

What is a Disciple Series: Part 1 – “Follow Me”

1. Background – Beginning a Sermon Series that will run through Easter on “What is a Disciple?”
 - a. Why preach this message?
 - i. **This message must be preached because it is easier to go to church than it is to follow Jesus.**
 1. **We’ve lost Jesus and found religion**
 2. It is far easier to compartmentalize our faith into a couple of hours on Sunday rather than follow Jesus who takes us to uncomfortable places.
 - a. It is far easier to feel good about ourselves for doing some religious duty than it is to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus.
 3. The scandal of the church is that the Christ-event is no longer life-changing, it has become life enhancing.
 - a. We’ve lost the power and joy that makes real disciples, and we’ve become consumers of religion and not disciples of Jesus Christ
 - ii. **This message also must be preached because we all tend to take the path of least resistance.**
 1. **We’ve lost our first love.** Other things have consumed our heart and our attention.
 2. Our lives have gotten into a rut.
 3. Have you ever been in a spiritual rut?
 - a. Some of you may have gotten into a snowy rut this past week and needed a push to get out?
 4. It is no accident that of the 7 churches mentioned in the book of Revelation, only one was commended...the rest needed a push to get back onto the path of following Jesus.
 - iii. **And finally, this message must be preached because the future of the souls of our world depends upon people being devoted disciples of Jesus.**
 1. **We’ve lost our vision for a lost world**
 2. Jesus did not suffer the cross so that we could build ourselves safe havens into which we could retreat from the world but so that we might take His kingdom into the most hostile regions of the world.
 - a. I’m afraid that western Christianity has become docile, domesticated and civilized.
 - b. We have forgotten there is a kingdom of darkness stealing the hopes and souls of humanity without God.
 3. We need to recapture the passion and the heartbeat of Jesus, which reverberated through the early church and changed a pagan world.
 4. We must reconnect our lives to the fire that Jesus ached to see raging on this earth. (Luke 12:49 *"I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!"*)
 - a. Domesticated, safe, easy Christianity will not change our world.
 - b. Only dedicated disciples will.
2. Follow Me!
 - a. Every disciple that Jesus called, He called with two words. “Follow Me.”
 - i. *Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.* (Matthew 4:18-20)

1. Notably, these were Jesus' first words to Peter and His last. (cf. Jn 21:19)
 2. Two simple words, yet they comprise the core of understanding what a Christian's destiny is as a disciple.
- ii. Jesus had crowds gather around him and listen to Him in their spare time. Matthew 8:1 “*When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him.*”
1. These were admirers, people who wanted to see the teacher, the promised Messiah, but they weren't willing to commit their lives to Him.
 - a. They liked to hear Jesus teach, they came for the “show”, to see a miracle, some even came because they needed a miracle. Others came because they could get a free lunch.
 - b. But most who came and saw remained admirers.
 - c. It is this way today. (How?)
 2. And of all the people Jesus “called” not all responded.
 - a. A rich young ruler wasn't willing to part with his past from which he gained his value and identity.
 - b. Other men gave a variety of excuses when Jesus challenged their comfort zones.
 3. This one question will be asked this morning of everyone here.
 - a. **Are you a follower of Jesus or simply an admirer of Jesus?**
- b. Before you answer that loaded question with the oversimplified “oh, I'm a follower” I think I had better spell out what Jesus expected of His followers.
- i. First, the word for “*follow me*” is properly translated “*Come after me*”, δευτεροπισσωμου which infers “*become my apprentices.*”
 1. In other words, “*Become my students and live your lives after the model I will live before you.*”
3. Lets do some contrasts to help us figure out if we are admirers or followers.
- a. How do most of us measure the level of our or others maturity as a Christian?
 - i. Is it by whether we or they attend church regularly?
 1. Is attendance the measuring stick by which Christian maturity is measured?
 - ii. Is it by whether or not we tithe faithfully?
 1. Is giving an accurate measure of a disciple?
 - iii. How about by how deeply we serve our church?
 - b. Now, I do not want to minimize the importance of these actions, but I have to say that they are incomplete measurement tools for the Christian life.
 - i. Using these things to measure how faithful a disciple you are is like trying to measure a mile with a measuring cup.
 - ii. Too many of our churches today are filled with “admirers of Christ” who come to sing a few songs or be entertained or fed for an hour a week.
 - iii. Too many of the people in the pews of today's churches have not had an encounter with the Creator of the Universe.
 1. They are admirers of Jesus.
 2. They like God.
 3. They admire what he can do for them.
 4. But they never give themselves to Him.
 - c. **Admirers focus on the externals, Disciples focus on being turned inside out.**
 - i. We live in a cultured version of Christianity which often says, “My goal is to eliminate sin in my life.”

