



Text: John 1:35-51¹

Series: *Life In His Name*: The Message of John's Gospel

Title: Part 3 – Are you a disciple of Jesus?

Date: September 26, 2010

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

When I visit in the hospital the first thing I do is head to the nursing station in the active care ward and look through the Religious Census file that is kept on that desk. At intake, the hospital staff will ask new patients if they would like to register their religious commitment so that spiritual support can be provided by the chaplain, lay visitors from the churches and by the pastors as we visit in the hospital. The census covers all the faiths that are present in town but I have to let you in on a little secret: I read through the whole list! Why? Because it seems that only a few of you think of yourselves as “Baptist.” I have to look through the entire list to make sure you haven’t identified yourselves by some other term such as “Christian,” “Nazarene,” “Pentecostal,” “Missionary Church,” or “Protestant.”

Let me ask you to think for a few moments with me this morning about labels. Assuming you believe in Jesus, **what label do you wear to identify yourself as a believer in Jesus?**

Let me recommend that you choose one from the catalogue found in the Bible. The New Testament is full of “labels” we could use. Some are found in the early part of the Book of Acts where believers in Jesus were referred to simply as

“believers” Acts 2:44

A little later, they were referred to as those...

“belonging to The Way” Acts 9:2

And shortly after that, they were called...

“saints” Acts 9:13

But the term that has come to be most frequently used of those who believe in Jesus was first used in the church in the city of Antioch. Luke, the writer of The Book of Acts, tells us that...

“in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.” Acts 11:26

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The term “Christian” only occurs three times in the New Testament and yet it has come to be the primary term used around the world to describe those who believe in Jesus Christ. The origin of term, “Christian,” is a little uncertain but the “ian” ending was attached to names in the ancient world to indicate that someone was a follower of a particular person. It could have meant something like “of the family of Christ,” or “loyal to Christ,” or even, “soldier of Christ.”²

Although “Christian” is only found three times in the New Testament, the term it replaced, “disciple,” is found over 250 times in the Bible, all of them concentrated in the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

The word “disciple” was used in the ancient world to describe someone who was attached to a teacher, often as an apprentice. The essence of the term “disciple” is that of a learner devoted to the teaching of a Master or Teacher, and that is the relationship we see in our passage this morning in John’s Gospel. As I read God’s Word for us this morning, I want you to notice the disciple/Teacher relationship that existed between Jesus and the men who followed him. This morning I want us think together about the question: **what does it mean when I say that I am a “disciple” of Jesus Christ?**

One thing I want to clarify about being a disciple of Jesus before we jump into our reading this morning. Some people have the idea that being a disciple is a “higher stage” form of Christianity. In other words, you can be a Christian and a believer in Jesus Christ, but not be a disciple. But that isn’t the picture of discipleship that John gives us. In his Gospel, being a disciple of Jesus is being a believer in Jesus. For example, John tells us that Jesus said...

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32

As we go through John’s Gospel we’re going to see that “abiding” in Jesus and his Word and being set free by Jesus from our sin is the essence of what it means to believe in him. And Jesus connects all those things with being one of his disciples.

Another thing I need to clarify is that the term “disciple” doesn’t only refer to “the Twelve” disciples. There was a broad group of disciples composed of everyone who was following Jesus (John 6:60, 66) and then there was the close circle of disciples around Jesus that is sometimes called “the Twelve” (John 6:67). Sometimes the Twelve as simply called, “the disciples,” but please don’t think that the term is limited only to them. In John’s Gospel, everyone who believes in Jesus is a disciple.

²D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 184.



I'm reading this morning from **John's Gospel, chapter one, verses 35 to 51.** This is God's holy, inspired and authoritative word; let's hear it with open ears and responsive hearts.

³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

So what can we learn from this passage that will answer the question: **what does it mean when we say that we are disciples of Jesus Christ?**

First of all, being a disciple of Jesus means that...

We follow Jesus

"The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus." John 1:35-37



John the Baptist collected disciples around his teaching, too. But John knew that he had come to prepare the way for Jesus and so when he saw Jesus pass by, he instinctively directed his followers to shift their allegiance to him. He didn't even think about it. It's a sign that John had been teaching his followers to expect the Messiah that when he pointed Jesus out to two of them, they immediately followed Jesus.

