

The Master Craftsman

The Master Disciple Maker – Part II

Selected Scripture

Introduction

If you had been in Florence, Italy, in 1501, perhaps you would have seen workers pulling into that city, a huge marble block. It was to be used by one of the well-known sculptors of that day and that era. He had planned to make of that block of marble, a masterpiece. However, when he observed it closely, he noticed that it was flawed. He discarded it and said, “No matter what expense or work you’ve gone to bringing that block of marble here, I won’t work with it – it has imperfections.”

The marble block sat in the cathedral yard for several weeks. Finally, a young, fledgling artist noticed it. He saw the imperfection, but in his mind, he also saw great beauty that could be brought out of that imperfect piece of marble. He asked permission to work on it and it was granted. Perhaps they thought his inexperience was leading him into a foolish endeavor.

For three years, this young artist worked. He sculpted that which was in his mind – a brilliant piece of work. Finally, at the end of three years, he assembled all of the well-known artists of his day, which included Leonardo da Vinci. The artists gathered in the cathedral yard to view the masterpiece, which had been veiled. When the veil was dropped, the work was met with resounding applause. The artists were amazed that this young artist could do what he did with such imperfect marble. This was only the beginning of the masterpieces created by Michelangelo Buonarroti.

The unique thing about this story is that Michelangelo chose, on this one occasion, to work with flawed material to make a masterpiece. Today, I want reintroduce the individual who will *only* work with flawed material. His masterpieces are not made of marble, stone, or wood, but of flesh and blood. He takes the material of humanity, those who have yielded themselves to Him, and from these imperfect, flawed resources, He designs, sculpts, and makes of them, masterpieces.

We will take a closer look today, at the beginning of this process as Jesus Christ, the Master Craftsman, calls the twelve disciples to Himself. They are flawed, imperfect, and problematic, yet He will call them and will begin to work on the things in them that we would call flaws. We will look at four of these flaws today, and observe the way Jesus works through these men’s lives in spite of the flaws.

The Flaw of Narrow-Mindedness

The first flaw is that of narrow-mindedness. Now there are two ways that narrow-mindedness works. Let us look at these.

Toward those we do not know well - judgmentalism

Look at Mark 9:38-40.

John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us.”

One of the problems that the disciples had was the flaw of narrow-mindedness, or the “we versus them” mentality. This is the mentality that whatever God is going to do on planet earth, He will do it through us; through me. This is the thinking that whatever God is attempting on this globe, He will attempt it through our efforts; through my efforts.

When we are narrow-minded, we tend to shy away from those who are not part of our little associations or our little group. They look a little different; they may talk a little differently and we are not exactly sure who they are. Certainly God cannot work through them because if He could, they would be part of us; part of our little group.

The narrow-mindedness of the disciples in these verses is directed toward those they do not know very well. They are displaying an exclusive attitude; the “we versus them” attitude. Note, however, that Jesus’

answer shows a totally different concern. Where the disciples had a problem with the fact that the person was not part of the core twelve, Jesus had the concern that the man was doing something in His name. If the man was doing the work in His name, even though he may turn against Him, Jesus says, “He can’t soon turn against the One in whose name he just performed a miracle. So give him time, but don’t exclude him; don’t tell him to either stop or join us.”

I was talking to a Trans World Radio missionary recently, about this attitude. We were discussing a concert put on by Trans World Radio that featured the Christian singer, Steve Green. Although I enjoyed the music immensely, I was more tuned into a slide presentation that was shown. The camera took us literally, around the world as they are ministering in all of the different languages. There was no narration in this slide show – just many different people in numerous different languages sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ or Jesus Cristo, etc. I watched mesmerized by the thought of how tiny I am; how little we are.

Have you ever gotten caught up with narrow-minded thought? We tend to think that when God does something in our lives, we are it. This is a snare that seems to sneak into the lives of disciples. Those whom we do not know well, we think, “Well, we’ll just kind of look at him sideways, but if he joins our group, then God will bless him.”

How small this narrow-mindedness toward those we do not know well is. It leads to judgmentalism; a judgmental attitude.