1. It seems we are so preoccupied with “self” that we never get busy with the commands of Jesus to “go”
 2. Jesus freed you from the fear of condemnation through the cross.
 3. Your preoccupation must be on Him and not on your sin and your failures.
 4. *Admirers say, “I want to be like him”*
 - a. During Michael Jordan’s reign as Basketball’s superhero, the mantra was “I want to be like Mike.”
 - i. Gatorade knew that people would want to imitate Mike, and so their sales grew, because people believed that they would be “like Mike” if they ate what he ate, drank what he drank and wore the same shoes he wore.
 - b. Admirers always want to be like someone they like.
 - i. But they rarely if ever are willing to go deeper than wearing a pair of shoes that their hero wears.
 5. *A Disciple says, “I want to do your will God.”*
 - ii. The motives between these two approaches may be similar but the results are significantly different..
 1. I have previously related how God delivered me from cigarettes about 3 years after becoming a Christian. It was this so called “sin” that made the difference between these approaches evident to me.
 2. Some Christians who knew I smoked treated me with disdain, as if somehow I was bad because I wasn’t externally perfect.
 3. But I also knew some other Christians who focused on what God was doing inside of me.
 - a. They stressed learning to hear God’s voice.
 - b. They taught me how to discern God’s work.
 - c. They taught me the value of surrender.
 - d. They stressed obedience to the movement of the Spirit.
 - i. As a result, I was able to conquer smoking because of two things:
 1. I surrendered the habit (God if you want me to quit, just tell me how and when) and
 2. I had learned to hear God sufficiently, so that when God did move supernaturally in my life and speak to me, I was able to overcome this addictive habit.
 - iii. Holiness for a Disciple is an internal trait not just an external one
 1. This week I heard a sound byte from Coretta Scott King’s funeral. It was from her daughter. She described her mother as “a holy woman.” And then she defined that term. “She was sold out to God.”
 - iv. Folks, that is the difference between an admirer of Jesus and a follower of Jesus.
 1. **walk around the stage as you ask these questions:**
 - a. Are you sold out to God?
 - b. Are you willing to give everything you are and all that you have to Him if He asks?
 - c. Are you holding onto anything at all?
- d. Disciples are made healthy but never normal..**
- i. You cannot meet the Creator of the Universe and remain the same.
 - ii. When people talk about knowing God and their lives are the same today as they were when they began their journey, something is terribly wrong.
 - iii. When Jesus touches your soul, you can count on some kind of disruption in your life.
 - iv. In fact, **when Jesus touches you, you are no longer fit to live a “normal” life.**
 1. Maybe some of us here are trying to hold onto “normal.”

2. We want what the world has and we want what God has.
 3. We want the respect of the world and we want the blessings of heaven.
 4. We try to keep a foot in heaven and a foot in hell.
 5. We want a respectable job, a nice home, nice toys and cars. We want everything that everyone else has and we want God to bless us.
- v. Folks, when you became a Christian, you DIED to being normal.
1. You were called away from normal, from safe and from being respectable.
 - a. Story: I recall a conversation with a fellow at Nabisco shortly after I became a Christian. He was disturbed by how new believers were offending people by being so bold and open about their new life in Christ. I remember exactly what he said, *“we ought to lock up new Christians for 6 months until they tame down a bit.”*
 2. Admirers like to be normal, safe and respectable.
 3. But disciples must be untamed and uncaged.
- vi. I have known some pretty abnormal Christians in my life, maybe you have too?
1. You probably have even muttered to yourself, geez, this guy ought to get more civilized.
 2. Now, I’m not talking about the guy who stands on a corner and shouts at people all day. But I am talking about the person who seems to have some strange ways about them, yet God uses them day in and day out to lead people to Himself.
 - a. They are the people that you and I say, *“Gee God, I am so much more normal than they, why don’t you use me like that?”*
 - b. His reply? Because your faith is too tame.
- e. **Disciples have seemingly irrational faith.**
- i. Many of you remember when Kristina said she felt led to go to Panama on a mission trip last year. She need to raise over \$2000 in just 6 months. I tried to discourage her. It sounded irrational, too bold, too daring. Her response to me? *“Dad, you are a pastor, where is your faith?”*
 - ii. My faith was too rational. I was losing the disciple’s “edge.” I had become safe in my faith, which really isn’t faith at all!
 - iii. Look at some other irrational people with irrational faith:
 1. Noah builds an ark and doesn’t even live in a flood plain.
 2. Esther risked her life to approach King Xerxes in Persia to try to spare her people.
 3. Elijah calls down fire from heaven and he has never done such a thing before.
 4. Hosea marries a prostitute to demonstrate God’s love for Israel.
 5. Moses parts a sea by pointing his staff at it.
 - a. All of these folks would have been certified loony if just one thing were absent from the equation.
 - b. If you took God out of the equation, their actions would have been completely irrational.
 - iv. My own father and mother thought I was nuts in 1986, quitting a great job with incredible benefits after getting married and having our first child.
 1. I did so because I was called to ministry and needed to move my family from Houston to Fort Worth where I could attend seminary.
 2. We moved without certainty of a home and we had no job lined up. We had enough money to survive for maybe a month without a job.
 3. If God had not been in that, it would have been nuts to do that. But God was in it, and God did amazing things!
 - v. I believe that a disciple of Jesus Christ resists the temptation to domesticate his faith.
 1. If he becomes tamed and civilized, he becomes an admirer and not a disciple.
 2. He loses the power of who he is and what God has planned for His life.

