

Mark 8: 34-38, Matthew 16: 24-27, and Luke 9: 23-26; "The Living Room of Christian Discipleship", Sermon # 53 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 25th, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service.

If you were with us this last Sunday, you know that I began to tell you about Christian Discipleship by using the illustration of a house. I am doing this because discipleship for a Christian is the place where you dwell. It is the place where you will live and move and have your being. I believe that I have a biblical basis for using this illustration. It is found in Hebrews chapter 3, verses 3-6. "For this One (that is Christ) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house." "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." "And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." The object of discipleship is to be "faithful in Christ's house." It is "to hold fast our confidence" in all that He has done for us, and is doing for us by His grace. It is learning to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and persevering in that rejoicing. If discipleship for Moses was being found faithful as a servant in Christ's house, I would say that discipleship for you and I is also to see our need to be faithful in His House. Every true believer; every true disciple, is a part of this house which Christ has built. And the Lord expects you to live your Christian life, understanding that there is a purpose which Christ has for you, in relation to every room in this house which He has built. The rooms are related to your various experiences; both of pleasure and pain; joy and sorrow; and your various responsibilities; being obedient or disobedient to what God has said that you should be doing in each room. It is a life of faith and obedience in relation to Christ in each and every room. In each of these rooms the believer-disciple learns more about how to glorify God in that area of his life; in this house that Christ has given them to live in. The question to ask yourself is this; am I being faithful in each room of this house?

So what I want to do today is to begin to overview with you, the rooms of Christian discipleship. In each of these sermons that are coming, I want to try to put a name to the major areas of discipleship so that you can see where it is that Christ would change you or use you in His service, so that you can be faithful in His house. Being faithful to Christ is a growing process, and your discipleship will only be finished at your death. At death you will leave this house and go to your eternal home. But, O what a glorious resurrection awaits for each one who is found faithful while they are here! As I bring you into this house I want to take you to see the living room, the dining room, the kitchen and the parlor; and the 1st floor bathroom. Then I will take you upstairs to where the bedrooms, and closets and another bathroom are located. And finally we will descend and go downstairs

to the basement where an exercise room is located. There are seven room areas in all that we want to consider even though there may be more than one of each type of room on each level. We want to give each room particular consideration, and also understand how they relate to each other, so that we might make progress in the discipleship to which Christ has called us. I am not going to try to rush through them. I will elaborate on the meaning of each room as we come to it, instead of giving them all to you in advance.

The 1st room, which we will look at this week, is the Living room, the room which represents self-denial. We will look first today at the upper part of this room.

When you come into this living room you will notice that it has a large vaulted entryway which is a part of the living room. It represents the fact that being a disciple is first of all being and becoming more and more devoted to God; that is, that as a disciple, you are a worshiper of God. To be a faithful disciple you must pay attention to this vertical dimension of self-denial. The first and most important duty of the Christian life is to worship God. He is to be honored and worshiped in every area of your life, but this is publicly made manifest in your coming to church regularly. A secret disciple who will not make the public commitments of His faith, such as being baptized and coming to church, when God is asking for it; cannot be glorifying to God. It was only when Joseph of Arimethea and Nicodemus, who had before been secret disciples; denied themselves, that they went public in their "asking for the dead body of Jesus" from Pilate. It was after they saw Jesus crucified, that they were manifest to God and to the world as Christ's true disciples. Why; they might have lost their lives for such an action. And yet this is the way that it is in true discipleship. . I like what Edward Door Griffin says about sacrifice in relation to self-denial. He says, "Without a principle that will lead us to deny ourselves habitually and in all respects for Christ, we have no religion." "The father of the faithful did not hesitate a moment whether to sacrifice his beloved Son Isaac; and shall we demur about giving up trifling objects, and yet rank ourselves among the children of Abraham?" "It is all a mistake and ruinous deception." "Those who will not sacrifice every worldly interest when called to it, are unworthy to be reckoned among the children of Abraham or of God; both of whom spared not their own; their only son." "In times of ease, when nothing is required to be given up, the selfish heart may easily lie concealed, and feel good-natured towards God and man." "It is when sacrifices are called for that we are to discover what our hearts are." "If at such times we find no self-denying principle within us; or though there be some faint movements that way, if we find no controlling propensity to give up everything for Christ as fast as He calls for it; of what avail are all our fancied submission and our supposed supreme love to god which in easier times flattered our hopes?" "A man never knows himself until he is called to make important sacrifices for Christ." "Abraham never had a full opportunity to discover what his heart was, till put upon this trial." "And if this experiment had evinced that he

could not deny himself for God, it would have proved, notwithstanding all his former fair appearances, that he had other objects of supreme regard." "The same is true in respect to us." "What we are, is to be determined, not in times of ease and pleasure, but in times of trial."

