

Chapter 1 – Believers And Disciples

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, 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. (Matthew 28:19-20)

The Command

In Matthew chapter 28, after showing Himself to His disciples for 40 days and just prior to His ascension into heaven, Jesus commands,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, . . .”

Or, literally, “Go! Disciple everywhere.” His words...

“baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”

clearly tell us that the first step to discipling must be evangelism. But, as wonderfully fulfilling as evangelism is, Jesus did not stop there. His unbroken sentence continues:

“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.”

For most, it is a struggle to grasp evangelizing the world. How much more inconceivable to consider discipling the world when two thirds of those living don't follow the Lord?

It's a command nonetheless; a command given to every single believer in Christ. Make disciples! So, what is a disciple?

The Greek word *matheteuo* simply means *student* or *learner*. My goal in discipling another is to teach them how to learn from Jesus Himself. But what did it mean to the Apostles standing on that mountain with Jesus? What is the Biblical definition of a disciple? What did Jesus ultimately mean? The Bible teaches a great deal on this subject and this book is going to explore seventeen biblical characteristics of a disciple.

There is an interesting Scripture in Isaiah chapter 8:

*Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples.
(Isaiah 8:16)*

When we read the context, Isaiah is talking about God's judgment upon Israel because they have refused to follow Him and therefore they are about to suffer terrible consequences. So the Lord commands Isaiah to take His Word and give it to His disciples. The disciples are to protect or "seal" God's Word. Who was the Lord actually referring to? A six hundred year old mystery unveils itself...

And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him. Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel From the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion. (Isaiah 8:17-18)

"Here am I," Isaiah goes on to say. Here is who? According to Hebrews 2:13 this is a prophecy of Jesus Christ and His followers.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to

make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings [Jesus]. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” And again: “I will put My trust in Him.” And again: “Here am I [Jesus] and the children whom God has given Me [disciples].” (Hebrews 2:10-13)

So this is now a fulfilled prophecy concerning the followers of Jesus. God says, “Take the Word, seal it up and give it to my disciples.” Don’t you find it interesting that as followers of Jesus Christ we were even mentioned prior to our birth and pre-selected by God for such an amazing task? God looks to His disciples to seal His law.

Let’s take a discipleship quiz: How many disciples were there? Twelve?

And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples (Luke 6:17a)

How many are in a crowd? As you think about a crowd gathering, how many are in it?

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples (Acts 6:2a)

Now we have a multitude. Is a multitude bigger than a crowd? So, once again: How many disciples did Jesus have? Thousands. As Isaiah prophesied and Hebrews elaborated, they are the children that God has given to Jesus.

What qualified the original disciples? Did they come from the religious elite? Did they come from the seminaries? Did they come from the universities? Were they the Pharisees? Were they the Sadducees?

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. (Matthew 4:18)

A disciple doesn't have to be a college graduate, or someone in "full-time" ministry. Look at the following verses.

Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. (Matthew 4:19-22)

How many fishermen do you know with a college degree? How many Bible studies do you think these men were leading? Are fishermen generally among the religious elite of high class society? When you think about fishermen, you think of a laborer, a gruff looking character with a wild beard and hardened hands. This is who Jesus Christ picked, rough, hard-working, common people.

We too often interpret this passage to read, "Follow Me, and I will send you to college." Or "Follow me and I will teach you Greek." Or "Follow me and I will train you in liturgy."

Do you think these unlearned and common men understood what was said to them? "I will make you fish for men!" He took their daily occupation and gave it a spiritual significance. Their knowledge about fishing would become God's blueprint for a Temple greater than any that had ever been built.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on

the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

The invitation sounded so simple! Fishers of men. Dear reader, the Bible teaches that discipleship is decidedly simple. (Notice I didn't say "easy.") The invitation includes all human kind, both elite and common.

What did these two groups of sweaty fishermen do after they were called? They immediately followed. Immediately! Which tells me that when God calls you as a disciple, don't linger. Come quickly!

How could these common men possibly think they could follow the Creator of the universe? They had never cast out a demon before. They had never raised the dead. In fact, it is likely that they had never done anything of significance up to that very moment. They simply came because Jesus asked.

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. (Matthew 10:1)

It wasn't until after they came that Jesus gave them their authority and power. Jesus said, "Okay, since you have followed me, I will equip you." When God calls you, He equips you. The limiting factor in discipleship is not the calling or even the equipping, but the willingness to follow. God desires to bless His disciples in incredible ways when they come to Him. What if James and John had never left the boat? They could've said, "Wait a second, I've never done

that before.” “I can’t lead a Bible study. I can’t even read well.” “I don’t know how to evangelize. I’m not any good at praying.” But the Lord knew all of this and just smiled and said, “Perfect. Come and let God have the glory.”

