

BIBLE EMPOWERED TEACHING

Series: Jesus Christ The Son Of God

Lesson 7

JESUS' DISCIPLE

The Greek word that is translated “disciple” in Matthew 28:19 is a **verb**. It is thus a word of function with the expectation of results. The word “going” in the same text is a participle. After the disciples of Jesus experienced the gospel of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, He knew that they were going somewhere to tell everyone they encountered that Jesus was alive, and thus the Savior of the world. They needed no command to go. So in their motivated going because they finally believed (Mk 16:14), their task was to disciple people to Jesus. They were to disciple those to whom they preached the incarnational offering of the Son of God for our sins, His death, and the proof He continues to live by His resurrection and ascension. The text of Matthew 28:19,20 is all about motivation. They were going forth with the resurrectional power of the gospel in order to motivate people unto being disciples of Jesus.

If the gospel were only facts to be believed, then it would lose its power to change lives. There would be no power in the gospel if it were only about facts and events to be believed. There were indeed facts and events, but the facts and events were the revelation of the heart of God that was crucified on the cross. It was thus this crucifixion for the sins of the world that was the motivation that would persuade people to be disciples of Jesus.

The gospel is first the power of God in reference to our salvational needs (Rm 1:16). However, because it is so powerful in reference to salvational matters, it cuts right to the heart (motives) of the individual (At 2:37). Everyone who believes the gospel, therefore, should respond with action if they truly believe. True belief in the gospel demands a positive response, and that response is discipleship. What Jesus was saying in the text of Matthew 28:19,20 was the same thing He said in Mark 16:15,16. There is no reason to talk about being baptized if there is no belief. Likewise, there can be no baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit if there is no commitment to being a disciple of Jesus. True belief always inspires discipleship.

And then we should add the text of 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9. Paul explained that Jesus is coming again “*in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Th 1:8). If one does not believe, he will never respond to the heart of God through obedience to the gospel. Those who do not know God, therefore, will not obey the gospel by being baptized into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Rm 6:3-6). This is exactly what Jesus meant in Mark 16:15. In fact, when we add the commission of Matthew 28:19,20, those who do not know God will not be baptized into an eternal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One will not be baptized in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whom they do not know. Discipleship, therefore, is knowing the one true and living God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A. Initial responses to the gospel:

Those on the A.D. 30 Pentecost in Acts 2 first believed the message of the gospel that Peter presented. But because of their belief in the gospel, they were cut to the heart (At 2:37). They were cut to the heart because they discovered the heart of God that they had crucified seven weeks before.

Because they were cut to the very motives of what determined their relationship with God, they responded: “*Men and brethren, what will we do?*” (At 2:37). The word “do” revealed that they knew that something beyond belief had to take place in their lives. Something drastic had to be done because they had done a drastic deed in crucifying the heart of God. Since they were cut to the heart because of their belief in the message of the gospel, response was demanded. They had to become repentant disciples. Subsequently, an answer to their response of belief was given: “*Repent and be baptized every one of you ...*” (At 2:38).

Peter informed them that water (baptism) was involved. Being cut to the heart by the gospel meant that their belief must move them to obedience of the gospel, which indeed happened on that memorial day. About 3,000 were discipled to Jesus through faith, and then they received the remission of sins in the waters of baptism (At 2:41). Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16 were enacted on that day for the first time in history in order that repentant believers might escape the coming vengeance of the One whom God raised up to sit at His right hand (2 Th 1:6-9).

B. Discipleship in response to the gospel:

Before we come to the A.D. 30 Pentecost of Acts 2, we must go back to statements that Jesus made during His ministry and before the 3,000 headed for the water. Throughout His ministry of teaching, Jesus was preparing the apostles to give a right answer to those who believed and would respond to the power of the gospel. It is significant to see in the response of those on Pentecost the very things that Jesus previously taught in reference to a response to the gospel. The **order** of response is important. So we go back about two months before Peter gave the instructions of Acts 2.

