

Discipleship – Part 1

2 Peter 1:16-19

Today, I want us to begin a two, perhaps three-part study about “discipleship”, intentional efforts through which fellow believers like you and me reach into each other’s lives, training and encouraging one another in “who Christ is” and in “how to trust Him” with all our hearts.

“Discipleship” is what we find taking place in these words of 1st and 2nd Peter. Listen for a moment, beginning in verse 16.

¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19 (ESV))

As we read these word, we can recall some of the last words of instruction given to the Apostle Peter by the Lord Jesus. Recall that there on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called Peter aside and with strong and emphatic words, exhorted Him to “feed and to care for His sheep”, to disciple them.

¹⁵ . . . Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. (John 21:15-17 (ESV))

Folks, imagine this for a moment if you will. This is not just one friend saying to another friend, “Peter, my time and my mission is over here on the earth and I’ll need to leave soon. After I am gone, I’ll need for you to take us my mission and carry it forward. Do you love me enough to do that for me, to make sure that my beloved sheep are fed and cared for?”

To the ordinary reader, it may seem that that was all that was taking place. And to some extent, it was. But it was also so much more! By this time Peter knew who Jesus really was, and that Jesus' commands were more than just a friend passing along a request to another friend. Peter knew that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the Living God", the Creator of the universe, the Almighty God. And that the church that Jesus was now putting into place was the single most important endeavor that mankind would ever experience.

Jesus was saying, "Peter, it begins here and it is to be carried forward to the ends of the earth. Just as I have made disciples of you and the others, now you must be faithful to step on forward and do the same, to make disciples for me where ever you go.

¹⁸ . . . "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV))

Those were the marching orders given by Jesus to His disciples. And now here some years later, in these words of our text, we find Peter being faithful to the task and to the commands and to the calling Jesus had given to him. Peter is here feeding and discipling and caring for Jesus's sheep.

As we said in earlier messages on this passage, these words are part of a second letter that Peter wrote to these folks, a group of Jewish believers who through the dispersion had been resettled in an area of Asia Minor that is now part of modern day Turkey. How these dear ones first came to their salvation in Christ, we aren't told, but they were true believers, and they were hungering for God and in need of ongoing teaching and discipleship. And that was exactly what Peter was doing with those words.

May I pause here and say to us that this is one of the greatest needs and also one of the greatest failings within the church today. There is a lot of initial evangelism that takes place both inside and outside of our churches, and rightfully so. In keeping with Jesus's command in Mark 16, we are told to

¹⁵ "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.
(Mark 16:15 (NASB))

It all begins with evangelism. Many churches, especially Baptist Churches have as part of their regular worship service, an altar call. And countless mission trips are conducted each year. And many come to know Christ as Savior and Lord through their efforts.

But once the gospel has been given and received and salvation takes place, as with these dear ones that Peter is addressing with his words, the efforts must not diminish for a moment. The next step of “discipleship” must begin immediately and be unending. “Discipleship” is absolutely essential to the life and to the growth of all newly born souls. It is through “discipleship” that a “spiritually adolescent” soul will be carried into their next steps of maturity.

And note here in the words of this passage how Peter goes about discipleship. He uses both His own “eyewitness” and he uses the “witness of the words of scripture”. In verse 16, He tells them

¹⁶ . . . we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:16-19)

While you and I have not had the wonderful privilege that Peter had of actually being face to face with Jesus, we do have an “experience” of His personal presence in the events of our own salvation. And because of that, we have a special story to tell, a kind of “eyewitness” testimony of our own about how Jesus and the Holy Spirit saved us out of our own miry pits of sin.

And we also have these scriptures, all the many prophecies in the Old Testament that prophesy about Jesus coming to the earth and doing exactly as He did, giving His life as a payment for our sins, redeeming us from our bondage to sin and to self.

And may I say this again, discipleship is so very, very important and necessary, otherwise a newly born soul will immediately begin to weaken and wither and deteriorate and then die on the vine. Am I saying that, without discipleship, a new Christian might lose their salvation? No, but something of a similar sort does seem to take place. If a newly formed branch does not begin to receive nutrients immediately, they begin to dry up and die. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 15 verse 5

⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. (John 15:5-6 (NASB))

This is why Jesus was exhorting the Apostle Peter so strongly to be faithful to disciple, to feed and to care for His sheep. Sheep are in constant need of watchful care.

May I take a moment and carry Jesus' analogy about sheep a step further. In the nature of their being, sheep are simply not able to provide for themselves. They are completely dependent upon their shepherd. They need help to be taken from pasture to pasture where they can easily find food and water, else they will perish and die.

And so it is also with all who become believers in Christ. They need immediate and constantly ongoing feeding and care. And feeding Jesus' sheep was exactly what Peter was doing. He began in verse 1 by reassuring them that they had faith and were fully saved, telling them that they had the same kind of saving faith that he himself had.

I know that we covered these thoughts in an earlier message, but may we stop again for a moment and each of us ask ourselves, are we absolutely sure that we ourselves are fully saved? 2 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that it is a right thing to do to examine ourselves to see if we are truly in the faith. Listen!

⁵ Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?
(2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV))

In our years of serving in among the young people at French Camp, they often would lapse into doubt about their salvation. And we would have to walk with them back through these scriptures to help them answer this question. One of the scriptures that we would use is one that I often quote to you regarding how believers first come to know and trust in Christ. It's found in Ecclesiastes 3, and it tells us that God has "placed eternity within the hearts of men". This is the work of the Holy Spirit, invading our hearts and minds and thoughts, making us to know that there is something beyond the natural realms of life, something mysterious and eternal in nature. And it is in that "special mystery" that we realize that there is more to life and responsibility and accountability for our daily behaviors that we need to be aware of. And if we respond to that "mystery" in the right way, we will eventually realize that we must not face that accountability on our own, that we desperately need someone to stand there for us, a Savior. And that is when the Holy Spirit leads us to the witness of these scriptures, the prophecies of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of those prophecies that we can see take place in the New Testament, the "word of God" telling us that it is Christ and Christ alone that can save us and redeem us from our sins. It is then that we place our faith and trust in Him and we are saved. That is the meaning of these words in verse 19,

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19)

Folks, this is discipleship, the remembering of all that God has done to bring us to this place in life where we now stand, the promises He made to us in the Old Testament and then the fulfillment of His promises being so evident in the gospel and the other scriptures of the New Testament. This is discipleship, continually remembering and rehearsing the truths of God to ourselves and to others who will join with us in bible studies and Sunday School and church and especially all those ordinary daily conversations that we find ourselves involved in.

Discipleship is often akin to our raising our head out of the depths of the waters of life and getting a fresh breath of air. As we know, we can't live very long without air, but neither can we live very long spiritually without a constant intake of the "spiritual air" of discipleship, learning more and more about who God is and about His plans and purposes.

We have much more to say and to learn about "discipleship", but we will close for today, and the Lord willing, pick back up here next week. Listen as we close!

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