



Articles and Sermons :: What Is A Disciple?

What Is A Disciple? - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/11 18:31

The Greek word used in the New Testament for 'disciple' is 'mathetes.' It's a common word and concept from the ancient world, much more common to them than it is to us today. There were disciples of many individuals back in those days. Philosophers of all branches of learning would often travel around the country, teaching their take on things. If successful, these philosophers would attract a group of individuals who would regularly sit at the feet of their teacher, and learn his particular insight and point of view. They would often congregate together and form a sort of school. These people became known as disciples. For a disciple is defined as one who literally sits at the feet of another to learn.

We can see a clear use of this word in Matthew 5:1-2:

Quote:
-----"When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying..." (NASB)

Jesus' ministry at this time had started picking up steam and drawing attention. People were beginning to take note of this man who had gone down into the rivers of the Jordan at John's baptism ceremonies. After being baptized by John, Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit where He was tempted by the devil for forty days. When He came out of His wilderness experience, a controversial ministry began in which Jesus announced that the long awaited for kingdom of God that had been prophesied, had finally come, and He demonstrated through the power of the Spirit the power of that kingdom by healing the sick and casting out devils.

News quickly spread throughout the region, and large crowds of people were coming from all over to seek out the Lord, and to hear of this kingdom. It was at this time that the Lord, seeing the massive crowds, moved up onto the side of a mountain so people might better hear what He had to say. Here we read how He sat down, and His disciples came to his feet to begin to listen to what it is He had to teach.

Indeed, this posturing is no accidental one. Jesus sat down on the side of the mountain ready to speak, and His disciples surrounded Him ready to listen. The master teacher and disciple relationship must always be this way. There is one who speaks, and there is one who listens. And these are not just casual listeners. They are individuals who have come to an end of their self, and thus are attentive. They listen to their teacher speak, and hang on every word that He says.

It is no accident then, that over the next two chapters of Matthew we have complete silence from the crowd. Indeed, there is no longer, unbroken, continuous monologue of Christ's in the entirety of Scripture, apart from this so-called Sermon on the Mount. There was not one question, there was not one rebuttal, there was not one heckler there that day. There was complete silence from the crowd of disciples, because their master was speaking. Things of course, would not always be this way. But I believe this posturing serves as the ultimate model for what it means to enter into discipleship.

You see, discipleship is more than a sixteen-week program held at church a couple times a year. Indeed, the notion that you can become a full blown disciple by taking a series of classes once a week for four months out of the year is suspect. Far be it from taking a series of classes of gradually increasing depth, or doing a series of Bible studies with questions at the back of a book, discipleship is a posture one enters into, a disposition of a person's very being. Discipleship is not something you do, rather, a disciple is something you are.

A disciple is one who sits at the feet of another to learn. A disciple is one who has heard everything there is to hear, and has postulated even his own ideas about why it is the world goes round and round. He is one, however, who has found no rest or satisfaction in what he has heard and what he has theorized. He is one who has come to an end with this world and end to himself. But in the hearing of the words of Christ, he finds himself arrested and amazed, for in Him he finds one whose teaching has an "authority" not found amongst the many scribes in his day (Matthew 7:28-29). Indeed, to him the teachings of even the world's best scribes become mere scribble. A disciple is a finished man, who in humility now sits at the feet of another to learn, absorb, and soak in what it is his teacher has to say. For, he is no longer interested in the opinions of others or even himself, for he is a man undone, and interested in the words of one alone.

One thing I have observed over my ten years as a Christian, is that often in the Church you find that the Lord is lacking true disciples. What you often find today is a peculiar mixture of people bringing many ideas and opinions in. We mix the teachings of Christ with all sorts of philosophy, psychology, and other devilish and worldly things. We are not single minded in our devotion to listening to what it is our master has to say. We are not truly interested in "what saith the Lord?" Indeed, what the Lord has to say will seldom ever even make its way into consideration at a meeting of the deacons or elders. Every step of the way we are busy soaking up the books and tapes of others, only occasionally stopping to consider what Christ thinks on a given matter.