Only one of the two is identified by name. In v. 40 we're told that the name of one of them was Andrew but we're never told the name of the other disciple. Most Bible scholars think it was John, the Gospel writer. We know from the other Gospels that John became one of Jesus' first disciples, but throughout this Gospel John is very reluctant to identify himself by name. He remains in the background and makes sure that Jesus, the One he followed, remains our focus.

"Follow" is an important word when it comes to being a disciple. Andrew and John "followed" Jesus. When Jesus saw them "following" (v.38) him he invited them to come along. Later in John's account of these early disciples, he tells us that Jesus invited Philip to join him with the words: "Follow me." (v.43)

Throughout his Gospel "follow" is repeated again and again. Jesus said,

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

And again, he said...

"If anyone serves me, he must follow me;" John 12:26

In his last words to Simon Peter, Jesus entrusted to him the care of the sheep who had come to believe in him. Jesus asked Peter, "do you love me?" and Peter replied, "you know I do!" "Then," Jesus responded, "feed my sheep." That exchange went back and forth three times and it's become imbedded in Christian memory as one of the most touching exchanges between the Lord and one of his disciples. But Jesus doesn't end the exchange with "love me" or "serve me," but rather with the simple appeal that began Peter's relationship with Jesus years before...

"Follow me." John 21:19

It was Jesus first and his last word on discipleship.

When we "follow" Jesus we determine to follow his example; we set ourselves to follow his teaching; we seek to live our lives in a way that reflects the priorities of Jesus. Jesus' final words to Peter must have had a tremendous impact on his mind because years later he wrote...



“For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” 1 Peter 1:20-21

I’ve told this story before but I’ll tell it again because of the simple lesson it carries. Many years ago, now, I was listening to a panel on CBC radio discussing spiritual matters. The panel was made up of a wide range of people from all kinds of faith backgrounds. The question they were discussing was: are there many ways to God?

The entire panel, except for one member, believed that there were many ways to God, if indeed there was a God at all. The one who dissented was Brian Stiller who, at that time, was the president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Brian gave a disciple’s response to the question. His words have stuck with me over the years because of their simplicity, their integrity and their grace. He said, “I would be less than a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ if I did not tell you what Jesus would say in answer to our question. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.”

Following Jesus means that His word becomes our final word. It means that his example becomes our example. It means that his priorities become ours. It means that his suffering becomes ours. And one day, it means that his joy will be ours, too.

Second, being a disciple of Jesus means that...

We stay with Jesus

When Jesus saw Andrew and John following him he asked them...

“What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.” John 1:38-39

Sometimes the word “follow” can be misunderstood as a relentless round of activity done in Jesus’ name. We follow, follow, follow.... But almost immediately, John reminds us that one of the most important things that a disciple must do is to just spend time with Jesus. They spent the whole day with Jesus. John and Andrew just hung out with Jesus.

There is a wonderful word that we’ll find repeated in chapter 15 of John’s Gospel that brings us back to this idea of “staying with” Jesus. It’s the word, “abide.” It means to stay with or be to be connected with someone. Jesus said...



“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

The word that is translated later as “abide” is also found right here in our passage. It’s the word translated as “stay with.” It might be a bit of stretch but not very much to say that, “They came and saw where he was abiding and they abode with him that day....”

Some of my most cherished times are the days when I’ve taken the day for prayer and Bible reading and worship. I’ve just “hung out” with Jesus. Those were often the days when he would speak to me about issues in my relationship with him, where he would give me preaching and ministry ideas and where he would simply renew my spirit with his presence. I believe those days with Jesus changed me.

The Navigators have a great guideline called, **“How to spend a day prayer,”**³ written by Lorne Sanny, one of the founders of the ministry. There are two questions that Sanny used to shape the plan for the day and they were drawn from Paul’s meeting with Jesus on the Damascus Road...

“Who are you, Lord?” Acts 22:8
“What shall I do, Lord?” Acts 22:10

Whether you spend a day, an hour or twenty minutes, every disciple needs time with Jesus on a regular basis. We meet him in prayer, in his Word and in worship with other disciples. It’s what keeps us alive and fresh. We are “disciples of Jesus” first and foremost, and only members of churches because of our relationship with Jesus. If we lose our time with Jesus, our service for him wither and perish. But if we “stay with” Jesus, if we “abide” with him, he promises to make our lives and our service for him fruitful and productive.

Disciples spend time with Jesus.

Third, being a disciple of Jesus means that...

We share Jesus

Andrew was an intriguing disciple. Every time we meet him in John’s Gospel he’s bringing someone to Jesus (John 6:8; 12:22). John tells us here that Andrew...

