

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

February 2, 2014

The Lies of the Father of Lies

John 8:51

Prayer: *Father God, I do thank you and praise you for the incredible gift that you are. I thank you for sending your Son, I thank you for the cross, I thank you for this time that you have given us to set aside to focus in on the gift of your Son. And Lord, I just pray this morning that again as we're going to spend some time looking inward asking your Holy Spirit to convict us, I pray for that grace as well, and I pray that you would be honored and glorified by everything that takes place, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, it's the first Sunday of the month, and as we do each first Sunday, this is the day that we remember in particular, Jesus Christ and his cross. Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples and there for the last time he celebrated a Passover supper with them that is captured in *Matthew 26:26*. It says this: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given*

thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and to drink the cup to -- in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He then asked them to remember this sacrifice on a regular basis, and this is what we call the Lord's table. We celebrate it once a month and we do that by meditating on what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us on the cross, by examining ourselves, by asking God's Holy Spirit to come into us and to help us with that task, by confessing our sins and then by participating in the elements. John 6:53 says this: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

Now we've been following the life of Jesus and we've worked our way so far to the eighth chapter of the gospel of John. You might remember where we were last time, Jesus is once again, he's putting the Pharisees in their place. This is a group of people who had substituted their own rules, their own regulations, their own reputations for that of the true God and they had become so blinded

to their own wickedness that they openly mocked the very God that they claimed to be serving. At this part of the dialogue that we're going to be looking at, they're mockingly asking Jesus, "Who are you?" And Jesus responds by saying in *John 8:25*: "*Just what I have been telling you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.*" They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said to them, "*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.*" As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

We looked last time at this interesting fact, the fact that the good news of verse 30 that many believed in him, well, it rapidly devolves into the bad news of verse 59 which says: *So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.* And we asked ourselves the question: How did that happen? I mean, how could this crowd that believed in him then reject that belief so strongly that they wanted him dead? Jesus had something to do with that. Jesus begins by addressing those who claim to believe in him. *John 8:31*: *So Jesus said to the Jews*

who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." We pointed out last month, we asked the question, do you see what Jesus is doing here? What he is doing here is he's making a distinction between mere belief, which all of those in the crowd had, and saving belief. It's an absolutely critical distinction. See, Jesus is addressing those who already profess to believe in him and he's essentially saying to them, that belief is not enough. See, Jesus didn't say "If you agree with my word." He said: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." To abide in God's word is to stay, it's to remain, it's to endure patiently. It's to understand that God and his word is your center, it is your identity, it is your home. That was not the case with these folks that Jesus is sparring with. And Jesus knew that right from the start. I mean, as I've said before, this is a dialogue that ends very, very badly. Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter in *John 8:37*. This is what he says, he says: "I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father." They answered him, "Abraham is our father." And Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works that Abraham did." He says Abraham's children are the ones who do

the works that Abraham did, not because they have to, but because God has done a work in their hearts, and because God has done a work in their hearts, they now want to. And the work that Abraham did was this: *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness, Romans 4:3.* This is the work that separates mere belief from saving belief. This is a work that means you recognize that you are incapable of saving yourself. It is placing our trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. See, Abraham had placed his trust in the very same God who now had become the man Jesus, who had lived a perfect life and was now explaining to these children of Abraham the difference between biological offspring and spiritual offspring. You see, the Jews he was dialoguing with considered themselves to be God's children by virtue of their race, by virtue of their ethnicity, by virtue of their birth. Jesus was blowing that idea right out of the water. He suggested that they bore no resemblance to father Abraham because they had none of the faith in God that Abraham himself had. Instead of the love that he had for the Father, in fact they had deep hatred for Christ, so much so that they wanted him dead. They were deeply offended that Jesus had seen right through them and completely discounted their family heritage.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 40: *"But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not*

what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did." You see, in a manner of speaking Jesus is telling him not only are you not a real relative, you are true sons of the worst father who ever existed. And true to form they respond: "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one father -- even God." See we're not illegitimate like you are, Jesus, we have real fathers; you didn't. That's what they're suggesting. We have real fathers and our real father happens to be God. Verse 42: Jesus said to them, "If God were your father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me." You see, Jesus' hearers were so steeped in the lie that they were incapable of hearing the truth. In fact to them everything was reversed. The truth appeared to be a lie; the lie appeared to be truth. Jesus said in John 14: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." So here we have this picture, truth itself is walking and talking directly to them and they're so convinced that he is this renegade lying carpenter instead of their idea of the real god, a