Before His ascension, Jesus gave a very significant explanation of what transpired on the day of Pentecost. He gave the following important instructions to a group of apostles who could not wait to go forth and tell everyone that the One in whom they had believed had been raised from the dead:

Going, therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you (Mt 28:19,20).

Their “work order” was important as they went into all the world to preach the gospel. They were first to disciple, then baptize, and then continue teaching. We must not miss the significance of this order. Discipling came **before** the baptizing. **No one’s foot was to step into the water until a commitment had been made to follow Jesus.** And no one could truly follow Jesus until they knew the God who would sacrifice His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16).

As stated before, in Matthew 28:19 the Greek word “disciple” is used in its verb form. It is an action word that refers to becoming a follower of Jesus in response to believing the gospel of God’s heart. The apostles in this context were instructed to disciple. Discipling infers that someone is being disciplined to follow Jesus in response to their being cut to the heart by the gospel.

An individual is first disciplined, and then he does what those on the day of Pentecost were instructed to do (At 2:38,41). In response to the gospel message, one naturally asks what to do. Discipling involves being cut to the heart by the gospel, but it also involves doing something in response to being cut to the heart. In other words, the only outward evidence that we would have of one being cut to the heart would be his or her follow-up of doing what Peter instructed in Acts 2:38. True belief is always signalled to others with a splash in water. Therefore, because of belief one must first make a commitment to be a disciple, and then he or she can put his or her feet in the water. The water must always signal discipleship.

Discipleship **does not** happen in the water. Before the water, a personal commitment to be a disciple must first be made, and then by immersion in the water God does His part in cleaning up those who are disciples to Jesus (At 22:16). It is not the water first, and then commitment to discipleship. It is not first God’s work (remission of sins - At 2:38), and then our commitment. This would change the order of what Jesus instructed. Disciples are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, and then they are taught. It is not that people are baptized, and then taught to be disciples of Jesus.

C. The motive for discipleship:

So we stay close to the ascension of Jesus and His last instructions to the apostles. On another occasion than that of Matthew 28:19,20, Jesus made a direct statement in reference to the disciples’ going forth.

*Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to every creature. He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned* (Mk 16:15,16).

Jesus’ meaning in this statement is the same as the Matthew 28 commission, but another motive on the road to discipleship is added. Belief is the motivation. The emphasis of the Mark 16 commission indicates that these instructions were made before the Matthew 28 commission. In other words, Jesus first emphasized belief, and then He spoke of that which belief must motivate, that is, discipleship.

In the Matthew 28 account, the “going” was assumed since the Greek word is a participle. In the Mark 16 commission, “going” is also a participle. Both accounts assume that

the disciples had been motivated to go into all the world with the message of the gospel in order to generate belief and discipleship.

What is significant in the Mark 16 commission is that the disciples are specifically commanded to “*preach the gospel.*” In the Matthew 28 record, it is assumed that they would, for the gospel was the motivation for their “going.” It is thus the gospel that is the motive for discipleship, and thus, the continuation of the instructions that Jesus gave personally to the eleven at the time of both the Matthew 28 and Mark 16 commission. It is the gospel that cuts people to the heart.

And thus it was the gospel that Peter preached on the A.D. 30 Pentecost that motivated the people to act on what they had heard. Add to this the realization that those Jews on Pentecost finally began to know the true God of heaven who had a heart for all people, not just the Jews (At 10:34,35; 2 Pt 3:9). This God did not want anyone to perish, including the Gentiles. Being cocooned in their own Judaism, this was the God of love they did not fully understand. He was the God who so loved the entire world that He gave His only begotten Son, the very Son for whom they had called to be crucified (Jn 3:16).

Discipleship to Jesus assumes that people believe the gospel that is preached. It assumes that one discovers the true heart of God, and in doing so, discovers the one true and living God. As in the Matthew 28 instructions, belief and discipleship all take place before one can come into an eternal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the Mark 16 instructions, Jesus added a greater explanation in reference to one’s response to the preached gospel. If one does not believe the message of the gospel, then certainly he will not be disciplined to Jesus. And if he is not disciplined to Jesus, then certainly he will keep his feet out of the water. He will not obey the gospel (See 2 Th 1:8).

