

“Following Jesus”
2 Peter 1:3
June 23, 2002
Dr. Jerry Nelson

Matthew 5-7 records the great “Sermon on the Mount” – the sine qua non of Jesus’ teaching.

- He has pronounced the blessings of the Kingdom – “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.”
- He has reiterated the true ethic of the Kingdom – “You have heard it said, but I say to you...”
- He has emphasized the unfailing provision of the Father – “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow.”

And he ends his sermon with a clear call to decide.

Matthew 7:24-27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Imagine yourself seated on the grass that day listening intently to Jesus words.

Jesus finishes. What happens?

Do you jump up and immediately engage your neighbor in conversation about the track meet yesterday between your Capernaum Catbirds and the Tiberias Tigers?

Listen to what happened: Matthew 7:28-29

“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

Matthew ends his record of the Sermon on the Mount by focusing our attention again on the person of Jesus.

It was important to Matthew **Who** gave the sermon.

The content of the sermon was important because it was **Jesus** who spoke!

“He taught as one who had authority.”

There was something about him.

He spoke as if convinced that his words change destinies.

He spoke of having a special relationship with God – he said, “my father.”

He said that in the final judgment “many will say to ME” – making himself to be God.

He spoke blessings as if it were his prerogative – the prerogative of deity. (Bruner 291)

There was something about his very presence and demeanor that etched the words of his sermon into the minds of his hearers.

“He taught as one who had authority!”

“He was at the very least, the most remarkable person to walk this earth. He came with words too incredible to believe and with wonders too incredible not to.

His footsteps shook the world, leaving a crevasse across centuries, separating the ones that stretched ahead of him from those that lay behind him. The prints left by those steps were made not by the hobnailed boots of a soldier or by the tailored footwear of a senator. They were made by sandals, sandals as unaccustomed to floors of marble as they were to fields of battle.

Who was the man that wore them? This man wielded no sword, commanded no army. This man whose steps were so foreign to corridors of power.

About him we know very little...He himself wrote nothing, published nothing. His sermons were short, His prayers, mostly private, His ministry, a scant three-and-a-half years.

Who was this man who changed the world, walking wherever he went in such ordinary sandals? His name was Jesus. Some knew him as Savior.” (Ken Gire Introduction to Moments with the Savior)

The Gospel writer, Matthew, like Ken Gire who penned those words, was most impressed with the person of Jesus.

The people were captivated by Jesus.

Again today, as last Sunday, I want to define what it means to be a Christian.

Maybe for some of you it is a redefinition.

Some have turned “being a Christian” into merely a status, a position, a condition.

“I am a Christian” has become similar to saying I am a Democrat, or I am a Boy Scout, I identify myself with the philosophy or organization.

We arrive at that status of being a Democrat or a Christian by virtue of joining, by saying we are, by paying dues or by being initiated.

It doesn't need to imply anything more than that I am on the membership rolls.

I can be an active or inactive Democrat, an active or inactive Boy Scout.

To be a Christian in that sense is to be on the roll.

I prayed the prayer, I was baptized, I was confirmed and therefore in the end I expect to “make the cut”.

The word “Christian” is used two times in the New Testament.

- The synonym “follower” is used seven times.
- The synonym “believer” is used 27 times.
- The primary synonym of Christian is used 269 times.

Do you know what that synonym is? “Disciple”

The Greek word is *mathetes* which we translate into English as *disciple*.

A *disciple* was one who attached himself to another to gain some practical or theoretical knowledge, whether by instruction or by experience.

The concept of a disciple was popular in the Judaism of Jesus' day.

Rabbis had disciples who studied with them in a well-defined and special relationship.

The disciple was expected not only to learn all that his rabbi knew but also to become like him in character and conduct.

So when Mark says in Mark 3:14 that Jesus chose twelve men in "that they might be with him", he accurately reflects contemporary understanding of what it means to be a disciple. (NIV Bible Dictionary)

Jesus said in Luke 6:40 "A student [*mathetes/disciple*] is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher".

One definition is that "A disciple is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is." (Willard 282)

A Christian is a disciple, a Christ-follower.

We are all disciples of someone or maybe of many, first of our parents, then of teachers and peers.

Maybe we are disciples of people we don't even know us but we know them – such as people in the occupation or profession of our choice – people we wish to be like.