god they had credited out of their own rules, regulation and spiritual pride, a god that's based on a lie itself, that they wanted to kill him. Again Jesus says verse 40: *"But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did."* I just want you to picture for a second this dialogue taking place. Just imagine the irony here. Picture these religious leaders engaged in a furious debate about the nature of God and they're debating God and they don't even know it. Jesus chose this venue to reveal the truth about the father of lies, and he did it in such a way that the response of his hearers illustrated exactly what happens when the lie becomes a part of your life. They didn't stop, they didn't take a second to listen, they didn't evaluate, they simply got angry. Jesus had struck a nerve. See, Jesus told them who their real father was and he told them just what their father was like: *"He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

See, Jesus said the most natural thing there is for the enemy is the lie. This is his native tongue. This is his comfort zone. Of course Jesus is speaking from history; he's speaking from experience. Think back to the very first interaction that human beings ever had with this enemy, and it centered around the very

first lie. It's in Genesis 3, it says this: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." That was lie number one. And then it was a lie that brought wholesale death to Adam and Eve. It's a lie that caused them to commit spiritual treason against their creator. See, they believed this lie and it permanently altered their natures. They traded in the perfection that used to belong to them for the imperfection that this lie had now produced. One simple lie from the enemy and it not only destroyed wholesale Adam and Eve's relationship with God, it also poisoned every single subsequent son or daughter of Adam who would be born with that lie as a part of their nature. You see, ever since that first day in the garden, the enemy who Jesus himself calls the father of lies, ever since then the enemy has been using the lie to destroy us.

As the elders begin distributing the bread, I would like us to take

this time to begin to examine our consciousness, and I would like us to ask God's Holy Spirit if we have been victims of a lie. You see, every time we sin, we buy into the lie that that sin is worth more than our relationship with Jesus Christ. I'd like us to consider the dialogue that Jesus had more than 2,000 years ago as taking place today between him and us. Jesus warned those who believed in him that mere belief was not enough and then he went on to warn them about the nature of the enemy who had captured so many of their minds and hearts, and just to recapitulate, he said he was a murderer: *"He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* Those are harsh words from the God of love, and yet it is love itself that drives Jesus to expose his enemy as the best liar the universe has ever known. He's the lord of lies. And as the lord of lies, he's free to bend the truth into whatever pretzel he wishes in order to take your eyes off the prize. No one on earth knows him like Jesus knows him, and Jesus is speaking a warning to us this morning.

As the bread is being distributed, I would like us to consider also the warning that God gives us about communion itself. It's found in 1 Corinthians 11 starting at verse 28. It says this: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of*

the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. You know, as we distribute this every month, I repeat the same thing. I say communion is an extremely serious undertaking and to enter into communion in an unworthy manner is to literally court disaster, and if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King and if you are concerned at some point that you need to be reconciled with your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, just pass the elements on as they come to you. No one's going to think that you are odd, no one's going to think "What's wrong with him? How come he didn't take the elements?" In fact, they may just think you're wise. But I also point out that on the other hand, we can make the mistake of thinking that unless we're spotlessly perfect, we're not worthy to receive communion; and that, too, is a lie from the enemy. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we don't sin and it doesn't mean that we never fail. What it means is this, it means that when we do sin, when we do fail, we are aware that we have sinned. Why? Because we've got the Spirit of God within us. The Spirit of God is within us convicting us, and so we grieve as children who know that we

have a father who longs to forgive us, who longs to cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin. It means that when we sin, we realize we have an advocate with the Father, someone up in heaven who is speaking on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, The Righteous One.* And so because we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own, we are free now to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself of the privilege that Jesus has purchased for you.

As Tim Keller says, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die and he died that in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. What I would like us to do right now is just take a few moments, ask God's Holy Spirit to convict you, and ask yourself the question: "What lies have I believed?"

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, verse 23 says this: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had*

given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Take and eat.

