competent relay team is strategic, and they figure out how to leverage each other's strengths instead of focusing on weaknesses. A seasoned relay team is encouraging and patient.

Relays are also about getting into your competitors' heads. Your best runner should be positioned so that they make up the difference for a weaker player if need be.

In the relay of salvation history, Jesus was and is our best runner. **He ran the race and, for the joy set before Him, he went to cross for our sake.** He has handed His children and servants the baton. We are now called upon to expand the Kingdom in His physical absence even as He is still encouraging and leading us through His Spirit.

We need to be a team who continues Jesus' mission. We must work together and encourage each other in passing on the baton. We need to recognize each person's contribution and refuse to make it about ourselves.

Jesus places before us an example to follow. He laid down His life for the Father's sheep. Now we are called upon to do the same thing. A true disciple masters the art of being selfless.

True discipleship is all about laying down one's life so another person's life may be salted and enriched for the sake of the Kingdom.

Not only is godly witness about servitude and a posture of childlike humility and obedience, but it is also about boldly going out and enhancing people's lives with the Gospel. It is about being the salt of the earth that doesn't just enrich people's lives, but staves off death and decay.

That is why we must battle the sin that leads to death and decay in our own lives so we can truly be Jesus' emissaries to the world around us.

We must move from being Christians who only prioritize receiving from God to those who want to be used by God to serve and give.

Cat and Dog Theology Story.

In order to get to that discipleship posture, we, like the disciples, need to run to Jesus and follow his example. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that our passions and desires change from prioritizing self to a focus on God and others.

Pray with me.