

Making Disciples

David Flatt

Jesus had been crucified. The disciples were devastated. Then, everything changed. Jesus rose from the dead. The resurrected Lord revealed Himself to the disciples. Over forty days, He strengthened the disciples. They were at a turning point with Jesus. He would shortly ascend to Heaven. They would be left to carry out the mission of Jesus on earth. They were charged to make disciples of all nations.

Matt. 28:16-20: “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Today, we share the same mission. We are to make disciples. But, how? What is involved in this process? What message are we to convey to non-disciples? Answers to these questions are found in the instructions of the resurrected Lord.

Making Disciples Involves...

1). Teaching discipleship. Perhaps some think we make disciples by baptism. We frequently use this text to convince people that they need to be baptized. However, discipleship is much broader than the act of baptism.

If anyone knew about making disciples, it was Jesus. He made disciples in His ministry. How did He do it? Jesus persuaded people to follow Him for who He was, what He had to offer, and why they needed Him.

Jesus spoke about our need for a new life. He told Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This was not a call for Nicodemus to be baptized. This was a call for Nicodemus to be reborn. Nicodemus knew nothing about this life. He was just beginning to learn about Jesus and the new life of a disciple.

Being saved from sin demands a new birth. We must believe in Jesus’ resurrection and resolve to repent of our sins. When Peter preached on Pentecost, he told the people to *repent* before he told them to be baptized (Acts 2:38). Unless we are willing to repent of our sins, we will never experience anything new.

We must commit to learning about a new life in Jesus. We must commit to a new method of thinking and perceiving the world. Jesus frequently discussed important issues like these. Read the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus commanded a new way of life. This is the kind of teaching Jesus used to make disciples during His ministry. The process of commitment, learning, and changing is called discipleship.

2). Baptizing disciples. The resurrected Lord commanded, “...Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” (Matt. 28:19). Interestingly, Jesus says we are to baptize disciples. Baptism serves an essential function of discipleship. In Peter’s Pentecost sermon, he explained that baptism was for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Paul wrote that we put on Christ by baptism, receiving a new identity (Gal. 3:27-28). New life demands a new identity. Baptism is not an end, but the beginning of a new life (Rom. 6:3-4).

But, what if people just want to be baptized? This is often the case. They may have some recognition of their need to be baptized but are uncommitted to repentance. They have no intention of learning a new pattern of behavior. They have no plans for participating in the local church. They have no interest in discipleship.

Such thinking is deeply flawed. This view does not grasp the meaning of the Gospel. Baptizing people with this faulty mindset will not produce disciples. Those of this perspective must be properly taught and urged to reconsider their need to become disciples. The apostles were to baptize people who were committed to faith, repentance, and the new life of discipleship. This is what they did. We must follow their example to make disciples.

3). Learning a new way of life. Roughly 3,000 people believed, resolved to repent, and were baptized after the Gospel was preached on Pentecost. Afterward, they continued learning about their new life (Acts 2:41-47). They worshipped together. Their hearts began to change (Acts 4:32). They became self-giving and supportive of one another. When persecuted, they did not quit their new life. Instead, they began to share the Gospel with other people (Acts 8:4). They lived as disciples of Jesus.

Disciples are to be taught to follow all the commands of Jesus (Matt. 28:20). Jesus authored a lifetime’s worth of teaching for disciples to learn and implement. There is much work to be done in our lives as we seek to live closer to Jesus. Disciples attend to their relationship with Jesus each day. By example and word, they live to make new disciples.

Conclusion

Discipleship is a complex endeavor. It describes a special relationship between a student and a teacher. The student does not simply learn information, but by learning seeks to emulate the teacher. Discipleship is not a hobby. Rather, discipleship is a lifestyle.

Jesus once spoke to Jews who had begun to believe in Him. Jesus told them, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). These Jews were disciples. Jesus wanted them to grow into true disciples.

Jesus wants us to initiate a relationship with Him. Then, He wants us to grow in our relationship. Our discipleship matures by abiding by the word of Jesus.