

Call to Obedience #406
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What Jesus Thinks About His Disciples

by Reimar Schultze

There is a church tradition that the disciples were mediocre men; they were very much like many of us deserving criticism. But in John 17, Jesus hands His report of His disciples over to His Father, just hours before His crucifixion, saying this: *Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son,And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them...* (John 17:1, 22).

Here in John 17 we find Jesus' thoughts about His disciples. Here we find the "gold standard" of the true value of a disciple being presented most precisely, beautifully and authoritatively by their Master. Notice here that Jesus refused to give any criticism of any of his men in His prayer report. Here we have no condemnation, but rather only commendation of their lives. Here, the times of meager performance of the disciples was totally outweighed by the dominant fact that they had forsaken all to follow Him. Here in our judgment of them, we learn what needs to be overlooked and what needs to be elevated. Here we learn what is stubble and what is gold. For example, the disciples' weak faith, their competitive spirit, their rashness of speech and such things are treated as stubble. These things did not enter into Jesus' grade report card to His heavenly Father. Neither will these matters be in His grade report concerning you before the matchless throne of God. The question is: "Have you done the will of God?" By Jesus' confession, His disciples had done that. That is the gold.

In Jesus' eyes, these *puppies*, these very young men were strong rather than weak; they were like rocks rather than chaff to be blown away. (Yes, didn't Jesus even call Peter a rock?) And indeed, it was soon proven that they were not blown away! They were not at all like many of us, but were very much like their Lord, for as He had forsaken all to do the will of God, so had they. The point is: "Our discussion of the disciples' performance should reflect Jesus' opinions, not the traditional criticisms."

Notice how Jesus spoke of His men in this marvelous prayer of John 17:

Verse 6: *I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world...they have kept thy word.*

Verse 9: *...they are thine.*

Verse 10: *...and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.*

Verse 22: *...the glory which thou gavest me I have given them...*

Verse 26: *...I in them.*

My friend, I hope you see from this that if we have ever looked at these disciples as mediocre men, giving us an excuse for our mediocre behavior, we have some serious repenting to do. By Jesus' definition, there are no mediocre disciples even though their conduct may be less than perfect. Look at two phrases by which He defines discipleship here: 1) *the men which thou gavest me out of the world*. The first mark of a disciple is that he is *out of the world*. He is no longer of the world. He has turned his back on the world to such an extent that Jesus said, *...and the world hath hated them* (John 17:14). The second phrase describing discipleship is this: 2) *they have kept thy word*. You can read this to mean that a disciple is consistent in obedience. He has stopped making excuses. Of such men Jesus says, *they are thine*, speaking to His Father. And then He said: *and thine are mine*, proudly claiming co-ownership of them with His Father. Of such men Jesus said: *I am glorified in them*. Such men share in the same glory that Jesus has (v. 22)!

Of course, Jesus addressed the weaknesses of His disciples as necessary during His training and interaction with them, but because of their passionate obedience, He was even glorified in the very process of correction. To Him, these weaknesses were nothing but straw compared to the marvel and wonder of having men who were willing to follow Him to death. Do not be fooled; the greatest wonders of the world are not the pyramids or the Taj Mahal; they are not as Agur said: *...the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid* (Prov. 30:18-19). Rather, they are the people who keep God's word. They are His vessels bearing the glory of God. Such men are the wonders of the world.

They have kept thy word...I am glorified in them...And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them. What a wonderful symphony that is. Is your life a symphony for Jesus? This symphony never stopped playing even when the disciples bungled the notes. We need to be delivered from this critical spirit

that condemns people when they fumble while trying the best they know. The 26th president of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt, remarked:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly... who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.” (“Citizenship in a Republic”, Speech delivered at the Sorbonne, Paris, France, April 23, 1910)

Ah, my friend, stop criticizing the warriors in the arena. Join them. Our failures, weaknesses and imperfections are covered by the blood of the Lamb, as John said so well in his epistle: *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin* (1 John 1:7).

So Jesus, on the way to the cross, was totally satisfied with His men. He was confident that they would be able to carry on where He left off. It is time for us to stop looking down at these disciples and to begin to look up to them as Jesus did. Again, His attention was on *they have kept thy word*; His pleasure was in *I am glorified in them*.

Do you really know what is important? What is your main focus? What is your passionate daily pursuit? To God, the man with eternity in his eyes is the most wonderful of all. He is an instrument through whom God will save souls. God is looking for such men: *And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none* (Ezek. 22:30). Be such a man and you will be a man through whom God can do anything He wants to do.

To Jesus, love and obedience are inseparable. He said: *If ye love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:15). If you love God with all your heart, you will obey Him. You will have a perfect heart even though your performance may still be clumsy. You may still cut off an ear once in a while, lack refinement in your speech or act too hastily. Jesus knows all about that. It comes with the

territory of growing up. He can and will clean up after you. He always cleans up after His obedient children who have done the best that they knew how to do. And remember, since He can put an ear back on, He can fix any of your failures. He will do it gladly and He will do it well. Do not worry about it. Remember, that is what 1 John 1:7 is all about. Performance is a matter of time. You cannot push time. But a perfect heart is a matter of the moment. You can capture every moment. Live every moment in obedient love. You cannot do better than that. There is nothing more spiritual than that. Put your energies there and the rest will come along in time.

Many say: "I am waiting for the Holy Spirit to fill me; then I will have power to obey God." Wrong; you have abounding grace to obey God now. In fact, God requires obedience *before* He will fill you with the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32). God will not send His Holy Spirit into a disobedient heart. Remember, Jesus' disciples obeyed and glorified God *before* He breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. So it was with Enoch, with Noah, with Abraham, with Joseph, with Moses, with Elijah, etc. They all obeyed before there was a Pentecost.

In summary, the devil will keep harassing you over your performance, but God will keep looking at your loving and obedient relationship with Him. That matters to Him, and that and nothing else should matter to you. Enough said. Amen and amen.

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