

Disciples

This morning we begin a focused study of the Gospel of Luke. A very different kind of study than we typically do here in the preaching. I'm not going to go through and preach on every verse in Luke. [Since it IS the longest book in the NT, I am sure many of you are relieved.]

But it is not because of its length, that we are not going to do that. Rather it is because I want to focus us very particularly on something very valuable that the Gospels give us, that I believe is often overlooked or at least under-valued when we read the Gospels.

Luke, like the other Gospels is first and foremost a presentation of Jesus.

When it comes to who Jesus IS, the Gospels are all we have. In the later writings of the NT, we get an explanation and further expansion on who Jesus is, but as far as Jesus' person and life, the Gospels are literally a 4-D view of Him – 4 eyewitness accounts of His life.

And though their primary focus is on Jesus and who He is – the divine Man – our Hero, our Savior, our God..., we also find 2 main Secondary emphases in Luke...

- Those who were around Jesus, with Jesus
- The Teaching of Jesus (primarily – the Gospel Message – how one comes to be reconciled with God through Jesus).

And typically when we consider the Gospels, our attention primarily falls upon Jesus and the Gospel message – and for good reason.

And yet, this other Secondary emphasis on those who were with Jesus is hugely significant for our understanding of what it is to be a Christian. For though Jesus is our perfect example, the object of our devotion and faith, it is those around Him in the Gospels that most correspond to us...

- they are seeking to “get” Jesus, like us
- they must trust Jesus, like us
- they often fail Jesus, like us
- they are constantly learning from Jesus, like us
- they are being transformed progressively by Jesus, like us

There is a great deal to learn about our own relationship with Jesus from the interactions between them and Jesus. They become for us a metaphor of a true Christian response. I say a metaphor, because though they are real people and these are real historic episodes, much like God's dealing with the Jewish nation in the OT, what happens with them physically (because Jesus is right there with them physically), relates to our own spiritual response to Jesus. We don't actually follow Him up from the Jordan River up to Jerusalem, asking Him questions along the way – rather we spiritually “follow Him” by pursuing His Word and being attentive to His Spirit.

This is what I mean by their lives are a metaphor for what our lives ought to look like.

So, as we go through Luke, we are not only going to keep our eyes on Jesus, but also be keeping an eye on those around Jesus, (how Jesus interacted with them, and how Jesus required that they respond to Him), so that we might learn what it is for us to be “with Jesus” in an authentic way.

And that may not be in the way you presently think. In reality, for all of us, we are all needing to grow in this area – whether it be our knowledge, or the practice of what we know.

For all of us then, it will do us good to go back to the source, strip away all of the traditions, and the layers of misconceptions that build up over the years, and just to simply look at what Jesus Himself defines and requires of those who would be with Him.

So – that is what we are going to be considering.

To start that journey, which is going to take some time, and we are not going to get in a hurry...

I want to do two things this morning...

1) Frame the Entire Gospel of Luke to get the big picture

2) Begin to define 1 word that sets the basic understanding of how we relate with Jesus.

And then as we move forward in the weeks to come, we are going to identify 7 defining marks that Jesus adds to the basic understanding of this 1 word, as found in the Gospel of Luke (as well as the other

Gospels also).

So, let me give you an overview of Luke...
(not a structural outline, but more of a thematic one).

For the first 8 chapters, Jesus is almost Luke’s entire focus ... with two primary emphases...

Ch. 1-4 – Presentation of Jesus

- Angelic Announcement
 - Zacharias – 1:11
 - Mary – 1:26
 - Shepherds – 2:9
- Prophetic Recognition
 - Simeon – 2:25-32,
 - Anna – 2:36-38
 - Leaders – 2:46-47
 - John the Baptist – 3:2-17
- Pedigree
 - God’s Son – 3:21-22
 - Adam’s Son – 3:23-38
 - Better Adam – 4:1-13
 - Messiah – 4:14-21

Ch. 4-8 – Validation of Presentation (Power of Jesus)

- Over Temptation – 4:1-13
- Over Human Influence – 4:14-30
- Over Demons – 4:31-37
- Over Disease – 4:38-40
- Over Sins – 5:20-26

These same elements appear again and again throughout ch. 4-8, and also throughout rest of Gospel.

Jesus is GOD. Jesus is the perfect MAN. Jesus is

the Messiah / Savior / Prophesied / Anointed One.

The God-Man, come to save us! This is the great WHO Luke is presenting to us, and that presentation continues throughout Luke's Gospel.

And I would so LOVE to preach through these early chapters, showing off Jesus to you! But a few years ago, I did that very thing – preached through the Gospel of Mark (2009-2011), and so if you would like to access that, you can on Sermon Audio.

