

Training in Discipleship

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[0 : 00] We all know the importance of someone being properly trained before they do something for you. You might have been caught up once or twice in your life getting some guy off the street to come and help you in your house.

Ladies probably don't do that a lot. Guys do that often because you know, why must I pay six, seven, eight hundred bucks when I can get a guy and do it for one hundred bucks or two hundred bucks now I guess. And the guy comes off the street, you need help with your walls for example, he paints your walls but it's not quite up to standard.

And then you think twice about doing it again next time. The importance of someone being properly trained before they do something for you. The more it personally impacts you, the more you want them to be well trained.

For example, eye surgery. You're not going to take some guy off the street if you need eye surgery. You're going to make sure that person knows what they're doing before they touch you.

It's strange then that Christians often don't value being trained in things that impacts them the most. The kingdom of God. Many take training in the Christian faith as an optional extra in their Christian lives.

[1 : 21] But Jesus says to be trained in how the kingdom works is one of the most important things you can do because then you're able to add to the highest level of value to others.

You add value to others by being trained in the things of the kingdom. So in today's section in Matthew, Jesus wraps up his teaching on the parables and he stops and he pauses and he makes sure his disciples have understood the teaching that he's been given.

Not just because he wants to make sure they're able to teach others but to make sure they understand the immense value of being trained to be dispensers of kingdom treasures.

And so if we're going to be Christians, people that are trained in how to dispense kingdom treasures, we need to know how the kingdom works. And so we need to understand how the kingdom works.

The first thing Jesus wants from his disciples is that they understand how the kingdom works. And Jesus tells one last parable in this section. He's going to tell more parables further on in the gospel.

[2 : 29] And we'll look at the parable in a bit. But then he stops at verse 51, turns to his disciples, Have you understood these things? Have you understood these things?

The immediate context is the last parable of the dragnet and the fish, but Jesus is really asking them, Do they understand what all the parables as a whole have been all about?

The Greek word behind understand means to piece together, to bring all these little bits together that he's been talking about, and to hold them in a coherent whole so that they understand how the kingdom works.

And so let's look at this last parable to see what does it teach us about how the kingdom works. And what we'll see is it's a kind of a summary parable to all the other ones that Jesus has been speaking about.

And those parables are really all found in chapter 13, but it is a long chapter. It ends in verse 58, although the parable section ends over here. We've had a number of parables, and so if you've forgotten them, that's okay.

[3 : 37] This one kind of summarizes them as a whole. And the first thing it teaches us is that the kingdom, well, the first thing is the parables are all about the kingdom.

In fact, the gospel is all about the kingdom. Because the gospel is all about Jesus being a king. And the parables as a whole tell us that the kingdom has arrived.

The kingdom is already active in the world. The kingdom is busy in the world. It's already here. And so verse 47 in the parable, Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake or into the sea and caught all kinds of fish.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. The net is in the water, which means the kingdom is in the world. It's busy doing its work.

And the work of the kingdom is to make the people of earth citizens of heaven, if I can put it like that. To make the people of earth citizens of heaven.

[4 : 43] Not to take them away from earth and put them in heaven, but to take the power of heaven and change people on earth. The kingdom is already active in the world.

Secondly, the kingdom is currently hidden, but growing. The kingdom is hidden, but growing.

There's a hidden, secret, unseen reality, almost an unassuming reality to the kingdom.

The net, this net that's described in this parable, is known as a drag net. The fish don't know it's there. They're just swimming around doing their thing until it closes in and then it's too late.

They're caught. This net is a drag net. It would have been dragged out to sea by a fisherman or by a boat and then circled around behind the breakers for hundreds of meters, maybe a couple of kilometers, and then brought back to the beach.

It's the kind of thing you would see if you go to fish during the week or maybe on the weekends. I don't know if they still do it, but they used to do it back in the day. That's a drag net. And the fish don't know it's there.

[5 : 56] Even you, if you're standing on the beach, you don't really know it's there. And you only see it when it's done its work and when it's being dragged ashore and all the fish are caught in it. So the kingdom is already active in the world, but it's hidden, but it is still doing its work.

It's growing, it's gathering fish in, it's gathering people in to its net. And then the third point is that the kingdom will be revealed in all its fullness.

The kingdom of God will be the final reality in this world and anything that doesn't fit its criteria is going to be removed from it. And that's in verse 48 onwards.

When Jesus says, When it was full, when the net was full, the fishermen, when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers, but threw away the bad.

So there's a gathering and then there's a sorting. And Jesus says, So it will be at the end of the age. It's going to be like this at the end of...

[7 : 02] Well, the end of the age there is actually at the consummation of the age. It's the climax of the ages. The whole world history is moving towards this one point.

