

## **“Following Him: What It Means to Be a Disciple”**

Matthew 4:12-25

This passage that we now come to in our study of Matthew’s gospel records the account of Jesus calling His first disciples, who in response to that call, drop everything and follow Him.

What does it mean to be a disciple, an authentic follower of Jesus Christ?

**Kyle Idleman** - *“I think Jesus has a lot of fans these days. Fans who cheer for Him when things are going well, but who walk away when it’s a difficult season. Fans who sit safely in the stands cheering, but they know nothing of the sacrifice and pain of the field. Fans of Jesus who know all about Him, but they don’t know Him. But Jesus was never interested in having fans. When He defines what kind of relationship He wants, ‘Enthusiastic Admirer’ isn’t an option. My concern is that many of our churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week all the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in truly following Him. The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren’t actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them.”*

A disciple is a FOLLOWER, not simply a FAN.

Long before believers were called Christians, they were first called disciples. In the New Testament, the word ‘Christian’ is used three times to describe the followers of Jesus. However, the word ‘disciple’ is used 269 times in reference to them.

In Acts, ‘disciple’ becomes synonymous with ‘Christian.’

What does it mean to be a disciple? The answer is very simple:

**“Disciple”** - *to be a student or apprentice; one who devotes himself to the disciplines of another*

**Francis Chan** - *“When Jesus called His first disciples, they may not have understood where Jesus would take them or the impact it would have on their lives, but they knew what it meant to follow. They took Jesus’ call literally and began going everywhere He went and doing everything He did. It’s impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person.”*

These disciples INSTANTLY forsake everything to follow Jesus. Matthew tells us that they immediately turn their backs on everything else and follow Jesus.

These disciples IMITATE Christ with their life. What He does, they do. Where He goes, they go.

These disciples INFLUENCE their world with the gospel. After spending some three and a half years with Jesus, He sends them out to impact the world.

**David Platt** - *"In response to this passage, we should be asking ourselves the question, 'Am I following Him?' No more important question can be asked."*

It is easy for someone to simply SAY that they believe in Jesus. But talk is very cheap. In our modern understanding, we tend to define belief as the acceptance of something as real or true. But biblically, belief is more than simply acknowledging something as true; it also involves a commitment to follow.

Many PROFESS publicly a belief that they do not POSSESS personally.

**Matthew 7:21** - **"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."**

According to this passage, four central truths emerge to show us what it really means to be a disciple. According to Matthew, a disciple is one who:

#### **1. REPENTS of sin and embraces Christ's gospel (4:17)**

*"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"*

Jesus began His public ministry after being tempted by Satan.

Verses 12-16 explain that Jesus relocated from Nazareth to the city of Capernaum in the region of Galilee which was referred to as 'Galilee of the Gentiles.' In Galilee, there was a mixed population of people who were despised and looked down upon by the other citizens of Judea.

**Luke 19:10** - **"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."**

Matthew shows us how this was in direct fulfillment of prophecy, quoting from Isaiah 9:1-2.

**v. 15-16** - **"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who have sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."**

Matthew explains that Jesus' arrival in Galilee brought light into a dark place, and brought life into a dead place. We are told in verse 23 how He specifically did this:

**v. 23 - "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people."**

Note the three-fold emphasis of His ministry:

- TEACHING in the synagogue
- PREACHING the gospel
- HEALING various sicknesses

**"Various Diseases"** - *all manner of sickness; no case was too difficult for Him*

Disciples pattern their ministry after Christ:

- 'Teaching' involves the instruction of other believers.
- 'Preaching' the gospel involves evangelism among those who are lost.
- 'Healing' involves personal ministry and aid to those who have various needs.

This is how we bring 'light' to a dark place.

**Warren Wiersbe** - *"The result of these great miracles was a tremendous fame for Jesus, and a great following from many areas."*

What was the subject matter of Jesus' message to people?

**v. 17 - "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

Like John who prepared the way for Him, Jesus also proclaimed an urgent message of repentance.

