

Matthew 4:12-25 | “What is a Disciple? Part 1”
Preached on April 23, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 4, verse 12. *[pause]*

We are continuing our study of discipleship in Matthew this week.

Last Sunday, the groundwork and foundation was set by Matthew by showing us “who we follow”.

And now we will move on to talk about “what is a disciple?” *[pause]*

I’ll actually be tackling ‘what is a disciple’ in 2 parts.

This week will focus more on Christ’s call to follow Him, and next week will focus on Christ’s statement about making us fishers of men. *[pauseeee]*

If you think about it, other than in regards to church-related things, we often don’t use the term ‘disciple’.

It’s not like a normal person talks about their job and says, “I’m a disciple of my supervisor.”

No one really involved in basketball says, “I’m a disciple of Michael Jordan.” *[pause]*

Even if we used the similar term of “follower”, you realize that even that word is used differently by us than it is in the Bible. *[pause]*

Nowadays, when we use the term ‘followers’ most often it’s in relation to social media.

We say, “So-and-so has 1 million followers”.

But all we really mean by that is that’s how many people follow that person’s page to see what they regularly post. *[pauseeee]*

So right from the start, we see that there may be a misunderstanding in some people’s minds as to what a disciple and follower is. *[pause]*

You see, in Jesus’ day, rabbi’s would have disciples who would follow them around, and learn everything they said and did.

We don’t do this, do we?

It’s not like a teenager follows their teacher around everyday of their lives, learning how to live.

They’d probably get in trouble for doing that. *[pause]*

Instead, they come to a classroom, learn for a while, and then go home. *[pause]*

The closest thing that we have is probably an apprentice, but even that doesn't go as far as what a disciple was in the Bible...

...For usually an apprentice doesn't adhere to the teachings of their trainer and spend all day everyday living life with them, but is only focused on learning a specific trade. *[pause]*

So if we are going to accurately understand the Bible's use of the term 'disciple', we can't start with our modern day understanding of the term.

Instead, we must look to the Bible, and according to the Bible, a disciple is someone who follows someone else, adhering to the teachings of another.

They are a student and a learner, who seeks to live their life in accordance with another person's life. *[pause]*

So then what is a disciple of Jesus Christ?...

A disciple is a follower of Christ.

Let's READ the passage to see this clearer. *[READ]*

This morning, we will key in on Jesus calling his disciples, but the call of his disciples is bracketed by two very important passages, showing us who Jesus is. *[pause]*

According to verses 12-17, He is the light. *[pause]*

Once John the Baptist's ministry is over, Jesus knows that it's his time to go into his public ministry.

He lives in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, which fulfills Scripture. *[pauseeee]*

What's interesting is that the two tribes spoken of here were among the first to be deported by Assyria back in the Old Testament time.

So they were the first ones to live in the darkness of exile, but now they are the first ones to experience the great light of Jesus! *[pause]*

This is signaling to us that the King is here, the light is dawning, and the kingdom is near!

That's why Jesus goes to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." *[pauseeee]*

Then in verses 23-25, the other passage that brackets the call of the disciples, it shows us a snapshot of Jesus' ministry.

He preaches, teaches, and heals.

His fame spreads throughout the region, and great crowds follow him. *[pause]*

The Messiah, the light, the King was showing that truly God was at work intervening in history and demonstrating the power of the kingdom.

His identity was being authenticated by his healings, and the kingdom had truly come near in Him. *[pause]*

All of this is to remind us of *who* will call the disciples in verses 18-22.

He's none other than the true light, the promised One, the King, who is the great preacher, teacher, and healer, bar none.

And it is *He* who casually walks by the Sea of Galilee, and changes the lives of a few men by saying, "Follow me."

And He's the same One who calls us to do the same, and changes our lives forever. *[pauseeee]*

As we look at Jesus calling His disciples, and calling us, we must never lose sight of that truth.

This one who calls us to follow Him is none other than the Light of the World.

And He has utmost power -- knowing these things helps us to view what we are about to learn in the right way. *[pause]*

This isn't some made up religion.

This isn't some fraud gathering a large crowd based solely on charisma.

This is the Alpha & Omega, who says, "Follow me." *[pauseeee]*

Now that we have seen the two passages surrounding the call of Jesus' disciples, which showed us more of who Jesus is...

...Let's zoom in on the call of the disciples in verses 18-22. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus is just walking by the Sea of Galilee when he sees two brothers, Peter and Andrew.

They are just going about their normal day fishing, when all of a sudden, Jesus says, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Immediately they follow him. *[pause]*

The same type of thing happens as Jesus sees James and John, and they even leave their father to follow Christ. *[pause]*

That's the story in a nutshell, but it's truly a powerful little passage showing us some things about being a disciple of Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

What would be immediately significant to the original readers of this story is the fact that Jesus chose his students.