This great gathering in and separation and throwing out of everything that's bad in God's world that has now become God's kingdom. The angels, Jesus says, will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.

In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's hectic stuff. You know, when we think of angels, kind of think of Valentine's Day, kind of think of something cute and cheery and little cherub with a little halo, little wings flapping, sprinkling magic fairy dust.

When Jesus thinks of angels, he thinks of them more like... This sounds very much like the angel at Passover. Remember, that if you didn't have the blood on the door outside, it was going to come in and kill your firstborn child.

It's a scary angel. And when you read the scriptures, you see how scary angels can be. Think of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament.

[8 : 27] When they come and do this separating, you're not going to be able to explain nothing to them, to say anything. They're just going to take you and throw you outside into the fiery furnace.

This is hectic stuff. And it's so important that Jesus talks about it a number of times. It's not the first time. In fact, there's been already a parable that sounds a little bit like this dragnet, the parable of the wheat and the tares, about a gathering in and a separation at the end of time.

But Jesus is doing this because he wants us to understand how dangerous it will be if we ignore his kingdom in this world and live life on our own terms, by our own rules.

Many of us are swimming through life, not really caring that the kingdom is closing in, not really thinking about it, just going our own way. A little bit like Dora from Finding Nemo.

A little bit aimless, doesn't really know what's going on. And if bad times there, oh, just keep swimming, just keep swimming. But there's no purpose there.

[9 : 42] There's no protection. And so we want to have, with the kingdom, when you put your trust in Christ and you realize, but there's this kingdom out there, there's this new purpose, this new drive, and this new power in your life to handle life's difficulties.

You don't just keep swimming. You can actually handle them a lot better. So the kingdom is already active in the world, but it's hidden.

We don't see it. It's difficult to see. But Jesus reminds us that the kingdom will be revealed. There's going to be a final reckoning. And the only thing that's going to remain on planet Earth is the kingdom of God and good people and righteous people.

And those people are connected to Jesus as their Messiah. But this is why we as Christians, or anyone really, needs training in these realities.

Because we don't see them. And without God telling us about them through His Word, we wouldn't really know about them. And so there's only one real source of truth in the world, and that's God's Word.

[10 : 52] But, you know, a Bible doesn't talk to you. It kind of just sits there. The way that the Bible most often gets into people's lives is it's got into a Christian's life, and then they talk to you about the Bible and about God.

And that's why Christians need training, because the Bible doesn't do the teaching. It's an inanimate object. The way that God has set up His kingdom is that there's almost two sources of truth in the world.

And I'm going to caveat that. The Bible is obviously the only real standard and pillar of truth. But the second source of revealing who God is and this heavenly kingdom that's all around us is you.

And so you, and me, need to be well trained in what is going on here so that people can understand what they cannot see. Something that only we can have.

That's why Jesus wants His disciples to be trained in kingdom truth. So the next point to look at is training in the kingdom. Training in the kingdom.

[11 : 58] Jesus wants Christians to be trained in discipleship. I'm going to tell you why I talk about training and discipleship in kingdom in just a second. But the point is He wants us to fully grasp what the kingdom is about and to be able to share that knowledge with others.

And not just to do that, but shows them how valuable the kingdom is and how valueless their life is without Jesus as their king. And that's the...

Well, actually, there is one final parable in all of these parables. Jesus ends it off by one last parable, really. Have a look at verse... In verse 51, He says, Have you understood these things? They say, yes.

And then He tells a little story in verse 52. Therefore, every teacher of the law who has been instructed or your version might say trained or taught who has been trained about the kingdom or instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.

Now, the word trained there, for every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom, someone who has been trained for the kingdom, in your version might be taught or instructed, behind that is the Greek word that is often translated as disciple in the Bible.

[13 : 22] It's mathetes. Mathetes. Not that you need to know the Greek word, but... It could easily read that, therefore, every scribe who has been disciplined for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of the house.

To be trained and disciplined is the same thing. To be trained and disciplined is the same thing. And I feel that this is where modern Christians often run into trouble.

Because, if we're honest, we don't like the idea of needing training. Especially when it comes to Christianity. Now, part of the problem is we live...

In the modern world we live in, it's a culture that wants instant reward. Training is too much like hard work. It takes time. We prefer to hire someone to do the job for us.

Often when you see on TV or in the movie where they've got to do something and build their big... Like, take the superheroes and they've got to build their truck or their machine or their...

[14 : 36] Take Iron Man, for example. He's got to build that Iron Man suit. And in the montage, in the movie, there's a cool song that plays. Often by ACDC. It's quite cool. Like a rock song. Because it's driving.

And within... Within 10 or 15 seconds. Five or six shots. Boom! He's got this Iron Man suit. It's made of nuclear... With a nuclear power. It's crazy. Just like that.

