



GET TO KNOW JESUS

Get to Know Jesus

Discipleship Studies – Session Four

What does a look at Jesus' disciples tell us about Jesus?

From the First Session Introduction - *So, you want to get to know Jesus! That's a very good thing to desire. And you know what? I have the sense that the feeling is mutual because Jesus wants to get to know you too! The prophet Jeremiah wrote the words of God himself when God said, "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Jesus isn't a "hide and seek" God...at least not in the way you remember the game! In the case of Jesus, he doesn't hide. In fact, Jesus is doing everything he can to get your attention. So, let's get to know Jesus!*

If someone was hanging around your friends, what would your choice of friends tell somebody who didn't know you about you?

How do we influence others? How have YOU influenced others?

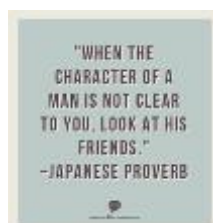
Who is the person or persons in your life who have affected you the most? How did they affect you? What changed in your life because of those relationships?

Who is ONE person you know you have influenced in your life? Has that influence been positive or negative? What have you done to influence them?

What do you think your friends will say about you at your funeral? Is that important to you? Does it change the way you live your life today? How?

Introduction to this Session

"You want to know the measure of a man, just look at his friends" Ebenezer Scrooge, Muppet Christmas Carol Movie





Jesus' Disciples

Here's your biblical history lesson for the day - when we speak of Jesus' disciples, we are not speaking specifically about the 12 men who we call, "apostles." Though Jesus does seem to give them special status through their relational access to him and the concentrated time that he spent with them, the 12 are not the ONLY people who could be counted as disciples. There were many different groups of people who heard Jesus' message and followed him. There were certainly more than 12 people...below is a short list of others who followed Jesus – remember, Jesus made an impact on others. And we have stories of people approaching Jesus wanting to follow him. So, here we go:

1. Israel: If you read the gospels back to back you would see something very important – though Jesus DID and ALWAYS accepted, loved and called people of all backgrounds to follow him, the gospels point out that Jesus saw his primary ministry to the people of Israel. Jesus occasionally went past the borders of Palestine and interacted with Gentiles as well as the fact that Gentiles often came in contact with him wherever he went, his ministry was predominantly to Israel. Jesus was proclaiming to the people of Israel the coming Kingdom of God for which they had been looking for centuries. When we think of people whose lives were changed by Jesus and those who may not have given up everything (like the 12 who had a radical change in lifestyle), it is certain that a good majority of his followers were Jews.

So, what did Jesus' Jewish disciples see in Jesus:

- a) At first, confusion reigned – remember back to our first lesson...young men at that time wanted to follow of Rabbi. Yes, there must have been something special about Jesus that caused these people to drop everything or at least give up daily routines, financial commitments, family relationships, and even put themselves in danger by following Jesus. There was danger from the Romans always...but for Jewish followers, just as dangerous were the religious "establishment"...those who eventually would attempt to silence Jesus at all costs. So, imagine what questions crossed these people's minds when they started to follow Jesus.
- b) Then they started to wonder – Jesus' followers saw amazing things. For Jewish followers, they were anticipating for 100's of years a Messiah, a King who would lead them back to glory. Although we do discover that they were mistaken in what a Messiah truly would be, they did know that the Messiah would perform wonders and miracles. Again, imagine what it must have been like to be hoping and praying for the Messiah to come and then, with your own eyes, you see healings, feedings, forgiveness, leadership, teaching of truth, etc. We get a really good picture of what these Jewish followers must have been thinking when in the gospel of Mark's story of the calming of the storm, after the storm subsides, the disciples ask, "who is this guy that even the waves and storms obey him?" That must have been the question on everyone's heart!

