



**“Following Jesus:  
disciples of the King”**  
by **Pastor Tim Dodson**  
at **JF Believers church**  
in **Menomonie, Wisconsin**  
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**Luke 6:12-19** Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: 14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; 15 Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; 16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor. 17 And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, 18 as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. 19 And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all.

There is a lot of talk within the greater church today about this concept or idea of a “disciple.” But like so often is the case, especially in our world of fluid word meanings, the principle of a disciple is effectively so nebulous that it is thus abused in the sense that it is tortured to mean whatever we want it to mean. I would guess that at any given time we could canvas a room of people, asking them what the definition of a disciple is and we would get a multitude of answers covering the spectrum of ideals. We might use a plethora of adjectives to attempt the task, even though we see attributes of an adjective in the word itself, along with both verb and noun. It’s a concept that for many of us can be hard to get our hands around. And then today we read that Jesus... recognizing these men as disciples, chose 12 as apostles, which can only muddy the picture even more.

We might however agree on a few of the descriptive attributes even in the fog of definition. I think we all would agree that the individual who is indeed a disciple is something *more*. More than merely a ‘sinner’s prayer’ convert. More than a church goer. More than a mere ‘novice.’ What do those we regard as the “experts” say? Alan Hirsch defines a disciple as “*one who follows Jesus and becomes increasingly like Him.*” Bill Hull says a disciple is a “*committed follower of Jesus Christ...a person who demonstrates belief by action.*” Paul Williams...leader of the “Orchard Ministry Group” says “*I believe discipleship, at its essence, is finding someone a few steps in front of you on the spiritual journey and following them.*”

We could sight scripture with examples of ‘denying oneself’ ... ‘taking up your cross’ ... and employ spiritual terms like ‘service’, ‘obedience’, ‘loving’, etc. We could incorporate concepts like ‘student’ and ‘committed.’ But these 12 men did all that and more. They literally *attached* themselves to Jesus and His life. It wasn’t just an adherence on some level to His principles and teachings. It was a bonding between the Master and the student.

We must carefully point out that in the passage before us, Jesus chooses apostles. While it seems that He personally and carefully chose apostles, *people* decide to be a disciple. An apostle is a messenger... and specifically in this case, one ‘sent out’ by Christ personally. I am one to avoid the use of the term “apostle” in the modern vernacular as I have found it universally true that when used today it is always an attempt to exercise undue positional authority over others instead of the humble servant heart of the “mere” disciple. We love titles, but eschew their ramifications.

Certainly every detail of reality and time is profoundly ordered by God, so saying that we ‘decide’ to be a disciple does not mean that he or she somehow stands outside the cosmic sphere of God. But again, we *choose* to be a disciple or not to be. The label “disciple” is not reserved for the educated, the denominationally anointed, or some other earthly criteria. It appears that the standing of disciple is available for anyone so willing to be one.

Imagine being one of these guys. Put yourself in their shoes for a moment. They were just ordinary guys! If anything, they were extraordinarily dull and wholly average. Just like you and me they had jobs, families, hobbies, and social lives. Back when they met Jesus they were *called*. A call we all receive when we meet Jesus! And then today in this passage they were “**chosen**.” Little did they know what lay ahead. None of us ever really do we when sign up for following Jesus so closely. None could have comprehended how life was going to change so dramatically. All the aspects of Christ—His teaching, compassion, and wisdom; His life, death, and resurrection; His power, authority, and calling—would reshape the rest of their lives.

A working definition of “disciples” is: *“one who moves closer to Jesus as a learner, follower, and lover, together with other disciples.*

These ordinary men would go from fishing in obscurity to standing before some of the most powerful rulers on earth. They would inexplicably be accused of “*turn[ing] the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6). What began as an adventure would radically transform their lives, and ultimately, the world, and would cost them everything they knew as their lives.

The first and most obvious action they embraced upon their decision for Christ, was they literally began going everywhere He went and doing everything He did. And in the process they began to look and think a lot like the one they were following. And the very real truth is that it’s impossible to actually be a disciple and not end up becoming like the person you are following. Jesus said in Luke 6:40, “*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*” Essentially, that is the point of *being* a disciple.

Yet somewhere along the way we have got the idea that a person can be a “Christian” without actually *being like* Christ. A “Christian” without being a disciple: a “follower” who doesn’t follow. Yet the followers of Christ weren’t even *called* Christians until the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts...long after Jesus went home to Dad. Jesus Himself never even used the term “christian.” Up until that point in Acts, they went by different names: “saints,” “brothers,” “*disciples of Christ.*” It is generally accepted that the term “Christian” was given as a derogatory term! Even in the term “Christian” we get a grander picture that is generally presented, because that term in itself means “little Christ.”

How can one really believe that to be a Christian simply is a matter of adopting the title and attending church on a fairly regular basis? Yet there are so many people who actually try to live this way! And because no one wants to be the one who tells the king that he “has no clothes,” the farce has continued to the point of now finding a historical foothold in a generation of young adult believers: a whole generation that has essentially lost sight of what it really means to be a follower of Jesus. It’s not that the concept is difficult to understand, but living it so profoundly affects the path of our lives that few actually will live it though we all want the blessings of standing that close to the Master.

Because of such, the conversations and discussions have been changed. The ‘debates’ have been altered so as to now encompass the idea of perceived “options” in our “spiritual negotiations” with the King. I have heard statements like “*ya...I’m not able to make that kind of commitment...it’s just more than I am willing to commit to right now...I just don’t believe that I need to do that much.....give that much...be that much.*” Statements that say “*I’m a Christian, but I’m not radical about it!*” Yet we know clearly that *JESUS* was radical about it, so....?

