

Sunday, 17 April 2016

[Peter learn to be like his master- Acts 9](#)



[Acts 9:36-43](#)

For some time I have been reflecting on a statement by a Christian teacher named Dallas Willard. He said that we have somehow come to the idea that we can be Christians without being disciples. That being a Christian is just a kind of label we attach to ourselves. ... Those who are really extreme Christians, they are the ones who are into discipleship. So “Christians” might go to church, and generally say they believe that there is a God and believe there is a heaven they go to when they die. ... “Disciples”, on the other hand, are those who get involved in Bible study, who spend time in prayer and fasting, who spend time serving others, Spend time in solitude during retreats, read books about Christianity, and get involved in other spiritual disciplines that help to shape spiritual character and develop a deeper relationship with God. ... But, somehow we got the idea

that this isn't for all Christians, only for those Christians who are really very serious. Dallas Willard points out that the word "Christian" is pretty rare in the Bible, but the word "disciple" occurs pretty often. ... "Disciple" implies learning. It implies an apprentice learning from a master. So we are expected to grow and develop in our spiritual lives.

I once heard a preacher named Rob Bell talk about what it meant to be a disciple of a Rabbi.[\[1\]](#) He said that children would often go to the local synagogue and begin memorizing the Torah (the Old Testament). Most children would also start apprenticing with their parents, maybe learning their family trade. Some students would really start to shine as they were learning the Torah. All of the students would try hard. The Rabbi was the most honoured person in the town. They would see the rabbi around town with his group of disciples. The kids would want to be close to the rabbi. They would want to be important like their rabbi. They would want to be like their rabbi.

Some of the children would really be talented when it came to studying Torah. They would come up to their rabbi and they would ask if they could be one of his disciples. Then the rabbi would quiz the child about the scriptures to see if the kid was the best of the best. The rabbi would only take the best of the best- Those that were really talented- Those he thought could really do what he does. Different rabbis had different ways of interpreting and living out the scriptures. The rabbi's particular way was called the rabbi's "yoke". So to take on a particular rabbi's teaching and way of living was to take on the rabbi's yoke. If the rabbi quizzed the child and he wasn't the best of the best, then he would tell him to continue to learn and to love God and to learn his family's trade. But if the child was the best of

the best- if he thought the child has what it takes to be like the Rabbi, then he would say, “come, follow me”.

This wasn't just going to school to cram some facts into your head. This was learning everything the rabbi's way of living. It meant following the rabbi everywhere. It meant seeing how the rabbi ate, and walked, and talked... everything. So the disciples would follow the rabbi closely as they traveled the dusty roads and a saying arose as a kind of blessing for a rabbi's disciples, “may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi”.

So when Jesus calls Peter he is fishing. The implication is that Peter was not the best of the best. He was rejected and told to love God and learn his family's family trade. When Jesus says, “Come, follow me” to Peter- Jesus is choosing him. Peter isn't begging a rabbi, and then being quizzed and turned down. Jesus finds *him* and calls *him*. Peter has been told he's nothing special. And here comes a rabbi who wants him as a disciple. Jesus builds a pack of rejected anybody's who weren't good enough to be the disciples of another rabbi. And Jesus uses this group to change the world.

Rob Bell then talked about Peter getting out of the boat to walk on the water like Jesus (Matt 14:25-31). The reason Peter had the audacity to get out of the boat was because as a disciple he was learning to do what his rabbi did. That's what it meant to be a disciple. It was to learn to be like your rabbi. So when Peter sees Jesus walking on water, Peter wants to give it a go. But he starts to doubt and sink. Rob Bell thinks it's because Peter loses faith not in Jesus, but in himself- he loses faith that he can actually follow Jesus. But because Jesus called him, he believes in Peter. He believes he can do it. Peter is a disciple, an

apprentice of Jesus. An apprentice learns to do what the master does.

Just prior to where our reading in Acts starts Peter heals a paralytic. We read, “he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralysed. And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.’ And immediately he rose” (9:33-34).

Now compare that to Jesus in Luke 15, “he said to the man who was paralysed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. (Lk 15:24-25).

Then in our Acts reading today we meet Tabitha who became ill and died. They laid her body in an upstairs room. They asked Peter to come.

“...the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, ‘Please come to us without delay.’ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive” (9:38-41).

Compare this to something Jesus did in Mark 5-

“They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi”, which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.” (Mk 5:38-42).

They both send out the mourners from the room. Peter prays. Jesus and peter both grab her hand. And they both say "get up". If they both were speaking Aramaic Jesus would have said *Talitha cumi* and Peter would have said *Tabitha cumi*, which is only one letter difference. And both came back to life.

Peter was a disciple of his rabbi. He learned to do what his rabbi did. The difference is that Peter calls on the power of Christ and does it all in his name, whereas Jesus speaks the healing into being. For Peter, following Jesus meant a different life. It wasn't just a belief he locked up in his head. It made a real concrete difference to how he lived his life. He actually believed he could become more like Jesus.

Now, I'm not saying we should all head down to the morgue and start calling dead bodies back to life. Though, I do believe if Jesus called us to that we could. I think this was at the beginning of the church and they were granted very real and concrete signs

of the salvation and new life given through Jesus. It was the establishment of a new kingdom on earth and so these signs are evidence of the kingdom of heaven invading earth. I do believe miracles still happen, but I think miracles had a special role in the early church.

There is plenty that we are called to as disciples of Jesus, besides doing miracles. As disciples of Jesus we are called to reflect the character of Christ. We are to be people that grow in the Fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal 5:22-23). We are to be people that live the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). This will only happen when we spend time with our rabbi and grow in our relationship with God. As disciples we are to so have our minds soaked in Scripture that it is liked we are covered in the dust of our rabbi. As we spend time in prayer and reading Scripture we will learn the ways of our rabbi.

For much of the church’s history there were methods of discipleship. You would be discipled in the way of the Jesuits, or the Franciscans, or Dominicans, or Benedictines. A lot of those movements were monastic and so not necessarily very realistic for us. But there were some that weren’t monastic. The Jesuits didn’t start out as a monastic or clergy order. John Wesley was known for the "method" of discipleship he asked people to practice, which is why his movement became known as "Methodism". That was not a monastic movement at all. Most churches had regular feast days and days of prayer and fasting. This can become legalistic, but that’s not what it was meant to be. We have somehow made being Christian all about Sunday, but that’s not the way it has always been.

Many (if not all) of the Christian denominations came out of some movement that was intensely about discipleship. Even the Book of Common Prayer is a way of discipleship. We usually think of it as a service book, but it is really a way of being consistently soaked in Scripture and being covered in the dust of your Rabbi. It gives readings for every day- morning and evening, as well as prayers drawn drawn from Scripture and the prayers of the saints. On page 555 it says,

“Every Christian man or woman should from time to time frame for himself a RULE OF LIFE in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel and the faith and order of the Church; wherein he may consider the following: The regularity of his attendance at public worship and especially at the holy Communion. The practice of private prayer, Bible-reading, and self-discipline. Bringing the teaching and example of Christ into his everyday life. The boldness of his spoken witness to his faith in Christ. His personal service to the Church and the community. The offering of money according to his means for the support of the work of the Church at home and overseas” (p.555).

For most of Christian history Christians have been called into a way of discipleship- A way of learning to grow into people that look like Jesus. It is a way of being covered in the dust of your Rabbi.

May we be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit as we follow our rabbi. May we be covered in the dust of the one who called us to follow him. May you see that Jesus believes in you. May you be a disciple of Jesus, growing in his ways, learning to be like him.