- c) Eventually, the disciples catch on – but they still seem a bit confused. They were hoping for a certain kind of Messiah and Jesus didn't fit their bill completely. I'm sure they were elated at times and scared out of their minds. In John's gospel, Lazarus is raised from the dead. Imagine that! Then, not too long after that, Jesus is taken to a cross to die. One minute they are rejoicing...the next they are in hiding. One minute they are saying something like Peter exclaimed when he said, "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God" and the next moment they are running for the hills to spare their own lives. Remember everything these Jewish followers saw in Jesus had first to go through their "expectation lens"...that served them well at times and not so well at times. In fact, the more religious the Jewish follower was the harder time that person had in seeing Jesus' true identity clearly.
2. The Poor, gentiles, sinners, and the outcasts: Jesus wasn't exclusive in interacting with ONLY the Jews. There were people all over where Jesus lived, traveled, taught and prayed...from the hills of Galilee, to the shores of the River Jordan; from small towns to Jerusalem and the holy temple...Jesus was a non-discriminatory relator. To say that Jesus is the "face of God" is consistent with what we know about God's nature – that being PURE love. As you might imagine in an agrarian, ancient society, it was filled with poverty. The poor in Jewish society included widows, orphans, the physically disabled, and those who simply didn't fit in. You read the gospels, again, thoroughly and you do not see a situation with one of these "types" of people where Jesus doesn't stop, love and do something to touch them with the reality of God's kingdom. Many were healed...all given new hope. Many were fed...others were shed of the forces of evil that plagued their lives. Jesus was seen as a hero...a healer...a lover...a "hope" giver. Jesus was a liberator...a friend...a compadre (which often got him in trouble)...he was a physician...counselor...spiritual mentor. In Jesus teaching of the Kingdom of God, it especially was relevant to the poor and outcast. The Kingdom of God lifted up, blessed, satisfied, and be placed first. Contrast that with what Jesus said to those who were privileged and refused to be humble – Jesus said those are the people who will be brought down, cursed, hungry, and placed last. We can certainly conclude that many of Jesus' disciples would have been from the poor and outcast of Israel. Jesus' message offered them hope and gave them a place in the Kingdom of God that was often denied to them by Israel's elite. The tradition that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners is almost certainly grounded in the historical life of Jesus. In Jewish society, sinners and tax collectors were social outcasts. They were considered to be cut off from the people of God with little or no chance for reentrance. But Jesus offered such people reentrance into the people of God and a place in His Kingdom. For these people, their embrace of Jesus as Messiah, Savior, Lord, Rabbi...even a proclamation of Jesus as God, came easy. There was no religious hesitation as they had to match up with what they heard and saw in Jesus with their theology...they accepted Jesus freely...followed without hesitation. They knew the real deal when they saw him!
3. Women: In Jewish society, women had a low social position. They did not share the same rights or status of men. It is unlikely that many teachers during Jesus' day would have accepted women disciples. But Jesus breaks this norm. In the gospels we see that Jesus had many female disciples, women who traveled with him and followed his teachings closely. By accepting female disciples, Jesus elevates their position in the Kingdom of God. Women are no longer second class – here are some more examples:
- ❖ Jesus told a woman to spread the Good News of His resurrection
 - ❖ Jesus engaged in teaching and mentoring women – that's what Jesus was doing in the Mary and Martha story in John 11.

- ❖ Jesus depended on the financial provision of women for the welfare of his ministry.
- ❖ Jesus used female examples in his teaching and spoke about women in his stories.
- ❖ A young woman carried the body and blood of Jesus within her for 9 months.
- ❖ Jesus denied that there was hierarchy in His Kingdom...Paul eventually wrote the “magna carta” of what we would call “the church” – “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3).

So, how did Jesus’ women followers see Jesus? Jesus healed a woman from bleeding, he was her healer. Jesus freed a child from demons, for that mother Jesus was a lifesaver. Jesus defended a woman set up by men to take the sole fall for a grievous sin, Jesus was her Savior. Jesus brought a women’s child back from the dead, he was her Resurrection. Jesus received a woman’s devotion in brokenness and tears at his feet, Jesus was pure grace. Jesus commissioned a woman to share the message of God’s Kingdom after he exposed her as a fraud, Jesus was her Redeemer and inspiration. When a woman was broken because she could not find her Lord’s body after the cross, Jesus was the risen Son of God. As you would anticipate, there was NOTHING less than full dramatic impact, life-changing, transformative relationships that Jesus had with the women who were his followers.

4. Circles of Disciples: When speaking of Jesus’ disciples, we cannot speak of them as a single group because there seems to be different types of disciples and different ways in the commitment of disciples expressed itself. It is perhaps better to discuss concentric circles of disciples, with the inner most circle being those who were closest to Jesus and the outermost circle being those who simply heard Jesus’ message and perhaps sought to pattern their life after it. It is only obvious what they all thought about Jesus...he is worthy to follow!
 - a) Peter, James and John: the most intimate of his friends.
 - b) The Twelve: the number 12 is a VERY significant number in biblical literature. Jesus was “re-creating” the redemptive plan of God with a NEW “Israel.” Remember the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. The 12 disciples were meant to give new meaning to the words, “the time is now that the Kingdom of God be revealed.” This was a NEW covenant in Jesus.
 - c) The Followers: There were also people who seem to have physically followed Jesus around from town to town and village to village. The fact that Jesus selected twelve people from the group that was following him around, is evidence that there was a larger group following him around.
 - d) The Adherents: There also seem to be many people who both received Jesus’ message gladly and adhered to his teachings, but did not physically follow him. These people could certainly be called his disciples. Good examples would be the sisters Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Jesus was certainly close with these people but they remained in their homes, rather than as members of Jesus’ itinerant ministry/mission.



