

“Invitation to Discipleship”
(Matthew 11:28-30)
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March 18th, 2007

Introduction:

Can a person be a Christian, literally a Christ-follower, and not be a disciple? Am I, as an individual, allowed to define for myself, what it means to be a Christian? Are we given that liberty? So for one person being a Christian can mean such and such while for another person, it can mean something totally opposite. That's what's kind-of 'in' these days: customized religion. Give me a large dose of Christianity. Sprinkle in a bit of capitalism, a dash of Oprah, a pinch of Canadian tolerance, throw in a bit of Deepak Chopra or whomever your favorite self-help guru is, some good old fashioned hard work, and some Eastern Confucian values. And there you have it: customized Christianity. So let me ask the question again. Are we allowed to define what it means to be a Christian, a Christ-follower? Instead of giving you my answer, allow the words of Jesus to speak for themselves.

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

Luke 14:26-27 ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-- yes, even his own life-- he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Matthew 4:19-20 ¹⁹ **"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."** ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him

Matthew 10:37-38 ³⁷ "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 19:21 ²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

John 12:25-26 ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Luke 14:33 ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

These are just a small sampling of Christ's explicit teachings on discipleship. And we haven't even mentioned any of the implicit teachings that are found throughout the gospels.

I'm speaking on discipleship today because it is so important that we get this one right and begin to live as Christ's disciples. Folks, it's sad to say, but the truth is that the longer I am a pastor, the fewer genuine disciples I see. Even in this congregation there are many so-called Christians, but

not many disciples. The bible makes it clear that any person who is a Christian, is by definition a disciple. The words 'Christian' and 'disciple' are one and the same.

The passages we just looked at can make being a Christ follower into a real drudgery. We can easily hear that and say, "Why would anyone want that?" "Thanks but no thanks." And it's true, it is a strong look at the sacrificial side of discipleship. And that is definitely a message we need to be hearing more and more. However, today, I want to speak about another angle of discipleship that Jesus teaches.

It's from Matthew 11:28-30. The context:

Chapter 11 begins with Jesus speaking about John the Baptist. You can say he was one of the first New Testament disciples. And how did he live? He lived a life of self-denial, a life of suffering and the life of a martyr. Jesus considers him as one of the great ones. He says there's no one greater among men.

And then he criticizes the generation of his day for their inability to recognize the signs of the times. They failed to recognize John the Baptist and they failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

And then he begins to issue judgments upon cities that didn't receive the gospel. He says that these cities are even worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, the archetype cities of evil in the bible.

And then, right before he enters into the invitation to discipleship he says some things that may seem a bit out of place. Look at what he says.

Matthew 11:25-27 ²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

These verses say that God hides certain things from certain types of people (wise and learned) and reveals certain things to other types of people (children). And the passage says that this was in God's good pleasure.

And then Jesus in verse 27 speaks about his role in all of this. "All things have been committed to Jesus by his Father." And then Jesus says, no one knows the Son, except the Father. And no one knows the father except the Son. And then, who else gets to know the Father? Only those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

And then there's this invitation to discipleship. "Come to me" he says.

This is the tension that's found throughout the scriptures. It's the tension between the absolute sovereignty of God and the free will of man. We, as Christians, believe in both of these truths. We believe that every person who's made it into heaven, got there because God chose them, selected them, predestined them, allowed them. But we also believe that every person that makes it into heaven also made a conscious and deliberate choice to reject sin and accept Christ.

So what do we make of all of this in the context of discipleship?

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Discipleship begins with responding to Christ's sovereign call. (28)

The only person in the universe that can get you front row tickets to God's show. The guy with the inside scoop. The one who can make it all happen. Christ says to us in his sovereignty, authority, and ability, "Come to me". Isn't that amazing? The one, the only one, who can say, "him, her, that one, this one." The one, the only one, who can say, "by my blood, my death, my cross". Christ chooses us. There is nothing arbitrary or accidental about meeting Jesus. It's always purposeful. Discipleship is a response to the sovereign call of an almighty purposeful God.

Everyone and anyone can come.

The invitation to discipleship is extended to all. This is no secret club. It's by invitation only, but the invitation is delivered to everyone. Right here, right now, Jesus invites all of you on the journey of discipleship. "Come to me, all of you."

The invitation is extended to all, but only a certain type of person can respond to it. The weary and burdened can come.

- a. If you have no problems, and life is great, or at least you think it is, you don't need Jesus.
- b. If you have all the money you need and all of that money is making you happy, then you don't need Jesus.
- c. If you have all the special people in your life to make life worth living, then you don't need Jesus either.
- d. But...if you're weary, if you're burdened, then you can come. If you're tired of sinning. If you're burdened with the weight of guilt. If you're stuck in the mire of life. If you're a pornaholic, an alcoholic, a workaholic, a money-aholic, a success-aholic, or a sin-aholic, then come. All who are addicted to sin, come. The invitation's in the mail, open in up, read it, RSVP. Don't delay...come to Jesus.

There's a table in the wilderness, where the weak are strong, and the poor possess."

The promise of discipleship is that those who come will find rest.

Discipleship is an incredible paradox. There's a rigorous, tough, self-denial, suffering, painful side. We'll talk about that next. But in it you'll find rest.

Let me explain about **rest** in the Scriptures.

