

**Abstract:** Prompted by the decline and closing of churches, Dr. McCuiston promotes a renewal of disciple-making based on the concepts found in the Gospels. Focusing on the initial interactions between Jesus and His first disciples, the four Gospels are examined to determine if they provide the model for the disciple Jesus intended when He gave the commissions recorded in the Synoptics. The investigation centers on the person and nature of Jesus, giving evidence that it does matter who the master is as only Jesus is qualified to receive that honor. This quest is strengthened with what it means to ask, “If Jesus is Lord.” The evidence comes together with the examination of discipleship in the mid-section of Mark (chapters 8, 9, and 10), drawing the conclusion that the foundation of discipleship is Jesus who is also able to claim ownership as the disciples is ransomed to serve King Jesus, who paid the price.

### **Discipleship Across the Gospels**

Christian leaders in both churches and academia should be painfully aware of the decline in church membership in the last decade.<sup>1</sup> Church plants are not keeping up with church doors closing. Thus, there is no greater need today than that of dedicated leaders and devoted disciples. The latter is the focus of this article and should be at the heart of every concerned Christian and academic, based on the commission given by Lord Jesus as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels where Matthew’s *go and make* is reinforced by Mark and Luke’s *proclamation of good news* (Mark 1:1; Luke 24:46-48). The growth of the church recorded in Acts, and Paul’s summary statement of the transformation into a new creation that is appointed an Ambassador for Christ demonstrate a duplicatable potential and power available in this post-church era. Since the Day of Pentecost, there has been no greater need for true disciples.

Thus, the key, theological question raised regarding discipleship is: “Do the Gospels provide the model for the disciple Jesus intended when He gave the commissions recorded in the Synoptics?” The answer is found by a synopsis of “Discipleship Across the Gospels.” Questions that naturally emerge are: 1) Where did Jesus place the emphasis in discipleship? 2) What

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, December 31, 2019, accessed March 4, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

common concepts are shared by the four gospels? 3) What is the single motivation used by Lord Jesus as the foundation for the commissions given and how should that inform the making of disciples today?

### It Matters Who the Master Is

The first question identifies the foundation of discipleship and will be developed under the heading of “It Matters Who the Master Is.” The notion of who is leading should be obvious, yet it is more often assumed and seldom discussed with the passion required to establish it as the fundamental foundation. In fact, a church-wide paradigm shift is mandated to deliver a gospel that is focused more on Jesus and less on salvation and forgiveness, producing a serving disciple rather than a *sit and worship* church member. As Darrell Bock states, “The gospel is about more than death for sin.”<sup>2</sup> It is about the only one who is qualified to initiate God’s Kingdom on earth, establishing the church as the Father’s client agent until King Jesus returns.

### His Master’s Voice

In the 1950’s, various companies making gramophone and recording devices used a painting from the late 19th century called “His Master’s Voice.” The painter had “the hilarious idea of painting Nipper (the Jack Russel in the painting) on canvas, depicting him as absolutely confounded and wondering how the sounds could be coming out of the unusual object.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, the message of the advertiser was loud and clear – Nipper could not distinguish the difference

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, “Chapel - Dallas Theological Seminary,” *Chapel - Dallas Theological Seminary* (February 27, 2020).”

<sup>3</sup> Brad Smithfield, “‘His Master's Voice’ - The Origins of the Famous Jack Russell Terrier, Nipper, the Canine Advertising Icon for Many Gramophone Companies,” *The Vintage News*, May 25, 2017, accessed March 4, 2020. <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2017/04/28/his-masters-voice-the-origins-of-the-famous-jack-russell-terrier-nipper-the-canine-advertising-icon-for-many-gramophone-companies/>).

between the recording and his master. This reminds one of Jesus' statement, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). George Beasley correctly identifies the emphasis falling "on the Shepherd's calling and establishing a relationship with the sheep."<sup>4</sup>

The relationship with His first followers was initiated by Jesus Himself. These who were to become his Apostles (after all, discipleship precedes giftedness and ministry) had the privilege of a face-to-face invitation from Jesus. Nolland rightly contends that the "discipleship of the Twelve, though unique and unrepeatable, embodies patterns of discipleship which are of a more general relevance."<sup>5</sup>

The invitation had a single intent – fall in behind Jesus as He was on a mission. Based on the accounts of the first call to discipleship in the Gospels, this question must be answered, "Why would they respond to this call?" They were on the front side of the empty tomb, yet the reason was obvious, and that same reason should still prompt someone to follow Jesus today. That reason – the same conclusion Thomas drew when confronted with the resurrected Jesus – "My Lord and My God" (John 20:27). This gives Jesus the authority to say, "Follow Me."