Now, it's your turn...if you had to look at the lives of the disciples that YOU know, those who follow Jesus – what would THEIR LIVES tell you about Jesus?

If someone was trying to get to know Jesus and ALL THEY HAD was your life at which to look, what would they see? What would you LIKE them to see?

"you are a letter . . .
written not with pen and ink
but with the Spirit
of the living God . . ."
2 Corinthians 3:3

This verse above sets the agenda for our lives – we are to be LIVING letters, witnesses, reflections of Jesus! Just like the disciples of Jesus in the bible, our lives have something to say to the world about who Jesus is!

Even so, this is in actuality, one of the most tragic sentences I've ever written...and you know why! Many of us simply fall flat on our faces in being "living letters." If someone were to read the story of our lives and was looking for someone, they may not see Jesus. Why is that? Because we, so very infrequently, don't want Jesus to be the one that people see. We want them to see us...or we are fearful of letting Jesus reveal himself through us. To distort an old children's song, "hide it under a bushel, YES! I'm not going to let it shine."

Friends, don't be discouraged. Remember, our weakness is a perfect place for Jesus to shine! Remember, Jesus strength is perfected in our weakness! Where we are wavering, Jesus is strong and steady. If Jesus could be seen and experienced in and through the lives of his followers 2000 years ago, rest assured Jesus can do the same thing in you!

Pray NOW that Jesus can be seen as Messiah/Christ in your life...that people can learn about Jesus as Messiah/Christ through you. Jesus is the royal king! The fulfillment of the hope of the ages.

Pray NOW that Jesus can be seen as the Son of God in your life...Jesus prayed and referred to God as “Father” or “Abba” (Aramaic for father). God is Father to all of us – we are God’s sons/daughters. We have the ability, authority and power through the Spirit of God to act on behalf of God. In fact, Jesus said in John’s gospel that we would do GREATER works than he! Imagine!

Pray NOW that Jesus can be seen in many of the ways that he showed himself to the world through his disciples. Read this section from 2 Corinthians:

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.”

In what situations and circumstances has God brought YOU healing, comfort, peace, transformation? When has Jesus brought you hope, a new start, a fresh perspective, a jolt of “amazing grace?” As we have received, we can now give!

If you can pray now, “Jesus be seen in my life,” Jesus will honor that prayer! You don’t have to do it perfectly...you just have to do it with humbly. Jesus doesn’t expect perfection...Jesus expects you to be you...and he’ll take care of the rest!



Getting to the Finish Line

So, here you are...you made it to the end of the study. I know, many words to read and comprehend. NOW it is your turn to look at some of Jesus’ actions. Read over the following stories of Jesus from the gospels – read and ask yourself the question – what does this story TELL me about how Jesus’ disciples experienced Jesus? Put yourself in their place and try to see what they saw...you watch what Jesus does and watch how THEY responded. It will tell you volumes about your Savior and Lord!

I like the gospel of John because it is focused on Jesus’ relationships specifically –here are some sections to read:

- ❖ Jesus and the woman at the well – John 4
- ❖ Jesus and Nicodemus – John 3
- ❖ Jesus and the blind man – John 9
- ❖ Jesus and the man born lame – John 5
- ❖ Jesus and the woman who “sinned” – John 8

- ❖ Jesus, Mary, Martha and Lazarus – John 11
- ❖ Jesus and his friends – John 13

Take notes as you go along in the story. Remember, you are not just noting what Jesus says or does...you are noting what you learn about Jesus...who he is! GET to know Jesus! Remember?



Final Thoughts

Here's your final assignment - the BEST WAY you can get to know Jesus by talking to Jesus.

So, ask Jesus to help you get to know him – NOW!

Say, “I want to get to know you Jesus.” Say it at least five times in a row. Say it repeatedly throughout the day today.

And know that in order to get to know Jesus:

- You're going to have to talk to Jesus
- You're going to have to spend time with Jesus
- You're going to have to listen to Jesus
- You're going to have to be vulnerable with Jesus
- You're going to have to ask Jesus questions and then listen

Next Study will be our “wrap up.” What more can we find out about Jesus? That is Session Five!