What Christ says will shock and offend our sensibilities from time to time. What He says will not always allow us to continue on with the way things always have been, and allow us to be nice respectable Church members. Indeed, Jesus once taught that He was divine manna come down from heaven, to which He told his followers who were nice, good, and respectable Jews, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves." (John 6:53) And what is it we read? As a result of this teaching, "many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." (John 6:66) Such was simply too much for these disciples. With their minds they had drawn a line in the sand, and said to the Lord, "You can come this far, but no more."

Have you drawn a line in the sand? Does the Lord have the right to speak about all the matters of your life? Do His words and thoughts reign supreme? Or are you still sitting on the throne? Do you even care what He says? If I told you that in Matthew 19:3-12, the Lord teaches that divorce except for the reason of adultery is sinful, and that to remarry after such a divorce is to commit an act of adultery, how would you respond? What if I were to tell you that not only does He teach this, but the same passage calls for such individuals to go on the rest of their lives as if they were eunuchs—individuals who had undergone castration?

Not all men can accept this statement Christ said, but such men are clearly not disciples. Instead what is it that we see in the Church? Men and women freely marry, divorce, and remarry just as easily and frequently as the world does, and we don't even bat an eye about it. After all, why must they go through life single and alone? Don't they deserve to be happy? Don't they deserve to experience sexual bliss and enjoy the comfort and companionship of another? But what is the call of Christ? The call of Christ is for the kingdom to be filled with eunuchs-- individuals who allow Christ to even speak to them about their own sexuality. But many cannot hear such things, because many are not disciples.

Please don't get me wrong or think I'm targeting any one group of individuals over that of another. I simply have picked this one issue out and examined it because there are so few topics that hit so close to home. There are few topics that so expose us and the disposition of our hearts. The sex drive is a powerful drive, and the issue of marriage goes back to the very foundations of the world. It's fundamental to our very constitution as human beings. Yet, it is evident that many in the Church have drawn the line in the sand, and like the Jews said, "Lord, you can come this far, but no more."

Of the disciples that heard Christ teach that you must eat of His flesh and drink of His blood, there were many who were offended and turned away. But there was a group who did not turn away. While they undoubtedly found the Lord's teaching that day as being a difficult teaching to accept and comprehend, these disciples had not drawn a line in the sand. For they had realized that Christ alone had the "words of eternal life." (John 6:68) These men had heard everything else there was to hear in this world. But they realized there was nothing else out there that was worth listening to. Others might have clever ideas and good advice, but they found the words of Christ alone carried with them Divine Life.

That is why they were not interested in anything else. No matter how clever the sayings of the wisest of the rabbis, Plato, or all the rest, the words of no one else were even comparable. For the word of the Lord was the issue of Life. The words of even the smartest of men, no matter how short, clever, and wise, could not even begin to compare. Yet how quickly do we turn to Dr. Phil or Oprah for advice? Why is it that we even turn to such people? Christ alone has words full of Life. If He alone has it, then the words of Dr. Phil and Oprah are filled with nothing but death. There is a stench to what they have to say. Just because you put a dead man in a nice suit doesn't mean he doesn't rot and stink to high heaven just the same. Yet that is all that this world and its many words can ever hope to be: a well dressed dead man full of stink. Clever and worldly speech is nothing other than the dressing up of a dead man.

But the words of Christ are altogether a different thing. They are powerful words. A when Christ speaks, the cosmos respond. It was by the word of the Lord that the heavens were made. He merely spoke and everything came into existence. There was nothing that was created in this world that was not spoken by the Lord into existence. Indeed, even upon the return of Christ, "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." (John 5:25) His spoken word not only created the heavens and earth, but is bringing about, and will bring about the resurrection of the dead.