## **Follow Me**

All four gospels record Jesus' initial encounter with Peter and Andrew. Matthew and Mark describe a simple picture of Jesus walking along the beach, asking two men to come with him (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20). However, Luke and John offer more dramatic accounts

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<sup>4</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1999), 174.

<sup>5</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 1265.

(Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51). Seen together, these four witnesses present a leave/follow model that is repeatable in the contemporary church.

The concept of following is expressed in two ways in the four accounts. Matthew and Mark use an adverb (δεῦτε) to support the main verb of making them fishers of men. This adverb is used to exhort or incite and is normally followed by an imperative or aorist subjunctive.<sup>6</sup> However, Matthew and Mark use a future tense to indicate progression. Louw and Nida group this adverb under “spacial extensions,” marking movement in a specified direction,<sup>7</sup> which, in this case, is the future work of fishing for men, that is, making disciples. The summary statement of *follow* appears in all four Gospels using the aorist, active, indicative – punctiliar aorist – indicating the moment a conscious decision was made (Matthew 4:22; Mark 1:18; Luke 5:11; John 1:37). In each case, there was a linguistic emphasis on leaving and following.

## Leaving

Leaving was not without cost. Mark, in his typical, simple manner, states they left nets (1:18). Matthew adds value by stating the loss of the family business (4:22). Finally, Luke declares that they left *everything!* In these and John’s report, the aorist active participle was used to express the leaving and hearing that prompted leaving, which John’s context required (John 1:37). A. T. Robertson supports the idea that it was the aorist active participle that “made the participle so powerful in Greek.”<sup>8</sup> The participle in this form reveals the idea of an expressed

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<sup>6</sup> William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1118. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 291.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 722.

<sup>8</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Logos Bible Software, 2006), 1098.

nature. Leaving was the indication of a paradigm shift regarding their life's calling.<sup>9</sup> Bill Hull confirms the need for this conscious decision as being "at the heart of the transformational process."<sup>10</sup>

Jesus had come to do the will of the Father (Hebrews 10:7). His mission of serving the Father by initiating his kingdom through preaching and teaching would need faithful servants to continue this task after he returns to take His rightful place at the Father's side. Now that the kingdom has come, it is required of the disciple to drop everything, "because entering the kingdom is more important than even life itself (Mark 8:36)."<sup>11</sup>

## Following

Nolland rightly contends that "The abruptness of the call is matched by the immediacy of the following. Following Jesus involved the abandonment right then and there of their lifestyle and material possessions: the call of Jesus is totally disruptive."<sup>12</sup> The disruption was not the end of the story. Rather, the drama unfolds with a leave/follow scenario that establishes Jesus' first followers.

The "come after"/follow portrayals graphically illustrates a "follow the leader" commitment.<sup>13</sup> Early in Mark, Peter comes after Jesus. However, the scene changes when Jesus is ready for Jerusalem and suffering, the hour for which He came (John 12:27). Here, Peter

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<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, vol. 34A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1989), 51.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 179.

<sup>13</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 50–51.

moves in front of Jesus, taking the lead by rebuking Him (Mark 8:32). Jesus' response was to put Peter back in place, "Get behind Me." The reason was clear. "You are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's" (Mark 8:33). The shift in perspective was the result of a shift in purpose. A similar modification in contemporary outreach has moved *making disciples* away from making the conscious decision to serving King Jesus to the saved and forgiven comfort of *sit and worship* Christianity. The former is God's interest while the latter belongs to humanity. The same, stern response from Jesus is needed today to create the desired paradigm shift – "Get behind me." This knee jerk reaction by Jesus gives evidence of His authority, asking Peter, "If I am Lord, then who are you?"

### **If Jesus is Lord**

The question of Lordship asks the average *sit and worship* church member what Jesus should mean to them. To facilitate a master/slave response, consider Francis Chan's insight that prompt some important "if" questions, "...we don't get to write our own job description. **If** Jesus is Lord, then He sets the agenda. **If** Jesus Christ is Lord, then your life belongs to Him."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the solid rock on which discipleship stands is in the *who*, not the what you may learn or know.

Jesus **is** the *why* of discipleship, but it is more complex than just saying He is Lord. We know that saying this is not enough (Matthew 7:21). Rather, discipleship is a decision, a commitment that determines the reason for being a disciple in the first place. Like Jesus who emptied Himself to take the form of a bondservant and become obedient by dying on a cross (Philippians 2:7-8), the decision must be made to empty one's self and take the form of a

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 216-217.

bondservant to King Jesus, who is the prototype disciple for whom emptying and humbling were the driving forces in taking up His cross. No less is expected of the Christian today.

