

Discipleship

Lessons From Would-be Disciples

Lesson #4 for January 26, 2008

Scriptures: Matthew 8:19-22; 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-30; Luke 4:16-30; 9:57-62; 12:30-34; 18:9,18-30; John 3:1-21.

1. This lesson focuses on some of the challenges of discipleship. There were five groups that we know about who followed Jesus almost continuously: 1) The 12 disciples, 2) Other disciples including the “72,” 3) A group of women, 4) The curious crowds, and 5) The hostile authorities including Pharisees, scribes (teachers of the Law), and Sadducees (priests). Our lesson today focuses on individuals from among these groups all of whom were attracted to Jesus but for various reasons decided not to follow Him—at least not at that time.
2. Let us review briefly what we know about the nature, character, and calling of each of these groups. We know far more about the 12 “named” disciples than about any of the other groups. Read Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16 for a description of their calling.
3. There were apparently many more “called” disciples who were chosen at different times and in different ways. Some are mentioned in Luke 10:1-12 when Jesus sent out 72 to minister to the villages in the non-Jewish territories.
4. There was an important group of women who followed Jesus. They were certainly disciples as well. (Luke 8:1-3) We know very little about those women. Did they prepare meals? Arrange lodging or accommodations? Purchase supplies? Repair or replace worn-out clothing? Help to organize the crowds? Support Jesus with their money? I am sure that we will be surprised to find out how much those women did quietly behind the scenes in that patriarchal society.
5. The curious crowds were almost always present. There were hundreds and at times thousands of people following Jesus for various reasons: 1) To get healing, 2) To listen to His words, 3) Just because they were curious, or 4) Because Jesus was the most interesting and exciting thing which had happened in their territory for years!
6. The hostile, scheming, and angry authorities included primarily Pharisees, scribes (otherwise known as teachers of the law), and sometimes Sadducees and priests. There was a constant interplay among these groups as well as between Jesus and these groups.
7. Today, we sit comfortably in our homes and follow events around the world by television or the internet. News is delivered to us via e-mail, “snail mail,” radio, television, telephone, and pagers. None of those modalities were available in Jesus’ day. If one wanted to know what was going on, he almost had to be present in person. Those who were really serious about following Jesus had to leave their work, their homes, and their friends and had to spend time with Him “on the road.”
8. This lesson focuses on the challenges of change in behavior. Before a person’s behavior changes, he must: 1) Be aware of the new possibility of thinking and acting, 2) Become convinced that the new way is better than the old way, and 3) Actually try it. We also know that people tend to fall into three broad categories when it comes to behavior change. Some are quick “adopters,” others are mainstream thinkers who generally follow what their peers do, and finally, there are the slow “adopters”—the last ones to accept a new practice.
9. One further consideration, we know that people tend to think in certain patterns. Furthermore,

people tend to organize their “thought world” into a logical (at least to them) whole which we sometimes refer to as a “paradigm.” If an idea is presented to someone that is completely outside of their paradigm, it is very difficult for that person to “hear” it or understand it and it is virtually impossible to adopt that idea without a lot of mental effort.

10. Let us look at the main characters in our lesson for this week. Read Matthew 8:18-22 and Luke 9:57-60. Although the scribes were paid to be copiers and interpreters of the Scripture and were considered by most of the Jewish people to be the ultimate authorities on such matters, they were frequently at odds with Jesus and His interpretations. But at least one of those scribes saw the superiority of Jesus’ thinking. He was attracted to Jesus and “stuck his neck way out” and said, “I am ready to go with you wherever you go.” (Matthew 8:19, *GNB*) In effect, Jesus said to him, “You are a rich man and I do not even have a place to sleep at night!” We have no further information about what happened to that “would-be” follower.
11. The second character in our lesson was already known as “a disciple.” Read Matthew 8:21,22 and Luke 9:59,60. But apparently, he believed that following Jesus required too much “sacrifice” and he said, “Please let me go and bury my father.” It was Jewish tradition that when someone died, they were to be buried within 24 hours. This young man was not asking for permission to attend his father’s funeral! In effect, he was saying to Jesus, “I need to go home and stay with my father until whenever it is in the future that he passes away.” Perhaps he was afraid that his brothers would take more than their share of the inheritance. Or maybe, he was just tired of walking every day! He decided to put off his decision to follow Jesus. Jesus almost immediately revealed his duplicity. Once again we do not know exactly what the final outcome was. Jesus simply said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead.” (Luke 9:60, *GNB*)
12. The next group we will consider is the people of Nazareth at the time of Jesus. Read Luke 4:16-30; Matthew 13:53-58; and Mark 6:1-6. Everyone in Nazareth knew Jesus well. Some, no doubt, loved Him. Most of them probably thought He was a “goody-goody” who did not go along with childhood pranks or join the adults in their ranting against the Samaritans, heathen, or Romans. They appreciated His good carpentry but always thought He was a bit strange. After being gone for some months, He went home to Nazareth where news had been trickling back that He had followers and that He had performed miracles. The chief of the synagogue invited Him to read a passage from Scripture and to explain its meaning. Jesus was given the book of Isaiah. He read from Isaiah 61:1,2 which was a very well-known text to all of those present as a prediction about the coming Messiah. It was one of their favorite passages. He announced, “The time has come when the Lord will save his people.” (Luke 4:19, *GNB*) But, He did not read the part about “the destruction of their enemies” which was their favorite part! Worse than that, He mentioned two stories from the Old Testament in which each of two pagan “outsiders” (the widow of Zarephath and Naaman) were favored over Israelites! The Jews of Nazareth knew they were God’s favorite people and to have someone suggest that pagan individuals might be favored over them made them very angry. So angry that they wanted to kill Jesus! How could such a thing have happened? The only possible explanation seems to be that they were “possessed of” incredible prejudice which Jesus was trying to break down. They were prepared to kill Him rather than change their ideas!
13. Read John 3:1-21. Very early in the ministry of Jesus before prejudice had become overwhelming against Him, Jesus was working in Judea. A very prominent Jewish leader by the name of Nicodemus was attracted by this young Teacher. He knew that Jesus was not

