

"GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES"

Matthew 28:18–20 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* [NRSV]

The Lord wants disciples of all nations: He did not instruct that we make converts to a belief, to an ideology or to a religion; rather that we make "disciples."

So I may ask: who is a disciple?

Matthew 4:21–22 *And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. ²²And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.* [KJV]

Disciples were those who followed Him, without asking questions and even without knowing whereto they were following Him.

And so it was with Levi:

Luke 5:27–28 *And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. ²⁸And he left all, rose up, and followed him.* [KJV]

And so it was also, many centuries earlier, for Moses. When God commanded him to leave Mount Sinai and lead Israel to the Promised Land — but pledged not to accompany him, owing to the stubborn rebelliousness of the Israelites — Moses expressed his discipleship:

Exodus 33:15 *"If Your presence does not go," Moses responded to Him, "don't make us go up from here."* [HCSB]

Moses wanted to be with God and was not going to go anywhere, if God was not going with them.

When Jesus called, the disciples answered His call to follow Him, without regard to any plan, interest or desire of their own, because they recognized Who was calling them — as Andrew explained to his brother Peter:

John 1:40–41 *Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).* [NIV]

Prompted by the preaching of John, who was baptizing and preparing the way of the Lord, Andrew and the others recognized that the One, Who was calling them to follow Him was Christ, incarnate.

The recognition was not based on their reasoning nor on any experience of theirs, rather it was the result of the revelation given to their spirit by the Father, as Jesus explained later to Simon Peter:

Matthew 16:16–17 *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* [KJV]

Disciples know — without doubt or hesitation — Who Jesus is: not because of their own know-how or exegesis, but because the Father has revealed Him to their spirit.

Thus:

Mark 6:1 *He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.* [NRSV]

The disciples were those who "followed" Him.

The unconditional dependence on the Lord is central to the life of disciples and it is altogether critically essential, because — in establishing His Kingdom, which "is not of this world" — Jesus said and did many things contrary to tradition and even to common sense, thus often befuddling ideologies one has or has inherited.

For example, some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus and asked:

Matthew 15:2 *Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.* [KJV]

The disciples are not bound to tradition; they are bound to their Master.

More importantly yet, one may remember Jesus' frequent teaching:

Matthew 5:21a, 22a *"You have heard that it was said to those of old ^{22a}But I say to you"* [NKJV]

What does matters is "I say" : and, with it, a very personal devotion to the One, Who is the Living God, not to a metaphysics nor to a theology.

At another time — in Capernaum's synagogue — He said:

John 6:53–56 *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. ⁵⁴Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. ⁵⁶He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.* [KJV]

This was so contrary — not only to common sense, but — to tradition and even to culture and civilization that:

John 6:66 *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. [KJV]*

Those followed Him no longer: they were no longer His “disciples.”

Therefore, Jesus wondered and

John 6:67 *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? [KJV]*

This is how a “disciple” answered:

John 6:68–69 *Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. [KJV]*

The answer was not the product of any mental construct: it was the fruit of “discipleship” — of trust beyond oneself, of believing — with surety — a greater reality: “the Son of the living God.”

In fact, it was a practical and faithful application of:

Matthew 16:24 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” [NIV]*

This describes succinctly and simply what a “disciple” is to do. Hence the ministry of “making disciples” means helping people to know *the Son of the Living God*; helping them to “deny themselves” and all that belongs to the nature they had, before having become new creatures in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! [NRSV]*

Each disciple may accomplish such ministry by doing different things and fulfill different functions in the church of Christ, as the Apostle Paul noted to the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 12:28–30 *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? [NASB]*

We can rejoice that, as the disciples learn of the Lord and of His work, they become His friends:

John 15:15 *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I heard from my Father. [EXB]*

And, lest we be discouraged by our failings, we may remember that none of the disciples were faultless:

Matthew 26:56 *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. [KJV]*

All the disciples failed Him and one of them even denied Him three times:

Luke 22:61 *And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. [KJV]*

Yet, it was to this very one that, on the beach by the sea of Tiberias, the Lord gave the charge to nourish the church after the Resurrection,

John 21:17c *Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” [NRSV]*

The Apostle Peter was entrusted with “feeding His sheep,” on the basis not of his theology, but of his love for the Lord:

John 21:17b, c *And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” [NRSV]*

It was because of His immeasurable (and incomprehensible) power and love that the Lord’s directive is:

Matthew 5:48 *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” [NIV]*

For sure:

Philippians 3:12–14 *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [NASB]*

All disciples are also encouraged to press forward, because:

Mark 10:27 *Looking at them, Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God.” [HCSB]*

What the disciple has to do is to be always alert, as Samuel was:

1 Samuel 3:10b *And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” [NRSV]*

Hence: am I a disciple?

That is: “Am I willing to be of no value to this age or this life except for one purpose and one alone — to be used to disciple men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ”?

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