

Discussion 7-19-15 - Believer or Disciple

I sent a note to you last week promising to talk about some things on my mind.

I said "They are my thoughts and Vicki's regarding what we are seeing, how we need to prepare, and perhaps some discussion on the topic I asked each of you to think about..."

"What is a Believer, and What is a Disciple?" Is there a difference? Which are you, and which should we be?

I believe things have changed forever for Christians now, and it may call for new priorities for us all.

We will also discuss a Small Group Study we feel the call to begin in the fall.

Most of you who have been in this class for a few years know that I don't take time too often to go "off the record" and talk about other things, but I will take a few minutes to talk to you and to myself about some things that trouble me, and trouble Vicki of late. We feel change is in the air.

About 7 years ago, we felt a call and a strong urgency to study and teach God's prophetic Word. We felt it needed to be heard and it wasn't being even discussed. Some Pastors were talking about it, as always, but it was far off the normal path for most preachers. We researched, read, and listened to many hundreds of resources so we could understand it ourselves, and become familiar with God's prophetic Word then and what it means to us today. Along the way we did several small group studies in our home, in other homes, in the choir room, and on regular Sunday night worship sessions.

We had great attendance, because people are hungry for what God's Word has to say about the future. We were "watchmen on the wall" as Ezekiel put it, called to watch and tell what we saw coming towards us...I think we have done that as best we can over the timeframe.

However, it has not been without its costs to us personally, and to our ability to be effective members of this body of believers. I don't mean financial cost at all but we have been viewed as "tin-foil" hat wearers, fringe, alarmists, and slowly but surely cut off from a lot of fellowship within the body. I know most of you don't see this, but we do...in ever so many subtle and not so subtle ways. For the most part, it does not bother us too much because we know we are doing what God has called us to do and we will continue to do it as long as He continues to want us to do it. I don't say it to engender any sympathy or "poor me" thoughts because we did it full well knowing the costs

Without getting more detailed, I would anyone with a fair mind would see we were right to begin the effort. It is clear that the world has continued directly and ever more swiftly down the path laid out in Scripture. I take no joy in that, but it is apparent to all who are willing to look, that something is happening in the world today, and it is not good. Christians and even non Christians are feeling something is going on. For those of us who read and study the Bible, we know the plan and recognize the ever deteriorating state of the world as we progress down the slippery slope to the coming of the Lord. Thankfully we know the Rapture precedes the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord, and the Judgment and we believers are to be taken out to be with Jesus.

I believe I have done all I can to warn and sound the alarm... and that God is calling me to do some additional things at present. I don't know what they ALL are but we are taking an initial step this fall in doing another group study. We may do it in the church or we may do it in homes, but we feel it is important for those of us who want to seek God's guidance for what we should be doing...to come together to study and pray for how we prepare for what is coming.

We believe that the events of the past few weeks (SCOTUS, ISIS, and Christian bashing in the US) are placing squarely in our lives the most exciting time to be a practicing Christian. I will talk about that some more later, but with the changing societal events, we are seeing the Apostasy of the organized church, the church affiliated organizations, and para-church

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groups protecting themselves from the coming onslaught by embracing social changes. We are also seeing the separation of the wheat and the tares, or the sheep and the goats within the "Faith" communities... *much of it happening without a whimper*. I believe that the time is here for Christians to begin to face what our brothers and sisters have faced in other countries for years. Persecution is coming. It will start by us being marginalized and we will be addressed openly with hate-filled talk and hostility. Then actual forcing us to think and act the way they want or not be able to function in jobs, neighborhoods, and churches in any public way honoring or respecting God and Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (The Cost of Discipleship) had the following quote for his time, which directly applies to us today **"For Faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience"**. As you probably know, he faced death by hanging for opposing the Nazi Holocaust when the balance of the Lutheran church in Germany followed the changing policies of the Nazi's. He was hung just weeks before the end of WWII.

This is where we find ourselves in the church today, on so many fronts. We are seeing the coarsening of the church, the embracing of sexual sin as normal, the celebration of same-sex marriage as a "right", and a de-sensitizing of the church body to sin. We don't preach it any longer, we don't focus on it any longer, we don't want to offend members who are givers, and our clergy embraces the "happy happy happy" sermons and the "get the most out of life for you" preaching. Our church leaders, without denominational distinction, are signing on to the god of wealth, the god of sexual perversion, the pale god of our own making so not to offend. We cancel services, we don't teach scripture, we pick and choose sermons for good feelings not as a healing salve, and it goes on and on.

This is why I asked you to think about several things last week and in my email.

Believers and Disciples...an interesting topic for sure. Most of us think about them as synonymous descriptions of those who are Christians.

But are they the same? As a church and Christian witness, what are we to try and "make" in the world we meet?

In Matt 28, what is called the "great Commission" we see the following:

Jesus speaking to His 11 disciples in Galilee

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore **go (out) and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

We translate that internally in the modern church: Go out and bring people to church to join our church and become believers and get involved. We set up programs to evangelize them, entertain them, and feed them (with food not scripture) ...all those who come our way. We seek their money to support the church infrastructure, ministries, and salaries. For the modern church, if you attend, give generously, support the ministries of the church, and don't interfere with the professionals running the church...you are a great member in good standing, Where is the making of disciples, where is the teaching the Word, where is the emphasis on obedience and finding and following the will of God in our own life? You know as well as I do.

