

Week Two: Building a Gospel Foundation

Introduction

We live in a world where there are many organizations proclaiming many messages. Just take a look around, and you'll be sure to find an organization of some kind proclaiming a message of some kind. If you look close enough, you'll also find that many churches are proclaiming many messages as well.

Some of those messages that are contextual to our area are these kinds of messages:

- "In order to be a true Christian, you have to read the KJV Bible!"
- "In order to be a true Christian, you have to speak in tongues!"
- "In order to be a true Christian, you must be baptized into the Church of Christ!"
- "In order to be a true Christian, you must believe in the rapture of the church!"
- "In order to be a true Christian, you must be democrat or republican!"

Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't care about the Bible translations, the spiritual gifts, baptism, eschatology, or political matters. However, the problem with all of these messages is that they make something other than *the call to making disciples* the mission of the church. Let's be clear: The mission of the church is not to become a place that wins people to a particular Bible translation, a place that emphasizes one particular spiritual gift over others, an organization that tries to win people to a particular denomination, a place that wins people to a particular view of the last days, or to be a place that wins people to a particular political party. Rather, the church has been tasked with making disciples who follow Jesus' way. This is the mission that Jesus has given to us.

He spells it out explicitly for us at the end of the Gospel of Matthew:

"Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even until the end of the age." - Matthew 28:19-20

We must also keep in mind that these are the last words that Jesus speaks to His disciples in the Gospels. Jesus' last words to His disciples could have been anything. He could have told them lots of things, but instead He chose to tell them that they were to go into all of the worlds and to make disciples. They had followed and learned from Jesus for about three years. They had apprenticed themselves to His teachings and way,, and now they were to go repeat that process themselves in the lives of others.

Ultimately, that's what discipleship is. It's apprenticing ourselves to the way of Jesus and helping others do the same. We teach them to "observe" all that Jesus did and commanded.

The Way of Jesus

So, I see it this way. If we're supposed to follow the way of Jesus, then we have to ask the question "what does that look like?" If we're going to follow His way, then we have to familiarize ourselves with it in the same way that an apprentice would familiarize themselves with the way of a master. When we look at the Scriptures, we see Jesus actually tell us what His way looks like. Again, in Matthew's Gospel, he says:

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.” - Matthew 16:24 NLT

In this passage, Jesus says that His way is the way of voluntary, self-sacrifice. It’s taking up the cross and suffering for the good of others, which is ultimately the heart of the Gospel. Jesus Christ voluntarily suffered and died for our sins and was resurrected from the dead to redeem us from the Kingdom of Darkness and to reconcile us with the Father. He then tells us that if anyone wants to be His follower, they must give up their own way and voluntarily take up their cross too.

Now, this isn’t the only place where Jesus said this. He said this repeatedly throughout the Gospels. Here are a few more instances where Jesus repeated this.

- “And anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.” - Matthew 10:38

- “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” - Mark 8:34

- “Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.” - Mark 10:21

- “And whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.” – Luke 14:27

- “Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. And after He had said this, He told him, “Follow Me.”” - John 21:19

Now we have an answer to our question. What does the way of Jesus look like? It is the way of voluntarily denying ourselves and giving up our way for the good of others. That is the way of Jesus. That’s what He did in laying down His life for us, and that’s what He beckons us to when He calls us to “follow Him.” Discipleship is gospel-centered in that it’s a call for us to apply the pattern of the Gospel (Dying to ourselves that others may have life) to our own lives. We’ll flesh out what this looks like in greater detail over the next few weeks, but let’s sum up this week’s discussion this way. Everything we do – Whether it’s worship, discipleship, church services, small groups, being on mission in the community, or whatever it may be, all of it is aimed at the goal of forming us into Christ-likeness.

This is what the Apostle Paul labored for in all of the apostolic work that he did. Like a parental figure, particularly a mother, he toiled in the pains of childbirth that Christ might be formed in those he invested time in. To the church in Galatia, he wrote:

- “My children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” - Galatians 4:19

Let’s spend some time in some discussion reflecting on the reality of discipleship and the struggles that come with that.

Discussion Questions

5. Did you find anything surprising about this week's chapter? If so, what?

6. Many are convinced that following Jesus is simply something that we do intellectually. But after reading these passages, do you think there's more to following Jesus than just intellectually believing Jesus is who He said He is and did what the Scriptures says He did? Discuss.

7. When you examine your life, would you say that you're actually following Jesus or the Christ is being formed in you like the Apostle Paul desired? Be transparent. We can't help one another if we don't open up our lives and say where we are.

8. What keeps you from following the way of Jesus? What are some areas that you struggle with?