

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN

Matthew 4:18-22

Today I would like to talk to you about Jesus' concept of discipleship, the Lord's teaching concerning discipleship. And for this, we will look at the passage in Matthew 4:18-22. This is what we read.

Matthew 4:18. 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.

19 Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'

20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

21 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,

22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Discipleship

The words that I want to concentrate on particularly are in v. 19, *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*. When Jesus invites us to follow Him, what He has in mind is that we become His disciples. And hence He says in Luke 14:27, *Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*. 'You follow Me, you come after Me, in order that you become My disciple.'

Of all the titles found in the NT for a person who has made a personal commitment of faith to Jesus, the term *disciple* is certainly the most common one. It appears 268 times; 238 times in the gospels and 30 times in the book of Acts.

When I was doing some research on this word, it dawned on me that the term 'disciple' is not the word that we commonly use to say that we have made a personal commitment to Christ. I tend to use the term Christian. 'I am a Christian.' But in the Bible, the word Christian appears only three times. And of these three times, twice it occurs on the lips of unbelievers. One of these two times is found in Acts 11:26 where we read that *the disciples were first called Christians*... Who are called Christians? The disciples. Only disciples are called Christians. The Gentiles called the disciples, 'Christians', *Christianos*, because they were so Christ like in their conduct that it reminded them of Christ. We know that they are followers of Christ, disciples of Christ, because they carried the character of Christ. By saying that, we are now beginning to see the meaning of being a disciple of Jesus.

This passage in Matthew 4 is about discipleship. And I would like to tell you, on the basis of this passage, some of the characteristics of the true disciple of Christ. And I would like you to see for yourself whether this is also your experience of discipleship.

Follow Me

Jesus says to these fishermen, *Follow Me*. This is the first time that the Lord Jesus uses this word in Matthew, *follow Me, deute* (dyoo-teh) in Greek. He uses this word in the context of discipleship as He was asking Peter, Andrew, James and John to become His disciples.

The second time that the Lord Jesus uses this word *deute* in the gospel of Matthew is in Matthew 11:28 where He says, *Come to Me ...and I will give you rest*. It is the same Greek imperative. *Come to Me...* Notice that this is also a call to discipleship, and this time, the invitation is open to all. You see, in Matthew 4, Jesus is speaking to four specific fishermen. But in Matthew 11, using the same Greek word *deute*, He extends the invitation to all. The invitation to become a disciple is now addressed to everyone.

Notice also that the same Greek word is translated by two different words. In Matthew 4, we have 'follow Me'. In Matthew 11, we have 'come to Me'. These two words define in a complementary way the meaning of the Greek word *deute*. This is important to notice. And in this respect, I would like to make these comments.

Being with Jesus

The first thing that we see about discipleship is that we have to come to Jesus. You can't just stand on the sideline and claim that you believe in Jesus. We cannot be a Christian at a distance with a remote faith. Being a disciple involves that you are part of the game. You are not just a partisan of Christ. You take part actively in His salvation mission for the world.

There is a world of difference between being *for* Jesus and being *with* Jesus. To be *for* Jesus, you can sit on the sideline and cheer your Master. 'Hurray Jesus. Come on. Knock down Satan. Give him a black eye. Give it to him.' A disciple is not simply involved with a loud mouth and clapping hands. He is involved in the action. He is in the battle. He takes off his jacket and says, 'Here I go into the battle. If any body is going to hit me, I'm ready to take the bruises, for God's sake because I want to be with my Master.' A disciple is *with* Jesus. This is what Jesus wants to stress when He says, *He who is not with me is against Me...* (Luke 11:23a).

The Lord Jesus chose twelve men not just to be *for* Him, but more than anything else, to be *with* Him, to follow Him where He goes. When He goes to the cross, we go the cross. When He is whipped, we are whipped. Paul says, 'I have been beaten, I have been shipwrecked. Look at my body. I bear the marks of the body of Christ because where He went, I went with Him.' The marks upon his body proved his service to Christ. He was not just watching the battle. He was in the battle, *with* Christ. That's what Jesus expects when He says, *Come to Me*.