The Gospel accounts being considered offer three insights into creating this driving force in someone who has yet to commit to Lord Jesus. As should be evident, this perspective puts disciple-making at the point of sharing the Gospel not after they have been saved and forgiven, baptized, or wherever one places the salvific experience. Albert Einstein once said, “*doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results is the definition of insanity* (quoted author’s emphasis).”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Einstein would call the contemporary church insane for continually repeating a process that results in churches closing their doors.

This shift in practice must turn back to the New Testament, especially as revealed in the Gospels and Acts. The epicenter of discipleship is Jesus, not the believer. Believer orientation evangelism focuses on forgiveness and salvation. New Testament evangelism focused on the person and nature of Jesus. After all, it does matter *who* was on the cross.

### If I am Lifted Up

In John Stott’s emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus’ claims, he states:

He spoke like a megalomaniac, but he was the most balanced and modest of human beings. His teaching was fundamentally self-centered – I, I, I; me, me, me – but he was absolutely unselfcentered and gave himself away in the self-sacrificial service of others. He made himself the central figure on the Judgment Day and then got on his hands and knees and washed his Apostles feet.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Albert Einstein, qtd. In Renee Delgado-Riley, “Governance at UNM: Your Voice Is Needed,” *Governance at UNM: Your Voice is Needed: The University of New Mexico*, February 3, 2015, <https://staffcouncil.unm.edu/blog/2015/01/unm-governance.html>).

<sup>16</sup> John Stott, “Is Jesus Veritas for the 21st Century,” Lecture (*Veritas Forum*: Cambridge, MA, 1998).

Now, sitting at the right of the Father, Jesus' call to become a disciple has been extended through His Ambassadors when He is lifted up. Only then will people be drawn to Jesus (John 12:32).

Looking again into the call of the first disciples, two common traits are evident in the making of disciples. These are the testimony of others as well as Jesus Himself and the miracle Jesus performed. To begin, consideration will be given to the testimony of John the Baptist and Andrew, Peter's brother. Both are from John's account.

### Testimony

Supporting the prologue of the nature of Jesus, John puts high Christological statements on the lips of others (1:29, 34, 36, 41, 45, 49). Thus, "the confessions provide a credible motive why these men would make the dramatic decision to leave everything behind to follow Jesus."<sup>17</sup> The response to the "Behold, the Lamb of God" statement would be understood in the light of John as only the forerunner of the anticipated Messiah. From his response, it seems that Andrew understood that the Baptist intended to send them to the someone else.<sup>18</sup>

Andrew's response indicated some type of messianic expectations, which is not the case today. People aren't looking for someone to rescue them. The American identity of self-worth stands against the need for any type of messianic figure intent on changing their status quo. Science offers answers that are comfortable as they eliminate the need for a God, judge, or

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<sup>17</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 72.

<sup>18</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 154.



supreme entity. No God mandates self-rule, commonly known as relativism. As Lincoln confesses, “the messianic conviction can be taken for granted.”<sup>19</sup>

Andrew stood outside the norm and not only readily accepted but acknowledged Jesus by the proclamation to his brother, Peter, “We have found the Messiah”. So strong was this conviction in Andrew that when John mentions him, he is always giving testimony of Jesus (6:8; 12:22).<sup>20</sup> John includes another example of this type of testimony with the woman of Samaria who insists that her neighbors “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I *have* done” (4:29). John uses the same adverb here indicating that the woman was coming after Jesus. Come was controlled by the verb “see,” an aorist, active imperative. Insight into her life, the prophetic language: “a time is coming,” and the assertion that “salvation is from the Jews” seems to confirm her conviction of Jesus messianic nature.<sup>21</sup> However, contemporary evangelism does not focus on the person and nature of Jesus. Rather, using a believer oriented approach of having a home in heaven, being a sinner, or Jesus lifting burdens, the offering is an answer to life’s problems. Jesus *is* the answer, but they have the wrong question.

### Words and Works

In addition to the testimony of others, Jesus Himself offers evidence as to why they should leave and follow. Luke records two activities of Jesus that confirm Andrew’s messianic

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 118.

<sup>20</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 155-156.

message. Robert Stein contends that Luke's intent is to demonstrate Jesus nature.<sup>22</sup> The first is His authority in teaching and the second, His power over creation.

Jesus uses Peter's boat as his pulpit to speak to the crowds. While Luke does not give the details of the lesson, it is feasible that something Jesus said convinced Peter to go against his judgment as an experienced fisherman and his human weakness being tired from working all night. Peter ultimately complies to Jesus' request, calling Him *Master*, a term used in the New Testament only by Luke (5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49; 17:13), principally in miracle stories and typically someone addressing Jesus.<sup>23</sup> Stein confirms this by noting that the *someone* was a disciple.<sup>24</sup> Luke adds further confirmation to Peter's assessment of Jesus by his response to the miracle where Jesus shows control over nature. Seeing this miracle, Luke changes the title to "Lord" (5:8), acknowledging his own human frailty and sinfulness."<sup>25</sup>

Moving from this first account into the Gospels, the disciple is soon confronted by the reality of Jesus' intentions and ultimate hour for which he came (John 12:27). That hour involved a cross – a challenge to every disciple, forming the focus of discipleship.