“first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at

³ <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=10108>



him and said, “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).” John 1:41-42

Whatever it was that passed between Jesus and Andrew during the day they spent together it confirmed to Andrew that Jesus was the promised One of God, the Messiah. What he had discovered about Jesus that day he shared with his brother, Simon. He brought him to Jesus, and Simon had his own meeting him.

Andrew found his brother, Simon and shared Christ with him. But I think there might be more to Andrew’s story. It says that Andrew “first found” Simon but, the question is, what came second?

D.A. Carson, a New Testament scholar, points out that verse 43 reads in Greek this way. This is the way NASB renders the verse ...

“The next day He purposed to go into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, “Follow Me.” John 1:43 (NASB)

The question translators have to answer is, “who is ‘he?’” Carson suggests that “he” might well be Andrew, not Jesus, as many translators have determined. He suggests that if Andrew was the one who went to his home town of Bethsaida and looked up his old friend Philip it continues John’s theme of witness to Jesus. In Carson’s view, Andrew finds Philip, brings him to Jesus, and Jesus says to Philip, “Follow me.”

Not only would this continue John’s theme of witness, but Andrew is always bringing people to Jesus. In chapter 6, he’s the disciple who brings a little boy with a bag lunch to Jesus when they needed food to feed 5000 people. In chapter 12 Andrew and Philip together, bring a delegation of Greek Jewish converts who wanted to meet Jesus. Andrew brought family, friends, children and strangers to Jesus!

From time to time we hear statistics about how people first came into church membership. These figures trace back to the Institute for American Church Growth, which asked 10,000 people about their pilgrimage. What led them in? Answers were: Special need, 2 percent; Walk-in, 3 percent; Pastor, 6 percent; Visitation, 1 percent; Sunday school, 5 percent; Evangelistic crusade, 5 percent; Program, 3 percent; **Friend/relative, 79 percent.**⁴

Here’s a point: don’t worry about convincing people that Jesus is the Savior of the world, just share with them what’s done for you and then invite them to meet him themselves. How? Encourage them to read John’s Gospel. Or better yet, read it with them. If you’d like to do that I’ve got a study guide that will lead you as you seek Jesus with them. Or, bring them to *Christianity Explored* on

⁴Wayne Zunkel, *Leadership*, Vol. 5, no. 3. © 2010 PreachingToday.com



Wednesday nights this fall where we'll be studying the Gospel of Mark together to answer the questions, "Who is Jesus? Why did he come? What does it mean to follow him?" I love leading this study because it gives me an opportunity to share with people what Jesus has done for me. We're going to be starting up in the next few weeks ... watch for the announcement. If you're interested, talk to me.

Fourth, being a disciple of Jesus means that...

We study Jesus

"Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." John 1:45-46

Philip continues the chain of sharing begun by Andrew and so he in turn finds Nathanael and shares his discovery of Jesus with him. Although Philip had not been with Jesus long, he'd heard enough from Jesus to know that the whole Old Testament spoke of him.

"The Law and the prophets" was a kind of short form to refer to Old Testament scriptures as a whole. It's probable that Jesus had been sharing with Philip the Old Testament scriptures that spoke of his coming and his ministry. That was Jesus' approach to Bible study throughout his life and even in his resurrection ministry. After his resurrection Jesus continued the teaching approach he'd followed with Philip with two unnamed disciples on a road heading from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus. Luke tells us that...

"beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 24:27

If you'd like to engage in that kind of study about Jesus, just talk with our friends at *GoodSeed* and they'd be happy to share God's Word about Jesus with you following Jesus' model of beginning with Genesis and progressing through the prophets right through to the New Testament. If you'd like a copy of their study book, *Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*, just talk with me after the service.

Disciples don't just study for studies sake. We study for our lives! Jesus said to the religious scholars of his day...

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." John 5:39-40



Disciples study God's Word to learn about Jesus so that we can have life. And as we study both the Old Testament that spoke prophetically of Jesus' coming and the New Testament that speaks of the fulfillment of those prophecies in his life, death, resurrection and coming again, we find life in Jesus! God's Word, the Bible, is our source of truth about the One who has given us life. And as we study his word, our lives are renewed, strengthened and directed.

Fifth, being a disciple of Jesus means that...

We believe in Jesus

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” John 1:47-50

It's not enough to simply study, we must come to believe in Jesus. Remember, that's the key to life in Jesus' name as John tells us later in the Gospel. We started our time in this Gospel with his words in chapter 20...