Toward those we know very well - jealousy

There is another way that narrow-mindedness works. This, I think, is a little worse. It is narrow-mindedness against those we know very well; those we know personally. It seems that this can lead us into the realm we could call jealousy. Turn to John chapter 21.

As Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and is about to ascend to heaven, He is having an intimate talk with Peter as they walk along the seashore. Jesus is telling Peter what is going to happen in his life. Peter happens to turn around and see John walking; sort of tagging along. We read in John 21:21,

So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, “Lord, and what about this man?”

In other words, “Lord, what are You going to do in his life?”

Continue to John 21:22.

Jesus said to him, “If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!”

I love this classic answer.

One of the toughest places to share the goodness of God is in church. One of the toughest people to tell that you just received a promotion or that you just moved into a new home or that you just got well is a person in church. I am talking about disciples; people who want to follow Jesus Christ – I will leave everyone else out.

Why is this? These are snares laid at the feet of those who want God to work. Why is it that, as soon as He does something, we get overly impressed with what He is doing? And when He is doing something in someone else’s life, we do the same spiritually in our souls.

Jealousy is one of the primary problems of those who would follow Jesus. In these verses, Peter is saying, “Okay, Lord, I know what You are going to do for me and that’s exciting. But what are You going to do for this one? Are You going to do more for him than for me? Are You going to do less for him?”

Jesus says to him, “What’s that to you?”

In other words, “It’s none of your business.”

Jesus then says,

... *“You follow Me!”*

The Flaw of Personal Ambitions

There is a second flaw that I want to introduce. Not only did Jesus Christ have to sculpt through the imperfections of narrow-mindedness, He also had to sculpt through the problems of the flaw that we will call personal ambitions.

Turn to Matthew chapter 20. This is a classic passage that is probably very familiar to you. Look at Matthew 20:20.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, . . . making a request of Him.

This mother has two big strapping boys. These sons are grown adult men who have been following

Jesus for some time. Look at her request of Jesus in Matthew 20:21.

*And He said to her, "What do you wish?"
She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."*

Turn to Mark chapter 9, and we have the same problem. The disciples were walking with Jesus through Galilee into Capernaum. During this five and a half hour walk, the text tells us the disciples were talking about something. When they finally arrived, Jesus says, in Mark 9:33b,

... *"What were you discussing on the way?"*

One text says, "What were you arguing about . . ." (Mark 9:33 NIV).

The disciples hung their heads because, as the text tells us, they were arguing about who would be the greatest. For five hours these men were arguing back and forth on the road.

"I'm the greatest."

"No, I'm the greatest."

"No, I'm the greatest."

"No, I'll be the greatest."

Back and forth the disciples argued. This argument gets so heated that finally, these two grown men get their mom involved, which is rather pitiful. I can just see this little old, gray haired woman coming with her two big strapping boys, saying, "Lord, these are my two boys. They are fine young men. Of all the twelve, these are the finest. Would You allow them to sit on Your right and on Your left?"

This lets us know that they really put dear mom up to this. They had this little argument going, so they said, "Mom, would you do this for us and help us to have the first place?"

How ridiculous! It happens today, too. It happens in our society. The insiders in Washington call it, "Potomac Fever". When a president is elected, as one senator says, "We're all lusting after a position; an appointment."

It happens in the Christian world, as well. Why is it that we pray, "God, use my life," and as soon as He does, we get overly impressed with the fact that He did and we become impossible to live with? It is because we have personal ambitions.

I came across a verse at a very convicting moment in my life that God used to bring me to a recognition

of this thought. I relearn it all the time, as well. Let me pull back the veil in my own life and failure in this.

During the first year of our church, there were very few people involved. I had begun without any real expectations, but then, God began to work. After a year, ninety-five people were coming. I began entertaining such deluded thoughts of grandeur, "Oh, ninety-five people! That's really something!"

At that time, a gentleman in the church invited me to spend a day at his cabin to just rest. I went thinking that God would surely be impressed that I was taking a day out of my busy schedule to meet with Him like that. So there I was, sitting on the porch with my Bible and my small journal. I was reading the notes that I had made the previous week and I was reading the scriptures, and I thought, "I'll read one of the prophets. Great man that I am, I'll read from great Jeremiah. Let's see what great Jeremiah has to say."