Take My yoke

But coming involves a second thing. It involves following. You come and follow Me. If we go back to Matthew 11:29, we see that following Jesus means taking His yoke. Verse 28 says, *Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden*. Then right after, in v. 29, it says, *Take My yoke upon you*. 'The way I want you to follow Me as a disciple is by taking My yoke.' These are the words of the Lord Jesus.

The yoke is what goes on the neck of the two oxen in front. And the ploughman uses the yoke to tell the animals where to go. He pulls the yoke one way and the oxen turn this. He pulls the yoke the other way and the oxen turn that other way. You get the picture? The yoke represents obedience. And God is the One who controls the yoke. In taking the yoke upon you, you commit yourself to live under the lordship of God. A disciple lives a life under the sovereignty of Christ, under the sovereignty of God, under His control. That's what discipleship is about. And that's what Jesus expects from us when we follow Him.

A disciple knows that Jesus doesn't dish out sweets. Don't get the impression that by coming to Jesus, everything will be automatically fine. That you will find a job or a mate, that your business will succeed, that you will pass your exams, that your marriage will get better. A disciple knows that when he follows Jesus, he exchanges a yoke for another one. He takes the yoke of Jesus and abandons the yoke of sin. A yoke is a burden. But Jesus' burden is light, light compared to sin. Sin is a much heavier burden. But Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light. That's why we can find rest for our souls when we follow Him in taking up His yoke. *Take My yoke upon you; follow Me.* 'Live a life in obedience to Me.' That's discipleship.

Learn of Me

So firstly, come to Jesus. Secondly, follow Jesus by taking His yoke. Thirdly, *learn of Me*, Jesus says in Matthew 11:29. A disciple is a learner. He learns of his Master, Jesus. When Jesus speaks of learning, He doesn't mean that you put lots of information into your brain. That's not the essence of learning for Jesus. You learn of Jesus by walking with Him day by day. You learn of Jesus by imitating His lifestyle. You learn of Jesus by becoming like Him. What Jesus did, you will do the same. How Jesus behaved, you will behave in the same way. The apostle Paul speaks of the word 'imitate'. We imitate Jesus.

That's how I learned to practice medicine. As a medical student, I had to learn from every specialty of medicine month after month. We called that to do our rotations. Every month, we would spend four weeks in a given department, trying to learn as much as possible from the doctors who were working in that department. For fifty months, month after month, I would follow these great specialists in their field, trying to learn how to treat patients in the same way that they did. Each case was a learning experience in which we could observe our teachers putting their skills into practice. And we were encouraged to imitate them with the understanding that one day, we will be on our own, taking care of patients with the same diseases.

In the spiritual world, it is no different. A disciple learns from Jesus, a learning that involves a process of imitation. Paul says that the disciple is to so imitate Jesus that he is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). This process doesn't last just fifty months; it is a lifetime commitment. Discipleship then is a way of life that involves a process in which the person learns to become more and more like Jesus by the grace and the power of God. Discipleship is about becoming like Jesus as we walk with Him in the real world. And the real world begins at home, with our closest relationships, in the moment-to-moment circumstances of life.

God's transforming power

Now, here is another point. A disciple is one who follows and learns from Jesus. *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.* Notice the learning part. *I will make you.* That is how we are to learn. It is not that we make ourselves fishers of men. He will make us fishers of men.

If you are like me, we all enter into the Lord's service with a deep sense of inadequacy. But don't let that become an excuse for not serving God. Don't say that you are not fit to serve God because you don't seem to have any gift, or that most people are far more capable than you are. Please

don't think like that. Understand that it is Jesus who enables you. He can transform every person if that person is willing to learn and to follow. When I look at the Christians around me, I am often impressed with what God can do with people who, in the human eyes, are not fit to serve in the kingdom of God. Look at Jesus' twelve disciples. They were not the kind of people that a master would naturally choose as disciples. And yet, Jesus chose them. He took the weak things of this world, equipped them with power, and turned the world upside down.

