

Be My Disciples
John 1:35-51

Our study today again brings us to those earliest days of our Lord's ministry, those days when He was first being revealed as the long-awaited Messiah. And as we will read here, it would be John the Baptist who would be the first to introduce Jesus to the world.

John, being a few months older than the Lord Jesus had begun his ministry earlier, that of baptizing and preaching the message of repentance, unveiling the plan that God had called him to carry forward. And his part was as he had just said in verse 23, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord."

And many, many people were responding to the call of the Holy Spirit and were coming to John to be baptized. And among them was the Lord Jesus. And while at first, John hesitated to baptize Jesus, saying that he himself was the one needing to be baptized, he went ahead and baptized the Lord anyway. And as he did, an amazing thing took place. Listen!

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:16-17)

Then, shortly after His baptism, the Lord Jesus began to gather some men to walk closely with Him, disciples who would learn intimate things about Him and about the special mission of salvation that He had come to earth to bring to the souls of men.

And over time as Jesus would gather many disciples to follow after Him, some of those disciples would be given even more responsibility than the others. Some of those disciples would become Apostles, men who would be given the special responsibility of carrying God's Pure and Holy truth into all the world, men who would write down and would preach and would teach these truths that we read here in these scriptures.

Why do we need to separate out the Apostles from all the many disciples? It's because they really had very, very different responsibilities.

Folks, you and I who believe in Christ and have received Him as our Savior and Lord are His disciples. But we are not His Apostles.

And yes, some denominational leaders in the modern churches call themselves Apostles, but they are not! They are not!

An Apostle is a person that God has revealed "New Truth" to. And that only took place in those beginning days of our Lord's ministry. And those men are revealed to us in the scriptures. There are no others!

Let me say that again. There are no other Apostles! Those within our modern day churches that claim to "have a word from the Lord" for us, do not. The words that are given to us within the scriptures are the only words that God has given to us. There is no other, especially no new revelations from God. And we must be careful to understand that.

And as for me, I will "flee from those people". They are not messengers from the Lord! And I fear their presence.

Dear friends, the devil is so very crafty. He can cause the most innocent looking person to be able to give you and me his "lies". And neither we nor the person giving those "lies" might be aware of the devil's involvement. So, for me, I just quickly run from those people.

With all of that being said, may we return to our scripture and study about how the Lord Jesus chose the disciples who would follow Him. These are the words of the Apostle John, beginning shortly after Jesus was baptized. John chapter 1, verse 35,

³⁵ The next day again John (the Baptist) was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ 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?" 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. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found

the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:35-51)

Along with these men, Jesus would then continue to draw others to Himself, some of which He would form into a tightly knit group of twelve, men specially chosen for the purposes that God had planned for them.

In Matthew chapter 10, we are given a more complete list of those men. Listen, beginning there in verse 2,

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2-4)

A question that we will ponder as we study today is . . . What does it mean "to be a disciple of Christ"? What did it mean for those men who walked with the Lord Jesus in His days on the earth, and what does it mean for us, for you and for me now, in our day?

Folks, I've found that for myself sometimes if I begin with one of the simplest explanations, I am then able to more easily move on to a more complex understanding.

And so, with that thought in mind, I'd like to give us an example that I'm reminded of from the days that I worked in the ministry to youth at French Camp Academy. During many of those years, my duties included being in a dormitory, watching over some of the children while the houseparents could enjoy a restful day off.

And I can recall on one of those occasions that I was giving a devotional to some young men, ten to twelve years old. And I was using some simple examples that I hoped they might understand.

On that occasion, I asked them if they knew what a navel orange was. Most of them didn't, but when I mentioned that those were the oranges with no seeds, then they remembered.

Then I asked them if they knew what a mule was. And they all quickly said that they did. Most of them also knew where a mule came from, the cross-breeding of a donkey and a mare.

I then asked them if they knew what the word "hybrid" meant. I explained that a "hybrid" was the mixing of two unlike plants or animals, such as mixing two unlike kinds of orange trees, or mixing two unlike kinds of animals like a horse and a donkey.

I told them that very often the "hybrids" that came from that kind of mixing were unable to reproduce themselves; that mules and navel oranges were kinds of "hybrids", and that a male mule was generally unable to reproduce another mule. And that a navel orange had no seeds and therefore could not produce another orange tree.

The reason for my examples of the "hybrids" was to explain that God's purpose in the way that He created animals and plants was so that they would first of all be able to reproduce themselves.

But a "hybrid" cannot reproduce. While a navel orange can taste especially good and mules are especially convenient to their owners in that a mule seems to be far better fitted for certain work conditions than the average horse, both of those hybrids miss out on the most important part of their being, they cannot be fruitful and multiply.

I explained to them that in a real sense Adam and Eve became as those “hybrids” that moment there in the Garden of Eden when they chose to mix the image of satan and the image of self into the image of God that resided within them.

From that first moment that Adam and Eve chose to invite sin into their being, God's presence departed from them and they became as “hybrids”, unable to reproduce God's pure image in their offspring.

And what a sad, sad day that must have been for the heart of God!

Can you imagine what it would have been like if Adam and Eve had of stayed pure and holy, producing children that walked this earth with the purity and the holiness of God coursing through their veins?

But they did not remain pure and holy. They chose instead to become “hybrids”, able only to reproduce corrupt replicas of their own sinful selves.