- vi. Folks, you and I were not redeemed by Jesus to be normal.
 - 1. We were called to be disciples.
 - 2. We were called to be baptized with fire and the Spirit.
- f. **A disciple doesn't live safe**
 - i. For many of us, the church is a fortress to which we retreat from the world or a monastery to which we try to preserve the Christian "culture" from the onslaught of a hostile world.
 - 1. If the church building was supposed to be a place to hide, we would be singing "a mighty fortress is our church."
 - 2. In churches like these, you will find a declining, defensive group of aging members whose services resemble something from 50 years ago.
 - 3. Our faith wasn't given to us to hide from the world.
 - 4. Our faith was given to us to go out and to change the world.
 - ii. We have been called to live dangerously. The local church is meant to be a hospital for the wounded and a training center for the battle.
 - 1. It is not a retreat center but a command center.
 - 2. It is the place where we get ready for battle.
 - 3. "The call of God is more than a leap of faith. It is a life of faith." McManus.
- g. **A disciple is willing to pay the cost.**
 - i. When we realize what price was paid for us, the cost we are called to pay is nothing in comparison. Jesus gave His all for us. Innocent for the guilty, and not only did he die for us, but he who was sinless bore our sins to hell itself.
 - ii. When Jesus exhorts his followers to "*deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.*" He is not asking us to do something He hasn't already done.
 - 1. "*denying yourself*" is not choosing to refuse yourself a meal or to get rid of money or to sell your home.
 - a. It is not a form of suicide of self (that is self will).
 - b. It is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before us and no longer looking at the path that previously seemed to hard to travel.
 - 2. "*Take up your cross*" is only possible when we have become oblivious to self.
 - a. Our eyes are so fixed upon Christ that we cease to notice the pain of our own cross.
 - b. **Only a man who is dead to his own will can follow Christ.**
 - i. This exhortation was rooted in the concept of death.
 - ii. We die to our desires when we begin to live for God's will.
 - iii. We let go of what we are holding onto when we reach to grasp God's best.
 - iv. We abandon the life of safety and security
 - v. It is no part-time endeavor.
 - vi. It consumes us. Christ Consumes us.
 - iii. Dietrich Bonhoffer, author of The Cost of Discipleship reminded his students, "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.*"
 - iv. Jesus' death was not to free us from dying but to free us from the fear of death.
 - 1. He came to liberate us, so we would "die up front" and then live.
 - 2. "*Jesus wants to take you and I to places where only the dead dare go.*" McManus.
 - v. All too often we want to obtain grace at the cheapest cost, as if we could shop for it and find a bargain.
 - 1. But there is no bargain when one comes to Christ.

2. When we come to Christ we leave the “self willed life” and follow His directives the rest of our lives, each day, “dying daily.”
3. Cheap grace is the bitterest enemy of discipleship.
 - a. Cheap grace will try to get me to believe that my duty as a Christian is to leave the world for an hour or so on Sunday morning and go to church. And once there, hear again that my sins are forgiven, and return to a life no different than unbelievers.
 - b. Do we live secure in secular living with our Fire Insurance policy in hand?
 - c. There are some in this room who may hear Jesus say to you someday, “Away from me, I never knew you.”
- h. Remember when we gave our definition of a disciple as one who follows Jesus? Quite literally it is one who “follows in His steps.”
 1. Who and what will my eyes be set upon?”
 2. Following in the steps of Jesus requires that we be looking at Him and not other things.
 - a. Skiing...you go where you look.
 - b. Plowing...your furrow goes where your eyes go
 - c. The principle is that **you will always follow what your eyes are set upon.**
 - d. The Christian will go where he looks. If you look at stuff, success, things, then that is where you will go. You won't go in the footsteps of Jesus.
 - e. But when Jesus is your goal, when He fills your vision, when He is the focal point of your attention, your life will follow Him.
 - ii. And where does Jesus lead us? Always to the cross.
 - iii. Today, the question you must ask yourself is...
 - iv. ”Who will be in charge of this life of mine?”
 - v. What will the focus of my attention.
 - vi. Who and what will I follow?
 - vii. Will you follow Him today?
 - viii. Let's pray.