If there is no belief, then there will be no request as those on Pentecost: “*Men and brethren, what will we do?*” Or in the words of the Ethiopian eunuch, “*See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?*” (At 8:36). There is no cutting to the heart if there is no understanding of the God who gave His incarnate Son for the sins of the world. Without this belief that cuts to the heart, there is no need for water, for one is not committed to being a disciple of Jesus if his belief is not strong enough to move him to respond to the God who gave of Himself for us.

D. Responses to the gospel:

This brings us to how quickly the gospel can impact the heart of an individual. The religious condition of the heart of the one to whom the gospel is preached often determines how soon he or she will respond to the gospel. For some in the first century, the response was the “same hour of the night.” But for others, as many priests in Jerusalem, it took three or four years before they came to terms with the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and what such would mean in their lives. They had to transition their thinking concerning who God was. He was not a God of law and condemnation. He was a God of love who was extending His heart to all men through the grace of the cross.

1. The Pentecost response to the gospel: It was early in the morning on the A.D. 30 Pentecost when eleven of the apostles stood up to lay the groundwork for what Peter would conclude (At 2:13,14). We are not told how long the eleven preached before Peter stood up. But with the privilege of the “keys” to unlock entrance into the kingdom reign of Jesus (Mt 16:18,19), Peter stood up and affirmed the gospel message that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ) who fulfilled all prophecy in reference to the Messiah (See Lk 24:44). He was now reigning from heaven on David’s throne (At 2:14-35). Peter reminded the stunned Jewish audience that the One for whom they had been waiting for centuries was the One they had seen seven weeks before crucified on a cross (At 2:36). This Jesus was now Lord over all things (Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-23).

In this case, the response to discipleship of about 3,000 was immediate. That very day those who believed, obediently went to the water to wash away their sins (At 2:41). If Peter’s announcement came at midday, then by the end of the day about 3,000 disciples had obeyed the gospel. Those who responded “*were devout men out of every nation under heaven*” (At 2:5). They were Jews who had traveled from many distant nations in order to be in Jerusalem for the annual Passover/Pentecost feast. When they heard the liberating message of the gospel, therefore, their response was immediate.

Because of their long journey to Jerusalem, they had proved their discipleship of the Father. In only a few hours, and with one message of the gospel, they transferred their discipleship to the One who was at that time seated in heaven on the throne of David. So by the close of the day, about 3,000 had made this paradigm shift from the kingship of the Father to the kingship of the Son (See Cl 1:13).

2. A jailor’s response to the gospel: Paul and Silas ended up in jail in Philippi. They sat in cold jail cells singing gospel songs, with an audience that was intently listening to the message of the songs and their prayers (At 16:25). An earthquake occurred, and the doors of the jail cells were thrown open (At 16:26). The jailor, who was trembling with fear, “*fell down before Paul and Silas*” (At 16:29). He, as well as the prisoners, had heard the gospel message of the songs, and the prayers of both Paul and Silas. So he asked, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (At 16:30). Paul gave an answer that one would naturally give to a religious idolater. It was an answer that was given after the instructions of Jesus’ Mark 16:15 commission. It was the first step to discipleship: “***Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you and your household will be saved***” (At 16:31). So that same hour of the night, “*he was baptized, he and all his household*” (At 16:33).

It took the jailor only a short time to hear and respond to the gospel. In the same hour of the night when Paul and Silas were released from their jail cells, he and his household obeyed the gospel. He first believed, as Jesus had before stated (Mk 16:15,16). He was then baptized because he had chosen to be a disciple of Jesus that very night. His commitment to discipleship assumed that he was previously a very religious person, as well as all his household.

3. The eunuch’s response to the gospel: As the Ethiopian eunuch returned from worshiping in Jerusalem, he was reading the gospel message of Isaiah 53. He had surely en-

countered some Christians in Jerusalem who were teaching the gospel daily in the temple courtyard (At 2:46; 5:42). He was thus confused concerning the One about whom Isaiah had prophesied (At 8:34). When a gospel preacher walked up from the desert, the opportunity to hear about Jesus presented itself to a very religious person (At 8:35). Philip “*preached Jesus to him*” (At 8:35).

