

August 7, 2016

Transformed from the Inside Out

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:37-40

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 7:12

What does it mean to you to be a Christian? Actually that is a pretty timely question, I think. Religion in general and Christianity in particular is coming under a lot of scrutiny right now. Who is a Christian? Who is not a Christian? What is a Christian?

For me there are two fundamental parts to the answer to all these questions. First, what does the Bible, the Word of God, have to say about those who would be disciples or followers of Jesus. Second, what do I personally, individually, and specifically plan to do about what the Bible says about discipleship.

It is not now, nor has it ever been, my task to decide who is a believer and who is not a believer. I can certainly make judgement calls about the attitudes and actions displayed in the lives of those who claim to be believers, but I cannot judge nor condemn their level of belief.

When I turn those questions on myself I am forced, I think, to come to terms with my own belief; a much more important place to be. What do I believe the Bible, the Word of God, says to me about my discipleship? What is my personal response going to be to what God says about discipleship? In the end these are the only two questions I think we need spend much time and energy on. These are the questions that ultimately make all the difference in my life and, I think, in yours.

So, what does the Bible, the Word of God, say about discipleship? There are two statements made by our Lord which I am convinced perfectly summarize his answer to this question. The first is found in Matthew 16: 24-25. I've preached on this passage many times. ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."***

The second statement is recorded in John 13:34-35. Again, I have preached on this passage often. ***"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*** I believe that these two statements from the Master perfectly summarize what it means to be a disciple.

If I would follow Jesus, if I would be his disciple, then I must learn to say no to my self-serving nature, to literally put it to death, and to surrender my life and my survival completely to him. The reality of that surrender will be evident in the way I treat others. My love for others, displayed in the reality of my actions and attitudes, will demonstrate the validity of my discipleship.

In his 'Sermon on the Mount' Jesus teaches, ***"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you..."*** And he concludes, ***"...for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*** This idea that a simple, single commandment could sum up every aspect of our relationship with the Father is consistent across Jesus' teachings. He said much the same thing when he was challenged to identify the greatest commandments. He responded with, ***"Love the Lord your God with all***

your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' And again he says, *"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

So, while we might argue that discipleship is all about keeping a long list of commandments perfectly, the simple truth that Jesus teaches is that our discipleship is perfectly summarized in the way we treat others. At the end of the day my belief in and surrender to my Savior is demonstrated in my attitudes and actions toward others, alone. There is no other measure, no other witness, that so loudly proclaims who and what I am to the world, than my actions and attitudes toward others.