Therefore, let us turn from this world and the many voices that try to compete with the words of Christ. Let us be tired of everything that the world has to say and offer. Let us not even be consumed with our own clever ideas and theories. For we have come to an end of all that. We only want to sit at the feet of our master, and be fed with His very words. Indeed, with the words of Christ being the issue of life, being a disciple is therefore the issue of life and death. Indeed, the issue is ultimately of our very salvation. Let our motto be, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ!"

Re: What Is A Disciple? - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/14 7:59

Perhaps I picked the wrong day to originally make this post on, (Easter weekend) so, I thought I'd give it a bump in case people didn't get to see it and get a chance to discuss it.

Re: - posted by dunlow64God, on: 2009/4/14 10:10

Amen and Amen! I don't like to refer to myself as a "Christian" anymore. Not being rude or arrogant, but that word has been abused by people who don't even have a relationship with Christ. I would rather say that I am a follower of Christ or a disciple of Christ. The meaning of being a Christian for most people, mainly in the secular society is not the same as the meaning of a Christian as used in the Bible. And that can go for the nonsecular society as well. Anyway, that's just my two cents! Have a blessed day! :-)

Re: What Is A Disciple? - posted by RobertW (), on: 2009/4/14 10:38

I think that 'disciple' is an initial stage of the believers walk with Christ. You will notice that over time the number of disciples in the Gospels drew down to almost nothing either by their rejection of Christ or by trial.

I think of being a disciple like getting on a train that is traveling across country. Some people get on reluctantly, so we can say they are 'reluctant' disciples and time will prove this. There are stops along life's road where the person can 'get off' when they no longer desire to be a disciple. The book of Hebrews refers to it as 'drawing back' or *furling the sails*.

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. (John 2:23-25)

Some followed for the signs and wonders or healing or the food He provided. They were not trusting 'Him' or following Him, they were following the provision. This is not a true disciple. They cried Hosanna one week and crucify the next. Why? They were not truly following *Him*.

In time each person comes to a decision. At some point God is able to 'entrust' Himself to the man that utterly trusts in Him. When the person puts the full weight of their life under His care and authority- He can 'trust' them. It is at this point that I believe a person is a candidate for becoming a witness. A witness is a disciple that is transformed by the power of the Spirit into a New Creature and is baptized into Christ. They are enabled to be a 'disciple' that loved one another because of Romans 5:5. This is how all men know. But the great test is found in our willingness to love and forgive as God loves- even our persecutors. That is what Steven was and did.

Re: What Is A Disciple?, on: 2009/4/14 10:46

I liked your message here. As I think "what is a disciple?", I firstly and foremost think of a "**disciplined one**", and that is exclusively and always from God alone...the inner sanctum of our being, where the Holy spirit dwells, and convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgement. This is the place where we hear His voice; His pleasure, delights, and also that which grieves Him. It is here where we say "Yes Lord.", and bend again, or where we ambitiously proclaim "My way!...not Yours!"

He scourges and disciplines every one He receives as a child, and if we do not ENDURE Discipline...then we are bastard offspring...not sons at all. The nature of discipline, is but the very molding that conforms us to the living image of Christ Himself...the very thing that bears holy fruit....and thereby holiness. Unless you understand this...That this is the ver

the root and core of Christianity itself, surrender, obedience and submission...then you are liable to miss everything. you will not become as Christ...you will not become a Christian.

We may be members of one another, but we surely will not stand with one another on the day of our deaths. We will stand alone, before the lord, as we all will stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

"MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND WILL FOLLOW NO OTHER."

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/14 22:26

Quote:

Amen and Amen! I don't like to refer to myself as a "Christian" anymore.

I hear you. Indeed, "Christian" has mostly become a term that is nominal in its meaning... which renders it almost meaningless, which is rather pointless.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/14 22:29

Quote:

Some followed for the signs and wonders or healing or the food He provided. They were not trusting 'Him' or following Him, they were following the provision. This is not a true disciple. They cried Hosanna one week and crucify the next. Why? They were not truly following Him.