I began casually reading Jeremiah and I came to chapter 45, verse 5, and like a thunderbolt, this verse struck me. It said,

. . . are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them . . .

"Could you make it a little clearer, Lord? I didn't catch it!" Boom!

As disciples, we are intent on following Jesus Christ and want Him to use our lives, don't we? Then, He does! But we get overly impressed with the work that He has done.

These disciples had been called – they had been selected. They then started thinking, "Jesus selected us for the kingdom! So now, who will be the greatest? Who is God going to work in the most?"

Jesus had to give them an example, which He did near the end of His life on earth, and in the process, He gave the disciples the solution to their flaw of personal ambitions. Jesus had them all sit down and then, got a basin of water and put a towel over His arm. He proceeded, in the presence of these great men, to untie their sandals and wash their feet.

Now in our minds, we tend to think of greatness in terms of how many people are serving us. Jesus was saying that we are great in terms of how many people we serve.

There was the flaw of personal ambitions in the disciples. They were filled with greatness, but Christ was filled with graciousness.

The Flaw of Spiritual Weakness

Let me give a third flaw that we will call the flaw of spiritual weakness. Let us look carefully at two passages.

Turn to Matthew 26:56b.

. . . Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

For three years, Jesus has been pouring His life into the lives of the disciples. For three years, they have said, "We'll follow You." Peter, in fact, said, "I will follow You until I die." Then, however, they all left Him and fled.

Now look at Mark 14:50.

And they all left Him and fled.

One of the problems that we have as disciples, is leaving Jesus; fleeing His call. We, all of a sudden, come to some understanding of what this battle is all about; what this war entails, and say, "Uh-uh, I'm leaving. Discipleship is for somebody else. I'll just slip into heaven as a believer. But to follow Him closely and allow Him to sculpt and to mold? No. That is too much."

Solutions to the flaw of spiritual weakness

What was Jesus' solution to spiritual weakness? There were two.

1. First, Jesus taught the disciples how to pray with a proper attitude in mind.

He said to pray,

*Your kingdom come. . . . deliver us from evil.
(Matthew 6:10 & 13)*

Jesus taught the disciples to pray, not only with an attitude of desire, but with boldness.

Even though we are flawed; even though we have imperfections in our lives, we can go to God our Father with boldness and pray, "God, keep us serving."

2. Secondly, not only did Jesus teach the disciples how to pray, but Jesus prayed for them.

In John 17:11, Jesus prays,

. . . Holy Father, keep them in Your name...

In Luke 22:31-32a, Jesus is talking to Peter and He says,

Simon, Simon, . . . Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you . . .

You may know someone who is a real prayer warrior. When you go to them and say, "Will you pray for me?" and they say, "Yes," there is the feeling of confidence that you are being brought to the throne of heaven on the prayer of this believer.

Jesus Christ, Himself, is praying for you and for me.

The Flaw of Unrealistic Expectations

There is one more flaw to draw our attention to, which we will call the flaw of unrealistic expectations. This is a problem with any disciple.

As disciples, we come to the Lord and say, "Lord, I want You to use me." Then, all of a sudden, something happens, and we say, "I didn't expect that."

This is a problem throughout life. We expect things to be a certain way and then, we get involved with them and discover that they are not really what we expected. Ministry happens to be one of these things. Following Jesus Christ happens to be one of them, as well.

One of the most difficult steps for a new believer to take, once they have finished the "honeymoon" period when everything is wonderful, is to get involved in ministry and realize it is different than they expected; it is difficult; it may be hard.

Solutions to the flaw of unrealistic expectations

Disciples have unrealistic expectations. Jesus Christ is going to take care of that flaw and I love the way He does it.

1. First, Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs.

Look at Luke 10:1.

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come.

Let me give three reasons, although I am sure there are many more, that Jesus sent the disciples in pairs.

- Perhaps this was to maintain a balance in the ministry.

In other words, perhaps the pairs of disciples would complement one another. I can see Jesus putting Simon the Zealot, a man with a fiery personality, with someone like Nathaniel. I can see putting Simon Peter, the man who would rush in when he did not know where to rush, with Thomas, who thought everything through, “Now, I wonder if this is going to happen . . . Should we do this?”

