

Call to Obedience  
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By Pastor Reimar A. C. Schultze

## TO BECOME AS HE IS

Jesus said: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations"—Matthew 28:19

### Disciples vs. Prosperity

A very common theme among television preachers relates to money: instructing Christians how to get more of it and how to get out of debt. The prosperity message is dominant in much of the West (which is already prosperous). However, before Jesus left the earth He said to His followers, "make disciples," and not, "be prosperous." He commissioned them to be witnesses of Him (Acts 1: 8). The word "disciple" occurs 205 times in the four Gospels. It is unfortunate that the teaching on prosperity has crowded out the Great Commission.

Any honest reader of the Word knows that the overwhelming teaching of Jesus regarding money is this: prosperity reduces one's chances of getting to heaven. The more a man has in this world, the lower his chances for salvation (Matt. 19:24, Luke 12: 18 - 21). The apostle Paul says: "if we have food and raiment let us therewith be content," (1 Tim.6:8) and, "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6); and, "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Too many things of the world make many a Christian spiritually lean: How many prosperous people do you know who are faithful at prayer meetings, who have a passion for the lost, who visit the prisoners and are actually making disciples?

### Jewish Disciples

So, let us look at the word "disciple" as it was understood in the days of Jesus. In the Greek in which the New Testament was first translated the word for disciple is *mathetes*. But for the root meaning of the word disciple we need to go to the Jews and their word for disciple is *talmid*, because Jesus came to the Jews.

Now, here is how a Jew became a *talmid*. It was a gradual process. At the center of a Jewish community was the synagogue. The synagogue was the most cohesive force in the community: it is where people worshiped and prayed, it is where the word of God was read and explained and where rabbis debated. Next to the synagogue was a school. At the elementary level (*Beit Sefer*), children up to age 12 or 13 learned to read using the Torah, the five books of Moses. They memorized large portions of those books. Then at about 13, most children stayed home to learn housekeeping or the father's trade. However some of the boys who wanted to learn more about the Torah and about God continued their education in the word of God at the middle school (*Beit Tal-*

*mud*) until they were about 15, before they pursued their father's trade.

And yet there were a few of the boys who had developed such fire for the Lord and the Scriptures that they went further in scriptural training to become *talmidin* (disciples). They eventually ask a rabbi to join him. The rabbi would examine the applicant and give him a probationary period to check him out. If a rabbi agreed to accept a boy, he would say: follow me, become my *talmid*. The student would forsake all – his family, his trade, his life plans, to follow this rabbi for two to four years with the goal to diligently imitate and become like his master. Then eventually the rabbi would say to his *talmid*: you have become like me, now go make your own disciples.

Remember the words of Jesus: "*It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master*" (Matt.10:25). In the West, we think of a disciple mostly as a student. But the focus of the *talmid* in Jesus' time **was a combination of knowledge and likeness: knowing the word of God thoroughly and becoming like the rabbi**. This becoming like the rabbi is what Jesus stressed far more than education. Look at the lack of confidence Jesus expressed in reference to education when it comes to knowing Him: "*O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight*" (Luke 10:21). Paul adds these words "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent*" (1 Cor. 1:19 and Is. 29:14). In the Amplified Bible this passage reads: "*I will baffle and render useless and destroy the learning of the learned... and the cleverness of the clever. I will frustrate and nullify them, and bring them to nothing.*"

### **Jesus' Disciples**

Consequently Jesus did not go to one of the many Galilean towns which were like incubators for *talmidin*, producing large numbers of rabbinical disciples. He avoided places with universities, theaters, synagogues and rabbinical schools. Rather Jesus looked for His first five disciples in Bethsaida – a fishing village of about 200 people. Amazingly Bethsaida had neither a synagogue, nor a rabbinical school, nor a rabbi. But it was here where Jesus found Andrew, Peter, John, James, and Philip. Each was chosen with the words, "*Follow Me,*" meaning **become like me**.

So, Jesus' disciples or *talmidin* were not to study, but to *study to be approved unto God* (2 Tim.2:15). That means they were to become like God - godly, Christ - like. All scriptural study is vain, idolatrous, and spiritually destructive unless it leads to the godliness of the student. The rabbinical schools produced scholars, but most failed to produce godly scholars. Consequently most of them became Jesus worst enemies. In fact they killed Him. And also remember that most religious wars were started by people who were fervent students of the word of God but lacked Christ - likeness. Paul predicted that people would be ever learning without coming to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). I believe this means learning without internalizing truth. Jesus did not look for *talmidin* who thought they were qualified. He looked for men who knew they were not "qualified." He looked for the foolish to confound the wise, for the weak, the nobodies, to

put to shame the strong, that no flesh should glory in his presence (1 Cor. 1: 27-29).

Hence, Jesus upset the educational system of the rabbis and also their traditional manner of recruitment. Usually the *talmid* chose the rabbi. But Rabbi Jesus did not leave Such a grave matter to immature minds: He chose His *talmidin*: "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you*" (John 15:16). He did not look for their earthly gifts, for their Human accomplishments, but He looked into their hearts and chose His *talmidin* on the basis of the potential He saw there. Then He provided all that was needed to realize That potential! He gave them "*all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called*" them (2 Peter 1:3).

### **So when Jesus said, " follow Me," He meant, "become like Me."**

Go into all the world and make people to be like Jesus. Is this what we give ourselves to? Anything less than this is falling short of God's will. Can your spouse say of you that you are like Jesus? How many little Jesus' do you have on your church board, or in the pews of your church? How many of those do we have in our pulpits? You can find many a person who is a Bible scholar, but you can find Christ in them? Again discipleship is Christ- likeness.

Now, Christ-likeness is not sweetness. Jesus said nothing about us being sweet. He called us to be *the salt of the earth* (Matt. 5:13a). Christ-likeness is first and foremost to do the will of God always. That includes being pure, holy, courageous and utterly dependant on God the Father, as our Savior was. It means to be prayerful, loving, and bold. It means to resist all evil. It means *not to be conformed to this world* (Rom. 12:2). It is to accept a counter-culture mentality. When God gave the Ten Commandments, He created a counter-culture in the midst of the pagans, where there would be no murder, no stealing, no adultery, no disrespect for parents, no idolatry, etc. When Jesus came He established the kingdom of God with a new counter-culture making the Sermon on the Mount its constitutional backbone. Again, it is not sweet: It does not cuddle up to the world, but it resists it, rejects it and transforms it.

Marvel at it, Jesus has chosen you, knowing more about you than you know about yourself. You with your sinful background, your weaknesses, your hang-ups. He has chosen you even though your knowledge of the Bible is pitiful. Think of it! He has said to you: follow Me, become like Me! He has chosen you because He believes in you, even though no one else might. So then since He believes in you, believe in Him and get with it. Look at how God transformed these two uneducated fishermen, Peter and John: "*when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*" These two men did more to turn the world right side up than all the Pharisees and rabbis found in Jerusalem put together!

The next step after you have been chosen is for you to forsake all and attach yourself to Him. (Luke 14:33). Be with Him 24 hours a day. How else can you learn to become like Him? There is no other recipe except His continual presence in your life, nothing short

of this will do. What the Torah was for the Jewish *talmidin*, Jesus must become to you. You must unconditionally accept His authority and move from inward believing to outward obedience in everything. As you become a *talmid*, as you give your all to Him, He will restructure all your relationships and activities. And He will dwell in you and make you like Himself. Your destiny will be fulfilled.

In summary: to become a disciple, is to **become as He is**. That is the Great Commission!

Author's note: I am indebted to Ray Vander Laan for many of these insights. I recommend his DVDs **That The World May Know**.

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