In that day, the student would choose which rabbi to follow, not the other way around.¹

Yet Jesus takes the initiative in choosing his disciples. *[pause]*

Isn't that just like God, though?

He is the *initiating* God.

He always makes the first move. *[pause]*

You see this throughout the Bible, as he makes the first move and chooses Abraham.

He chooses Israel and calls them to Himself.

He chooses the prophets to go and speak for Him, and now here is Jesus making the first move, choosing his disciples, and calling them to something amazing.

And that's what he does in salvation.

Before the foundation of the world, he chose us.² *[pause]*

He has to make the first move because without doing so, we would never choose Him in our spiritual blindness.

But in love and grace, He seeks us and finds us.³ *[pause]*

This is where discipleship starts: with the initiative of Christ.

He came to us; we didn't go to Him first.

He sought us out to bring light to our darkness.

He is the seeker and saver of the lost. *[pauseeee]*

The disciples would always remember, "He sought me out and called me!"

"I was just going about my business, and God intervened in my life!" *[pause]*

Isn't that your experience?

Hasn't God stepped into your life and showed His initiating grace?

¹ Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Mt 4:19–20.

² See Ephesians 1:4.

³ A reference to Luke 19:10.

Can't you say, "I was just living my life for myself, when this happened, and then that happened, and I heard the gospel, and my life has never been the same."? *[pause]*

Even if you were saved at an early age, God initiated in your life by sending Christ and by making a way for you to hear about Him. *[pause]*

Like the disciples who were just fishing like a normal work day, so Christ steps into our seemingly normal days and turns our lives upside down. *[pauseeee]*

And what's the call that He makes? "Follow me."

Literally, what Jesus said was, "Come behind me." *[pauseeee]*

Whenever I go into a crowded place with my children, I always give them a talk beforehand.

What I say is that they need to follow me when we walk.

Wherever I go, they need to go. *[pause]*

Well when Jesus says, "Follow me," he means much more than that.

He doesn't mean just follow me as we walk in a crowd, but follow me in life. *[pause]*

His call of following entailed relationship, emulation, and obedience.

It meant that they were now to come behind Him, learn from Him, and adhere to His values, passions, and priorities. *[pauseeee]*

Do you view following Christ in that way?

Do you realize that it impacts your whole life? *[pause]*

It's easy to get into the mode of thinking that following Christ is just going through the motions of dressing up and making it to church on Sunday's.

Because that's how you were raised.

You were raised in a way that made it seem like Christianity is just something that you need to do, and so you do it to feel good about yourself that you checked off a box.

It was just a cultural thing to do.

That's just what people did or what your family did - you went to church.

But Jesus is showing us that Christianity is so much more than that!

Being a disciple means *following* Jesus! *[pause]*

It's not just this nice little polite invitation of, "If you guys want to, I'd just really like you to be with me."

No, it was a summons from God Himself, it was a divine call: "Follow me!" *[pause]*

And it radically changes our lives!

It means we now enter into a relationship with Him.

We come behind Him in life, so that our lives reflect His.

We learn from Him, and continue to learn from Him to the end of our lives, and we shape our priorities and values after His. *[pauseeee]*

To follow Christ, He must now be the leader of our lives, not us.

We no longer live as "captain of our souls",⁴ but with a new captain and leader. *[pauseeeee]*

It's easy for us to see Jesus as merely a helper on the side who we use when we need Him, but we don't see *Him* as the leader.

There's even a common quote whereby people say, "Jesus is my co-pilot."

But is Jesus really our co-pilot?

I thought he said follow *me*.

He literally said, "Come behind me."

He's not my co-pilot, He's my pilot - He's the leader. *[pauseeeee]*

Typically, how we view Christ is seen in how we live.

Do you live your life following Christ or do you see yourself as the leader, and He's only the sidekick? *[pause]*

You want to see whether you see yourself or Jesus as the leader? Just think about your life.

Think about what's most important to you, does it reflect what's most important to Jesus?

When you make decisions, what drives your decision making?

When you make plans, how often are your plans focused solely on yourself and what you want to do, rather than on what Christ wants? *[pause]*

Just think of the disciples here.

⁴ A reference to a line in William Ernest Henley's poem, "Invictus", which says, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

From this point on, their plans were now submitted to Christ's.

Wherever he would go, they would go, for they followed Him.

Their priorities and values were now going to be morphed in line with Christ's, for they would see his priorities and values everyday.

It was no longer their decisions that would drive their day-to-day lives, but Jesus would make the decisions, and they would follow.

That's the same pattern that our lives are to reflect. *[pauseeee]*

So many people pride themselves on being a leader.