“these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

When Jesus told Nathanael that he had seen him “under the fig tree” even before Philip had invited him to come and meet him, Nathanael realized that Jesus was all that Philip had told him and more!

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God!” It was commonly understood in Nathanael's day that the Messiah would be “a son of God” as God had promised to David. When God had promised David that a king would always reign on his throne the LORD had said of David's heir...

“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” 2 Samuel 7:14

Nathanael may well have understood “Son of God” in this more limited, messianic sense, as a man specially anointed by God, but he also may have spoken better than he knew. As we shall see as we continue our study in John's Gospel, John expands on Jesus' sonship to include identity and intimacy with the Father. John tells us that Jesus...

**“was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”
John 5:18**



“You are the King of Israel!” The next time Jesus was called this was the day he entered Jerusalem (12:13) to begin his march to the cross, the resurrection and our salvation. Nathanael believed everything he knew about Jesus. He believed! And because he believed in Jesus, he had life from this moment and forever! Disciples respond to what we know about Jesus with belief and trust and faith.

Finally, being a disciple of Jesus means that...

We anticipate more from Jesus!

“You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” John 1:50-51

Nathanael had much more to learn about Jesus and Jesus had much more to tell him. We’re only at the beginning of John’s story about Jesus but already Nathanael may have stumbled upon a truth about Jesus that is even greater than he comprehends. Jesus is “the Son of God” in more ways than he could grasp at this moment.

But disciples know that Jesus is always beyond our grasp! We know that he always has “greater things” to show us and teach us about himself. Jesus speaks of “the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” He’s referring to a moment in the life of Jacob that’s found in Book of Genesis.

Jacob was on the run from his brother Esau. He had deceived their father, Isaac, into give him the birthright the belonged to Esau and Esau was out to get him! As he ran, he stopped to sleep and in his sleep ...

“he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it!” Genesis 28:12

In Jacob’s dream there was a ladder on which the angels moved, but in Jesus’ word to Nathanael “the Son of Man” was one on whom the angels ascended and descended. Jesus is saying that he is the link between heaven and earth. He is “the Son of Man” who will open heaven. And how will he open heaven for us? Jesus said...

“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” John 3:13-15



When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, heaven was opened for you and me. By believing in him, life with God becomes ours! Nathanael was going to see so much more! John, Andrew, Peter & Philip saw the “Son of Man” lifted up to die; they believed, and eternal life is there’s. What incredible glory! What wonder! All contained in Jesus, the Son of Man.

As we journey through this Gospel we will see more and more wonderful things about Jesus. And disciples of Jesus long for more! We want to know him more! We anticipate more from Jesus! The Puritan leader, John Robinson, in his farewell message to the pilgrims who were leaving Europe for the new world, told them that he was confident that **“the Lord had more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word.”** Disciples anticipate that Jesus will teach them more.

Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian, created one of the greatest intellectual achievements of Western civilization in his Summa Theologica. It's a massive work: thirty-eight treatises, three thousand articles, ten thousand objections. Thomas tried to gather into one coherent whole all of truth. What a great undertaking: anthropology, science, ethics, psychology, political theory and theology, all under God.

On December 6, 1273, Thomas abruptly stopped his work. While at worship he caught a glimpse of eternity, and suddenly he knew that all his efforts to describe God fell so far short that he decided never to write again.

When his secretary, Reginald, tried to encourage him to do more writing, he said, "Reginald, I can do no more. Such things have been revealed to me that all I have written seems as so much straw."

Firm in his resolve, he wrote not another word and died a year later.⁵

Some years ago, a man I know very well, in the fact, he had a hand in leading me to the Lord many years ago, was worshipping in the church where I served as a youth pastor. After the service, he told me that during the service he’d had an experience with God that moved him beyond speech. The Lord showed him something wonderful that he’d never understood before and he couldn’t put it into words.

Disciples anticipate more from Jesus. And Jesus, by his grace and goodness, is ready to move us deeper and higher, and closer and fuller, and show us greater things about himself. I had opportunity this week to share this prayer with someone in need and I close by sharing it with you all this morning. My prayer for you, fellow disciples of Jesus, is that our God...

⁵ "Reasons to Fear Easter," Preaching Today, Tape No. 116. © 2010 PreachingToday.com



**“according to the riches of his glory ... may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”
Ephesians 3:16-19**

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song:** Lamb of God
- **Benediction**

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21