

FROM BELIEVERS TO DISCIPLES

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Scripture: 1 Kings 18

For our meditation this morning, I want to go to the Old Testament, to 1 Kings chapter 18. There is a verse there that Elijah throws out to the children of Israel when he says, "If the Lord is God, follow Him; and if Baal, follow him. But the people did not say a word."

This verse made me think about this whole idea about following God, of following after Him, following Jesus – moving from a point in our lives when we get to know God to actually trusting Him enough to follow Him. When we look at the children of Israel, they believed in Him. They knew that Yahweh was their God, they knew their history, they knew all about Him. The problem was that they weren't following Him. Not that they didn't believe in Him; they did. It was all part of their history. But the issue that God had was that belief didn't lead to following after Him.

It made me think, as I prepared for our meditation, whether we would fall into that same kind of category, or we could get drawn into that false sense of complacency where we too think that just believing in Him is okay. I met Him a long time ago, and I'm so glad that I did. But you haven't done anything about following after Him. You are a believer. But are you a disciple who follows after the Master?

I'm going to put up a slide that will have a delineation between what it is to be a believer and what it is to be a disciple.

| <u>BELIEVERS</u> | <u>DISCIPLES</u> |
|---|---|
| Believers happen instantly | Disciples undergo a lifelong process |
| Believers trust Christ | Disciples follow Christ |
| Believers only enjoy Christ's love | Disciples reciprocate His love |
| Believers receive God's gift of salvation | Disciples receive God's instruction |
| Believers only respond to "Come unto Me." | Disciples also respond to "Come after Me." |
| Believers are happy with justification (Salvation) | Disciples seek after sanctification |
| Believers have entered into an initial relationship with Christ | Disciples are committed to an ongoing relationship with Him |

So the question for us this morning as we think about following Him is: Have we moved on from the point of justification on to the road of sanctification? Because justification is a one-time happening. We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are saved. It happens in a moment of time, and you've probably been in that moment, justified freely before Him. But the question that I'd like for us to think about in all seriousness today is: Are we on the road of sanctification? Are we allowing God's Spirit to renew us, to purify us, to get rid of the old self which we know is symbolic of our baptism – that the old self is gone and we are a new person? Are we believing in that and living a new life? Are we being made holy? Are we walking a holy path? Are we taking righteous decisions? Are we living lives of honesty and integrity and faith and compassion and kindness and love?

That's the question for us this morning. Are we dynamically following after Him or have we too fallen prey to the complacency that the Israelites had fallen into? They believed Him, and yet they were going after other gods as well – Baal, and prophets of Asherah, the priests of Asherah. How about you? How about me? Are we on that path of following hard after God?

I think for us to really answer that question, we need to go back to a point where Jesus asked Peter a very pertinent question. You remember, on the shores of Galilee, Peter and the disciples had just gone fishing and caught nothing. Jesus told them, "Put your nets on the other side," and they caught many fish. They came back and had a breakfast of fish with Jesus. Then Jesus asks Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" And we recall the passage: three times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?"

What was the point that Jesus was making? Among a host of others, as you have heard this scripture so often mined for different but eternal truths, I believe that what Jesus was saying to Peter was that "You know that you've been able to see Me in the flesh, hear Me and do the things that I am speaking to you. But now, when you don't see Me anymore, and that time is imminent, for you to continue to follow Me, it's going to take a different motivation. And that motivation is love." That's why I believe He asked Peter three times, "Peter, do you love Me; do you love Me; do you love Me?" before releasing Peter into whatever ministry or calling He had for him.

I believe that we too need love as a motivator to continue to follow after Jesus. We need to move from the law and its requirements, not in any way diluting them, but seeing it fulfilled out of love for God; not so much out of duty but out of devotion to Him. I believe that's why Paul would say, "The love of God constraineth me." If you were to look at different translations, you will find that the word 'constraineth' is translated differently in almost every translation. The reason for that is that the Greek word underlying this English word is a difficult word to translate because it has a dual connotation. On the one hand, it means being held like a vise, and on the other hand it means being moved forward. The love of God holds me, the love of God moves me along the path that God wants me to walk – all under the umbrella of LOVE. The motivation that we need, beloved, to move from being believers to being disciples in love with the Master and following after Him, is love. And that love must continue to grow in us, in you and in me.