It doesn't take a long time in the movies for them to see how things get done over time. And we sometimes have that same mindset when it comes to, for example, Christianity.

Along with this culture of instant reward is the culture of self-sufficiency. Especially in the Western culture. It says, I can do it myself. I don't need to ask for help.

Many of us, myself included, struggle to ask for help when we need it from someone else. We don't want to seem weak. Underlying that is pride.

[15:39] Because we all know no one can do life by yourself. We all need someone's help. And many people have asked us for help. So it doesn't... It makes sense that we would need to receive training and be trained if we're going to be good at something.

One last thing that hinders us in thinking positively about being trained and being disciplined in the Christian faith. And that is it.

We also don't think that Christianity should require any effort on our part. Many Christians, especially our tradition, the evangelical tradition, we don't like to think that Christianity requires any effort on our part.

And we've confused the idea that we cannot work for our salvation to not putting any effort into anything spiritual at all. We've confused the idea that, yes, we cannot work for our salvation, and then we take that idea and say, okay, but then we mustn't do any...

We mustn't put any effort into our Christianity in case it might be works. Jesus doesn't have that problem, nor does the Bible itself. That's something we've got to work out in our heads.

[16:51] Jesus wants his people to make the effort of being trained in their knowledge of the kingdom, which means as a Christian, you must both be disciplined by others and disciplining others.

Being disciplined means learning from other Christians. Being trained, you can only be trained by learning it from other Christians, which means you need to be part of a community in order to be trained.

You can't do it by yourself. But it's not just true of Christianity. Just think of any worthwhile skill.

Take music, karate, or being a mechanic.

Take music, you can only get so far watching YouTube clips on your own. Many of us who would work in our car on the weekend, and you just Google, now how do I do this thing with the car? And then that one little bit, you're just not 100% sure how it goes, and so you've got to call your father, you've got to call your friend, say, listen, mate, just come and, how do I do this last little bit here?

And then they come next to you, and they show you, and that's how you get it fixed. The best help is having someone right there next to you, talking about the thing that you need to know.

[18:02] And that's what Christian discipleship is all about, literally spending time with other Christians, talking about God, talking about the Bible, and talking about Jesus.

It's actually really easy to do. It's not about going on a course, getting a degree, you don't have to pay for it, it's literally free. All it costs you is your time.

And so many Christians struggle with things in their life that would be immediately relieved. I'm not saying it would be instantly solved, but it would be definitely helped if they came along to church on a regular basis, or joined a home group, or made an appointment to talk to someone about this thing that they're struggling with.

And it doesn't have to be me or Nick. You can speak to any one of our more mature Christians at church, you will get lots of godly, biblical wisdom.

Not just on theology of Christianity, but on how to live as a Christian, how to live it out, how to deal with the issues that you're facing in your life. So being a disciple means learning from other Christians, being disciplined.

[19:23] It also means training others, or disciplining others. We don't just take in, we also give out. Now you don't have to be in a teaching role, like a Bible study leader, or a pastor or minister.

That's not what being a Christian disciple is all about. But as a family member, as a husband, as a father, you need to be training your children in the Christian faith.

But everyone should have friends and family and colleagues that they're spending time with talking about Christianity. If you don't have that in your life, just pray to God to send you someone that you can start telling them about Jesus.

Don't be scared about it. Just do it. You'll find that you'll have the opportunity and God will send you one. Someone might, he might challenge you. That's okay. You don't need to know all the answers. The best thing is just to go through the gospel, one of the gospels, one of the New Testament books, maybe the Psalms, and say, listen, let me just read the Bible.

And if you have, they've got questions you don't know about, that's cool. you've got your Christian community where you can go and take those questions and ask them about it. You don't need all the answers, but whatever else you're doing, you need to introduce them to Jesus, this idea of the kingdom, the idea that he's this king that's arrived.

[20 : 50] And because that is where the real treasure of Christianity lies. And so the last point here is that we get to share this rich treasure if you get trained as a disciple.

You want to be trained as a disciple because you get to dispense this amazing treasure about who Jesus is. Have a look at verse 52 again. He says to them, therefore every scribe who's been trained for the kingdom is like a master of a house.

He's a leader. not just no one. He knows what he's doing. And who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

He's got access to this hoard of treasure that he can offer to people. Now Jesus is talking about his disciples here, the ones that were with him, but he's also talking about us.

But he's saying specifically that they are more skilled than the experts in the law, which by the way took years of training. A scribe is an expert in the Old Testament law.

[22 : 00] And he's saying that his disciples are more skilled than these experts in the Old Testament because they only look to the Old. They only look to the Old Testament. Whereas Jesus' disciples have the new with them.

Jesus himself. The very fulfillment of the whole storyline of the Old Testament. And so, to have this treasure, as Christians, we've got to learn to take from the old and the new.

