

Follow The Leader

Recap/Intro

- What Jesus has just gone through
 - Temptation. What Satan uses to tempt you in order to bring you down, the Lord uses to test you and build you up.
 - How you deal with it is a matter of how you choose to perceive it.
 - After some recovery time, Jesus goes out and starts to do His thing. Preaching repentance to those who are already the people of God. (MAP) Hm.
- When you read the rest of the chapter, what He does seems to come out of nowhere. What these guys do also seems confusing. Why? What are we missing?
- Read it

Matthew 4:18-25

- The part that strikes me as odd isn't so much the miracles and the crowds following Jesus. It's that it looks as though
 - He seems to start teaching and preaching out of nowhere
 - He seemingly hollered at these fisherman to follow
 - And these guys literally drop what they're doing and follow
- What are we missing? The fact that Jesus was a rabbi who was calling disciples.
- What's a rabbi? What's a disciple? Remember, 1st century Israel.

What is a rabbi? (Rabbi Jesus book credit)

- Who they were
 - One who had an earnest desire to study and teach the Torah. Others would honor him by calling him "my master" or rabbi. Decades later it became a formal title.
 - Didn't come from rich or priestly classes, but from blue collar folk.
 - Worked seasonally, traveled and taught when they were free.
- What they did
 - Interpreted the Torah, explained scripture, told parables.
 - Some were traveling teachers teaching in synagogues.
 - Relied on the hospitality of others, never paid.
 - Took disciples who studied under them for years, traveling with them wherever they went. Disciples would then go out on their own, teachings in homes or synagogues. (reiterate centrality of Bible and study in daily life)
- Jesus the Rabbi
 - Teachings most closely resembled that of Pharisees of the day.
 - Didn't He yell at them a lot?
 - While some hated and wanted to trap Him, others just wanted to learn.
 - Questions and debate were tools for learning, not just belligerent.
 - Jesus had already been teaching in synagogues according to Luke. This tells us
 - Jesus must have been considered to be well learned, otherwise He would never have been invited or able to teach. No record of His scholarship questioned.

- Jesus was observant of the Torah. If He weren't, He wouldn't have been allowed in the synagogue.
- Jesus must have been known in His day as a great rabbi, a student and teacher.
- Jesus did everything any rabbi of His day would do. Walked the land, taught in parables, engaged in debates, interpreted Scripture, raised up disciples
- Jesus' parables were very similar to other parables we have record of. Using sheep/shepherds, seed sowing, kings, vineyards. The "four types" parable.
- The goal of a Rabbi
 - To raise up disciples who would carry on his teaching. Not just academically.
 - The mission of a rabbi was to become a living example of what it means to apply God's Word to one's life. Bad baseball coach.
 - Paul saying "follow me as I follow Christ" and "be imitators of me"
 - A disciples apprenticed himself to a rabbi because the rabbi had saturated his life with Scripture and had become a true follower of God.
 - The disciple sought to study the text, not only of Scripture but of the rabbi's life, for it was there that he would learn how to live out the Torah.
 - Likewise, Jesus' goal was to raise up disciples who would become like Him. As a follower of Jesus, we are still called to live out the adventure of discipleship, becoming like Jesus through the power of His Spirit at work within us.

What is a disciple?

- Generically, a learner, a pupil. Specifically, an apprentice (like trades, arts, Jedi!).

*To follow a Rabbi meant something other than sitting in a classroom and absorbing his lectures. Rather, it involved a literal kind of following, in which disciples often traveled with, lived with, and imitated their Rabbis, learning not only from what they said but what they did - from their reaction to everyday life as well as from the manner in which they lived. **The task of the disciple was to become as much like the Rabbi as possible.***

- Discipleship model come from Elijah and Elisha. Not just to study from, but to become like in order to carry on his ministry as a prophet.
- The goal is not just academic learning but personal transformation.
- Lifetime commitment to a reality, not a hobby.

The changes that He worked in His disciples' lives did not come instantly or easy. Our culture is fascinated with instant fixes and extreme makeovers. (Office reference) But discipleship has always been about a process. (Even post-pentecost)

While the Gospels record many instances of Jesus instantly healing people's illnesses, we know of not even one instance in which He simply waved His hand to immediately fix an ugly habit for one of His disciples. Instead, He simply kept teaching and correcting them, giving them time to grow. [what happens when you pray for patience?]

