

Discipleship

Study 4: Living Discipleship

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The Message

The title of this Bible study is double-barrelled; on the one sense we are all called to live in Discipleship, and on the other sense the Discipleship that we live is very much vibrant and alive. Jesus Christ our Lord and Master is living.

There are several key ways in which we are called to live as Disciples of Christ:

- a) By faith (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11)
- b) By the Spirit (Galatians 5:25)
- c) In peace with one another (1 Thessalonians 5:13)
- d) With one mind {one accord} (1 Peter 3:8)
- e) In obedience (Isaiah 1:18-20, 1 Peter 1:14)
- f) In sincerity (Romans 12:9, Hebrews 10:22)
- g) In love (1 Peter 4:1-11)
- h) Uncomplicated lives

Sometimes Christians can lose the understanding of what it is to be “*alive together with Christ*.”¹ Study of the Hebrew Scriptures gives us understanding that inherent in ‘life’ (Hebrew ‘hayyîm’) is the idea of activity. Life is ‘that which moves’ (Genesis 7:21f; Psalm 69:34; cf Acts 17:28) in contrast to the relaxed, dormant or inert state of non-life (cf Romans 7:8; James 2:17,20).

Life is associated with light, gladness, fullness, creativity, completeness, order and active being (Psalm 27:1; Job 33:25ff; Proverbs 3:16; Genesis 1). Life as God intended can be summed up in one word – ‘shalom’. This can be contrasted with the darkness, sorrow, emptiness, chaos and silence which are characteristic of death and inanimate being (Ecclesiastes 11:8; Psalm 115:17).

To be set free in Discipleship we need to recognise our dependency on God. We need to know our identity in God and know why we were created. God gave manna in the wilderness that Israel might learn that even physical life is maintained by “*every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord*.”² (cf Matthew 4:4; Luke 12:15,20).

Three different Greek words are used in the Gospels to convey different aspects of the concept of life. ‘*Bios*’ refers to daily life or livelihood and one’s resources for living. ‘*Psyche*’ signifies the self-conscious individual self. Finally, ‘*Zōē*’ usually denotes life as a gift from God and is often modified by the adjective ‘eternal’ (*aiōnios*).

‘*Zōē*’ occurs 16 times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke). In this context it is usually taken to mean the future life that we will be given by God. It is a life that will be entered or inherited at the end of the present age (Matthew 19:16-17, 29). When we look at these verses in Matthew 19, we can see that this ‘eternal life’ is synonymous with entering the Kingdom of Heaven, and being saved.

‘*Zōē*’ occurs 36 times in John’s Gospel. In 11 of these occurrences it is the object of the verb ‘to have’ (*echō*) and is used in the context of a promise, invitation or statement about those who believe in Jesus (John 3:15, 16, 36; 5:24,

¹ Ephesians 2:1-10

² Deuteronomy 8:3

40; 6:40, 47, 53, 54; 10:10; 20:31). When we study these verses together we can see that life or eternal life is not limited to a future age but can be realized in the present by one who believes in Jesus (in much the same way as Salvation). John can still speak of life as a future (John 5:28-29; 6:27; 12:25), but it is also something that one may possess in the present (John 5:24).

We need to understand that this life that God has given us is a precious gift. Yes, we all can feel overwhelmed at times as we become so sensitive to this fallen world in which we live in. The closer that we draw near to God the more we become conscious of our own sin, and the sin around us. Christians who are close to God are often very humble or humbled people, but are very dynamic people. We need to try and understand how God feels. Think how God's heart must have broken to see the sin that was in the world in Noah's time; the last thing He would have wanted to do was to send the flood to destroy the people that He had created, but His grace prevailed as he allowed a remnant to survive. Think also of the duress that He was under to have to resort to sending Jesus when He knew full well what the consequences would be; *““For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*³

Living Discipleship therefore is very closely related to faith, hope and love, and also community and fellowship. Through prayer we can always draw near to God with the confidence that He will draw near to us. It may be that we can never fully know God's heart, but we can know in part through His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Are we looking at the world and our place in it through the 'eyes of the world' or are we looking from the heart and insight that a relationship with God gives us as we are set free to live as Disciples of Christ?

Questions

1. What does it mean to us as individuals to be “alive to Christ”? (Romans 6:11; Romans 8:10)?
2. In what ways can we remind ourselves of the joy that it is to be a Christian?
3. What effect might it have on the Church community and mission and outreach if we were truly living discipleship?
4. Are the signs of living in true Discipleship evident in our lives? What can we do to make them become more evident?

³ John 3:16