Why is love the motivation? Why not just obedience or duty? I'll tell you, because: -

- Love gives us the reason to act
- There is no coercion in love
- It involves a free act of will
- It frees you from the burden of having to do something to wanting to do something – not because of what God can give or the blessings that he pours out on you, but just because He is God and we love Him and we want to do everything that He wants us to do.
- We want to be the reflections of the Lord Jesus because we love Him.

Do you remember that cosmic battle between God and Satan in terms of Job? Satan walks up to God and says, "I see Your servant Job" and God proudly shows him off as a righteous person, and Satan says, "He's righteous because You bless him." And God says, "No, you can take away that blessing." And Satan does. God allows all of these good things in Job's life to be stripped away and challenges Satan with this thought, "Job will continue to follow Me and love Me, not because of the blessing, but because I am his God and he loves Me." Not because of any blessings that we have been given. That's why, beloved, disciples follow their Master, out of devotion to Him.

So the question for you and me today is: Where are we? Where are we on this continuum from justification to sanctification? Have we stopped somewhere? Did we stop at the point of

justification? Or have we come along that path of sanctification and given up because the journey got too hard, or something happened to us, or we just decided to park? Where are you in that journey in following the Lord? Does love need to continue to grow or does it need to be jump-started today for you to get back on that road behind the Master?

I think it is fairly easy for us to answer that question about where we are. Let us just look again at that table.

- Disciples undergo a life-long process. Is that true? have you begun that life-long process of following after Him every step of the way?
- Are you following Christ?
- Are you reciprocating His love for you?
- Are you receiving His instructions and following them?
- Are you responding to Jesus' command to come after Him?
- Are you truly seeking after sanctification?
- Are you committed to an ongoing relationship with Him?

You may well say: How do I grow in my love for someone whom I can't see? That's the problem. Initially I started out with the first love, and I was gung-ho about it. Then it is so difficult to grow in love for someone whom I haven't seen. I would say to you that if you want to grow in love for someone, that you remember the things that they have done for you.

What has Jesus done for you?

- His act of kindness to you in bringing you out of a certain trajectory of death to one of eternal life. He wants the very best for you. Nobody else wants the very best for you as much as Jesus does. He wants you to grow into everything that you intended to grow into, and to fulfill every purpose. And He is there to help you make that happen.
- He loves you with an everlasting love as we are told in Jeremiah.
- He has given His life for you. He took the penalty for your sin and mine. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." He took our penalty on Himself and paid for it with His life.

Even beyond that, not just the things that He has done, which are so huge and wonderful. But...

- He continues to care for you and for me.
- He continues, as the Word says, to give us grace for every situation.
- He continues to let His strength come in our weaknesses.
- He continues to be with us every moment of every day.
- He sits at the right hand of God, the Father, interceding for you and me, praying for us.

That's what He continues to do, beloved; what He's done and what He's doing. And as we ask this question: How do I grow in my love for Him? - all we need to do is to remember everything that He had done and is doing for us. And love will automatically bubble up within us and help us to say: I'm not going to be satisfied in just being a believer. I'm going to follow this Jesus whom I love dearly. I'm going to emulate Him, I'm going to reflect His goodness in my life, through my behavior, my character, my words, my very attitude. And truly, the Lord who is God in my life, I'm going to follow Him.

Can that be where you can land at this point to say, "Yes! I'm going after Him. Maybe I haven't till now. Maybe I am, but I'm kind of lethargic about the whole thing." Or maybe this morning you are saying, "I want just a closer walk with Him. I want to just be with Him, hear Him, speak to Him and follow hard after Him.

Our closing hymn this morning is 'Just a Closer Walk with Him'. And I pray that as we sing it together, that it will inspire you and me to say, "Lord, I'm coming hard after you. This journey from justification through sanctification and to glorification one day, Lord, I want to walk hand in hand with you. I want a closer walk, Jesus, so help me Lord.

Heavenly Father, that is our heart's desire that we would walk closely with You, follow You, hear You, grow more and more in love with You. Never allow that love to diminish or die. We thank You that through Your Holy Spirit, we can move on that pathway of sanctification. Lord, we pray that every decision that goes up to You that says I'm going to get up and follow after the Master, that You would light a fire under each one through Your Holy Spirit that we would never lag behind, but would be close at Your side walking with You. Lord Jesus, in Your precious name we pray all of these things. Amen.

Let us sing our closing hymn:

I am weak but Thou art strong
Jesus keep me from all wrong.
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee.

Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Thru' this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.

Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

When this feeble life is o'er,
Time for me will be no more.
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To Thy kingdom's shore, to Thy shore.

Just a closer walk with Thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.
Daily walking close to Thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.