Jesus may have sent the disciples in pairs to provide this kind of balance in the ministry.

- Perhaps this was also to provide encouragement in the ministry.

When one disciple would get down in the ministry, perhaps another would be able to pick him up. These disciples were out in the ministry field by themselves, just the two of them, and they were able to encourage one another in the work.

- Perhaps this was to guard against pride as well.

One of the two disciples might get a little carried away with the results of the meeting of the previous night and all that was happening in the town they were in. The other one would perhaps, remind him that he was human.

There may be many more reasons, but let us look at the standard of operation.

2. Secondly, Jesus told the disciples to expect a couple of responses.

Look at Luke 10:3.

Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

Jesus is being realistic. He continues in Luke 10:4,

Carry no money belt, . . .

In other words, “Don’t take any silver or gold.”

We will discuss the reason for this in a moment. Continue in Luke 10:4,

. . . no bag, . . .

This was the “pera,” or the beggar’s bag. It was the bag a religious man would carry as he walked about because he might receive a gift. The minstrel would also carry a “pera,” and after playing his instrument, listeners could put money in his bag.

Jesus says, “You are not going out to beg. Don’t take a “pera”; don’t take a money belt.”

Jesus also says, in Luke 10:4,

. . . no shoes . . .

Now what is Jesus trying to do? Is He trying to make this ministry as tough as possible for the disciples?

No. I think Jesus is telling the disciples, and we will find this in another verse, “Whatever you do have, it will be a result of what people give you as you serve.”

Look, in fact, at Luke 10:7.

Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

If you have ever been involved in some kind of missionary work or ministry work, you can really live this out. I know that my family and myself do. We are, in a sense, recipients of whatever is given. I think of this suit that I am wearing – it is a gift from someone in this church. I think of the car that we drive; the house that we live in – these are things that we are simply recipients of.

Jesus is basically telling these men, “You’re not going out all set up. You are going out with nothing and whatever you have is given to you.”

After telling the disciples what not to take, Jesus tells them what to expect. Look at Luke 10:6-7.

If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.

In other words, “If you are ministering in a city and someone gets saved who lives in a house that is twice as big or has servants or has a lot more food, do not leave the little shanty that someone, by their grace, is providing for you. Stay there until you leave that city and go to another one.”

It is easy to imagine the problems that would begin if these disciples kept working themselves up into better homes of the people they were leading to Christ. Jesus says, “Don’t do that. Just take what they give you and expect from some, hospitality.”

This is the first response the disciples could expect. Jesus says, “You will come to a home where

they will open their arms and say, ‘Oh, I’ve heard about you; I’ve heard about this Christ. Come in! Let’s start using my home as your basis of headquarters in this town.’”

Now this is a great place to stop, isn’t it? This is a great way to motivate disciples. Just tell them, “You go out in My name and they will open their arms. As you witness for Me on the job or in the neighborhood, people will say, ‘Oh, that’s exactly what I’ve been waiting for. How can I accept Christ? What can I do for you?’” This would seem to be an incentive to be a disciple, would it not?

However, Jesus, being the realist that He is, says, “You need to expect another response, and that is, not hospitality, but hostility.”

Look at Luke 10:10.

But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, “Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.”

In other words, “You will come to places where they will slam their door in your face. You may share Christ with someone who will laugh at you.”

Have you ever shared Christ with someone at the job, only to hear them respond by saying, “You’re a what? A Christian! That’s dark ages. Everyone is enlightened now. Follow the god of your choice.”

Perhaps, after hearing these words, you think, “Man, what a dummy I am,” and kind of retreat.

Expect this. It is one of the responses that we will receive.

Jesus goes on to tell how the disciples should respond to hostility. There are two ways.

- First, do not take rejection lightly.

Look at Luke 10:12.

I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

Sodom, at this time, was simply a barren wasteland of volcanic ash and rock.

Continue to Luke 10:13-15.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be

more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades!

How is that for a response? I do not suggest memorizing these verses and giving them to your co-worker after they reject Christ. However, this is the attitude that we bear, not the verses that we share.