I have put a chart on the board to discuss to stimulate some discussion on the topic of Believer and Disciple

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(Salvation Gospel)

(full Scripture teaching)

Making Disciples along the Christian Walk				
Believer				Disciple
*----->				
<i>Attend</i>				
<i>Accept Christ</i>				
<i>Baptism</i>				
<i>Join Church</i>		witness to others		
<i>Get involved</i>			Study your Bible	
<i>Give money</i>				
Convenience	----->>			Passion
				<i>Hunger for the Word</i>
				<i>Sincere Desire to Follow Him</i>
				<i>Obedience to His Word</i>
				<i>Turning over your Life to Him</i>
				<i>Willingness to Suffer</i>
				<i>Stand and Defend</i>

While we want to witness and get people to become Christians, we ultimately want them to become disciples in the sense meant by Jesus in the great commission verses. We used to call those just beginning the walk as “baby Christians” and those well down the path as “mature Christians” but that designation has nothing to do with age, it has to do with spiritual maturity and commitment.

I know that the churches are full of believers; at least I hope they are believers. This means they have been born again and have the Holy Spirit living within them. If they don’t have the Holy Spirit, they are not true believers. We know that Jesus has large crowds that followed Him. I am sure many believed He was special and from God. Of all those who followed Christ, there were only a few disciples. That is always the way it is and will be until the final days.

In the definition of Disciple, there is a flavor of a teacher and student and the student becomes a disciple of the teacher by following him and doing what he does and learning from him. In the Christian sense, we are all students of Christ and believe who He is, but are we following Him and doing what He says? Are we willing to suffer for Him...pick up our cross and follow?

Why is this being talked about this morning? I think the time is at hand where each of us will have to decide what we believe, and if we are willing to “stand” or not stand when the tester comes to test each of us. It may be in our families, our neighborhood, our work, or in our church. What will we accept? What will we tolerate and ignore? What will we defend? Are we willing to say “Here am I, send me?”

*In Revelation Chapter 3, the last of the 7 churches Christ is speaking to is mentioned. **Laodicea**, the “who-cares” church, the church of apathy, the going through the motions church, and the church most like the churches in the world today as the end of the age approaches. But even in these churches there are those who are faithful and Christ promises eternal salvation to them, but woe to others.*

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This church, like all other churches, stands before God and Christ, and its light is visible to God. He knows our deeds and the desires of our hearts...both good and bad. He is at the door, speaking to you and to me. What will we do, and how will we answer? Will we be quiet and hope He doesn't see us, or will we open the door for Him?

I think it is instructive to note that none of these 7 churches exist as a functioning church today. Why is that? Doesn't Christ promise that the Church will stand and even the Gates of Hell won't prevail against it? The key is to understand that the word "church" means the "called out ones" and is better translated "congregation". No physical church, no denomination or church assembly, no matter how large, no matter how wide-spread is guaranteed to survive BUT the called out ones across all time will survive and that remnant will be protected by Christ.

Back to the door mentioned before...For me, I am willfully opening the door and will follow whatever instructions I get. I feel as though I must help prepare those willing to go through the door for what is to come. I don't know what all that is, but I will start with the fall session.

I will continue to do John, in this class, because it is so important for all of us to see the scriptural basis for our beliefs, but I cannot give you a Hunger for the Word, or even a complete teaching of it. I can lead but you and I must open up to the Holy Spirit and let Him lead us and direct us. To get the best God has for you, and fulfill His plan for you in the Kingdom, you need to "wash your own robe" and get yourself ready.

I come back to a point I made earlier. I know some of you think we have gone off the deep end but I can't be honest with you unless I tell you my heart and my priorities. We love you all and want to be faithful to teach and disciple you as best we can but we must be faithful to Him.

Christ picked His disciples because:

- 1. **They were diligent men.** Be diligent in all you do and let God redirect you into being diligent in His Kingdom*
- 2. **They were available.** They left their nets and followed Him*
- 3. **They were flexible.** Their minds were uncluttered by the religious world. He chose fishermen not theologians*
- 4. **They were teachable.** To be disciples we must be willing to learn from the master*

I ask you to take a look at yourself, as He looks at you, and decide where along the spectrum of the Christian Walk you are now. Then decide where you want to be. I think you can see what you have to become to progress and be where Christ wants and needs you to be.

Please pray faithfully and continually for yourself and for us:

- Steadfastness*
- Courage in the face of Evil*
- Obedience, even when it doesn't make sense*
- Singleness of purpose, and not be distracted or discouraged by Satan*

Christ warned Peter that he would deny Him 3 times. Peter was a disciple in the making, but in the face of pressure, acceptance, physical harm Peter denied Christ. Peter walked with Him, prayed with Him, saw the transfiguration, saw the miracles, wonders and signs...yet he failed.

We have the Holy Spirit in us, on this side of the cross, and like Peter and the other disciples on this side of the cross we can stand fast and be obedient.

Some Pastors are preparing their congregations for the Persecution and the situations we will face in the future. This is one of the things we will do in the small group sessions this fall.

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*When Jesus comes, and He is coming soon...will you be found as a disciple, following His commands and guidance?
All of us, whether true believers or disciples will be raptured out, but what glory to be found faithful, as Bonhoeffer put it...in the act of obedience.*