

Acts 18:23-19:7

"A Few Details Of Discipleship"

It's certainly not a comprehensive, all-inclusive course on discipleship. But we can surely pick up a few essential *details* of discipleship in this section of scripture that's before us today.

I suppose the 1st thing we should understand is the non-negotiable need both to be discipled & to be discipling. Jesus commanded *His disciples* just prior to His ascension, "**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (no exemptions, no exceptions), 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."¹**

We could really make an entire study out of that single Vs, couldn't we? But what I want you to see is that what Jesus said wasn't a suggestion, or a recommendation, it was a command. "Go & do this", it's an imperative, non-negotiable exhortation that anticipates obedience. Simply stated, a disciple is a learner, a student, a follower of a particular person & one who puts into practice what he (or she) has learned from that person.

Remember; Jesus said, "**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.**"² Now; there's a couple of more details that we're not going to dip into today (the idea of "deny yourself & take up your cross"). What I'm emphasizing at this point is the fact that a disciple is one who "follows", "learns of & puts into practice" the things that Jesus taught. Of course, denial of self, the self-will & learning to be about the will of another (namely God) is all a part of that.

& It's something that carries on, that continues until the day we die. We'll never arrive at perfection this side of eternity. That's why I say that we have a need to be being discipled ourselves, regardless of how long we've walked w/Christ. There's always more to know, always room to grow. Yet, we're also to be finding others, coming along side others & pouring into them, "*teaching them*" "*to observe*" that is, "to obey" the things that Jesus taught (the word of God).

So let's understand (right off the bat) that a disciple isn't found in simply *knowing* what the bible says, discipleship is really established in *doing* what the bible says.

Now; when we last left off Paul had just come full circle in his 2nd missionary journey. He'd left Antioch a few yrs. earlier & after many miles & much ministry, we discover in Vs 22 of Acts 18 that he finally makes it back home. Now look at Vs 23.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 28:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 16:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 23

& Just like that Paul is, “on the road again”. (Map, “Round 3”) Perhaps you remember last week I mentioned to you that Paul was a man who just always seemed to be on the move. Here he is again, moving on. I bring it up because if you’re not careful you’ll miss the end of his 2nd missionary journey & the beginning of his 3rd missionary journey altogether.

In Vs 22 we learn he comes home, & by the end of Vs 23 he’s already put 100’s of miles behind him again. & For whatever reason, Luke doesn’t feel compelled to tell us how long Paul stayed in Antioch before he set out again to get more ministry done in the outer reaches. Maybe he stayed for a couple months, perhaps longer, perhaps not that long, we don’t know. But ultimately (maybe Luke is keeping an eye on how much scroll he has left [he’s not exactly typing out a digital word document here] & wants to stay focused on essentials rather than menial details), be that as it may he wants to get us (pretty quickly here) into the on-goings of Paul’s ministry at Ephesus.

But before he does, he makes sure that we understand that Paul’s passion didn’t stop at making converts. Going into various cities/regions, preaching the gospel, seeing people saved & sailing on. That wasn’t Paul’s heart at all. But rather the 1st focus of this trip (no different than the last one) was to go back through these various regions he’d ministered in before (did you note the phrase), “strengthening all the disciples”.

He’d already *preached* to them, persuaded them (if you will) to trust *in* Jesus. Now his heart was to go back & *teach* them, take them deeper in their understanding of what it meant to draw near *to* Jesus, to walk *w/Jesus*. Look, it’s hard to put principles into practice that you don’t know! & Again, it wasn’t like he could just hand out “new believer’s bibles” or something when someone gave their life to Christ. He would teach them the principles & precepts of scripture; talk about what it looks like when we put it into practice in our lives. He wasn’t content to know that you were saved *by* Jesus (as great as that is). He wanted to strengthen you *in* Jesus.

If Paul were to visit our church, I have no doubt that he would take some time in order to know, A.) “How strong of a disciple are you?” & B.) “What can I do to *strengthen* your walk *w/J.C.*?” Listen, it’s not enough to make a strong *beginning* *w/Jesus*. (Of course I don’t want to take away from that, it’s a wonderful thing). But Jesus never offered the words “Well begun, good & faithful servant.” The words we’re looking to hear are, “Well *done*, good & faithful servant.” We need to be always growing in strength as disciples of Christ... That’s a passion we have around here.

That's why there are different groups intentionally designed to help you grow in your walk & relationship w/Christ. Be they women's ministries, youth ministry, mid-week life groups or whatever. Because though we're absolutely lit every time someone gives their life to Jesus. *That's not where you cross the finish line, that's where the race begins.* We want to disciple you, to strengthen you, to teach you what it means to follow Jesus, to take up your cross, to take His yoke upon you. We want to help you learn *of Him & grow in Him...*

Ok; for those of you who maybe don't remember. Paul had joined up w/a married couple (Aquila & Priscilla) whose hearts, hands & home they'd opened to the Lord. They'd sailed from Corinth w/him to Ephesus & though Paul did a little ministry there, his heart was to get to Jerusalem to keep the feast & fulfill his vow. *But having poured into them for the last couple of yrs. He left them to minister back in Ephesus (which btw is another purpose/benefit of discipleship, it multiplies ministry as you pour into others, they then become equipped to carry on the work, pouring into others).* So as we move into Vs 24 it's like a "meanwhile back in Ephesus" vignette.