This fulfillment narrative puts you into a storyline from the Old Testament. We've seen this in Matthew already. Remember in the first few chapters how Matthew shows us that the kingdom revolves, it centers on Jesus as the king who has now arrived in time and space to kick off God's kingdom project.

And how he fills all of these promises of the Old Testament. In fact, here's one of my favorite graphics to illustrate how the Bible works together.

You may have seen this before. It's a cross-reference of all the scriptures in the whole Bible and it starts on your left in the Old Testament and then goes all the way to the New Testament and each little line at the bottom is a book of the Bible and those lines that go across is how they cross-reference each other.

[23 : 31] There are over 60,000 direct cross-references between the Old and New Testament. All of them center on Jesus as the main character. All of the Old Testament leads up to Jesus' arrival in the New Testament.

The New Testament looks back to what happened at the cross and at his resurrection and the new life that he gives to people through the Spirit. And the New Testament also looks forward through the rest of history to Christ's return when he sums it all up.

Jesus is the sum total focus of the whole of history. What does that mean for us as Christians? Well, I think it means you can't be a New Testament only Christian who cannot reach back and bring out treasures from the Old Testament and see how they fit together.

A lot of churches are New Testament type churches. the Old Testament is gone, there's nothing there. Christianity starts in Matthew chapter 1. The Bible says Christianity starts in Genesis chapter 1.

[24 : 45] But neither must you be an Old Testament type of Christian. One is always going back and staying in the Old Testament, maybe fixating on the Ten Commandments, maybe fixating on the Sabbath, fixating on the stuff that, on maybe even the food laws or being circumcised or, as I say, or the Sabbath.

We've got lots of friends who will do a Sabbath sort of event every week, which is fine, but the Bible says don't get stuck there.

Jesus doesn't want us to be like the lawyers, like the scribes or the Pharisees, always stuck in the old ways. But neither are we to be like many churches, always chasing after new things.

we need to be able to do both. And we need to understand how the Old Testament and the New Testament brings Jesus together, or how they together talk about Jesus.

And again, this is why we need training. Because you want to be able to share these kinds of treasures about who Jesus is and understand how the storyline works.

[25 : 58] The deep treasure of the gospel is about who Jesus is, who he was promised in the Old Testament, telling us who he is in the New Testament and understanding how that's going to play out in history and how it culminates and revolves around who he is.

So if you truly know who Jesus is, this training, this being trained in discipleship is far from mature. In fact, it's the greatest joy you can have in your life.

In closing, I'm just going to quote from Colossians chapter 2. And this is how Paul describes the treasure that we have in Christ. I think it will be on the screen.

Paul says, my goal is that they, the Christian, the church that he's writing to, the church at Colossae, my goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding.

Full riches of complete understanding which you get by being encouraged in heart and being united in love. So there's this discipleship element where we're relating with each other.

[27 : 18] And when you do that, you've got these full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, that God is real but there's a hiddenness about it.

But here's where it's not hidden. The mystery of God is Christ. The mystery of God, namely Christ. Why do you really want to know him?

Why do you get this full riches of complete understanding? Because, in the next verse, in Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

That's a cool thing to have. if you're a Christian, you've begun to have all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

And as over time, as you spend time being discipled, as you spend time discipling, this treasury of wisdom and knowledge grows and grows and grows. It becomes easier and easier to show it to others.

[28 : 29] Paul goes on in that chapter and says this about who Jesus is. in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. What does that mean?

He spells it out a few verses later. He says this, for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. form. All the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.

That's fairly mind-blowing. And you have been given that same fullness in Christ.

That doesn't you not have the fullness of the deity that Christ has. but you've got God and the Holy Spirit and Christ working in you.

In fact, that's what the sacraments is all about. It's a sacramental eating and participating in Christ's death and resurrection. You have been given fullness in Christ.

[29 : 32] He is the head over every power and authority. Those are just some of the rich treasures that Christians can draw on in their own life and share it with others in how you live and in speaking about Jesus.

These are treasures worth sharing, treasures worth learning about. Friends, these are treasures worth knowing and treasures worth showing.

Well, let me pray for us that we become good disciples of Christ and learn from each other. more about Jesus and more how to live as a Christian in the kingdom.

Lord Jesus, we realize that you are the ultimate treasure of all of history, of both heaven and earth. You are beyond the apple of God's eye.

In you dwell the fullness, all the fullness of deity. And in your wisdom, Lord, that we do not understand in your mercy, you've decided to be our friend, to be our Lord, to be our king, and to unite us to you and to pour all this power, all this glory, all this beauty and goodness into our lives.

[30 : 59] Lord, help us to treasure you above all things, to learn more about you as our treasure, and to share you, Lord, with others as their best treasure.

Amen.