It wasn’t just a men’s club either:

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. (Acts 9:36)

So, there goes our religious myth. The disciples weren’t twelve men, but a multitude of both men and women. And don’t think that disciple-making stopped when the Lord departed. By the time Acts chapter 6 rolls around, Jesus is at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Yet, there was miraculous growth occurring in the early church, and Acts tells us how it was happening.

The number of the disciples was multiplying (Acts 6:1)

How? It wasn’t the short sermons, awesome music and coffee bar. It wasn’t the great seating and the perfectly set climate control. The church wasn’t even located in a friendly neighborhood. But they were “multiplying”! HOW? Jesus had said, “Go make disciples,” and they did. They didn’t argue about where they would meet or any of the things that now swallow up a church’s time and resources. They were reaching out to people and making disciples.

They gathered where they could and discipled. In fact, the New Testament speaks of many little house churches and the elders who were raised up to shepherd them. The Bible speaks nothing of giant cathedrals, or mega-churches. Now there is nothing inherently wrong with mega-churches or cathedrals as long as they’re making disciples.

Before I go on, I want you to ponder two things. Are you a disciple? And secondly, are you making disciples? It is my hope that when you are done reading this book, all excuses will have been “sacrificed on the altar.” “I don’t know enough.” “I’m too old.” “I’m too young.” “I’m married.” “I’m single.” The Master is offering you the ability to touch other people’s lives with His love and power.

What if everyone who is saved took on one disciple? Within a year, we would have doubled in number. Within two years we would be quadrupled. Within three years there would be sixteen times as many of us. Imagine if we had sixteen times as many mature believers in the church. What would God do with that!

We so commonly refer to ourselves as “Christians” and yet we may not even know what that means.

So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:26)

What is a Christian? A Christian is a disciple. I might refer to myself as a Christian and attend a church. I might be saved, but can I really be called a biblical Christian unless I am also a disciple? It does not say that the *believers* were called Christians, but the *disciples*.

The word “Christian” is only mentioned three times in the New Testament, but it has become the name we readily cling to as believers in Jesus. The amazing thing is that in the early church this was most likely a derogatory title.

What does King Agrippa say, when Paul gives his testimony?

You almost persuade me to become a Christian. (Acts 26:28)

Notice that Paul doesn't use this "title" in response.

"I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains." (Acts 26:29)

When the early church was being persecuted, how does the Apostle Peter exhort them?

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. (1 Peter 4:16)

If you suffer as a "Christian," don't be ashamed.

When I first realized that this word only occurred three times in the Bible, I was amazed. Since it was the term I grew up hearing, I thought that it must be used throughout the Bible. Jesus must have mentioned it hundreds of times. But He never even used the term once. In stark contrast to this, the Greek word for "disciple" occurs 260 times in the New Testament. Which do you think God wants us to be? A Christian? Or a Disciple?

These two words differ even in American society. If someone comes up to you and says, "Are you a Christian?," the great majority would say, "Yes." But what if someone asked, "Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?" How would they respond? The latter word causes us to stop and think. It means a little more. There's a weight attached to it, some sort of a responsibility.

Being a disciple is more than being a believer. Biblically, a believer simply comes to Jesus to receive, but a disciple comes to Jesus to give everything away. It is the difference

between stretching out an open hand and holding it up (to receive) or holding it down (to give).

Here are some Scriptures describing a believer:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

How do you receive salvation? By being a disciple? No, by believing in the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. Period. That's grace. You are saved based on believing in the work of God, not your own. So, in this verse, a believer comes to receive eternal life.

When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." (Matthew 9:27-28)

What does He ask them? "Do you believe . . ." The very next verse says that He healed them. So, we see in these verses that I can believe and receive eternal life and even healing.

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father,

“How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:17-24)

“All things are possible for him who believes.” What is He talking about? He was telling this man to believe that God could do what he was asking. So we have now been shown that if we believe, then God will save you, heal you and even remove a demonic spirit from your life. If you believe, you shall receive. That is a Biblical fact. We cannot even receive the Word of God unless we believe.

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 8:4-8)

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that

fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:11-15)

The ones that fell on the road were eaten and did not receive the Word of God because they never believed. If they would have believed, the Word would have gone in. Didn't believe; didn't receive. The second soil is actually referred to as a believer who believed for a while, but when the sun came up their belief withered. They believed, and received, but the suffering was too much. The third soil also believed and received, but the cares of this world choked the fruit that their lives should've produced. Then there are the ones who have good ground and keep the Word of God (which the Lord referred to as a disciple in Isaiah 8:16). They work through the hard times and ultimately bear fruit.

So in this parable, we have three believers, but only one bears fruit: the disciple. What did Jesus say?