We have been looking at a dialogue between Jesus and these religious leaders and the Jews that he was talking to, and we saw that Jesus opened this dialogue with an offer. *John 8:31, it says: So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* See, it's a testimony to the power of the lie that the response to Jesus' offer was an insistence by people who had been 400 years slaves in Egypt, but they'd never been slaves in the first place. *John 8:33: They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you can say, 'You will become free'?"* You see, they'd been listening to the lord of lies, and he had them convinced that they had never even been slaves in the first place. That was a lie that he had crafted just for them.

Now, it's been over 2,000 years since that day, and his lies have only gotten better with age. We can look around today and just see how powerful those lies are and how much they become a part of our culture. Let me just sample some for you: See, in our day, a baby in the womb is no longer a baby. A baby in the womb is a choice. Just last week there was a young man who was convicted and sent to

prison for 14 years for tricking his girlfriend into taking an abortifacient, causing her to miscarry. Now, the law saw fit to punish this man not for manslaughter but for product tampering. That was how they got him. And they were able to do that only because the woman wanted to carry the child to term. See, if she had decided to end the child's life herself, if she had decided that her boyfriend's murderous act were excusable, then suddenly there is no legal case, there is no manslaughter because the baby's legal existence is entirely dependent on whether mom wants him or her to exist. So if you want the baby, it's a baby. If you don't, it's just a blob of cells. That's a lie. That is a flat out lie from the lord of lies. But you know, it fits perfectly with Jesus' description of the enemy: He was a liar and a murderer. Abortion combines the lie with the murder and then it attempts to saddle the mother with guilt that can last a lifetime. It is such a masterful lie, but it's so much a part of our cultural landscape that we hardly blink an eye at things like this.

Another lie that is custom tailored to us today is that gender is no longer a God-given aspect of creation. *Genesis 1:27* says: *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* Nonsense, says our culture. Gender's not the sex that you were born with; gender is not that marker that's in every one of the trillions of cells in your body.

Gender is a determination that you get to make with the aid of drugs and surgeons. In California it is now legal, it is now law, state bill 777, children must be taught that gender is solely a matter of choice. That's a lie.

And we all know that marriage is undergoing the process of being completely redefined even though it was God who originally defined it. Jesus said this in *Matthew 19:4*, he said: "*Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?* So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." You know, last week was the Grammy awards, and I know most of you probably heard what that was all about, we had a mass same sex wedding officiated by that well known religious leader Queen Latifah. What in the world does that have to do with music? What does a music award show have to do with a mass same sex wedding? Nothing. But it has everything to do with mainstreaming cultural transformation, and anyone with eyes can see where this is going. Clearly the enemy's lies have become the new truths in our culture. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he's a liar and the father of lies.

But there's a far greater lie with far greater consequence that Jesus was concerned with warning the Jews against, and it's a lie that hasn't changed in 2,000 years. It's the lie that confuses mere belief and saving belief and it's the only lie that's 100 percent spiritually fatal. That's why in *John 8:31*, Jesus says: *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* See, this was an offer but it was an offer and a warning. Jesus' warning fell on deaf ears because they had already drunk the Kool-Aid. It was part of their defense mechanism, and their hatred for the truth that he was bringing was so intense, they wanted him dead. *John 8:37: "I know that you are the offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you."* You see, it's the grace of God alone that opens one's eyes and allows him to see that what he thought of as freedom was anything but and what he thought of as truth was also anything but. And it's God's grace alone that allows us to see the lie for what it really is. So here's a question for us this morning: Do you know the truth that Jesus says will set you free? What is that truth? Is it information? Is it a set of propositions? Is it a long list of rules that you're supposed to keep? Or is it a relationship like no other relationship you've ever had? Do you abide in his word or do you hide in the hope that you can get by by straddling the world and

the kingdom of God when Jesus insists that you can't? He says in *Luke 16:13*: "No servant can serve it masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." See, we have to understand something here. There is an extremely clever father of lies custom crafting whatever lie you need to keep you from eternal life, and he relies on you never realizing you've been lied to.