"I'm the leader here!" they think.

But really, any disciple of Jesus is ultimately a *follower*. *[pauseeee]*

Yes, there are times when it's bad to be a follower, who just follows others and does what is wrong, but this is not that.

We should trumpet to the world that we are not the end-all be-all of the world, but we are mere servants and followers of the One who is the true Lord and Leader. *[pause]*

We are not the world's versions of leaders.

Yes, we may take on some leadership-type roles, but basically we are to be humble followers, followers of Christ, and there's nothing else that we would rather be. *[pauseeee]*

So as we zero in on Christ's call of saying, "Follow me," what does it entail?...

I. To follow Christ, you must trust Him.

Think about it this way, anyone that you follow, you must trust.

If you don't trust that someone will lead you in the right way, you don't follow them. *[pause]*

Let's say that you were lost and so you asked someone how to get somewhere.

But the person said, "I'm not sure where that is or how to get there, but just follow me, and we will see where we end up."

You wouldn't follow that person because they have no idea where they are going.

But if someone knew exactly where to go, you'd be willing to follow them.

So we must trust Christ to follow Him. *[pauseeee]*

The disciples had to trust Jesus to get up, leave their boats, and follow Him. *[pause]*

Their response was immediate and unquestioning because they trusted Him.

If they didn't trust Him, they would have hesitated and taken some time to think about it.

If they didn't trust Him, they would have asked him a million questions like, "OK, where are we going?"

"What will we be doing?"

"What all is involved in this endeavor?"

"Can you send me the job description, so I can think about it for a week."

But they didn't do that, instead, they trusted him, for to follow someone you must trust them.

[pause]

Do you trust Christ?

Do you trust that His plans are best?

Do you trust that what He values and prioritizes is truly what's most important, rather than what you think?

Do you trust that He will lead you in the right way, and it will be worth it all? *[pause]*

So many times our lives don't reflect a following after Christ because we aren't fully trusting Him.

We tend to trust *our* plans and *our* decision-making skills. *[pauseeee]*

Here's something to think about...

What happens when you see a smooth path, but He's walking you down the hard-looking path?

Do you follow Him?

If not, what are you demonstrating?

You are saying, "I don't trust you, for you are taking me *there*? I don't trust that you know what's best, for just look at how hard that path is."

But what's He saying?...

"Just follow me. You can trust me. I know what's best. Follow my lead, steps in my steps. I'll be with you." *[pause]*

To follow Christ, we must trust Him.

And really, that's how someone starts becoming a disciple - they turn from their sins and trust in Him as Savior and Lord because of His work on the Cross and in the Tomb.

And trusting Him should be a continual thing as we follow Him all along the way. *[pause]*

So do you trust Him? *[pauseeee]*

Here's something else to consider about following...

II. To follow Christ, you can't follow other things.

In order to follow Christ, the disciples couldn't follow someone else, could they?

In order to follow Christ, the disciples couldn't pursue other things because Jesus would now consume their time, plans, and values.

So also, we can't follow other things, if we are going to follow Jesus faithfully. *[pause]*

The truth is, you can't be half-heartedly following Jesus, or you will be a bad follower.

Our focus must be on Him. *[pause]*

Have you ever had to follow another car in order to get somewhere?

You can't half-heartedly follow that other car, or else you will quickly find yourself lost. *[pause]*

Your focus must be on that car and where they go.

"Did they take a left turn? Did they merge onto the highway?"

If you are focused on other cars, or if you are distracted by sights over there, then you could be led astray and take the wrong turn. *[pause]*

So also, we must remain focused on Christ to follow Him well.

We can't pursue other things.

Even Jesus made it clear: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."⁵ *[pause]*

You can't be all about money, money, money and serve God.

You can't be all about your career, and follow Christ faithfully.

You can't be focused on yourself, your plans, your wants, and be a good follower of Jesus.

⁵ Matthew 6:24.

Your focus and devotion will be divided. *[pause]*

It's not that we don't use money, but how we view and use our money is transformed.

It's not that we don't have careers or seek to be good workers, but how we view and use our career is reshaped. *[pause]*

To truly follow Christ well, you cannot be following after other things!

If we are pursuing other things, then how could we say we are actually following *Him*?
[pauseeee]

That leads me to the third aspect of following Christ...

III. To follow Christ, you must be committed.

When Jesus called these disciples, in that moment, they were committing.

In fact, this commitment is seen in how they leave things behind. *[pause]*

Peter and Andrew are said to leave their nets and follow Him.

James and John leave their boat and father to follow Him. *[pause]*

This took commitment and devotion.

They were leaving behind their jobs and families for Jesus.

They would no longer have a steady income, but would have to live by faith financially.

They would no longer have the comforts of home, but would constantly be on the move with Jesus.