By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:8)

What is my point? My point is that a believer is different than a disciple. I do hope that you are all believers.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

You must believe that God wants to give, that He answers prayer, and does good things for those who call upon Him. You've got to believe before you can even start your walk

with the Lord. However, based on the parable in Luke, I am persuaded that you can be a believer and still bear no visible fruit. But like every plant, I believe there is a yearning within you for the fruit that you were designed to produce. For a believer, it is that desire to be alive with the Spirit of God and to walk in His Presence daily.

It is also important to note that Jesus Christ did not delegate His power and authority to the people He healed or those He fed or the ones who were forgiven of sin. When He told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven and that he should take up his bed and walk, it wasn't followed by, "Oh, by the way, you have the gift of healings now!" When Jesus told the woman that He wouldn't accuse her and that she should go and sin no more, He didn't end it with, "Now you have authority to cast out demons." He didn't raise the widow's son in Nain and then tell him to "Go and do likewise!"

To whom did He give His authority and power?

Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1-2)

He did not give His authority to the multitudes, nor to the people He healed, but to the disciples who followed Him.

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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, 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. (Matthew 28:16-20)

He takes all authority on earth, every single ounce of authority that has ever existed, and gives it to them so that they can make disciples for Him. This is the heart of His ministry on earth for us.

Many in the crowd never raised the dead. Many in the crowd never healed anyone. Many in the crowd did not do any of the great works the disciples did. Yet when Stephen comes along in the book of Acts and becomes a disciple, surrendering himself and taking the non-glamorous job of feeding elderly widows, what happens? The next thing you know he’s not only giving out bread to the widows, but...

Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8)

He became a disciple. This is what all of our hearts yearn for: to walk in the Presence and Power of our Lord Jesus. So what is a disciple? Let’s ask Jesus:

“Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it --lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise,

whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:27-33)

Did the believers hear these words? Yes. He is asking them to “count the cost” of becoming a disciple. Can you imagine starting a house and thinking, “Well, I don’t know how much money I have. I’ll just start it and maybe it’ll be completed.” Nobody does that. We count the cost and make sure that we can finish the project. This tells me that being a disciple is a calculated choice. I am not going to “fall into it” by accident one day.

Before I begin to disciple a person, I challenge them as Jesus did. A disciple will say, “I’ll try” while those who are only believers will say, “What’s in it for me?” A believer is there to receive, while a disciple is ready to “forsake all” and count himself last. Isn’t this what Jesus just taught? So I’ll say to them, “You’ve got to learn this or you’ve got to do that,” or “You’ve got to start memorizing Scripture.” And I’ll give them assignments, not to lead them to salvation or even necessarily because it is super-spiritual, but because it causes them to “count the cost” before I begin. That’s what Jesus taught about discipleship.

Do you think that when he said, “You have to hate your father and mother,” that He wanted you to go home and hate your father and mother? No. What was He doing? Laying out an enormous test and saying, “If you’re willing to do this then you can be My disciple. And if you choose not to, then you are not My disciple.” That’s why He said,

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

Then He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:59-60)

Jesus isn't without compassion. The Bible says He has great compassion and that He loves every person. He wept at Lazarus' funeral. Jesus knew the suffering that this follower would have to go through in leaving his dad. But He is telling him to count the cost. Does he love God more than his dad? If he does, then he will become a disciple. If he doesn't then he will return home a believer in Jesus, yet with great emptiness inside.

So, before choosing to read the rest of this book, what will it cost you to become a disciple?

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:33)

God loves us. He loves our family. He loves our children. He loves the people around us. But we've got to start discipleship by giving everything up. Then wherever the Lord leads will be full of His Presence. That's the first Biblical step of discipleship.

Do you want to be a disciple or a believer? The option is yours. Today, this very moment, God is asking you to count the cost and choose what you're willing to do. You might be thinking, “Can I do this?”

There is a story of a man named Peter who fell and hit his head upon a rock. When he became conscious he had severe amnesia. His good friend Jonathan tried to help resuscitate his mind by showing him past photographs with friends and family and telling the stories. Peter did not recognize his friends and family in the pictures. Jonathan was exasperated

and brought Peter to a mirror. Peter stared at the man in the mirror and then replied to Jonathan, “How can this man help me? He looks just as confused as me.”

We need to remember that this is true for each of us as well. Much of the problem in Christianity throughout history has been people trying to make themselves better. But we need to remember that the Gospel never asks us to make better humans, but rather to forsake all and follow Christ. Just remember, the only thing Jesus said was, “Follow Me.” He Himself did all of the transforming and shaping of them into His image. They were only fishermen, remember. All we need to do today is step up and say to the Lord, “I choose to be a disciple!” As you watch, He will create a radical revolution in us and through us.

So if you are willing to believe, receive and forsake all for Jesus, then step right up to chapter two and begin your journey into discipleship.