Indeed, and if you ever closely study the theology of the book of John, you'll discover that the only "faith" John ever approves of is faith in response to the words of Christ, not the signs and wonders. Those who followed Christ because of the signs and wonders are ones Christ distanced Himself from.

Re: - posted by ADisciple (), on: 2009/4/14 22:54

This passage always comes to heart when I think of being a disciple:

"The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 50.4).

Some years ago I read somewhere that this could be translated, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of a disciple.. he wakeneth mine ear to hear as a disciple."

How does a disciple speak? With words (I think it must mean) of Life, that impart grace to the hearers, a word in season for the weary. Words from a disciplined tongue... that speaks as the Son of God Himself spoke: "the words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life" (Jn. 6.63).

How does a disciple hear? It is with an ear that is awakened to OBEY, not just hear. That's what makes a disciple: one who follows, one who has made the commitment of obedience to follow Him, come what may. ("Except a man deny himself, and take up his cross, he cannot be my disciple.") So, he opens my ear, and I am not rebellious: "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50.5,6).

...I also think of the passage in Acts where "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11.26). In other words, there was a certain "something" about these ones who were disciples of Christ, a certain distinguishing characteristic... that identified them with the Christ, the Anointed One.

That can only have been the anointing... the Holy Spirit in them that bore witness to the Christ Himself in their lives.

This is a very high standard, and I know I fall short of it. But, I am still following...

AD

Re: - posted by ADisciple (), on: 2009/4/15 0:04

Quote:

ADisciple wrote:
I am still following...

After I posted that, I recalled something I read years ago by... I think it was T. Austin-Sparks. He said we in the western world are inclined to think of being a disciple in terms of the teacher/student relationship in the classroom. Theory. But the word disciple, he said, is better understood if you think of master/apprentice.

Disciples (apprentices) are following Him, learning of HIM... as the disciples of old followed Christ. What an education that was! Like an apprentice in, say, welding school. He is out there on the job... watching how the master does it, and then trying it himself, learning hands on, with the master by his side. Maybe he makes mistakes, but he learns from his mistakes, too. He is not just sitting behind a desk all the time, taking notes.

...I think it was T.A-S, but it's been quite a while...

AD

Re: What Is A Disciple? - posted by BVO (), on: 2009/4/15 7:21

thanks for bumping this. I read it the first time and chewed on it for a while and the more I thought about it the more value it had for me to print off. I went back looking for it under devotional thoughts and general topics and gave up, not having a lot of time to search. This is an area that is very little considered, but even among those who consider it, it is not considered for the depth that is spoken in Luke 14. I am all the time hearing of groups having discipleship classes, or going out to make disciples. I led a group from our church years ago to a neighborhood in need to knock on doors and share the Jesus video and talk to people. I realized that it is impossible to make disciples unless you are yourself a disciple, because you may point someone to a faulty "way" if you are not following closely yourself. All you can speak of is what you "know" or else it is just theoretical and wishful thinking that the Christian life is what you say it is. Being a witness comes out of the disciple experience. We have touched, tasted and known this Jesus we speak of. Well thanks again, and this has been the constant reality check for me as to my life in Jesus. Am I a disciple? Yes!

Lord bless you all, Barry

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/4/15 7:30

The first time I came across a discipleship class while visiting another church once, I was greatly offended and grieved in my spirit about it. No doubt, the people putting on the class were probably well intentioned and sincere Christians. And if asked, they would probably admit that discipleship is a life-time commitment, and not just a class one takes. They probably were just looking to give people a bedrock of understanding for their faith. But still, my spirit cringed at the thought.

While there is much need these days for more systematic and comprehensive teaching in the church, and learning the ins-and-outs of the faith at its most basic levels, I'm afraid such classes invite a mindset other than what Christ thought of.