How can we apply this to ourselves in a country where we are not facing open persecution or where we are not being required to offer up our only begotten son? I think that we can do it in this way. There is a great deal of self-denial that is related in the Christian life to what you will do, and what you are willing to sacrifice in relation to your coming to church and being a part of a local church. Praising God in public worship is a sacrifice. It is the offering of your praise and adoration to God. It is the offering of your time, your talents, and your resources for the Lord's use. This is indeed, a great sacrifice. The giving of your tithes and offerings is a sacrifice. Coming and listening to the public ministry of the Word of God is a sacrifice. The laying down of your life for the brethren is a sacrifice. How can a person say that they love the brethren if they never or seldom come to church? And yet this is clearly listed as one of the marks of a true Christian in 1 John 3: 14. "We know that we have passed from death to life when we love the brethren." When you come to church regularly, you are saying, "I will hear what God the Lord will say to me." "I will come and publicly praise the Lord with others of like precious faith, for all that He has given to me." "I will submit to the teaching of God's word, to do it, by the grace of Christ." "I will regularly commit to doing this because God and Christ are pleased with it. I will not let the people of the world, or my flesh, or even my closest relatives, dissuade me from it." You see; it is easy and convenient, but not God-glorifying, to be a stay-at-home Christian on a Sunday. It is worse, and can even be positively selfish and sinful to be a stay-at-work Christian on the Lord's Day. "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Make room in your thinking for what God has commanded of you. Remember that keeping the Lord's Day holy is a moral commandment which is for the most part related to regular church attendance and your upholding of the public worship of God. It is a commandment to be obeyed because you love God and you love Christ. It takes self-denial to faithfully attend all the worship services of the church. The Lord loves to receive the public worship of His people more than all other types and forms of worship and this is why you ought to deny yourself to come to church. Turn with me to Psalm 87 for a moment. "His foundation is in the holy mountains." "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" Here we find the Lord commenting upon His own purposes and desires. His foundation is in the holy mountains of His own decrees; His own eternal purposes in Christ to have a people for His own possession, who would gather together would praise Him. The Lord loves "the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." That is; Zion, which was the place in the Old Testament times, where God was publicly worshiped by Israel; that worship in Zion at the tabernacle and at the temple was more preferred by God than all the worship being offered up to Him by either

individuals privately, or a family gathered together. Why? Because it was God's purpose then and from all eternity; and it is God's purpose now, that He be glorified by each and every believer, in their gathering together to declare His glory in the Church of His Son Jesus Christ. "Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God!" It is not as though God is displeased with private devotions or family worship. Quite the contrary. He loves them too, and is pleased with them very much. And yet He loves the gates of Zion more because it glorifies Him more; having many saints worshipping Him together, seeking Him together, and planning together how He might be glorified in accordance with His word. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and she is the body of Christ, and she is God's plan for how He might be best glorified.

Being a Christian is not just going to church. But in our day, when there are so few who are going to church, it is necessary to state that it is true and Biblical self-denial to faithfully attend church. Being faithful in coming to church, working in and with the church, and serving Christ in the church, being regular and eager in attendance at church is a very important part of the life of a Christian disciple; it is what God would have you to do in accordance with His Word. Deny yourself and come. How can you say that you are a worshiper of the true and living God, and a follower of His Son Jesus Christ and yet not commit yourself to become a member of a local church; I do not know. Is Christ your life? Then come to where His people meet together for worship and join with them if you are Christ's disciple. Be willing to be baptized and to submit to Biblical authority in the teaching of God's word. The Church is God's glorious plan for every believer; it is for every disciple to enter in. Therefore commit to come. Commit to Praise Him. Commit to give to the church's ministries and further building up of the "the gates of Zion." Deny yourself in this way, and come and follow Christ.

Let's look 2ndly, now, at the lower part of this room; the horizontal part of self-denial.