Or maybe it is someone of fame or fortune whom we wish to emulate – and so we study them.

We orient our lives around what we perceive they have that we want. (Willard 270ff)

Dallas Willard wrote, "It is one of the major transitions of life to recognize who has taught us, mastered us, and then to evaluate the results in us of their teaching." (Willard 272)

We realize that we are very much like our parents and we either like that or we want something very different.

We realize we have been mastered by some teacher or hero or peer and we analyze whether that is really how we wish to orient our lives.

Jesus called people to become his disciples – to allow him to be the master of how they think and what they do – "No one can serve two masters."

To **be** a disciple is to become **like** the person whose disciple we are.

To be Jesus' disciple then is to become more and more **like** Jesus:

Over and over again the Scriptures describe it as:

Romans 8:29 "...conformed to the likeness" of Jesus.

Ephesians 4:13 "...become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Colossians 1:28 "...perfect in Christ."

2 Corinthians 3:18 "And we... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

God's purpose in sending his son is not just that we would go to heaven when we die **but that we would be fit for heaven when we die** – God has called us to holiness, to Christ-likeness.

1 Peter 1:15-16 "But just as he who called you is holy, so **be holy in all you do;** for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Thessalonians 4:3,7 "It is God's will that you should be **sanctified**... For God did not call us to be impure, but to **live a holy life.**

Ephesians 1:4 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be **holy and blameless** in his sight.

2 Corinthians 7:1 "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, **perfecting holiness** out of reverence for God.

God has called us to holiness, to Christlikeness.

How do we become like him?

This may surprise some of you. The answer to how we become like him is to be **WITH** him!

Discipleship is all about "with-ness" – to be a disciple is to be **with** someone.

It certainly meant that when Jesus was physically here.

Matthew 9:9 "Jesus... saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

It is as simple as this, if Matthew had not followed, Matthew would not have been a disciple, would not have been a Christian.

As I said earlier, one of our temptations is to reduce Christianity to a status or maybe even a code of conduct with which we attempt to comply.

We go to church, pray, read our Bibles, give some money and time, and live a moral life and we call ourselves Christians.

Christianity has become for us a static system of doing or not doing instead of an active, living, daily relationship with Jesus.

Imagine if Matthew had said, "Jesus I heard your Sermon on the Mount and while I can't go with you because of my business I want you to know that I will not hate, lust, lie or judge others – I will be a good Christian."

Discipleship is about relationship.

But it is a certain kind of relationship – a **"with"** relationship.

- I have a relationship with George W. Bush – he's the president of my country.
- I have a relationship with my wife Barbara.

Which of those two illustrations of "relationship" do you suppose defines a "with" relationship?

- Jesus said in John 12:26 "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.
- And in John 15:4 "Remain in me, and I will remain in you."
- And in Matthew 28:20 "...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

And when we are with him we watch him, we study him, and we see him in action.

2 Peter 1:3 "(Jesus') divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him (Jesus) who called us by his own glory and goodness.

God has called us to holiness, to godliness, to Christlikeness.

How does Christ-likeness come to us?

How does holiness increasingly characterize us, how is God's will for our lives fulfilled?

"Through out knowledge of him" - Jesus.

And **how do we gain that knowledge of him?**

By observing Jesus' "own glory and goodness."

As we are with him we increasingly see his glory.

One day the disciples of Jesus were with him in a boat in a life-threatening storm on the sea of Galilee.

You remember that Jesus awoke and spoke to the winds to calm them.

Matthew 8:27 "The men (disciples) were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

The disciples saw his glory.

As we are with him we see his goodness.

Matthew 15:31 "The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing."

The disciples saw his goodness.

Just as our lives are shaped by those others who influence us, so as a disciple of Jesus, watching what he does, hearing why he does it, and learning his heart, we become increasingly like him.

We are students of Jesus – studying him.

We learn how to do things in the way he would do them.

And mature disciples are those who "obey everything he has commanded us" (Mt 28:20)

His word becomes our authoritative guide; his will our greatest desire; and his presence our greatest joy.

But you say, “How can I be **with** him when he isn’t even here?”

“I can understand how all you have said would apply to those who were here when Jesus was on earth.

“They were able to see him, hear him, observe him with others, witness the miracles, and listen to his teaching.