So how do we know that we haven't drunk the Kool-Aid? How do we know that when it comes to understanding what it means to be a child of God? How do we know that if Jesus wasn't walking down the middle of Port Jervis today, he wouldn't be having the exact same dialogue that he had with the Jews of his day with us? Well, Francis Chan and David Platt have this to say about one overwhelming danger of believing a persistent lie about following Jesus, about believing a lie that says mere belief and saving belief are the same thing. Listen to what they say. They say: It is impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." That's the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: We imitate Him, carry on His ministry, and become like Him in the process. Yet somehow many have come to believe that a person can

be a "Christian" without being like Christ. A "follower" who doesn't follow. How does that make any sense? Many people in the church have decided to take on the name of Christ and nothing else. This would be like Jesus walking up to those first disciples and saying, "Hey, would you guys mind identifying yourselves with Me in some way? Don't worry, I don't actually care if you do anything I do or change your life-style at all. I'm just looking for people who are willing to say they believe in Me and call themselves Christians." Seriously? No one can really believe that this is all that it means to be a Christian. But then why do so many people live this way? It appears that we've lost sight of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

As the elders begin distributing the cup, I want to ask the most important question you will ever be asked. That question is: How do I really know if I am a follower of Jesus Christ? I mean, in light of the fact that so many have a very different idea of what following Jesus really means, it appears to be a question that very few believers are willing to ask themselves. There are far too many Christians I know who consider having Christ as the center of their lives only a noble and distant goal instead of proof of genuine life in the first place, and part of the reason for that is the way we have presented the gospel for years. We've told folks that simply raising your hand or saying the sinner's prayer and

signing a card makes you a Christian. It does not. You become a Christian when God's Holy Spirit takes up residence within you. *Ezekiel 36:26* says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* See when that happens, when that transaction has taken place, when you've received a heart transplant from God, you are fundamentally a new creature. You have a new heart. You have new desires. *2 Corinthians 5: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* And so the question is this: Is a new creation with a new heart and a new spirit content to simply mouth Christian platitudes and identify with Christ only so long as it never really costs anything? What if such a person is nothing more than a victim of the father of lies, someone akin to the very people that Jesus was talking to when he told the ones who believed in him that there had to be something more. Someone sold a gospel that seems to view true discipleship as only for a few select super saints, and normal Christianity is something that requires nothing more than a verbal assent to some spiritual propositions: Jesus is God, Jesus died on the cross, I believe that, therefore I'm a Christian. Not so. James tells us that demons believe all that and they shudder! See,

I fear we've created a climate in which any attempt to question the authenticity of our relationship with Jesus is considered out of bounds, that in spite of the fact that God encourages us to do that very thing. *2 Peter 1:10* says: *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.*

So how do we make our calling and election sure? Well, there's a simple question that we can ask ourselves that flows directly out of Jesus' words in *Luke 6:40*: *"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."* The question is this: How much like Jesus have I become since I've identified myself as one of his? How much like Jesus have I become since I've identified myself as one of his? You know, I said last week that to grow as a Christian is to fall deeper and deeper in love with Jesus Christ, and we do that by abiding in him. As I said, "to abide" means "to remain," "to stay," "to endure patiently," is to understand that God and his word is your center, your identity, your home. And when your center is Jesus Christ, you will start to become like Jesus Christ. Jesus said in *John 15:5*: *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* Now I've often said this, what Jesus is saying here at street level is that the more you hang out with him, the more you abide in him, the more

like him you're going to become. Peter fleshes this out by saying this in 2 Peter 1:5, he says: *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities, you will never fall.* Now understand, Peter's not giving here a list of things you have to do to be a Christian. He's instead giving us a list of identifying characteristics of those who already are Christians. You don't grow in these qualities by seeking them in and of themselves, I mean, to do that is a guarantee of deep spiritual failure. You grow them by seeking Christ. You see, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." And to be like Jesus is to be filled with virtue and knowledge and self-control and steadfastness and godliness and brotherly affection with love. And you know, if you think you can produce those qualities on your own, you're sadly mistaken. But Jesus can. And Jesus does, if you abide in him,

when he is your center, when he is your identity, when he is your home.

So take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart right now and ask yourself one very simple question: Have I become more like Jesus Christ since I've become a Christian? Now, if you can't really say that, consider the possibility that you might not be a Christian. One of the most profoundly terrifying scriptures in all of the Bible is *Matthew 7:22*. It says this: "*Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'!*" Jesus, look at all the fine religious stuff that we did for you! We did wonders! We prophesied! We even cast out demons! And Jesus utters the worst words human ears will ever hear: "*I never knew you.*" He was speaking to folks who had drunk the Kool-Aid. These were folks who had bought the lie that they were part of the kingdom when they were never part of it. They bought whatever lie was custom tailored to them by the enemy, the father of lies. So I ask you this morning to just step out into that scary place where you ask yourself: Could this be me? And consider the profound mercy of God, that he might be speaking to you right here and right now about making the enemy's lies into his profound truth.

