

Title: “Go Up. Go In.”

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John 1:29-42a

1/19/2020

Lesson:

We are called to be disciples of Christ Jesus and we learn how to do this through our imitation of Him. This week we focus on our relationship with God and with His Church. (part 1 of 2)

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

“What are you seeking?” This was the question that Jesus asked Andrew when he was being followed. And it’s a question that Jesus asks us, this morning. What *are* we seeking? Like everyone in this world, we are seeking *something* in him. Everyone is. An atheist is seeking a life free from the knowledge of, and response to, God. A Hindu is seeking the same spiritual perfection that is found in God. A Mormon is seeking an eternity of reign over his own planet like God. Everyone is seeking something from Him, but many just don’t know it, can’t admit it, or don’t understand it. But they know they want *something*. Just like us. But what sets us apart is that we have found what we are seeking in the death and resurrected life of Jesus Christ. Our “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” was perfect in every way that we could never be. And on the cross, he became imperfect for us, bearing the full weight of our sins, so that we could be made perfect through faith in Him. And so, if we are made holy, set aside for God and if we are perfect in his eyes, what is left to find that has not yet been found? Death has been defeated, our sins have been forgiven, and we have the promise of eternal salvation. Jesus sought you and me; Jesus found you and me; Jesus saved you and me. So, what are we still seeking?

I’m asking because although sin has no reign over me, a battle still rages within my soul. That which I know I shouldn’t do, I want to do all the more, and that which I know I should do, I find impossible to do. And the good that I do, I ruin with boastful pride and selfish motives. I constantly sin in my thoughts, and words, and deeds, and at every turn I hear the whisper of Satan challenging me on what has been found. Is it *really* me that Christ ransomed his life for? Does he *still* have enough blood to cover all my sins? You see, what *I* am seeking is assurance from God, and I’m sure I’m not the only one. I believe we all are, and what we seek, we find in the faith of Jesus Christ. And if we as devoted Christians, who *know* that we are saved through faith in Christ still seek, what of those who have fallen away or have never heard the awesome news of the Gospel? How do they discover God searching for them? How will they even know that they are lost? This is what discipleship is all about. It’s about God pouring into us and about us pouring into others. This week we will focus on our relationship with God and the church and next week we will turn our attention to the outside world.

Let's start with a question: what is discipleship? What does it even mean? Christian writer Dallas Willard once said, "Discipleship is learning from Jesus how to live like Jesus." Now that's a broad statement and one that we cannot cover in two weeks, so we are going to narrow the scope to something much more specific: relationships. One way to describe how Jesus lived is through his relationships. He had an "up" relationship with his Father and an "in" relationship with his disciples, the church. So, if we are to imitate Jesus, we are to imitate these relationships as well. We too, must "go up" and spend time with God and we too, must "go in" and spend time with believers. Next week we will "go out" and spend time with the world. But for now, let me ask you a simple question: Why *wouldn't* someone spend time in the Word, in prayer, and in devotion every day? Some might answer with time constraints or priorities, but I think it goes much deeper than that. Others might say that they even feel bad and will try harder to devote time to God, but I think it goes even deeper than *that*. I think that at the core, at least for many of these Christians they just don't *believe* that their sins have been forgiven. Their life has been, or still is, just too broken, too sinful, too shameful to be presentable before God. And so, they may perform like a Christian and go to church, and maybe even go to a Bible Study but deep down inside it is just too scary to approach God in private. And if you know someone like this, or if you feel this way, then God's message of love is for you. Your sins have been washed away. Jesus has found you, like a lost sheep in his flock, and has picked you up and carried you back to his pasture. He had left every other sheep to seek and find you. There is nothing you need to do, nothing you can do to earn your way back to him; he has done it all for you. Forgive yourself like God has already forgiven you. And if we truly believe this then we cannot help but want to respond to God's mercy and grace. And we will find ourselves desiring to meet him in the Word, converse with him in prayer, and contemplate his love through devotions every single day. And in doing so we seek Jesus just like Andrew did.

And imitating Jesus doesn't stop with this upward relationship; there is also a relational dimension that is found within the community of other believers. I would like to read part of today's passage to make this point. Starting in John 1, verse 35, we read:

³⁵The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus^u was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter^u).

In this passage we find that through Jesus other believers are gathered together to form a community. Even after Christ ascended into Heaven, they learned together, lived life together, strengthened and encouraged each other, together. As a group they worshiped God and left for us an example of how we are to do the same; how we are to *be* the church instead of simply *going* to

church. And *being* the church means fellowship and community not only around the table of the Lord but also around the table of knowledge through Bible study with others. This is the “in” part of the relationship that Jesus modeled for us and it is just as critically important that it be as healthy as the “up” relationship that we spoke about earlier. Together, they create for us a foundation that is necessary, that is really a requirement before we can then go “out” into the world and make disciples of others.

So, I'd like to leave you with a simple challenge for the week: spend time in prayer with God and ask for clarity on the health of your relationship with him and the health of your relationship with the church. Ask him for guidance in where you need more focus. Maybe it is through spending more time in individual study and devotion, but maybe it is also through group study. Maybe it is time to join or start a small group study - a mini community that is dedicated to learning more about Christ. St. Mark has plenty of resources and many people willing to help you answer this challenge - all you have to do is ask. Will you do that?

Let us pray.

Lord,

You are the Lamb of God, perfect in every way and we are flawed and imperfect in every way. But you love us and call us your own and upon that cross, you traded your perfection for our sin so that we stand boldly in the presence of God Almighty. This morning we ask that you pour into us a great measure of your love and motivate us to respond to you in thanksgiving through prayer and study of your Word.

In your name we pray. Amen