### **The Focus of Discipleship**

Every believer must be a cross-carrying disciple who is a blood-bound bondservant to King Jesus. This is discipleship *DNA*, taken from the prototype disciple, Jesus and best realized in Jesus' statements in Mark 8, 9, and 10 that require a *cross-bearing* attitude and commitment.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 170–171.

<sup>23</sup> W. Grimm, "ἐπιστάτης," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 37.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, *Luke*, 169.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

## His Imminent Passion

“He began to teach ...” (Mark 8:31) is Mark’s time marker, designating that Jesus’ intentions were set, and His course determined. He was going to Jerusalem to die! Brooks ties the *new* teaching to the reason the disciples *didn’t have a clue* about Jesus’ identity. He contends that they were not “ready to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. He had to die first.”<sup>26</sup> Mark 8:31 gives the first of three predictions, each using different wording, but all including the core elements of the passion – death and resurrection. Having set this backdrop, Mark reveals exchanges between Jesus and the disciples, giving insight into being a cross-bearing disciple.

### Set their Mind on God’s Interests (Mark 8:31-38)

This passage has the exchanged reference previously where Jesus commanded Peter to get back in line. Like Jesus, disciples have to be focused on the will of God that mandates the death of Jesus and cross-carrying disciples. In this, Mark insists that a *disciple must deny himself before he can put his mind on God’s interests*. This proposal is in the language of obligation (*must*) with the expectation that the disciple will respond positively to the intended purpose.

Cross-bearing is not just an inconvenience, it is a sacrifice. Cross-bearing is the passion to give Jesus everything He needs to advance the kingdom. “Such ‘self-denial’ is on a different level altogether from giving up chocolates for Lent. ‘It is not the denial of something to the self, but the denial of the self itself.’”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 136.

<sup>27</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press, 2002), 340.

### Be Last and Servant of All (Mark 9:30-37)

The next exchange built on Jesus' announcement of His self-sacrifice deals with the attitude of the disciple.<sup>28</sup> Jesus' disciples must learn that "in the kingdom ordinary human values are reversed."<sup>29</sup> Edwards suggest that the journey with Jesus must take "the road of humiliation to Jerusalem,"<sup>30</sup> which cross-bearing requires. Before anyone can pick up a cross, they must put their own interests away and walk the path of self-denial that was at the heart of the first conversation about Jesus' death and resurrection (8:34).

Discipleship is about *being* a follower of Jesus. By *being*, it is meant that the disciple is devoted to incorporating the very nature and Spirit of Jesus into their lives. Jesus is clear that humility produces a *servant mentality* that is not thinking less of yourself but thinking about yourself less.

### Be Able to Drink the Cup that Jesus Drank (Mark 10:32-45)

Jesus' final trial uses His own motivation to serve as the standard for His disciples. His willingness to offer Himself challenges His followers to be willing to "drink the cup Jesus drank" (10:38). By this, Jesus is asking them to pick up crosses, take bullets, or whatever phrase that speaks to total commitment. As with the second prediction when Jesus added the betrayal (handing over), He adds some very descriptive forms of torture and humiliation – mocking, spitting upon, and scourging, asking if they are willing to suffer the same.

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<sup>28</sup> Brooks, *Mark*, 150; Robert Imperato, *Portraits of Jesus: a Reading Guide* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 2018), 4.

<sup>29</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 256.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

It is now necessary to bring this to a close. Mark's conclusion is the most appropriate at this juncture. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (10:45).

### **Conclusion**

Being convinced of the person and nature of Jesus is the foundation of discipleship. Nowhere is this more evident than in the picture of ownership the Gospels paint with the image of ransom. This picture conjures up the notion of a slave being sold on the open market. "Who gives me five, no, make it six for this fine specimen of a slave. He is strong, works hard and can be left alone to finish a job. You'll get your money's worth with this one. Who will give me five?" Jesus steps forward, lifts both hands to His side, crying, "I will pay the price." Jesus sacrifices all He is for this slave, bringing him into His kingdom.

Now, what to do with this ransomed person. Does Jesus free him to go his way? May it never be! Jesus does free him from the bondage of the taskmaster who had enslaved this person. However, His intent is to make them His servant, designed (gifted) for kingdom work. **This is a disciple!** It is a slave freed from the tyranny of the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15), transferred into the kingdom of the Beloved Son (Colossians 1:15), bought with a price and is now a *living sacrifice* fully devoted to his Lord. **This is a disciple!** Now, teach the slave how to please his master.

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