



The Tri-Cities Edifier

Volume 6

June 16, 2019

No. 24

What Does It Really Mean to Be a Disciple of Christ?

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Matthew 28:18-20 says, 'And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.' These words were uttered by our Savior to His apostles shortly before His ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. We commonly refer to this statement as the "Great Commission." These words are called a commission because Jesus was giving the apostles the authority to carry out the task at hand. The commission is great based on its worldwide scope. In this statement Jesus commissioned the apostles and us (Matt. 28:20) to go forth and make disciples.

The word disciple is used 268 times in 255 verses in the King James Version. Most of these verses use the term disciple(s) merely to identify certain people as followers. For example, John had disciples (Mark 9:14) and the Pharisees had disciples. The Jews claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28). Jesus also had disciples (Matthew 9:10). Thus, the word is primarily used in the New Testament to refer to converts to Christ. This morning we will raise the question: WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST? What does it take to be a disciple? Is simply being a good moral person enough? Did the fact that Scripture refers to Cornelius as a devout man make him a disciple? *Is being a sincere religious person enough? That would describe Saul of Tarsus prior to his conversion (Acts 23:1; Acts 7:58-8:3).* Did Saul belong to Jesus when he participated in Stephen's stoning? How about just being a "church member" or someone who simply claims the name "Christian?" (1 Cor. 5:1-13) Let's look at eight traits that according to Scripture will be a part of our lives if we are truly disciples of Jesus.

By definition, a **disciple is a learner of Jesus**. Thayer defines the term as: "a learner, pupil, disciple....one who follows one's teaching...." Jesus has invited all men to become learners of Him (Matt. 11:28-30) In fact, the word of God stresses the only way we become followers of Jesus is through learning His word (John 6:44-45). This means I need to learn what Jesus thinks about such things as sin, service, sacrifice and salvation. I cannot be a disciple of Jesus unless I'm willing to spend time learning about Him.

A disciple of Jesus learns for the purpose of **becoming like Jesus**. Jesus plainly taught that the goal of discipleship was for the pupil to become like the master. (Matthew 10:24-25; Luke 6:46) Thus, we learn in order to be more like Jesus. In practical terms this means: When we learn what Jesus thinks about something, we will want to think that way too. When we understand how Jesus feels about something, we will want to feel that way too. When we see how Jesus acts and reacts in various situations, we will want to act and react in the same way.

A disciple is expected **to abide in Jesus' words**. "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) What this plainly means is we are to abide in all of Jesus' words and only in Jesus' words (Matthew 28:18-20; Gal. 1:6-9) The application is I must know what His word says, I must do what His word says and I must view His word as the only true authority in my life.

Jesus taught in the parable of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-6) that He expects **disciples to bear fruit** and to become increasingly fruitful. We can bear fruit for Jesus in many ways. When we turn from sin, then we bear the fruits of repentance (Luke 3:8). When we live righteous lives, then we bear the fruits of righteousness (Romans 6:17-22). When we listen to the Spirit's instruction, then we bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-33). When we do good works, then we bear fruit unto the Lord (Col. 1:10)

Disciples of Jesus will love other disciples. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13:34-35) In Scripture, love is not just declared, it is demonstrated as well. (1 John 3:17-18)

Disciples of Jesus love Him the most. This means we love Jesus more than family (Matt. 10:34-37). This means that we love Jesus more than our own comfort or ease (Luke 9:57-62). We must love Jesus more than our own lives (Rev. 2:10). Do you love Jesus the most?

To be a **disciple of Jesus means that we are willing to bear our own cross for the Lord.** (Luke 14:27). This is not talking about the suffering that comes simply because we are human beings. Saints and sinners alike will contract terrible diseases, endure floods & fires, and suffer through things like traffic accidents. Instead salvation from sin and service to Jesus Christ will inevitably bring at least some suffering. The "pleasures of sin" will have to be abandoned (Hebrews 11:24-26). The temptations of the devil will have to be resisted. The persecution of men will have to be endured (1 Peter 3:12). Are you willing to bear your cross for Jesus?

Finally, a **disciple of Jesus must be willing to forsake all else for Jesus.** (Luke 14:33) Now, I don't believe that Jesus is saying that we must automatically and unnecessarily sell all our possessions. But this passage is teaching that we renounce all that we have in our heart and that we are willing to give up all that we have for Jesus if need be. Jesus must be King and Lord of our lives.



Salt & Light

There is a slogan that people put on their cars around here, "Salt Life". The stickers are small and I always assumed there was an "&" symbol in there and that it might say "Light". I must admit for the longest time I thought it was some type of religious saying of a local denomination in the area, but then I saw a large sticker that read "Salt Life" and then I wasn't exactly sure at all what it meant so I "googled" it. Spending time at the beach or living at the beach... "Salt Life". Now I understood. In Richmond, Virginia it was "OBX" which stood for the "Outer Banks" in North Carolina which are on the ocean. Both convey the idea of loving the beach life on the ocean.

Sadly, that is exactly where so many individuals heart's reside, at the beach. If it is not the beach it is fishing, bowling, bar hopping, sports, cooking, etc. etc. Now is the time for us who are God's children to be "Salt & Light" in a very dark world. "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16 Let us be "Salt & Light" every day. We have a grander purpose than Salt Life.

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