

Foundations of Discipleship: Following Jesus

In my previous series of articles from John 1, John the Baptist introduced Jesus with the phrase, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Since early in this chapter, John the apostle has been pointing to the “witness” of John the Baptist to Jesus as well as John’s attitude of humility.

As we’ve seen, John the Baptist had a huge following. Mark 1:5 declares, “All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan.” Although John had many followers — and although some men would be prone to let that popularity bring about pride — John says, “I am not the Christ” (John 1:20) “He who comes after me ranks before me” (John 1:30) “... but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” (John 1:26-27)

The text that’s before us today is an accounting of the third day of the first week of Jesus’ public ministry as recorded in John’s gospel. As we begin this passage today, we’ll get another look at the humility of John the Baptist which is meant to serve as an example for all of us in our Christian lives. There are a couple of other things that I want to note that will be important to set this passage in its context.

We’re going to get a look at Jesus’ initial interaction with the men who would form the foundation of his closest disciples. In addition to that, we want to keep in mind that this text will give us an early look at three men — two, in particular — who would be the beginning foundations of the New Testament church (Ephesians 2:20).

John gives us this passage in layers; the first layer is very straightforward, and yet there is, I believe, another level of truth that we all need to see, clearly taught but embedded a little deeper in this passage. The outline that I’m using for this text will show us some important truths connected to what it means to be a genuine disciple of Jesus. Let’s begin with our first heading: ***Genuine Disciples of Jesus: Follow Him.***

This is just to say that following Jesus is one important and foundational aspect of what it means to be a Christian. “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.” (1:35-37) You’ll notice immediately that the statement “Behold, the Lamb of God” is meant to be a strong declaration pointing to the humility of John. In other words, John is confirming that Jesus is the one that he’s been preparing the way for.

There’s not the slightest hint of jealousy when these two disciples who have been following John turn and follow Jesus. In fact, just the opposite: They follow Jesus because that’s exactly what John wants them to do. To rightly understand John’s teaching is to understand the need for these men to leave John and follow Jesus. John has people that he’s been baptizing, but it all points

away from him and points to Jesus. John is giving us a foundational example of the importance of Jesus being first in our lives.

Everything else that we are and that we do must line up behind Jesus. He must be the priority. As John the Baptist will declare later in this gospel, “He must increase but I must decrease.” (3:30) This is something that we’ll be doing all our lives. We must continually be taken down off thrones of our own making and recognize that if Jesus is our Savior, he is, and must be acknowledged to be, the King of our lives.

I want to call our attention to two words in these verses. The word translated “disciple” is simply a word that means “pupil” or “learner.” The word itself has no connotation of commitment. Someone may be a pupil for a while and simply walk away when things get hard (John 6:53-60). Second is the word translated “followed.” The same thing holds true here. The word may speak of just following someone to a temporal destination, but for true disciples the word would carry the much deeper meaning of full life commitment. John, in this gospel, will often use the word “follow” meaning “to pursue as a disciple” (1:43; 8:12), but sometimes it’s merely used as speaking of the temporary act of “following.” (11:31) What we want to see in our passage today is a picture of small beginnings. At this point these two disciples are interested, but they’re still asking questions.

Although we’re looking at small beginnings, we can still say that genuine disciples of Jesus follow him, and we’ll see that this is what these two men will eventually do. In this article, we’ve looked at one very important foundational truth for genuine disciples. Genuine disciples of Jesus follow him.

And even though that’s true, none of us will ever follow Jesus perfectly. May we continue to draw strength from knowing that we rest — not in our own imperfect obedience to God but in the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. And because this is true, and because God’s gracious gift of salvation necessarily means a positive change of the desires of our heart (Psalm 119:10-11; Hebrews 10:16), by his grace, we should want to follow Jesus, more and more, every day of our lives.

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