And James and John left their father, no longer having the presence of their family with them.
[pause]

This was a very sacrificial response by the disciples.

It was a total change of their way of life.

It would no longer be "business as usual" in their lives.

Essentially, they left behind everything they knew. *[pause]*

How could they do this?

How could they leave behind so much stability and comfort to live a life of uncertainty ahead?

Because they trusted Jesus and saw Him as worth every cost! *[pause]*

Their commitment to Jesus trumped their careers and pursuit of money.

Their commitment to Jesus trumped their family ties.

And the only way that we will be committed followers of Jesus is we must see that He is worth it all.

Because to follow Jesus does truly involve cost. [pauseeee]

The example of these disciples shows us the radical nature of discipleship.

It will cost you to follow Him faithfully. [pauseeee]

Following Jesus changes the status quo; it changes our way of life.

Jesus steps into our lives and changes our 'business as usual', for He will lead us to leave behind the comfortable and familiar.

Because what happens if God calls you to be a full-time missionary?

You're going to have to sacrifice the presence of your family, the comforts of home, and the financial stability of a secular job. [pause]

What happens when God calls you to step out into the unknown?

To follow Christ, you must be committed and take that step, knowing all the while that He's totally worth it to follow with your life. [pauseeee]

Following Him means that our money is no longer our own, as we are called to use it for His glory.

Following Him means that our time and bodies are no longer our own, for our lives are to be submitted to His will.

But you can only do this if you recognize, like the disciples, that Jesus takes absolute priority and allegiance over everything. [pauseeee]

You see, following Christ means that we can't pick and choose what we want.

We can't have a little bit of Jesus over here, and a little bit of that over there.

That's not following Christ, is it?

That's not commitment - yet, so many of us do this.

We pick and choose the things that we want to follow, but leave behind the hard, uncomfortable parts.

But following Christ means that He must be our focus, our priority, and the One who impacts every single thing we do. *[pause]*

If He calls us to abandon a job for a job that He wants us to do, we need to do it.

If He calls us to sacrifice more money for His purposes, we follow.

If He calls us to spend less time on ourselves and more time with someone else in need, we walk in those steps. *[pauseeee]*

Too often we are double-minded, wanting to have our feet in two places at once: one foot living for ourselves and the other following Christ.

But this will not do.

You can't follow Christ with one foot trying to walk the other way, but with both feet following his path. *[pauseeee]*

Like the disciples' actions show us, following Jesus is a radical commitment that involves sacrifice and cost.

Are you willing to let go of some things in your life?

Are you willing to step out in faith?

You see...

Christ calls us to a radical new way of life: discipleship!

Sunday-only Christianity will not do.

Half-hearted following is not following.

Instead, we are to follow Him with our lives!

It will take trust, focus, and commitment - but it's *totally* worth it.

For the One who calls us to follow is the One who went and died for us and rose again.

He forgives us and gives eternal life to all who believe in Him.

He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, and He has all the wisdom and power.

There's no one greater to follow. *[pauseeee]*

So let's get down to where the rubber meets the road, or should I say, let's get down to where our feet follow His feet - how can we follow Christ better? *[pause]*

Maybe for you, you need to start submitting your plans to Christ.

Start out each day and ask Him, “Lord, is this what you want me to do? Or is there something else I should be doing?” *[pause]*

Or what about when you think about the next 5 or 10 years?

So often we have these goals and dreams of, “I want to do this. I want to do that.”

But do we ever consider, “What does God want for my life in the next 5 years or 10 years?” *[pause]*

Maybe you need to evaluate and change some of your priorities.

Your priorities have been about yourself and your comfort, but the Lord’s priorities are His kingdom and the service of others.

So maybe that means it’s time to sacrifice some TV time or time on the internet so that you can serve someone else.

Maybe it means giving of yourself to go over and help someone out.

Maybe it means cutting some needless spending and moving it towards something that would impact others for Christ. *[pause]*

I think it’s good for us to regularly evaluate our time and money.

Could we intentionally look at the time that we are spending on our own leisure and say, “OK, I’m going to intentionally use this time to serve someone else.”

Or intentionally looking at our spending and saying, “OK, I can cut that spending there and use that money to give towards this need over here.”

Intentionally set aside a time today or very soon to sit with your spouse or if you are single, to sit down and prayerfully consider some ways that you can follow Christ more faithfully and passionately. *[pauseeee]*

What does this kind of intentionally take?

A regular reminder that we are *followers of Christ*.

We are seeking to emulate His life, obey Him, adhere to what He has said, and mold our values after His.

We are saying, “Lord, lead me. I want to follow. Show me how I can live for you.” *[pause]*

May we always remember Christ’s call to follow, and may we follow Him with our lives.