“How does all this apply now?”

“How am I supposed to be with him when he isn’t here?”

Jesus spent significant time and effort in explaining the answer to that very question.

John in his Gospel records for us Jesus instruction in this matter.

Jesus explained to his disciples that he would soon die, be resurrected and return to his Father in heaven.

The disciples were deeply grieved over this because they had been WITH him for three years and now apparently they were losing him.

But Jesus says in John 14:1 ““Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”

And then he unfolds for them why they should not be discouraged or sad but encouraged.

- John 14:16-17 “I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Counselor to be with you forever**, the Spirit of truth... He lives with you and will be in you.”
- John 16:4 “I did not tell you this at first because **I was with you**.
- John 16:7 “Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”
- John 16:13-14 “when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth... He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

Jesus says that in his physical absence the Holy Spirit will be WITH us and so intimately WITH us as to say he is IN us.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was crucial in the plan of God.

And so after his resurrection Jesus said again to his disciples in Acts 1:4 "...Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

But as with us, the disciples couldn't imagine being WITH Jesus without the physical presence of Jesus.

And so, not understanding the significant role the Holy Spirit would have, they asked when Jesus would come again.

"Jesus, it is you we want."

And so again Jesus told them about the coming Holy Spirit, promising that when the Spirit was present with them, they would have all the advantages and more of having Jesus physically with them.

And when Pentecost happened they understood.

What the Prophets had foretold and Jesus promised, they now experienced – the presence of the Spirit of God.

And they became a fearless, joyful, commissioned group of disciples.

In Jesus' physical absence they lost nothing of Jesus because through the Spirit's presence Jesus was as real and meaningful to them as Jesus' physical presence had been.

So intimate is the relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with each other, that Paul would write in Romans 8:9-10 "You, however, are controlled...by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you..."

Notice how Paul use four terms almost synonymously:

Spirit

Spirit of God

Spirit of Christ

Christ is in you.

Because God is three persons in one, to have one is to have the other.

Sinclair Ferguson wrote, “Having the Spirit is the equivalent, indeed the very mode, of having the incarnate, obedient, crucified, resurrected and exalted Christ indwelling so that we are united to him as he is united to the Father.” (Sinclair Ferguson The Holy Spirit 71)

To have the Holy Spirit, is to have the Spirit of Christ, is to have Christ.

Yes, Jesus is absent physically but he is not absent.
He is here **with** us, in us.

You say, “Okay, maybe it is theologically true that Jesus is here WITH us but I still can’t watch him do miracles, or listen to his voice, or see the way he deals with people.

What does it mean to be WITH him today when he is physically absent?

I have asked others to join me this morning to describe how they experience Jesus today?

What does a relationship with Jesus look like and feel like?

Claire Knapp (Kimberly Staub)

Chuck Porter

Mark Greene

INTERVIEW

Living in the kingdom of heaven then “from the practical point of view in which we all must live, is simply our experience of Jesus’ continual interaction with us...throughout the days, hours and moments of our (everyday lives).” (Willard 280)

WWJD (“What would Jesus do?”) is an appropriate question to ask. But understand we are not robots but living people, so it is not that we simply copy everything Jesus did, but that we learn

from his attitudes and actions in the situations of his life how to respond in the sometimes-different situations of our lives.

Every aspect of life (private, public, work, play, etc) then is a context for imitating Jesus' attitudes and appropriately applying his actions.

Are you a disciple of Jesus?

A disciple is one who is WITH Jesus.

We have entitled our summer series, which begins next Sunday: "Experiencing Jesus: Friendship with the Master."

When we say "Experiencing Jesus" – the emphasis is not on our experience but our experience of **Him**.

The emphasis is on **knowing Jesus**, knowing more about him – for in knowing him through his revelation of himself by His Spirit through his Word to us we are drawn to him, captured by him, and become like him.

Our intention is **that we would all see Jesus**, watch him, listen to him, observe how he treats others, see his reaction to those who abuse him, hear his heart for the disadvantaged, learn his description of holiness, be WITH him.

Will you spend the summer with him?

Will you decide to pursue him?

Will you get to know him?

I close with a recording of a passionate description of the person of Jesus.

This is the Jesus who has called us to be WITH him.
("My King is..." by Lockeridge)