appreciated by his colleagues in the Sanhedrin. So he requested to see Jesus privately at night. What do you think Nicodemus expected to hear? Clearly, this Jewish leader recognized that he needed something more than he already had. However, he certainly did not think he needed any help in being saved! He was a Jew, a descendent of Abraham, and a member of the Sanhedrin! But he had a “heart desire” for something more. John recorded only a very small portion of his conversation with Jesus. Jesus did not spend a long time chatting with him. He got straight to the point. Jesus obviously loved him but He pointed out to him that major changes were needed in his thinking before he could become a true disciple. Nicodemus was shocked! But he did not reject the words of Jesus out of hand. Although he did not profess to follow Jesus openly at that point, later, on several occasions he prevented the Sanhedrin from taking action against Jesus. Even later, when he could no longer prevent action against Jesus and Jesus was dead, he went with his friend, Joseph of Arimathea, and took down the body from the cross, burying it in a new tomb and covering it with expensive spices. Having thus declared himself a follower of Jesus, he spent his entire wealth supporting the church and died a poor man. (AA 105.1) Jesus recognized that not everyone would immediately leave everything and follow Him. But this very important disciple would come forward at a critical time and do something for the dead body of Jesus, indicating to the Jewish nation that Jesus was not just a criminal or outlaw but rather that He was a credible Teacher. The support of Nicodemus would do much for the cause of the church, much that none of His other disciples could do.

14. Read Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-23; and Luke 18:18-30. In these passages is told the story of a young man (Matthew’s description) who was a ruler (Luke’s description) who was also very rich. He was certain—as were all Jews—that being rich, young, and a ruler of his people guaranteed him a place in the kingdom of God. But somehow, he still felt a lack of something. And he had enough self-confidence and ability to think “outside the box” that he approached Jesus and asked for further guidance. There are several puzzling things about this story. Why did Jesus focus on the last six commandments and man’s duty to his fellow man rather than saying anything about his responsibilities to God? This young man, no doubt, felt that he had done virtually everything necessary to live a righteous life. He thought that perhaps Jesus would give him one or two additional requirements which he could easily add to the long list of things he was already doing. When Jesus said, “Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me,” (Matthew 19:21, *GNB*) the young man could hardly believe his ears. To the Jewish people, having wealth was proof that he was good, that he was a follower of God, and that God was blessing him. How could he give up all that as well as the advantages of having money to follow this itinerant preacher?
15. Jesus concluded His encounter with that young man by explaining that it is very difficult for rich people to be saved. His disciples were completely flabbergasted. They believed just as the young ruler believed. But Peter immediately recognized that the disciples had done what Jesus was asking and he wanted to know what reward they would receive? (See Matthew 19:27; compare Luke 12:32-34)
16. Read Proverbs 13:22; 2 Corinthians 12:14; Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:32-34. How do we fit these verses together? How should Christians relate to money?
17. So, what should we learn from the examples of these “would-be” disciples? Is God asking us to sell everything and become homeless? Is He asking us to impulsively follow Him without considering all the consequences? What would Jesus say to us in our day? Are we allowing

the “weeds” of worldly cares to choke out our love for God and others? Do we have all our priorities straight?

18. Are we like those who promised everything but then found excuses or reasons for delaying and actually doing nothing? Is Jesus asking us to give up every “creature comfort”? Does He want us to live in hovels and drive junk heaps? Is God calling for you to set aside some of your pet projects, habits, even relationships in order to focus more fully on the kingdom of God?
19. Do we still have plenty of time to make up our minds and take action? Or do we live in a “life-or-death” time? Do we follow Jesus and attend church because nice people do that and it is comfortable to be with them and sometimes it is even interesting and exciting? Or do we join God’s people because we are really committed and we want to help the cause? Are we looking for opportunities every day whether at work or play to put in a good word for the Lord?
20. What does God expect from us in our relationships to our parents, our brothers and sisters, and our children? What about our neighbors and friends?
21. In our independent society, each one of us is expected to make up his own minds and to act somewhat on his own. But in other parts of the world, people act as groups, as tribes, as clans, or as large families. How does Jesus relate to those people? Will some people be saved because they follow their group into the kingdom?
22. Those who attend this class, listen to the Sabbath School CD’s, or listen to the Sabbath School class on the internet, have generally accepted what we call the “Larger View.” Honestly, we recognize that we are a small group among Seventh-day Adventist Christians. What do we have to say to our church and to our world? Have we become true disciples or just “would-be” disciples? Do we understand the usual paradigms within our church and within the world? Do we understand where and how we can approach those groups in their thinking and help them to recognize that there is a better way? Or do we—like the rich young man and like Nicodemus—believe that our salvation is assured and that is all we need to worry about?

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Info@theox.org

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