Modern Christians have sometimes been confused about what discipleship is, equating it with "discipline." Of course discipline is vital to the spiritual life. Jesus Himself said, "Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:23). But the overall goal of discipleship is not simply to grow in self-discipline, but to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Sometimes we hear the word disciple and conclude that it's too hard to become one. But think about the alternative. To refuse to become Jesus' disciples is to consign ourselves to a

wasted, frustrating life. The more we enter into relationship with Rabbi Jesus, the more joy we will experience. To become more like Christ will deepen our relationships and allow us to live more authentically. It may not always be easy but it will certainly be good, and, as we follow Him, we will find ourselves living with greater passion and purpose, experiencing a life of greater fulfillment. [which is a bonus, not the point]

- How is this accomplished? Intimacy with the rabbi.

Shmuel Safrai, a disciple "did not grasp the full significance of his teacher's learning in all its nuances except through prolonged intimacy with his teacher, through close association with his rich and profound mind." To that end, the disciple would accompany the Rabbi on all of his daily rounds: going to court, helping the poor, burying the dead, redeeming slaves, and so on.

It has been said, just as one candle lights another only if it is brought close, so a Rabbi only teaches well when he is close to his disciples.

One's rabbi was considered closer, more important to him than his own father. Rabbi's had a similar view of their disciples.

- Paul sees himself as a father to the Corinthians, to Timothy, a nursing mother to others. How about you and me, as discipler or disciplee?

So we see that on the night before His death, Jesus bent down and wiped away the grime on the feet of his disciples. This startling and intimate act of kindness embodied another rabbinic method: a rabbi was to model how to live by using examples from his own life.

- Discipleship is a process of life-shaping (like a sculptor in wood or stone)
 - Parents must be disciple-makers of their children.
 - We are often discipling others without even knowing it. People will mimic our actions instead of our words.
 - Whatever we take in is what comes out. Talk radio, gossip magazines, politics, sports, music, etc.

Who or what do we want to shape our lives? Even the culture around us will try to 'disciple' us if we have not placed ourselves under the transforming influence of Jesus Christ.

- It will happen whether we are aware of it or not. We have a choice. Be deliberate.
- Reiterate Eastern vs Western thinking

An Eastern view of discipleship seems far more in keeping with the gospel. The Eastern view encompasses the understanding that Jesus died for our sins and that belonging to Him involves repenting and receiving Him as Lord. But it also recognizes that Jesus lived transparently in front of His disciples in order to teach them how to live. They, in turn, were to live transparently before others, humbly teaching them the way of Christ. **This approach involves not just information but transformation. God's goal isn't simply to fill the world with people who believe the right things. It is to fill the world with people who shine with the brilliance of Christ.**

- How do we do this? We follow Him and His voice. Shepherding, pasture to pasture. Sheep must know the voice and follow.

Just like these sheep, what distinguishes us is not so much the "pen" we inhabit but the shepherd we follow. Some sheep come running as soon as their shepherd calls, but some struggle to obey his lead, going astray whenever temptation strikes. It takes a lot more energy to follow a wondering shepherd than to be cooped up in a pen. (para) But we are called to be disciples of a Rabbi who is always on the move, one who wants us to go with Him, making

disciples to the ends of the earth. We need to learn how to recognize His voice, to go where He wants us to go, and to serve and imitate Him so that we can share His good news with the world.

- Are you getting the picture now? **Are we missing a sense of reality to this thing?**
- Why is the church in America in such bad shape? Because we have been going and making converts, making believers, not disciples. Not even converts, transfers!
Consumer Christianity.
- Playing follow the leader “in our hearts?”

Reread passage

- **follow me** - two words. Come here, behind me.
- **immediately** - straight away. From “straight”. Not round-about.
- Fisherman, like Deadliest Catch guys, not Bass Buddies.
- **As they followed Him they heard Him teach and saw Him work. They would have had the understanding that this is what they would be doing someday. Wow!**

Wrap up

- **The mission of a rabbi was to become a living example of what it means to apply God’s Word to one’s life.**
- **The task of the disciple was to become as much like the Rabbi as possible.**
- Do you have a different picture of Jesus as your Rabbi now? Do you have a different picture of yourself as His disciple? Do you have different expectations?
- When you look at Jesus’ life (as we will in Matthew), what kind of difference do you see between His life and your life?
- Let’s put it this way. **If there were some way to turn off the Christianity Switch in your life, how much of a difference would it make? Would others notice?**
- Let’s learn to hear His voice. Let’s allow the Spirit to transform our lives so that they look like our Rabbi. Let’s follow the leader.