

The Cost of Christian Discipleship

In my most recent article from this series, we began our look at foundations in Christian discipleship. We saw that genuine disciples of Jesus follow him.

The point is that it's not enough to be merely a "generally good" or "generally moral" person. Genuine Christians seek to learn from scripture what's taught about our sin and the need for forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Anyone who is truly forgiven will follow Jesus as a pattern of life. Clearly, no one will do this perfectly, but a wonderful part of our salvation is that Christians, by grace, have been given new hearts and new desires for the things of God.

A natural overflow of God's amazing grace is that we want to be more like Jesus.

As we come back to our passage today from John 1:35-42, we want to look at another foundational aspect of discipleship.

Genuine Disciples of Jesus: Hear and Respond to His Voice

"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?'" (1:38)

Again, John uses a word that can have a straightforward meaning, but it can also have a deeper meaning.

I want to look now at the word translated "seeking." Interestingly, these are the first words spoken by Jesus in John's gospel. The New International Version translates this phrase, "What do you want?" I would suggest that the English Standard Version translation — which reads, "What are you seeking?" — is the better rendering of the Greek text. The Greek word translated "seeking" can carry the plain meaning of "looking for something." (e.g., Mark 1:37) But, having said that, it can also carry a much deeper meaning such as, "What do you desire to possess?"

An example of this can be found in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." In his very subtle and nuanced way John, in this gospel, is getting at deeper, even eternal issues. "What is it you desire most of all?"

One thing that lends support to this is that the Greek word translated "seeking" is in the present tense. This means that Jesus is not merely asking these men what they're seeking in that moment only but rather, "What are you seeking in an ongoing way?"

To say this is not to suggest that the disciples fully understood what Jesus was saying in that moment. But, again, we see John giving us a very straightforward meaning and another meaning that's subtle (i.e., somewhat less obvious).

Look now at Verse 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."

John continues marking time, not only in days but now he's marking the time of day. The "10th hour" of the day indicates that it's 4 o'clock in the afternoon. What did Jesus teach them? John doesn't give us Jesus' words, but these men were totally convinced that John had told the truth about Jesus.

Early 20th century pastor and author Arthur Pink, in his book entitled “The Sovereignty of God,” writes that the words of Jesus are so important and so valuable that those who listen are, by grace, set “free from ignorance, free from prejudice, free from error, free from the wiles of Satan, free from the power of evil: and if the truth is not ‘known’ then such freedom will not be enjoyed.”

The truths that we’re seeing early in John’s gospel are also taught later in John’s gospel. For example, Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) So, then, genuine disciples of Jesus, hear and respond to His voice. We want to look now at the fact that:

Genuine Disciples of Jesus: Have a Desire to Tell Others about Him

When, by the grace of God, we truly come to believe the words of Jesus, we cannot keep the good news to ourselves.

“One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ).” (1:40-41)

At this point, what might have appeared to be more subtle is now made clear. These men have found the Messiah — the Christ — that the Old Testament prophets said would come. Notice that this is the first time that Andrew is identified as one of the two disciples of John that we saw in Verse 35. Although the second of the two is not identified, it’s almost universally agreed that this is our first time that John the apostle places himself into the text.

Although we don’t have the time in this article to do an in-depth study of Andrew, what we find is that he’s usually in the shadow of his older — and more famous — brother, Peter. But before we touch briefly on Peter, let me just mention a few things that John’s gospel teaches us about Andrew.

If you look at the scriptural accounts of Andrew, two things stand out in this man’s life: First of all, Andrew was always taking people to Jesus.

Here in Verse 42, we see Andrew bringing Peter to Jesus. In John 6:8-9, it was Andrew who brought the boy to Jesus who had “five barley loaves and two fish.” From that meager fare — and a miracle from Jesus — it’s estimated that at least 20,000 men, women and children were fed and that there was a substantial amount left over (6:12- 14). In one other instance in John’s gospel, it was Andrew and Philip who brought some Greeks to see Jesus who wanted to meet him.

So, Andrew has a heart for taking people to Jesus. We’ll learn more about Andrew — as well as learn some things about his better-known brother, Peter — in my next article. Along with that, we’ll continue to call attention from John 1 to the fact that there’ll always be a cost to Christian discipleship.

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