Listen to this truth. Jesus says this in *Luke 11*, he says: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." See, that that's the good news. God is up against the father of lies whispering in our ears all the time, and what he is telling us is I am here. Call out to me, and I will answer you. Ask God this morning to open your eyes to the truth that will set you free. Ask God for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and ask yourself am I more like Christ today than I was the day that I became a Christian? "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." Ask that of Christ, ask that of the Holy Spirit, and if God is convicting you, understand it's a mercy. If God is convicting you, all you have to do is reach out, all you have to do is ask him to accept you with your sin, with the lies, with all of the evidence that the enemy has poured into our hearts. He is willing, he is anxious, he is waiting for us to get serious about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 25th verse says this, it says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as*

often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take, and drink.

This is the part that I call head, hands, and feet, the part where we talk about a practical application of what it means to remember Jesus, and I think that God is really calling on us to get serious about discipleship. You see, a disciple is someone who follows. Discipleship began when Jesus approached a group of men and just said, "Follow me." Discipleship in Jesus' plan ended at the very end of his ministry in *Matthew 28* when Jesus said: "*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 things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" Amen. I said last week that discipleship is something that happens at every single level of Christian experience. A person who's been a Christian a week can disciple somebody who's been a Christian a day. That means that discipleship is something that is open to virtually everyone. So I want to share a question that I recently heard. I'm going to kind of flip it back on you all right now. Here's the question: How many people in this body have been discipled by other people in this body? If you have, will you raise your hand? Excellent. That's great. How many of you in this body are in the process of discipling others? Would you raise your hand? That's wonderful. That's terrific. Now, how many of you would like to grow in the

understanding of what it means to be disciplined and by learning how to disciple others? Raise your hand. That's even more encouraging. That's great. See, we are trying to lay the groundwork for getting more serious about what it means to be a disciple. And we are at this point using our neighbors, our neighborhoods, the gate keepers, we have that right in the back there, it says "love your neighbor." We want every single person in this body to know that they are part of a group of people who is concerned about discipling them, that they're part of a neighborhood. If you come into this church, there's five different neighborhoods. The gate keepers for each of the neighborhoods, would you stand up? I see Tom, you're one, Scott, Dave, Christa, Steve. These folks represent Minisink, Middletown, Highlanders, Pennsylvania, Port, they represent every single different neighborhood. Wherever you are in a neighborhood, these are folks who are concerned for you as an individual. They're going to pass on to us as elders what particular needs you have discipleship wise so that we can grow in our ability to help you become disciples, so that you can disciple others.

We know that the lord of lies has been extraordinarily successful. But we know that the ultimate victory is always Christ's. We know that the lord of lies is a bulldog and he's a bulldog on a chain and every time he wants to, God will yank that chain and he will go

flying. It's our task to represent Christ on earth, and to do that we need to grow in our ability to disciple. And so if you're new, if you're trying to figure out where you fit in all of this, we'll figure out where you fit in the neighborhoods, but if you have a question about discipleship, if you have a question about the gospel, if you have a question about how do I do this, how do I center my life on Jesus Christ, bring it to your neighborhood gate keeper and he'll bring it to us, and we'll see if we can't move this whole process forward. Let's pray.

Father God, I do thank you for your word, I thank you for the example that you've given to us, and it is an incredibly sobering thing to be brought in on this dialogue of the deaf that Jesus is involved with, where Jesus is explaining to people what the lie is and how the master of the lie works, and they don't want to hear it. We see what it's like in this dialogue for those who have drunk the Kool-Aid, so to speak, who have bought into the system, and Lord, I just pray if there's anyone here who has bought the lie that you can have it both ways, that you can be a follower of Jesus and a follower of this world, you can't. I pray that you would give us the ability to give them the ability to make their choices and to understand that you welcome them, you have the grace, you have the forgiveness, you have everything they need to be disciplined and to become a discipler. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.