In other words, when someone that we witness to rejects Christ, we are to have a burden in our hearts that they are headed for hell. We know they will die without Christ, which is a weighty burden. So do not take their rejection lightly. Pray. Continue to ask for an opportunity to share.

- Secondly, do not take rejection personally.

This is where we often fail, don’t we? Note Luke 10:16.

The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Don’t forget, you’re representing Me. If they reject your words, it’s not necessarily a personal rejection. There is a spiritual war going on and they may not be able to stand the sound of grace. They’re rejecting Me.”

I remember learning this lesson from a wise individual that I was doing some visitations with. We were going to homes and knocking on doors, while I was in college. We knocked on one door and the gentleman came and we shared for about thirty minutes. It seemed like he would accept Christ, but finally, he said, “No, I don’t want Christ. I don’t want to talk anymore.” He then, shut the door.

I remember stepping off his porch feeling so dejected. I began thinking and saying, “If only I had said something differently; if only I had been a little sharper in my presentation, perhaps . . .”.

I went on and on and the fellow with me just listened for a while. Finally, he said, “If that man had accepted Christ, who would you give the credit to?”

I replied, “The Lord.”

He said, “Then when someone doesn’t receive Christ, who should get the credit?”

One of the problems that we have is that we take the credit when someone responds, don’t we? We take the credit when God uses our lives. That is the reason

it is so debilitating to us when it does not seem to work.

It is all of Christ. Jesus does not say, “When you go and speak in My name and they accept you, rejoice! When you go in My name and they reject you, rejoice.”

No. They are not rejecting you, they are rejecting the One of whom you speak. So do not take it personally.

There is one more lesson in this chapter of Luke that I want to give before we stop. Look at Luke 10:17. I love the results of the seventy disciples who were sent in pairs.

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”

These disciples had the tallies; they had all of the results. I can just see how carried away they were. This was their first time out and they had come back with stories of how God had moved in miraculous ways. They told the Lord that even the demons were subject to them.

“Simon, how many demons did you cast out?”

“Oh, I got seven.”

“How many did you get?”

“Well, I got twelve.”

“How many did you lead to Christ.”

They had notches on their belts. These disciples were so excited; so carried away with the results.

Jesus said to them, in Luke 10:18-20, after they simmered down a little bit,

. . . I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.

It is easy for disciples to get caught up with everything else. Jesus says, “If you rejoice at the end of a day’s work in My name, do you know what I really want you to be rejoicing over? The fact that I love you. The fact that I love you.”

Charles Spurgeon, at the age of twenty-one, was preaching to over 10,000 people. In his later years, he

said, “The older I get, the more simple my theology becomes. And it is this, that Jesus Christ loves me.”

Do we get carried away with anything else?

Conclusion

Jesus says, “You have some flaws, gentlemen, but we’re going to work through them. You have personal ambitions, you’re judgmental, you’re so easily made jealous by what I do in other believer’s lives, you expect too much and when it happens, you take the credit.”

However, what did Jesus do? Did He discard them? No. He worked with them. He is a Master Craftsman who works only with imperfect material like you and me.

I read recently of an artist, a great violinist, who was to perform before a packed concert hall. It had been announced that he would play a rare, expensive violin. The price of the violin was about 20,000 dollars. The violinist came out on the stage and began to play with the backing of a great symphony orchestra. The music was incredible. He played the violin and, at the end of his brief concert, received ovation after ovation. Then, all of a sudden, he took that violin, threw it to the ground, smashed it, stomped on it, and walked off the stage.

The people gasped at this. They could not believe it. As soon as he disappeared behind the curtain, the symphony conductor stepped to the microphone and said, “He promised that he would play on a very expensive violin. The one he has been playing on cost twenty dollars. He will now proceed to come back and play on the rare Stradivarius.”

The violinist played on the expensive violin, but only he could tell the difference.

Do you know what you and I are? We are twenty dollar violins. In the wrong hands we would probably squeak and squawk and sound terrible. But in the hands of a master, no one would ever know. Why? Because we have yielded ourselves to Jesus and have allowed Him to play upon the chords of our lives, imperfections and all, with such grace, such skill that the beauty of His name is heard by many. May it be by His grace.