Rest began with God. He rested on the 7th day. He commanded his people to rest as well. Out of love he gave us rest. He then promised the Israelite people they would find rest in the Promised Land and they did. All the enemies were conquered and there was peace. But it was short lived and rest eluded them once again. And then there came a man who embodied rest. In me, he said, you will find rest. In a relationship with me, in submission to me, you will find rest. And then rest is explained and expanded further in Hebrews as a final destination.

And so rest is nothing short of eternal life with Christ. This is the rest we all need and long for. And this verse says come, leave your sin behind and find rest.

Now let's move on and speak about that other side of discipleship. We spoke of the open invitation side, the release from sin and burdens, and the finding of rest, but there's another side.

Some might be thinking, "Ah ha! I knew there was a catch. I knew it was too good to be true. There's always the fine print."

Before we jump to any conclusions, let me explain what this coming to Christ requires.

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Discipleship requires submission to Christ. (29)

Unfortunately, many people come to Christ without hearing the full story. They hear of all the problems that will be solved and all the joys of life and all the good stuff, but they were never told about the cost, the commitment, and the character that was involved.

There was a teaching that popped up 10-15 years ago that still has lingering effects today. Why? Because it was 10-15 years ago that many of us became Christians. The teaching was about Lordship. And the question posed was, "Can a person have Christ as their Savior but not as Lord? And many scholars and pastors were saying "YES!" They were saying that having Christ as savior is one thing, but having Christ as Lord is totally different. They were saying that to place a condition of Lordship upon a person becoming a Christian was a corruption of the true gospel. They couldn't have been more wrong. Perhaps some of you heard an easy gospel...a cheap gospel. A gospel that gave everything, but demanded nothing. Perhaps you heard a gospel that spoke of only sunny days without a cloud in the sky. Perhaps you heard a gospel that spoke of wealth and health and prosperity to all who believed? I'm sorry to say...that was not the gospel.

The gospel in the bible has a cost.

The gospel in the bible has demands.

The gospel in the bible is the road less traveled.

The gospel in the bible requires suffering.

The gospel in the bible requires denial.

The gospel in the bible requires obedience.

So let's try to clear up any misconceptions of what it means to be a disciple, a Christian.

There must be submission to Christ's leadership in our lives.

"Take my yoke"

A yoke was a harness placed around the neck of an ox to perform work. And it always implied submission. For the ox, submission to the will and direction of the farmer or the master. For Christians, it required submission to Christ.

Nowhere in classical/biblical literature is a yoke ever a positive thing, a thing to be looked forward to. It is always negative. Only here in this verse is a yoke considered a good thing.

- a. The yoke of Christ is a yoke of labor.
- b. the yoke of Christ was a yoke of submission. (a prisoner walking under the yoke)
- c. The yoke of Christ is communal. (being yoked w/ each other)

There must be a submission to learning

Submission to Christ means “follow me.” In my study of the phrase follow me in the scriptures, there are several implications.

- A. new allegiance/priorities
- B. there is a great cost
- C. repentance is part and parcel
- D. requires self-denial
- E. obedience

- i. Learning *of* Him – learning of the person of Christ, in experience. Worship, Preaching, Prayer, but most importantly through obedience.
- ii. Learning *from* Him – what is he teaching? What does he require? What are his demands? What lifestyle does he expect? What are sins?
- iii. Folks, think of the hours and money we spend to earn our degrees and certifications...things that will last and carry us through the remaining 40 years of our lives. Folks think of the time and hours and money that will be needed to learn the things that we will need for eternity. Being a disciple of Christ will require a huge investment on our part. It can come no other way. I would not be honest if I said it was going to be easy. Christians, study the word, dive into prayer, and seek holiness.

- F. There's no doubt about it. The Christian life is a difficult life. But here's the paradox. The life of submission is easy because of who Christ is and the reward we get. (29-30)

- i. Submission is easy because of Christ character.

1. he is no evil dictator or ruler
2. he is gentle and humble in heart

gentle is used in describing the character of a follower of Christ. Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. It's used to describe Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem, not on a majestic stallion, but on a donkey.

NIV Matthew 21:5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

He's humble. He's lowly. Downcast.

The sovereign Lord of the universe. The one who created heaven and earth with just his words. He's gentle. He's humble.

- ii. The submission is easy because it results in **rest**
- iii. The submission is easy because Christ's yoke is easy and his burden is light.

How is that true? How is his burden easy and light? Well first of all, when we accept his invitation, Christ takes all of our burdens away. And why would he take away our burdens to give us an even heavier one? That wouldn't be freedom, it'd be slavery. His burden is light because of his incredible life he promises for us to have. The possibility for the first time in our lives to live in obedience to God. The first time in our lives to be on the receiving end of God's many promises. To know that in Christ everything is Yes. (2 cor 1:19)

Conclusion:

You and I are smart people. We know a bargain when we see one. You do the research. You check the stats. You comparison shop. And you make the decision. That's the one. This is the best deal.

Christ's invitation to discipleship is an irresistible deal. I think it's a no-brainer. Folks, with emotionless logic or with logicless emotion or better yet, with emotional logic, weigh the options. Here on one hand, live you life whichever way you want to live it, absent of God, and all the consequences of that life, including an eternity of separation from God in hell. Or choose life. Real life. Abundant life. The life custom designed by the creator himself.

As Christ calls us to a life of discipleship, one of the ways we can get on board is to take discipleship class or for women, you can be a part of a mentoring program, where a mentor can help you in your life as a Christ-follower.