

Sermon Series: “The Gospel for Life”
Discipleship 101
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Sunday, June 21, 2020

When one begins a relationship, it is best to set the tone from the beginning. E.g. I recall when I was in my first day of the 8th grade I had a new teacher come to Ecole Classique— my Algebra I teacher. He came in the class and was extremely strict and authoritative. He made very clear he wanted no nonsense from us, and said something like he had taught other eighth grade classes before, and I, sitting unfortunately in the front row, said something sarcastic like, “Poor you!” I don’t know why I said it, but it just slipped out of my mouth. When I said he turned to me and sternly said, “What did you say?” I said, “Nothing!”, and he said that I had better not speak out of turn. That first class was pretty strict, and he had put us in our places. He set the tone for the rest of the school year so that we would be respectful and ready to learn— and learn we did! But, perhaps unexpectedly, all of us students grew to love this teacher. In fact, he was one of my favorite teachers there. After he set the tone and we knew what to expect, he could let his great sense of humor come out and we could relax with him and learn from him. We could make mistakes when we put problems on the board, and he would help us out and explain things if we made a mistake. Sometimes we need that-- someone to set the tone from the get-go on relationships, so that we know what to expect and what is expected— whether it is parent-child, husband-wife, or boyfriend-girlfriend. And in our most important of relationships, we find tone quickly set.

READ John 8:31-38 (p. 101)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just said He is the light of the world, and He has explained who He is— He is from above, He is a pleaser of God and intimately close to the Father, and He is the Son of God who is lifted up on the cross for our sins. Many people came to believe in Him at this point, and Jesus addresses them.

READ vv 31-32. “Jesus started the discipleship process right away with the new believers with three important emphases. First, He instructed them that they will be His learner/disciples if they abide/remain in His teaching. Cf. John 6:60; 14:15.” It is of interest that in this passage Jesus is speaking to the people who believed in Him— so why does He encounter resistance in vv 33 and 37 where they question whether they have ever been in slavery and Jesus anticipates they want to kill him? F.F. Bruce in his commentary on John thinks there are those in this group of believers who are opposing Jesus, like the Pharisees; D.A. Carson in his commentary on John thinks that these believers may be fickle disciples. I think Carson is right. READ 2:23-25; 6:60. E.g., I think of Bart Ehrman, who is a New Testament scholar who was once a fervent Christian but now has not only left the faith but is a professed agnostic, and he is writing books aimed at believers like you and me trying to dislodge us from trusting the Bible as historically trustworthy and God’s Word to us. E.g., I recall again the person giving the commencement address when I was graduating from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; he said that our gift to him would be that years from now he could call us and ask how we are and we would respond we are still faithfully following Jesus. He said this to us because he had a friend of his in the ministry that he had heard had become an atheist; he called the friend to find out if this rumor was true, and his friend confirmed to him that indeed it was. So Jesus’ instruction to these new believers is extremely important for new believer and for old believers. That is why year after year as your pastor I have encouraged all of us to have a Bible reading schedule to follow— like reading the Bible in a year or reading the NT in a year. E.g., I recall talking to someone who said that reading the Bible can be so

hard and uninteresting; I would encourage you that if you feel that way to pray for the Lord to give you a hunger and thirst for His Word, and mind to understand, and patience to grasp the relevance to you life. E.g., I have told you before in church that I have been following the reading the Bible in a year schedule since the summer of 1991; Elena and I were in Scotland and my Dad mailed it to me, so I thought I would take him up on it. It was in 2002 when my Dad went on to be with Jesus, but his legacy in my life has exhibited itself in many ways, and this is one of them. On this Father's Day I thank the Lord for my Dad, and I am using the Bible that he read and marked up. He was someone who abided in the Lord; he would get up early and have his quiet time at the den table, and I recall seeing him doing this at breakfast. I once asked him of Scriptures that meant a lot to him, and he said from the Lord's Prayer, "lead me not into temptation", and I always thought that was odd— this man whom I could barely find a flaw. But I know he stayed firm in the Lord because he abided in His Word; and the same must be true of me, and of all of us here, especially in this day and age.

"Second, Jesus informed them if they follow Him they will know what is the truth." Cf. John 14:6." The noun "truth" (ἀλήθεια) occurs 25 times in John's gospel, the most in any book in the New Testament— which shows how important an idea this was to the Fourth Gospel and to Jesus. Yet the idea of Christianity as being "The Truth" as opposed to "a truth" has become offensive to many today, even in what people would call the Christian Church. E.g., in a book *Days of Awe and Wonder: How to Be a Christian in the 21st Century*, we find many essays by the late NT scholar Marcus Borg, who was well-known for being on the theological left. His widow wrote the forward to the book and this is part of what she says, ". . . the twenty-first century has seen even more dramatic change for Christianity. Old assumptions about images of God no longer hold. Christianity is no longer considered essential for 'salvation.' It no longer provides an unambiguous moral compass. And the United States, 'a Christian country,' is now

the most religiously diverse country in the world” (p. ix). I am convinced that if we lose Christianity as The Truth the faith will no longer be good news, but bad news—it promises great things like abundant life and life in eternity, but will be watered down to being mere personal opinion. Not only is Jesus The Truth, but also He calls us to be a people of the truth, to speak the truth, and rely on Him to provide for us. I was reminded about that with a man in Georgia, Coach Cleveland Stroud, whose high school basketball team won the state championship in 1987, but he found in video after the tournament that an ineligible player came into a game in the tournament for 45 seconds, and even though he did nothing noteworthy, such a player would disqualify his team. Instead of keeping this to himself, he let the Georgia High School Association know, and his team was stripped of its championship. Coach Stroud said at a press conference, “Some people have said that we should have kept quiet about it. That it was just 45 seconds, and that player wasn’t really an impact player. But you gotta do what’s honest and right. I told my team that people forget the scores of basketball games. They don’t every forget what you’re made out of” (from The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute newsletter, June 2020, p. 5). Coach Stroud is a member of Macedonia Baptist Church, and has been a father-figure to many young men who went through his basketball program. Jesus knew His disciples would have to be people grounded in the truth of the gospel and be people of the truth.

“Third, Jesus emphasized that if they follow the previous two points they will become free. Cf. Romans 6:15-23.” The Jews did not understand Jesus here—they were free, even though they were under the Romans. They will be free from the power of sin. E.g., I recall hearing on the radio this week how a father who was an alcoholic for several years became a Christian at about the age of 40 and gave up drinking, and this had a huge impact on his son, and became his son’s role model. That is the power of the gospel. It doesn’t happen overnight for

many people, but Jesus begins the process of making us new people, freed from the power of sin.

“By sketching genuine faith in such stark terms, Jesus is standing true to a pattern we find elsewhere: he is never interested in multiplying numbers of converts if they are not genuine believers, and therefore he insists on forcing would-be disciples to count the cost (*cf.* Lk. 9:57-62; 14:25-33)” (D.A. Carson, *John*, p. 348). There are at least two points we need to heed this Father’s Day.” Those two points are we need to abide in Jesus as Fathers, rely on Him, commit ourselves to His grace and rule over our lives. Second, we need to raise up godly men for tomorrow, because there will be an enormous need for them, perhaps more so than even today.