In Luke 9: 23 Jesus says, " If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Coming to church is certainly not the whole life of self-denial. Rather discipleship is also the every day, living out your life of following Christ; of your coming after Him in all the areas of your life; both inside and outside of church in relation to other people. It is how you do your work. It is how you represent Christ in your family, giving yourself to supply their needs and leading them in doing what is right in the many situations of life which will decide the course of your how your family will live. It is whether you love your wife in the way that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. It is whether you love and respect your husband. It is whether you engage in good works and really think about and care for the people around you. It is whether you can understand that Christ is included even in your recreations and entertainments. It is whether your witness to others in the things that you do and say will reflect the character of Christ. And in all of these things self-denial is going to come very much into play. And all of these things begin with having your

priorities straight; in your putting God first, above all other people, even your closest relations, in order that God's will would be done. Turn with me over to Luke Chapter 14, verse 25. Now great multitudes went with Him." "And He turned and said to them, 'If anyone does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.'" "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it--lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'" "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?" "Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace." "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

At this point in time there were great multitudes following Him. But would they be willing to follow Him all the way to the cross in His goal to work out a perfect obedience to the will of God? No, Jesus knew that they would not. In fact when the time came, as you see in Matthew 26: 56, it says, "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled." But now, at that point, where was His popularity? Now that He was being arraigned to trial, false charges, and the condemnation of death; not one of His disciples could stand with Him, their Lord. Their strength, their resolution and their resources would not stand the test in that hour. They were like the king going to make war with ten thousand against the other king with 20 thousand. They calculated the cost and fled. But remember, that Jesus was pressing on in His obedience for them, and for us as well. His self-denying love would stand. He was going to the cross for them, and for every person who would be His true disciple; for everyone who would be faithful to God. Here we see the great principle of living the Christian life. It is to not trust in your own resources to live it. It is to trust in Christ. He went to the cross and died so that you would have a strength and greater motivation than you presently have, while living your life to yourself. That strength to do what is right and to do God's will when it is not popular, is found in Christ alone. That strength to deny yourself in the "hating" of your closest relations, in order to find and do God's will; can only come from Him. You would love to have their good opinion of you continue. But you deny yourself. The life of the Christian disciple is not lived based upon popularity. It is not that we become a Christian because our parents did, or our friends do. We must have and prove the strength and power of Christ for ourselves. Sometimes we have parents who are religious and unsaved. They will tell us that it was enough that we were baptized as an infant. It is enough that we take the sacraments and think that we are saved by our good works. This counsel must be hated. Sometimes we have parents, relatives, wife or husband who hate true Christianity. In both of these cases, we must deny ourselves in terms of not receiving their counsel to us of

how we should not follow Christ in some particular way of our obedience. If we are to be saved and follow Christ we must hate all such counsel that will turn us away from following Him. If we listen to them it might mean that we will lose our soul, or that they might lose their soul.

Jesus could not have lived the perfect life of obedience unto God that He did, by looking at the multitude to see whether they were following Him. And so, here in Luke 14, when he sees that it has become popular to follow Him, and that there were multitudes who were thinking like Peter, that following Him was going to lead to His "restoring the kingdom to Israel", and that the issue somehow could not be related to suffering for the sake of righteousness, or suffering so that souls would be redeemed; Jesus says, "If anyone come to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." He is saying, without this kind of self-denial you will not be able to be his follower. Is He saying that a person should really hate his relatives? No, not with a sinful hatred. But rather with a righteous hatred. Why should a person hate those who he is commanded, in other places in the Bible, to honor and love? It is because it will often-times be those very people who may try to turn you away from doing the will of God. In fact, without your denying yourself; at some point, they will succeed in turning you away from doing the will of God, in terms of your obedience to God and following Christ. They do not have God's interests highest on their priority list. They are mindful of the things of men more than they are of God. They will do this, because their highest priority is not doing their God's will; it is found in doing their own will, pursuing their own interests, and preserving their own life of selfish sinfulness. So in comparison with the love that you love Christ with; your love to them is to hate them and indeed your own life also. You cannot listen to their counsel and their opinions as to how you should live your life if it conflicts with the will of God as it is found in the Bible. This is going to take real self-denial. If you have the grace of Jesus Christ at work in your heart, you will really come to hate your own life because you see that there is so much selfishness and so much sin there in your heart, that you wish that you could disown yourself, disavow yourself, and renounce yourself forever. This is what it means to lose your life for Christ's sake.