We have “designer Christianity” now. The old Burger King slogan of “Have it your way” has been stolen by Christendom, and has become *our* battle cry. We simply “purchase” our kingdom seat now, and then “order the options”...what we need and what we don’t...what we like and what we don’t...what level of comfort we can get, etc. But we must understand, it was never so in the Bible...it was never so with *these* disciples!

One of the first messages that Jesus gave was “*Repent...for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*” I find few ‘options’ in *that* directive! So the first call...the first message Jesus gave...before decisions were made and commitments uttered, was that word: *repent*. The idea that that word so vividly paints is a picture of a “turning.” A *turning* away from not just *sin*, but the very life we wanted and planned for on our own, unto a life of following a new road. A road that Jesus was walking. And He was never going to walk *our* road, no matter how much we may pretend. No matter how much “revisionist” altering of Christianity that is attempted, there is only one road that Jesus Himself ever offered and it was only the road of “*Come and follow Me.*”

Matthew 22:37 clarifies the life and path of the disciple: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.*” A disciple of Christ is a worshipper, a servant, and a witness. And it seems that nothing will irritate our pluralistic society more than being an exclusive and radical worshiper of Jesus. Lots of people are a-ok with the concept Jesus (at least *their* concept of him...again, one most often with the sharp edges filed off), and even following the “ways” of Jesus, when it leaves out the exclusivity part. The world is fine with Jesus the Moral Teacher, the Nice Guy, the Judge-Not-Lest-You-Be-Judged Motivational Speaker. But that is not the real Jesus. That’s a manmade figure ...one invented by humanity to tell us we are generally ok people.

One of the clear attributes of a disciple is a true disciple *makes* more disciples and/or commits his life to trying. Jesus commissioned us to “go” ...hence there is an innate action and sacrifice on the part of the disciple. Such a life is not earthly “convenient.” We are called to “go 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” (Matthew 28:19–20).

One thing is sure in all of this matter: *following Jesus is going to cost you on the earthly realm.* The cost of being a disciple certainly cost these 12 men. In most cases we only have second-hand reports and legends and they are not always reliable, but it is safe to say that the apostles went far and wide as messengers of Christ. They *lived* for Christ and they ultimately *died* for Christ. An early legend says they cast lots and divided up the world to determine who would go where, so all could hear about Jesus. They suffered greatly for their faith and in most cases met violent deaths on account of their bold witness. Why would they do such a thing? What possible motivation could have driven them to such a faith level? It wasn’t the paycheck or the retirement benefits! There can be no other explanation than *love*. They really loved Jesus and they loved mankind. They understood the gospel and grasped the magnitude of it. Such was not merely a verbal affirmation...they *loved in action*. Such is an important aspect in an age where we have seemingly lost all real hold on such a concept.

History tells us that PETER and PAUL were both martyred in Rome about 66 AD, during the persecution under Emperor Nero. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified, upside down at his request, since he did not feel he was worthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

ANDREW went to the "land of the man-eaters," in what became the Soviet Union. Christians there claim him as the first to bring the gospel to their land. He also preached in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, and in Greece, where he is said to have been crucified.

"Doubting" THOMAS was probably most active in the area east of Syria. Tradition has him preaching as far east as India, where the ancient Marthoma Christians revere him as their founder. They claim that he died there when pierced through with the spears of four soldiers.

PHILIP possibly had a powerful ministry in Carthage in North Africa and then in Asia Minor, where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul. In retaliation the proconsul had Philip arrested and cruelly put to death.

MATTHEW the tax collector and writer of a Gospel, ministered in Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the oldest reports say he was not martyred, while others say he was stabbed to death in Ethiopia.

BARTHOLOMEW had widespread missionary travels attributed to him by tradition: to India with Thomas, back to Armenia, and also to Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of how he met his death as a martyr for the gospel.

JAMES the son of Alphaeus, is one of at least three James referred to in the New Testament. There is some confusion as to which is which, but this James is reckoned to have ministered in Syria. The Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

SIMON THE ZEALOT, so the story goes, ministered in Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

MATTHIAS was the apostle chosen to replace Judas. Tradition sends him to Syria with Andrew and to death by burning.

JOHN is the only one of the company generally thought to have died a natural death from old age. He was the leader of the church in the Ephesus area and is said to have taken care of Mary the mother of Jesus in his home. During Domitian's persecution in the middle 90's, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. There he is credited with writing the last book of the New Testament--the Revelation. An early Latin tradition has him escaping unhurt after being cast into boiling oil at Rome.

Anyway you spin it, this is no happy ending Hollywood film. Certainly it also not the best recruitment film! The irony of the whole matter is that in our age where the press loves to repeatedly print how the Christian church is getting smaller and less influential in the political realm, seldom do we stop and consider that maybe that's a good thing. The scriptures say his "way is narrow and few shall find it." And just as it was prophesied, the kingdom of God today has grown from the tiniest seed...likened to the mustard seed, and grown into a "large tree." Luke 13:18 - 19 *"Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."* That may sound like a good thing until we consider that a mustard plant, under the best circumstances, never grows naturally into a 'large tree,' but is, in its natural state just a moderate sized bush, and that the "birds of the air" are generally presented as demons in scripture.

**"When Christ calls a man, He bids him to come and die." *Dietrich Bonhoeffer***