Repentance is DEFINED as a total change of heart and action.

**"Repent"** - *means to turn around; a change in direction; a change of heart that results in a change of behavior*

To 'repent' means to change one's mind and act on that change.

Just like John, Jesus preached a message of repentance in which He called upon people to surrender their lives and turn to God, to have a change of heart, and to live a completely different life.

Keep in mind that biblical repentance involves three key elements:

- CONFESSION of sin
- CONTRITION over sin
- CONVERSION from sin

**David Platt** - *“Repentance is a rich biblical term that signifies an elemental transformation in someone’s mind, heart, and life. When people repent, they turn from walking in one direction to running in the opposite direction. From that point forward, they think differently, believe differently, feel differently, love differently, and live differently.”*

There is such a thing as false or sham repentance.

**2 Corinthians 7:9-11** - **“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.”**

In other words, their repentance had resulted in a changed attitude and a transformed life.

### **“Seven Myths of Repentance” (Richard Owen Roberts)**

#### 1. Sorrow equals repentance

- *People think that they have come to repentance because they have been overwhelmed with sorrow for their sins*
- *Esau found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears (Heb. 12:17)*

#### 2. Self-preservation is repentance

- *Fear often provokes sudden changes in people’s lives without repentance*
- *Practices “foxhole religion”*

3. Penance and repentance are equal

- *It is the idea that you can sin and “make it up” to God by doing some religious deed*

4. Reformation is repentance

- *The idea of “turning over a new leaf” and resolving to do better next time*
- *Herod liked to hear John the Baptist preach, but gave the order to have him executed (Mark 6:14-29)*

5. Repentance and self-defense can exist together

- *Whenever a person seems to be repentant yet they defend themselves over their actions, you can be sure that such repentance is not genuine; seeks to justify oneself*
- *Being self-defensive is proof of pride, not brokenness*

6. Repentance can be selective

- *The idea of refining one’s sins so that they are more culturally acceptable; finding some sins more repulsive than others*

7. Repentance eliminates the consequences of sin

- There are always consequences and repercussions for the decisions that we make; repentance does not remove these

What is true repentance? Repentance is renouncing a former way of life for a new way of life. It is evidence of the transforming work of God at work in a person’s life.

**Psalm 51:10 - “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”**

**Jeremiah 24:7 - “Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.”**

**Ezekiel 36:26-27 - “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”**

This is where following Jesus begins. As God's Spirit brings conviction of sin and does what only He can do, a person repents of his or her sin and places their trust in Jesus.

A person declares their repentance and faith publicly through believer's baptism.

Repentance is DEMONSTRATED in the lives of these disciples.

**v. 18-20 - "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. Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' They immediately left their nets and followed Him."**

They let go of everything else and followed Jesus.

Disciples live with one end in mind--to honor their King.

## **2. RELIES fully upon Christ's grace (4:18-19)**

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

That Jesus called them had nothing to do with the good in them, but rather had everything to do with the grace in Him.

Notice from the passage:

He INITIATES the call to follow.

He INSTRUCTS and shapes His followers.

He INTENDS for His followers to reach others.

## **3. REJECTS this world to follow Christ's person (4:20-22)**

*"They immediately left their nets and followed Him."*

**David Platt** - *"There is only one conclusion to draw when we hear the invitation 'Follow Me:' Jesus is worthy of far more than church attendance and casual association. We have such a dangerous tendency to reduce Jesus to a poor, puny Savior who is just begging for you and me to accept Him into our lives. As if Jesus needs to be accepted by us! Jesus doesn't need our acceptance; He is infinitely worthy of all glory in the whole universe, and He doesn't need us at all. We need Him."*

#### **4. REACHES out to others through Christ's mission (4:23-25)**

*“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him--from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.”*

God's Word is not meant to simply be analyzed; God's Word is meant to be applied. Disciples do what they see their Master doing.

We are to imitate Christ with our life.