We do not know how long the teaching carried on as the two continued to travel down the road in the chariot. But in reference to the religious nature of the eunuch, we must remember that he had traveled all the way from Ethiopia in order to worship in Jerusalem. He was as those devoted Jews who had traveled hundreds of kilometers to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. He was a very dedicated person, and thus his discipleship to the Father was likewise transferred to the Son after his encounter with Philip. Once this transfer was made in his mind, it was then that he was ready for the water. “*Now as they went along the road they came to some water. And the eunuch said ‘See, here is water! What hinders me from being baptized?’*” (At 8:36).

It did not take the eunuch long to decide to respond to the gospel. He evidently knew all the prophecies. Philip only connected all the dots between the prophecies and Jesus. In Jerusalem, when the Christians taught that Jesus was the Messiah, the eunuch began his process of becoming a disciple. Philip only concluded what the eunuch needed to have reconfirmed, that Isaiah’s prophecy was about Jesus. It was then “*that they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him*” (At 8:38).

4. Saul’s response to the gospel: For a few years after the A.D. 30 Pentecost, Saul led a vehement attack against the disciples. All the time he was leading disciples to prison, he was listening to their testimonies that Jesus was the Messiah. But Saul fought against this belief. Though he knew what the Christians taught, he refused to accept the testimony of those whom he persecuted.

However, on a Damascus road it was time for the light to come on in the mind of Saul. A great light appeared from heaven and he fell to the ground. After regaining his senses, he asked, “*Who are you, Lord?*” (At 9:5). The answer was the beginning of his transformation to becoming a disciple of Jesus. “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,*” the voice answered (At 9:5). He was instructed by Jesus to go on to Damascus and wait. So he went and waited. He waited for three days (At 9:9). It was only after three days that the Lord sent Ananias, who came and said to Saul, “*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins*” (At 22:16).

Jesus gave Saul three days to make a mental paradigm shift from persecuting Jesus to preaching Jesus. It was only after Saul/Paul had made the commitment to be a disciple of Jesus that he submitted to the water in order to wash away his sins. Before he even came close to the water, Jesus wanted Saul, in blindness, to rethink all his past life and to consider all the persecution that was before him (At 9:15,16). He needed to commit to being a disciple before being baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

5. The priests’ response to the gospel: About five to six years after the A.D. 30 Pentecost, a very significant historical response to the gospel happened in Jerusalem that was

recorded by Luke in Acts 6:7: “*So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*”

Throughout the years that followed the A.D. 30 Pentecost, there were many priests, as Nicodemus, who were contemplating the fact that Jesus was the Christ, and thus the Savior of the world. They simply could not explain away the resurrection of Jesus. However, because of the social pressures of the Jewish establishment, it took them a great deal of time to decide to become disciples of Jesus.

We must not underestimate the commitment of these many priests who became disciples of Jesus. Being Levitical priests under the Sinai law, they would have been supported by the religious establishment at the time. But when they made the decision to become disciples of Jesus, they became disciples of the One who nailed the Sinai law to the cross (See Cl 2:14). **Jesus nailed their financial source of income to the cross.** In other words, the cost of their discipleship cost them their jobs. When Jesus said, “*Whoever of you*

who does not forsake all that he has, cannot be My disciple,” these priests took a long time to consider this point (Lk 14:33). We would suppose that they had some lengthy discussions with their wives before they made their way to the water. It may have taken them a great deal of time to secure other work in order to support their families before they made the final commitment to be disciples of Jesus. Regardless of their financial struggles, they made the commitment, and then headed to the water.

The cost of discipleship can be great. For this reason, anyone who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus must seriously count the cost. Jesus’ lengthy discussion on counting the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:25-35 infers that one not make a hasty decision to step in the water. Discipleship involves a tremendous commitment on the part of some, depending on one’s existing circumstances at the time he or she initially hears the gospel. But regardless of the cost, no price is too high in comparison to that which one will eventually receive in eternal glory (See Rm 8:18).