Vs 24-26a

So we're seeing here that it wasn't only the apostles who had a burden or even a calling of God to take His word to every nation. There were undoubtedly countless others who sought to spread the good news of God's word wherever they could. Here, a man by the name of Apollos comes into focus for us.

& We learn a few things about him. #1 He was a Jew (though his name was Greek), & he was of the dispersion, he wasn't born in Israel, he was born in Egypt; Alexandria to be specific. (Map, Apollos) Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great (as the name suggests). It was one of the greatest cities of the Roman Empire, certainly one of the great cities of Greek culture. It boasted a university & a library containing some 700,000 volumes. It's where the Septuagint was made (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) & as one might anticipate from someone coming from Alexandria, he was a highly educated (formally educated) man.

We discover he was "eloquent". Meaning he was a skilled orator, incredibly articulate & well able to communicate his point, his position. He was "mighty in the Scriptures". Which is to say, he *knew* the word of God. He was well trained in the O.T. Luke draws attention to that fact in Vs 25 when he says, "This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord."

But not only was he brilliant intellectually, able to articulate w/incredible clarity, he was also passionate of heart spiritually. He was “fervent in spirit”. He was passionate in his proclamation of God’s word. *You could tell, he really believed what he was preaching & proclaiming! There was conviction in his words. & What he spoke & taught, he taught accurately. In many ways he was an exceptional, remarkable man!*

Only one drawback, one snag (if you will), he only knew the baptism of John (that is J.B.). & John’s work was really only brought to fruition in Christ... So the message of Apollos, though not inaccurate, nor insincere, was simply incomplete. *Now, it’s pretty incredible that John’s fame & his message had made it all the way from the wilderness of Judea to Alexandria of Egypt & now up in Ephesus, his work & his words were widely known by the Jews throughout the Roman Empire.*

But John was put to death before the fullness of the work of Christ came to pass. So Apollos knew, “Repent, get ready & receive”. He probably had even heard of Jesus. John pointed Him out, He baptized Him. He said of Jesus when he saw Him coming toward him to be baptized, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*³ Again, speaking of Jesus, he said, *“He must increase, but I must decrease.”*⁴ *So there were definitely certain elements of John’s message that pointed to Jesus & our need to respond to Him. But his primary focus was one of preparation, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Get your heart right & ready to receive the Messiah.*

But he knew nothing of the death/resurrection of Jesus, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Day of Pentecost... the gospel of grace.

Couple of quick take homes here. (#1) You can only take people as far as you’ve gone & no further. This is why it’s so important that we continue to press on & keep growing in our relationship w/God. Because we can’t teach what we don’t know. We can’t encourage people or give people understanding in things we don’t understand or know ourselves. Apollos could take them to the point of repentance, being ready to respond to the Messiah, perhaps pointing out a Man named Jesus whom John had proclaimed as the Messiah. But he couldn’t share w/them the redeeming work of the cross, the reality of the resurrection, the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, & the message of God’s grace.

Having said that I want you to realize this, (#2) the scripture doesn’t *condemn* Apollos for not knowing everything, they *commend* him for sharing what he *did* know!

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 1:29]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 3:30]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Many people are afraid to share w/others because they feel like they don't know enough. Pour into others *what you do know!* Apollos didn't know much about Jesus, but man he shared passionately! & What he did know, he gave to others freely, w/out reservation & he spoke w/authority. We'll be growing, learning till the day we meet Jesus. If you wait till you're ready, you'll never be ready. Share what you know, encourage people w/the word of God.

Vs 26b-28

So, Paul's companions (Aquila & Priscilla) heard him, were immediately impressed by him & said, "we need to take this young man out for lunch." They didn't argue with or rebuke him publicly, they took him aside privately & said, "Wow, we can really see the fingerprints of God upon your life. & We were listening to everything you said & it was right on, however there's more!"

Apollos is all, "Wait, there's more!?" & They began to explain to him the way of God more accurately, the fullness of what God had accomplished in Christ. His death, resurrection, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, how it all tied together in scripture. & If you thought Apollos was excited before, he's unstoppable now.

Now that he knew the message more accurately, he would become radically, truly effective in his ministry. 2 more things. #1 Aquila & Priscilla were there at synagogue, listening to what was being shared every week. They could've been like, "We know the message, these guys aren't even presenting the whole picture." But they weren't. They went back again & again, to avail themselves to minister where the Lord might lead. Here's my point. If you have a few miles on you in Christ, you've known Jesus for a year, or two or ten. When you come to church it shouldn't be only to be ministered unto, but also to be involved in ministering unto others... Find somewhere to be involved, God wants to use your life in this place.