And in order to be focused on our goal, I am going to skip those chapters entirely – knowing that as we pick up in ch. 9, we will continue to seek Jesus in all His heroic, God-Man glory there as well.

So, ch. 1-8, Jesus Presented, and that Presentation validated by His Power...

But beginning in Ch. 9, there is a major focus shift to specific interactions with those around Him, those He has called to Himself. Hints of this have been given before (5:1-11, 27-28, 6:12-49, 8:1-3, 8:22-25), but now these interactions takes front seat. And this continues as a primary focus through ch. 18, where then the focus shifts back to Jesus as He heads to His death.

So, ch. 9-18 is going to be our focus. But even within that section, the densest concentration of Jesus' interaction with His own, and where these 7 defining marks are highlighted, is in ch. 9-14. And this is

where we will spend the bulk of our time.

Okay – so now you know where we are going, in the weeks and months ahead.

2) Now let me lay out for you the single word that more than any other defines our relationship with Jesus.

And let me do so by simply asking this question – “who do you think you are?”

Kind of an arresting question... How do you define yourself religiously. If someone were to ask you on the street what your religious affiliation, most of you here would answer, “I'm a Christian.”

And that would be a good answer in that context. It is a historic term – found in the Bible, in the early church, those who were associated with Jesus in Antioch began to be called “Christians”.

But outside of that context of the man on the street trying to find out your basic religious affiliation, it is not a very helpful term.

At its essence, it doesn't really tell us WHAT our relationship with Jesus looks like. It just means I am “with Jesus” in some sense. It means I'm not a Jew, not an adherent of Islam, or a member of a cult. I'm a Christian. But that is about all it says.

It is kinda like saying you are Basketball-ite. A what?? Yeah, I am a Basketball-ite. I'm not a football-ite, or a baseball-ite... I'm a Basketball-ite... I participate in

the sport of Basketball.

See, all that term does is puts you in the Basketball arena... it doesn't define for you what you do once you are there or your relationship to the game. Are you a player, a coach, water boy, equipment manager, referee, run the concession stand, take tickets?

Who do you think you are, AS a Basketball-ite?

If that's all you think you are, then you may be in the arena alright, but you are going to be up in the stands, out in the hallway, out on the court, blowing the whistle, stomping your foot on the sidelines... just kind of wondering around lost, and aren't helpful to anyone else, nor of any real benefit to the thing you say you are all about – the game of Basketball. Because you have only the most vague definition of your actual relationship to the game.

And my friends, we must not be content to merely call ourselves "Christian." To have some connection with Jesus, without any real definition of how He defines a proper relationship with Himself.

And that is why Jesus never used the term "Christian." It only appears 3x in the NT – and at least 2 of those, it is used by those outside, as somewhat of a derogatory statement. Peter embraces the term, and it has great historic precedent. We ought not to jettison it, but it only has limited use.

But Jesus did consistently use a term to actually defines for us the nature of the relationship – **"Disciple"**

Over 250x this term is used. This word was chosen carefully, because both in the Greek and Jewish culture, everyone knew what a disciple was. And yet, Jesus takes the term and even further hones and deepens exactly what HE means when He uses the term, by adding to it 7 particular marks that set apart HIS disciples from all others.

And we find these marks in the Gospel of Luke – and this is going to be the focus of our study – so that we might understand what it is to be a Disciple of Jesus Christ.

But before we begin understanding how Jesus expands and refines the term, we need to understand the basic definition of the term itself, because we don't use the word Disciple in our culture in any kind of formal way – like the Jews and Greeks did.

We have similar kinds of terms we use (that formally define a kind of relationship) – apprentice, intern, partner, associate, journeyman...

But "disciple" – a devoted, but kind of loose follower of any sort.

That wasn't how it was viewed in Jesus' day.

In both the Greek and Jewish culture, the "Disciple" was a recognized quantity.

A Disciple was a learner. But not just a pupil in a classroom. A special kind of pupil – more like an apprentice, one who personally attached himself to a master, to be under his personal direction, instruction,

oversight, and authority.

But not to learn a tangible skill, like carpentry or warfare or iron-working, but rather to absorb the master's intellectual ideas, philosophies, way of life.

And thus there was more than an economic learning of a skill – the disciple's whole life was to be shaped (or reshaped) by the master.

Thus for the Greeks – it was the philosophers who had “disciples.” There were all sorts of philosophers, who sought to make sense of life, and how to live it well. These “schools” of disciples developed around them (Stoics, Epicureans, Sophists), who willingly absorbed and internalized all of their intellectual ideas and ideals. Philosophers did not choose their disciples, but rather eager intellectuals would attach themselves to a noted teacher whose philosophy they appreciated, and often paid the philosopher for the privilege of being under his tutelage. And then when the philosopher died, this school sought to carry on and pass along his unique ideas to others, usually led by a single human leader. Many schools almost came to idolize / worship their founder as deity (or at least his ideals as divinely given).