And so, when Jesus invites us to follow Him, it is an invitation to serve Him, to bring people into the kingdom of God. That's what becoming a fisher of men is about, bringing people into the kingdom of God. Just as the fish are brought out of the sea, so men are to be brought out of the world and into the kingdom of God. That's the job of the disciple of Christ, a task that he is to accomplish with God's enabling power.

An immediate response

Now, a disciple is not a disciple unless he has responded to Jesus' invitation to follow Him. And let me draw your attention in the way the first disciples responded to Jesus. Let's go back to our passage in Matthew 4. Look at v. 20: *Then they **immediately** left their nets and followed Him.* Again, look at v. 22: *and **immediately** they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. Immediately.* I think that it is pretty obvious that the Word of God wants to underline the immediacy of the response of the first disciples of Jesus. How do you understand this?

As a young Christian, this has puzzled me quite a bit. How can anyone just leave virtually everything behind, his net, his boat, his family, and follow a man who just said, 'Come to me, and I will make you fishers of men'? I mean, this is a totally irresponsible behaviour. They don't even know the man! How can they just follow Him like that? Children wouldn't even do that. I teach my children not to talk to strangers when I'm not around. How can mature adults say 'Yes' so easily to a man that they don't know and who is asking them to be His disciples?

Well, are we sure that they didn't know that man called Jesus at that point in time? I would like to suggest that it is precisely because they knew exactly who Jesus was that they were so quick to say 'Yes'. Here in Matthew 4, these fishermen were already acquainted with Jesus. The earliest contact of the disciples with the Lord Jesus is not found in the synoptic gospels, but in the gospel of John, John 1:35-51. If you read the account, you will find that it is John the Baptist who first introduced two of his disciples to the Lord Jesus.

Following the Son of God

This account in John is very interesting because it tells us how the spiritual identity of Jesus was first revealed. And it came from the mouth of four men. John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael. They all recognize in Jesus the One whom God promised to send in the OT.

John the Baptist said of Jesus, 'Behold this is the Lamb of God' (v. 36).

Andrew said to his brother Peter about Jesus, 'We have found the Messiah, the Christ' (v. 41).

Then, Philip said of Jesus, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote about' (v. 45).

And then, Nathanael said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!' (v. 49).

I think that it cannot be more explicit than that. It doesn't leave anyone in doubt. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, is the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is why in Matthew 4, when Jesus said, *Follow Me...*, immediately they followed Him because they knew already who Jesus was.

You know, they loved their father, they loved their nets, they loved their boats, they loved their profession, but they knew that following the Messiah when He calls you was more important than all that. So, a disciple is someone who has acknowledged his sins and recognized Jesus as the Son of God who can take away his sins and make him right with God.

When the Spirit of God moves in a person, there is a response. And the response is immediate, not so much because it is instant. In fact, the Lord Jesus asks us first to count the cost before we make a decision for Him. Any person who is initially moved by the power of the Holy Spirit will most likely go through a period of struggle. And I would be concerned if that doesn't happen. But once the decision is made, there is no looking back. It is immediate in the sense of the firmness of the response, in the determination with which a person says, 'Yes Lord, I will follow You.' When the decision is made, it is made. The question is never to be re-opened. It is final until the day we depart from this physical life.

Disciples of an eternal Master

Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. This invitation to discipleship is as valid today as it was when Jesus called His first disciples. You see, discipleship does not end with the earthly ministry of Christ. It is very interesting that in the last few verses of the gospel of John, in John 21:22, the Lord Jesus renews His call to discipleship to the apostles, and particularly to Peter. The Lord Jesus is now raised from the dead. He is about to go to the Father. And He says to Peter, in the same way that He addressed His call to him in Matthew 4, ... *what is that to you Peter? **You follow Me.*** For three years, Peter followed the earthly Christ. Now he is being asked to follow the risen Christ who is about to ascend to the Father.

Jesus wanted to make sure that they understand that discipleship does not end with the end of His earthly ministry. The point to grasp is that though His physical presence is no more with us, His spiritual presence is now constantly with us. We follow Him on the spiritual level, in the spirit of His words when He says in Matthew 28:20, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* So discipleship continues down to this day. And you and I are His disciples if we have made the commitment to follow Him.