#2 Apollos was an educated man, an eloquent man. He could've been like, "I'm not sure you two tentmakers have much to offer me." But he wasn't prideful, he was teachable. This is such a key. Yes, he had his own goals, his own style of ministry. They weren't seeking to fit him into their mold. It's not Christian cloning... They trained him & released him that he might train others. But the point is that he was open to being taught. He understood that there might be things he didn't understand & he was open to that. It doesn't matter how long we've known the Lord, or walked w/the Lord, we should always remain open & teachable that we might learn more *about* the Lord...

It will enable us to serve Him more effectively, more fruitfully for His glory. Paul had instructed Aquila & Priscilla, they instructed Apollos & then he went & greatly helped those in Achaia, there in Corinth who'd believed through grace. Paul had planted the seeds there, Apollos watered them.

But check it out, you never know how God will use you in another person's life. God uses you to change one person, that person changes someone else, who changes someone else & only eternity will display the fullness of what God had done through your life. But it's an exciting & fulfilling thing, to be used of God. Find someone & pour into them, allow others to pour into you, just share what you know & continue to grow.

Ch 19

Vs 1-3

You know how in the movies it's like when people are kind of destined to meet but they just keep slipping past each other in random locations? This reads kind of like that to me. As Apollos leaves Ephesus for Corinth, Paul comes across Galatia/Phrygia & comes down into Ephesus. & Lo & behold, who did he run into? Some (our subject for today) "disciples".

I can't prove it, but because of context, my suspicion is that they were some results of the ministry of Apollos, but not everyone would agree w/me on that.

As for Ephesus. You might be interested to know that it was the 4th largest city of the Roman Empire, it housed one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient world (which was the temple of Artemis, or Diana). It was a principle center for magic (the manipulation of supernatural power) in the ancient world. The Ephesians were a superstitious kind of people, & this is the culture that Paul is coming into.

He'd promised that he'd come back should the Lord will, & he's kept his word. But as he enters the region he runs across some disciples, they seem to have the right vocabulary, they have a heart to honor God, they're looking to perhaps adhere to a higher moral code, but there's just something about them that causes Paul to believe that they're missing something. (Just presuming that when Paul met people the 1st thing he said wasn't generally, "Hi, my name is Paul, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?") 😊

But I don't know if it was a lack of enthusiasm, joy, maybe kind of a coldness rather than compassion & love, but something about them caused him to believe they were missing a key ingredient in their life lived for God. Now; some wonder if they were even saved, but they're called disciples which would lead me to believe they were...

Or, it could be that they were a religious group, meaning they wanted to honor God, but they hadn't been born again... people vary between the 2, I'm not sure that's the main point anyway. **The point is that they hadn't laid hold of the fullness of what God had done for them or wanted to do in/through them. So when Paul asked them about receiving the Holy Spirit, they said, "Holy Spirit? We haven't heard of such a thing..."**

He says, "Well then, into what were you baptized?" Why? Because Jesus said that when we baptize people, we're to baptize them into the name of the Father, the Son & the... Holy Spirit. They hadn't heard of the Holy Spirit so he's wondering into what they were baptized... **They said, "John's baptism." Again, a baptism of repentance, but the Christian baptism is an identification w/the death & resurrection of J.C. through the power of the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was appropriate for its time, but what it pointed to found its fullness in the finished work of Jesus.**

So not exactly like Apollos, yet similar in that they knew the condemnation of sin, the moral obligation to do what's right before God, but didn't know of the death/resurrection & ascension of Jesus, the gospel of God's grace or the power of the Holy Spirit to enable & equip them to fulfill God's call upon their lives.

Vs 4-7

It's not so much that they were baptized *again* as it was that they were baptized into the fullness of everything baptism represented in the manner that Jesus had Himself commanded (Matt 28:19). Being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus implies the manner that Jesus commanded, w/full understanding of the gospel.

Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were filled w/the Spirit & received gifts *of* the Spirit (of which we're told they spoke in tongues & prophesied).

Again, Paul found them, poured into them & took them deeper in their understanding of God, who Jesus is & the work He wants to do in our lives. I suppose it's fair to consider the same question today. Have you received the gift of the Holy Spirit? Can people recognize that you belong to Christ or is there something missing? A lack of love, or joy or compassion. No real heart to serve the Lord or give of yourself to the Lord?

I'm not asking if you believe in Jesus (though that's a valid question). I'm asking if you're living under the Divine influence of the Spirit of God? God wants you to go deeper. Take the plunge, seek God for the fullness of all that He has for you that He might be glorified in your life...

Prayer Points:

God, we thank You for the clarity of Your word. We thank You that You love us & that You want to use us right where we're at. That You not only want to pour *into* us, but pour *through* us into the lives of others. Give us that heart that wants to know, & wants to grow. Always teachable, moldable, pliable in Your hands. Fill us fresh today w/Your Spirit.

Listen, if in your heart you want to do right before God, you want to be found pleasing to God, but it's like there's a piece of the puzzle still missing... Ask Him today, that He might fill you to full, to the overflow w/the Holy Spirit. That He might have His way completely, irrevocably in your life.

Or if you're in a place where you've not even received Jesus, let's start right there. Turn from your sin, believe on the Lord J.C. & you'll be saved.