It is worthy of note that some Greek philosophers like Socrates, refused to call his followers “disciples,” feeling that such a formal arrangement was not appropriate to absorbing intellectual ideas. Rather he simply invited others to be with him to “share his own intellectual life,” they themselves by that being taught to think and reason for themselves, rather than slavishly emulate his own thinking and adhere to his

own way of life. [Okay, Socrates, call it what you will]. I mention this to show you that the word “disciple” did not just mean “learner / follower.” It was a formal relationship, that had to do with authority & emulation & transformation & ultimately transmission to others.

For the Jews, it wasn't all that different, although philosophy was not the going concern. Rather it was revelation. God Himself had spoken to the Jews through Moses. Thus the Rabbis did not promote their own ideas, but rather they became masters of the Torah (the Law of Moses), seeing themselves as “disciples of Moses.” Not only memorizing the entire text of the Law, but also promoting their own particular way of interpreting it and applying it to life. This is where the “traditions” came from...

I.e., Luke 5:33

The Jewish disciple would willingly attach himself under the tutelage of a respected Rabbi in order to learn the Law and its proper application. In fact, it was considered a great dishonor to seek to study the Torah on your own, without putting yourself under the oversight of some Rabbi. Since the Rabbi's reputation was at stake based on how his disciples behaved, Rabbi's often exercised strict control over the lives of his disciples.

The goal of the disciple would ultimately not be to idolize or worship the Rabbi, but rather become the Rabbi himself one day – not just in intellectual learning, but also because he had been trained to fastidiously live out the Law. Thus now as a true “disciple of Moses,” he could pass Moses teaching on

to others. If anything, it was Moses that was idolized.

So, you have these 7 defining marks of the term “disciple” – source, connection, absorption, emulation, authority, honor, proliferation.

And Jesus readily used this term (with all of this understanding attached to it), and without diminishing these characteristics at all, deepened the relationship between He and His disciples with 7 clarifying marks.

At this point, can I make an important clarification...

When I am drawing out the difference between the term “Christian” and “Disciple,” I am not suggesting as it became popular for men like Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie to do back in the 80s, that these were two different categories of believers. First you became a Christian, and later some might become more devoted followers (a Disciple).

No – that is a false distinction. The terms describe the same thing. It is just that the word “Disciple” helps clarify exactly who we are supposed to be much better than the term “Christian.”

Now, there is one other group besides Philosophers and Rabbis worth considering when it comes to disciples.

Prophets – it is worth noting that Prophets didn’t have disciples... They had servants, but no one learning from them, to be able to do what they did.

Why? Because it was a special assignment and

endowment from God. Non-repeatable. God chose each prophet individually.

Joshua was not Moses’ disciple. He was his servant. God chose to use him after Moses, but not because Moses was his Rabbi.

Same with Elijah & Elisha. God just happened to choose to use Elisha after Elijah.

Jeremiah had a servant Baruch, but he did not become a prophet after Jeremiah.

I point this out to so that we recognize...

Jesus was not a merely a prophet. Yes, He brought a new revelation from God to call people back to the Father, but He also gathered disciples to Himself.

Jesus was not merely a philosopher. Though He did self-generate a new wisdom for life, this wisdom was not from a mere man, but from the God-Man.

Jesus was not merely a Rabbi. He did not just interpret the LAW for us, He fulfilled the LAW for us.

Jesus does not merely attract disciples, He chooses disciples.

Jesus is not merely revered by His disciples, He is worshipped as God by His disciples.

Discipleship with Jesus is not about what you might learn for yourself from Him, but rather what you might become for Him.

He was not just a source of truth, He is the truth.
He did not just promote a way, He is the way.
He did not just point to life, He is the life.

We will find as we go through here, that it is all about Him, not what we might get from Him for our life, but becoming His, absorbing His life, and making it our own.

It is not just about being a “Christian” in the barest sense of the word (or putting on that moniker whatever flavor you happen to prefer), but it is about being a “Disciple,” in the fullest sense of the word, and according to how Jesus will deepen the term.

We have some learning to do.
Some paradigms to shift.
Some attitudes to shore up.

I hope you are ready for this study. It will be good for us. But like it was for the apostles themselves, it will not always be comfortable for us – changes will be needed, at times painful changes. That’s okay, if we think that is not necessary, then we think we are already fully trained, and already fully like our Master.

We are not.

But by God’s grace, and for the glory of Jesus and the joy it gives all true disciples, by this study we will become better, truer disciples – and some of us may even become true disciples for the first time.