True self-denial in the Christian life, is based upon love to Jesus Christ; a love for Him which is greater than for any other person that you have known. Turn with me to Matthew 10: 34. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth." "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." "For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be those of his own household." "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." "He who finds his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for My sake will find it." Here is this same principle of self-denial taken from the vantage point, not of hatred this time; but of love. "Do you love your relations more than Me," Jesus

asks? Will you listen to them to do what they will tell you, you should do, when it is clearly against what I have said as the Son of God?" "I who have come to save you soul, and who can save the soul of your relatives; you will not listen to Me?" "Then you are not worthy of Me," He is saying. He who is worthy of Him will deny himself at this point and pick up his cross; he will be willing to suffer and if need be, die in order to do the right thing in his following Christ. All the various kinds of difficulty and persecution and even death may indeed come to the one who would be the faithful disciple of Christ. "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."(2 Timothy 3: 12) This is self-denial; to be willing to endure these things to find Christ and know Him better. This is what the Apostle Paul wanted. He says in Philippians Chapter 3, verse 8, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God on the basis of faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead." This is self-denial; to deny what unbelieving, or even well-meaning, people would have you to do which is in opposition to the will of God and Christ. It is necessary that you, as the follower of Christ, exercise self-denial whenever you are being tempted to compromise the Lord's will, laid out in His Word, in little things or big things. But this self-denial comes through Christ's working in the power of His resurrection to give you that strength to deny yourself. You experience the fellowship of His sufferings and rejoice in the hope of what lies ahead, in Christ.

And then, 3rdly, and finally - We want to look at the Centrality of this room; what results from the exercise of self-denial in living the life of Christian discipleship.

The centrality of this room is fitting for self-denial. Self-denial brings a multitude of spiritual and even material blessings which could not have been reasonably anticipated, were there not a God who does impossible things. Look with me at Matthew Chapter 19, verse 23. The rich young ruler comes to Jesus in verse 16, asking what He might do that he might have eternal life. Jesus tests Him with the man's own view of his own obedience to God's law. Jesus tells him that if he wanted to have eternal life, he should keep the commandments. Can he do it? The man asks, "Which ones?" Jesus tells him the ones related to the second table of the law, the 5th through the 9th commandments; summarizing them by mentioning the commandment that "he should love his neighbor as himself." He deliberately did not mention the 10th commandment yet. The young man says to Jesus, "All these things I have kept from my youth." "What do I still lack?" Jesus tells him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me." "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great

possessions." What was the problem? He was covetous. He wanted to hold on to His selfish life. He wanted His possessions more than Christ. He thought that he had worked hard for that money and those possessions and he simply could not give them away. He would lose his life if he gave away His money and His possessions. He didn't see that his clinging to these things instead of giving them up for Christ, would cost him his soul. He needed Christ's grace, Christ's sacrifice for His sins, and He didn't want to deny himself and pick up his cross. But if he would have "lost his life", here, he would have indeed found it later. He would have obtained eternal life, because He would have had the greatest of treasures and the greatest of possessions. He would have had Christ. You can see that a person can be very outwardly moral and yet not want to deny himself and pick up a cross. He can ask all the right questions and still not come forward to deny himself at the time when Christ asks for it, because he still wants to hold on to his present selfish and sinful life. He looks good outwardly, but He has other gods besides the true and living God. He has other Saviors besides the only One who can save; the Lord Jesus Christ.

After the man left, Jesus turned to His disciples in verse 23, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." "When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying 'Who then can be saved?' "But Jesus looked at them and said to the, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" Now notice Peter's response to these statements. (Verse 27) "Then Peter answered and said to Him, 'See, we have left all and followed You.'" "Therefore, what shall we have?" "So Jesus said to them, Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Now listen to this: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, (In other words, they denied themselves; they lost their life for Christ's sake) shall receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life." Mark 10: 29 and 30 say, "...no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life." What great rewards for self-denial. What great rewards for losing one's puny selfish life. A rich man may think that he has ever so many precious things, but he will eventually lose them all when he dies. They are infinitely small in comparison to the rewards which Christ gives, when self is denied and all is given to Him. When a selfish rich man dies he carries nothing of his riches away with Him. But O how great a gift of grace it is that Christ gives, when you invest all that you have with Him; to lose your life that you might find it. That is true self-denial. You say to me, "I have a hard time denying myself in the way that you have explained it to me today." I say to you;

come to Christ now and see how all things are possible with God. If you come to Christ you will be His learner and He will be your teacher. He will show you by His words and by His deeds which you read about in the Bible, how to deny yourself. Come to Christ and leave your selfish life behind, and you will not only find grace to deny yourself, and grace to pick up your cross, but you will find that He will give you far more than you have bargained for. He will give you true joy and happiness; a hundredfold for everything you gave to Him. It is a famous saying of Jim Elliot, the man who gave his life trying to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador with the gospel of Christ in the 1950s: "He is no fool to give that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Let us not be fools in the way that we live our life. Let us deny ourselves, and pray to be wise.