

## LESSON 6 CHOOSING THE DISCIPLES

Throughout history, great men have had a following. They may be great scientists, historians, mathematicians, politicians, teachers, and preachers. There are those who stand as examples of great knowledge, but they lead their followers down paths of destruction. We can see this throughout history. It was true in the Bible, and it continues to be true today.

There is great danger in following an individual because we are taken in by their words, their charisma, their good looks, their charm, or their ability to draw a crowd. We must be attentive to the message, and we must seek proof that what they say is truthful. They must have authority for their message.

John the Baptizer must have been a powerful speaker. He drew a crowd, but I suspect it wasn't all in his message. He must have been a strange-looking man, dressed in animal skins, tanned from spending so much time in the sun, and eating locust and wild honey. Remember that he was under a Nazarite vow, and his hair and beard would have been long. Those who followed John were called disciples. A disciple is simply a learner or a follower. John's disciples followed him as he taught and baptized. Jesus also had many disciples, but the twelve who were specifically chosen to follow Him were different. They were taught specifically about what was to come after Jesus left this earth, and they were later given specific duties. They were ordinary men, but they were offered a chance to be on the inside of Jesus' earthly teaching.

In John 1, after the baptism of Jesus, John continued to preach. His message was the same, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When people questioned him as to who he was, he replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias" (Isaiah). John proclaimed that there was one coming after him who was preferred over him.

John had been baptizing in Bethany, and after this encounter of questioning as to whom he was and what he was teaching, he saw Jesus approaching him. He made a proclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me." John made it clear that Jesus was preferred over him, and that this man standing before them was this man. He then proceeded to relate the

story of Jesus' baptism and the appearance of the Holy Spirit, and he declared, "This is the Son of God" (John 1:33-34).

The following day, John was standing with two of his (John's) disciples. Jesus approached, and John called attention to "the Lamb of God." These two disciples of John followed Jesus. When Jesus saw them following Him, He asked them what they were looking for. They answered Jesus with a term of respect, calling Him Rabbi. This was a title of respect given by the Jews to their teachers. It was also applied to doctors and other educated people.

In answer to Jesus' question, they said they wanted to see where He was living. Jesus invited them to come and see, and they followed Him and spent the day with them.

One of the two disciples was a man named Andrew. We know from Matthew 4 that Andrew was a fisherman. In both the books of John and Matthew it is revealed that Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. The book of John says that Andrew found his brother, Peter, and told him that he had found the Messiah (the Christ).

Matthew gives us a different report on these brothers. Matthew says that they were fishing; Jesus called them to follow Him, and they left their nets and followed Him (Matthew 4:19-20). Though the stories are slightly different, there is no contradiction. John just doesn't give us the specifics. Matthew doesn't tell us about Simon's name change, but John does. John says that Simon would hereafter be called Cephas. Cephas means a stone, and we will see in a later lesson how this name becomes important.

Jesus traveled the next day through Galilee, and there He found Philip, asking him to follow Him. Philip found Nathanael and declared that they had found the one spoken of in the Law of Moses and the prophets. When Philip told Nathanael this, Nathanael wanted to know if any good thing could come out of Nazareth. The city of Nazareth was probably considered a place of poorer people and not held in high esteem. Philip simply said, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said, "Behold an Israelite indeed in who is no guile." Jesus declared Nathanael a man who was not deceitful. Nathanael's response is so interesting. He wanted to know how Jesus knew him. Jesus surprised Nathanael by telling him that before Philip called him, He had seen him sitting under a fig tree. Nathanael then declared, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel." If Jesus were using our language today, He would probably say something like, "You think that is special that I saw you under a fig tree. You are going to see

greater things than you can imagine. You are going to see heaven open and angels of God ascending and descending on Me.”

I can only imagine what Philip must have thought. I suspect he was excited, bewildered, and maybe a little afraid. Curiosity would have also been part of his reaction. I wonder how many times he thought about that statement before it actually happened.

Matthew records the calling of James and John following the call of Peter and Andrew. These two men were the sons of Zebedee. They were also fishermen, and they were mending their nets when Jesus called to them. Matthew 4:22 says that they immediately left the ship and their father to follow Jesus.

This brings up an interesting point. Later on, Matthew records the words of Jesus concerning our relationship with the family. He says, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37-38). This passage attests to the fact that there may be times when we have to put Him before family. That is truly what James and John did when they left their father to follow Jesus. It is also interesting to note that the mother of James and John can be found at the tomb of Jesus in Matthew 27:56. She was probably one of those women who traveled with Jesus and tended to His needs and those of the disciples.

The choosing of the rest of the disciples is spaced out over time. We do not know exactly how they were chosen, but we will look at the call of Matthew a little later.

I feel certain the disciples had no idea what was ahead of them when they chose to follow Jesus. Be aware that Jesus simply asked each of these men to follow Him. He made no demands that they do so. Each one had a choice. Each made his own decision. Any could have left at any time.

The same is true of us today. Jesus has called us to repentance and obedience to His will. We can answer the call, or we can ignore it. We can begin the journey and then decide we don't want to continue. Only one of Jesus' twelve disciples chose not to complete the journey. How sad that Judas won't enjoy the rewards of a life of service to the Lord.

Notice that there were men from all walks of life in this group of disciples. There was a tax collector, fishermen, and even a thief. Jesus' invitation is open to all of

us regardless of our race, position, education, economic status, or spiritual maturity. He doesn't care if we are wealthy or poor, educated or uneducated, beautiful or homely, sick or well, bond or free. All He asks is that we surrender our lives to Him and be obedient to His will.

#### FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE LESSON?

1. What do you think made the fishermen leave a thriving fishing business and follow a man they did not know?
2. What sacrifices would these twelve men have had to make in order to follow Jesus?
3. Discuss the similarity between John the Baptizer's fulfilling the Nazarite vow and our living the Christian life today.
4. Nathanael appears to have been prejudiced against the people of Nazareth. How can prejudice affect our Christian life today?
5. What should be our criteria for following any man's teaching today?