But now, here in these verses that we have been studying over the past few weeks in the book of John, we can see where God, through Christ is beginning the process of restoration. He is reaching down deep into the souls of us “hybrids” and restoring us back to the condition that we were in back in the beginning, as “Sons of God”.

He is fulfilling the promise He made in Ezekiel 36 where He said,

²⁶ I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

You will recall that earlier in this Book of John we studied about that precious truth that gave us assurance that “to all who received the Lord Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the power, the right, the privilege to become children of God.”

These words clearly and plainly tell us that to all of us who would receive Christ, to all of us who would believe on His name, God will restore us to the condition that Adam and Eve first enjoyed.

But God would not stop there. He would also give us the ability to join with Him as He reproduced other Children of God.

All the people who in the past were unable to reproduce any kind of good fruit at all, would now, in Christ, be fully restored and fully able to reproduce fruit after their own kind.

Jesus said,

⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.(John 15:8)

But folks, listen! These earliest days of Jesus were only the beginning, the starting point. The twelve disciples and the few thousand other followers mentioned here in the scriptures were only the beginning.

There was a whole world of people besides them out there even in those days, and when you consider the billions that have come along afterwards, the restoration of God's people would be a formidable task. And that task would be made even more formidable by the conditions God placed on it.

God's plan was to use disciples to make more disciples. He would use fruit to produce more fruit.

And "hybrids" were not up to the task. It would take "sons of God" to reproduce more "sons of God".

And so, Jesus began with the twelve, twelve simple uneducated men, but men that He had changed into "sons of God". And from those twelve He would change the world.

He called,

. . . Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2-4).

Jesus called these men to Himself and for three and a half years He taught them and empowered them to go out and bear more fruit. And to not only show

forth the fruit of righteousness in their own behavior, but to also reproduce that fruit of righteousness in anyone who would listen to their message.

In those earliest days of Jesus, there were others besides the twelve who answered the call of Christ, but not many of them were ready for the rigors of this higher calling, this calling to be His disciples and to actually bear more fruit.

With many of those others, when times of stress came, they fell away. Only the twelve remained truly faithful, and even one of them eventually abandoned Jesus.

Jesus knew that His time on the earth would be limited. And He knew that His first purpose was to die as an atoning sacrifice for sin. But He also knew that in order to carry the power and the purpose of that sacrifice on forward into succeeding generations, He would need to use the hearts and minds of men and women like His twelve disciples, and like you and me.

And that meant training up those disciples, students that would become teachers, fruit that would become "fruit bearers", branches of the vine that would reproduce more and more fruit.

And so Jesus began right away to develop a rigorous discipleship training program, beginning with these twelve . . . Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Human logic in our day and time of "how to" books and "promotional seminars" suggests that if we were to gather twelve on-fire disciples around us, thoroughly indoctrinate them with the plan, and then send them out, that 12 could quickly turn into 24, then 48, then 96, then 192 and on and on and on. And in a matter of only a few weeks the entire world could be evangelized.

And folks, that truly was and is God's plan for the salvation of the whole world. It has all of the ingredients to be able to be a complete success.

God's Holy Spirit precedes every witness, softening the hearts and fertilizing the ground of those who are listening, giving life to many dead souls. Disciples then do their part by being the hands, the feet and the voice of God's mercy and

grace. And then God the Father draws those waiting, searching souls to Him. It's a plan that should work perfectly, God, in consort with His disciples, reproducing more disciples. A perfect plan.

But . . . But . . . and for reasons our small minds might never fully understand, within the Holy and divine plan of God, He decided to allow one element to remain within the hearts of men. And that element would and does interfere with and prevent an otherwise perfect plan from working perfectly. He allows "choice" to remain, "choices" in making our own decisions, "choices" that can be right or that can be wrong.

Let me say this more clearly . . . for reasons we might never understand, God has sovereignly ordained and decreed that sin will still be allowed to work within the hearts and souls of all men and women, even those who have been restored as "children of God".

And so then, many of us who have the ability and the calling to go and bear fruit are often not much more productive than the "hybrids" that we used to be. We are disciples, but even so, we by our own choices, don't go out and produce fruit.

It no doubt must be grievous to the heart of God, to watch perfectly good branches simply sitting there in the vine doing nothing of value except enjoying their own salvation.

We have fruit, but like the navel orange, our fruit has few or sometimes even no seeds at all. The fruit tastes good to ourselves and the fruit is very convenient to our lifestyles, because there are no seeds to inconvenience us.

But folks, that is not what God intends for us. And He tells us so in verse 8 of John chapter 15. Listen!

⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:8)

God has given us salvation for our own personal good and enjoyment yes. But our salvation has an equally important part, and that is that we would respond by going out and reproducing more and more fruit. Fruits of righteousness should be showing forth in our own lives and we should be reproducing that fruit of righteousness in the lives of others. That is our calling as disciples.

The question for you and me today is, “are we willing to join in with the plan that God has for us and truly become the bearers of the “fruit” that it will take to evangelize the world. Are we willing to “go ye into all the world and make disciples”.

Folks, it is the purpose for which God created and called us. John 15 again,
⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:8)

It may be a delightful life that we have as we personally enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit living in us, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and all the rest, but that simply is not all that God wants of us.

We are to go and make disciples, reproducing fruit after our own kind. And so He tells us,

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

Pray with me.