

## “What’s a Disciple?”—Matthew 28:19-20

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “What’s a Disciple?”, is Matthew 28:19-20 → Jesus said: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

When you hear the word “disciple” what thoughts come to your mind? For most Christians they may think of a follower of Jesus, more specifically one of the twelve disciples. In the Greek world, philosophers, religious leaders, and mystery cults also attracted people, many times referred to as their “disciples.” A person became a disciple as he sought out a teacher to follow and learn his principles for living. A disciple is basically a student, pupil or learner.

Thus, in Jesus’ day many of the famous rabbis in Judaism had their disciples who studied under them. The word “rabbi” means “my teacher.” The apostle Paul was *educated at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel according*

to the strict manner of the law of the Old Testament (cf. Acts 22:3). Rabbi Gamaliel is described in Acts 5:34 as *a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people*. John the Baptizer also had disciples (cf. Matthew 9:14; 11:2; Luke 7:18; 11:1; John 1:35; 3:25), one of whom we know became an apostle—*Andrew, Simon Peter's brother* (cf. John 1:40).

The Gospels and Acts are the only New Testament books which use the word disciple, ninety percent of the time referring to those who followed Jesus, listened to His teachings and even believed in Him as the Messiah. However, Jesus put forth a radical perspective of being His disciple, much different than the traditional perspectives of the rabbi in their day. Instead of simply being a rabbi or teacher conveying information academically to pass on to others, Jesus demanded a life of the denial of self, the willingness to take up the cross of suffering and persecution for His name's sake (cf. Matthew 16:24), and obedience to His teaching flowing from a total love for Him (cf. John 14:15). Such a commitment of discipleship, combined with Jesus' teaching about Himself as being sent from heaven by God, proved a stumbling block to some. John 6:66 says that *many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him*. They quit.

From His many disciples, Jesus *chose . . . twelve, whom He named apostles* (cf. Luke 6:13). It was eleven of these apostles who gathered with Him before His ascension into heaven and spoke the words of our text,

commonly referred to as the Great Commission. What were they commanded to do? He says in verse 19 of our text: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*. They were being sent by Jesus (“apostle” means “sent one”) to **make disciples**. They were to gather around themselves students to teach and be their rabbis? Isn’t this quite a tall order for some fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot, and a bunch of other ragamuffins, described in Scripture as *uneducated, common men* (cf. Acts 4:13)? We must be thankful that it wasn’t dependent upon their power, intelligence, education, abilities and so forth. They were simply instructed to be faithful in two tasks.

Notice the *therefore* in this instruction. Whenever you encounter the word “therefore” in Scripture it is crucial to ask what it’s there for. In the previous verse Jesus had stated that *all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him* (cf. Matthew 28:18). Having accomplished the salvation of people for *all nations* by obeying God’s plan perfectly, He reigns as the exalted Lord of heaven and earth. *Therefore* He **will** bring that salvation to all people through visible means distributed by His disciples (i.e. His Church).

Our text mentions the two activities connected with visible means through which He will bring this salvation for *all nations* by the power of the Holy Spirit. He instructs them in verse 19 to baptize people *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. As we remain

faithful to bringing people to the water based upon Christ's command in our text, the Holy Spirit enacts a new birth in people's hearts. They are *born of water and the Spirit* (cf. John 3:5), connected to Jesus' death and resurrection (cf. Romans 6:3-4) *which . . . saves you* (cf. 1 Peter 3:21-22). Through such visible means, not by just going through some motions of having water applied to you, the Holy Spirit produces a new life in you. Titus 3:5-7 says *God saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* Therefore, we must be faithful in administering this means of grace **based on the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

A disciple is not simply a baptized person. Rather, a disciple is a baptized person who continues to hold to the teachings of Jesus. Jesus says in John 8:31-32 → *If you **abide** in My word, you are **truly My disciples**, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* Thus, the other task to which Jesus calls His disciples is expressed in verse 20 of our text: *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.* Discipleship is living the justified life in Jesus, sanctified by the Holy Spirit for obedience to His teaching. You have the privilege in this day and age to encounter the teachings of Jesus in the

Bible which is readily accessible to you in many ways. In worship with the gathered believers you hear, speak and sing God's Word to and with one another. God's Word is not bound but has free course and is also shared through various avenues of media. Never underestimate the mutual conversation and encouragement with fellow disciples based upon God's written Word either.

The Word of God is a means through which the Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son, so that you can have a proper relationship with God as your heavenly Father. Even though disciples of Jesus have a total commitment to live in obedience to Him they still deal with the presence of sin in their hearts and the world around them. Where do you turn when you have broken commitment with Christ by your disobedience to His Word? The Holy Spirit brings you to the Word in the conviction of your sins. Listen to what 2 Timothy 2:11-13 says: *The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, **He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.*** Did you hear that? **He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself.** His Person & Work is completely bound up in doing all that was necessary for your forgiveness of sins held out to you anew in the Word **all the way into eternity!**

This is *the truth . . . you will know* in His written Word which *will set*

*you free*. It releases you from your burden of guilt and sin. The devil, the world and your lingering sinful nature strive to deceive you into discrediting the work of Jesus for you, striving to you make you give up and despair of your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. They will tell you that you are no Christian; that you are worthless; that God could never keep forgiving a sinner such as yourself; and that Jesus has abandoned such a failure. Jesus holds out the written Word reassuring you: *behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (verse 20). He tells you in that Word that you are His special child through baptism (cf. Galatians 3:26; 1 John 3:1); He tells you in that Word that you are worth so much to Him that He laid down His life for you (cf. Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:10); He tells you in that Word that forgiveness is always yours in repentance and faith (cf. John 6:37; 1 John 1:8-9); He tells you in that Word that even in your failures His power is manifested (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). Can you see why Jesus instructs us disciples to *abide in His word*? Can you see why it is so essential to *grow in the **grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ***, as 2 Peter 3:18 tells you?

What's a disciple? It is you . . . and you . . . and you . . . baptized children of God who bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others both corporately (i.e. as a congregation of believers in this place), and individually (i.e. in the daily vocations, relationships and conversations of your life). It is you . . . and you . . . and you . . . baptized children of

God who “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” God’s written Word in order to abide by it in your daily life. It is you . . . and you . . . and you . . . baptized children of God in whom the Holy Spirit creates, sustains and strengthens you in your discipleship daily. Amen.

*Not by might, nor by power,  
but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*

(Zechariah 4:6)

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.