

May 1, 2005 Created To Become Like Christ (Rom. 8:29)
Pastor Mary Scheer, Brewster Baptist Church

“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ love us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Eph 5:1

So far we've looked at the fact that we were “Planned for God's Pleasure,” and “Formed for God's Family,” Today, we are looking at the third purpose, “Created to Become Like Christ.” As Romans 8:29 says that we were created to become like Jesus.

When I first learned I would be preaching on “Becoming Like Christ,” I wondered, “What does that really mean...to become like Christ?”

Becoming like Christ...that's an awesome thought. *If you think about it, we're all becoming something.* We may not think about it everyday, but if we're living and growing, we're all becoming. But “what” are we becoming?

Some people have great dreams and live their lives working toward becoming whatever their dream is.

As we get older, someone may say to us (and too often it's a spouse), “Your becoming just like your mother,” but they didn't mean it in a good way. Actually, most of you have heard me talk about my mom before, and I would be proud to become like my mom.

Some people are inspired by role models and want to be like that person. In fact some people take this to extremes. Have you seen the show, “*I want a famous face?*” A TV show where people highlight all the efforts they put in to trying to become exactly like the famous person they idol and actually have plastic surgery done to re-sculpt their face to look like that person.

I have watched several people on this show have multiple surgeries, and the transformation is always amazing...on the outside. I always wonder if they get the fact that no matter how much they look like the person on the outside, that's all it is, just a fake façade, a cheap imitation.

Christians don't have to wonder what they should become. God told us it's his will that we should become like Christ. The question for us is HOW.

I really believe that if we GET this concept today, it will revolutionize the way we think about and approach this subject.

Because he never asks us to do anything he is not going to help with, God had a plan and a process to help us with this.

After his resurrection, some of Jesus final instructions to his disciples are recorded in what we know as the Great Commission, when he said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.” Mt. 28:16-20

We are here today as a result of the Great Commission. *We are disciples with a destiny!*

What do you think of when you hear the word, “*disciple?*” It's not something we hear all the time on TV, in the news, not too many articles in the magazines and there weren't any classes in my school on being a disciple.

So, I took a fresh look at the word disciple to see what Webster had to say about it.

Disciple: “One who believes and helps disseminate the teachings of a master.”

Disseminate: “To sow, To spread, To scatter widely.” (Webster’s Dictionary)

Disciples are people who spend their lives learning to *imitate and become like their master* and spreading their master’s message. So in short, a disciple is to “imitate & duplicate.”

So the process for becoming “like Christ,” **begins** with being a disciple. So what does it mean to be a disciple? What did it mean in Jesus day and what does it mean for us today?

(I have to thank Pastor Kevin for helping point me to the research material, which frames the background I’m going to share. My eyes have been opened in a whole new way)

In Jesus’ day, it all began in school.

Schools were associated with the local synagogue in first century Galilee as described in the Mishnah.¹

*Between the ages of **4-6** all children enrolled in (*Beth Sefer*) **Elementary School**. The first day of class the Rabbi would ask each child to hold up their slate. Then he would cover it completely with honey, (which was a sign of God’s favor). Honey was the most extravagant, enjoyable, pleasurable thing. (For me it would have been warm, melted milk chocolate).

Then he would say, “My pupil, lick off the honey. May you never forget the Word of God is like honey. Taste and see that the Word is good.” Quoting Ezekiel who said the Word is sweet like honey. This left a powerful impression, linking Scripture with pleasure.

From the ages **6-10**, they spent their time memorizing the Torah (The first 5 books of Moses, Gen. Exo. Levit. Numb. & Duet.). Memorizing every word by age ten.

Now you may be thinking, oh our kids could never memorize that much text today. But I’m here to tell you, that my daughters know all the words to all of their favorite songs and the lines to their favorite movies. Our memorization abilities aren’t any different today, just our focus and priorities.

*From the age of **10-14 advanced students went on to (*Beth Talmud*)** and memorized the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, right up through Malachi. Not only did they learn the text, but they learned a process of questioning and answering that demonstrated to the Teacher they could understand and interact with the text.

Boys who didn’t make the cut during this level stayed home to help out around the house and learn a trade and by 13 girls were generally given in marriage.

*But the best of the best from this school went on at **age 14 to (*Beth Midrash*)**. Here they continued studying, learning application and interpretation.

The most outstanding of these students sought permission to study with a famous Rabbi. These students were called (*talmid in Hebrew*) **which is translated, “disciple.”** A group of them were called (talmidim) disciples (plural).

¹ Herbert Danby, ed., “*The Mishnah*.” Aboth 5:21, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985.

While a “student” wants to know the material to pass a grade or a class, a “talmid” (or disciple) wants to be like the teacher, to become what the teacher is! *Ah ha! A disciple wants to “become” like his teacher.*

Students would pick a Rabbi they wanted to be a disciple of based on their teachings. Their teachings were called a “Yoke.” Rabbis’ taught the acceptable interpretations of their community as had been passed down.

(what did Jesus say about his Yoke—his teachings? Mt. 11:28)

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke (teaching) upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke (teaching) is easy and my burden is light.”

Very few Rabbi’s had what was called (*Smikhah – Shmeeha*) meaning “Authority.

A Rabbi with Smikhah, “authority” could give a whole new interpretation of the Scripture. *Jesus had Smikhah, he taught with authority.*

Because this was so rare, you can see why people flocked to Jesus, walking for miles and sitting with him for days, long after their food ran out, to listen to a Rabbi who brought new understanding to the Scriptures.

A student would seek out a Rabbi whose “yoke” they wanted to study and tell the Rabbi he wanted to be his disciple.

Then the Rabbi would test him on the Scriptures, asking difficult questions designed to test understanding.

Like everyone else, Rabbi’s only had so much time, and would only live for so long. So a Rabbi only wanted the best of the best, someone he knew would be able to be like him and pass on his yoke.

The question in the Rabbi’s mind was, “does this student have what it takes to be like me?”

If a student failed the test and was not picked up by a Rabbi he was sent home to learn the family trade.

But, if the Rabbi believed the student did have what it takes, he would invite him to become his disciple by saying, “Come follow me.”

The disciple would leave everything, home, family, friends and devote his life to following and doing everything the Rabbi did, imitating his every move.

One illustration of the length a disciple would go said that if the Rabbi bent down, the student bent down, if the Rabbi picked a blade of grass and put it in his mouth the disciple did the same.

Whatever the Rabbi did, his disciple did. He wanted to walk like him, talk like him, pray like him, become like him!

The Rabbi / Disciple relationship provides the best model of learning for a disciple to “become” like his Rabbi through a process of **“being with that led to becoming.”**

Normally students chose the Rabbi they wanted to follow.

We know of two Rabbis' that chose their own disciples...A very famous Rabbi not in the Bible, named Rabbi Hillel and Jesus.²

When Jesus called his first disciples, where did he find them? (Mt. 4:18-22 – Mk 1:16-20)

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, **Simon called Peter** and his brother **Andrew**. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “**Come, follow me**, Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, **James** the son of Zebedee and his brother **John**. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” **Mt. 4:18-22**

They were fishing! This meant they had not been accepted by another Rabbi.

For whatever reason, these guys didn't make the cut. Either they didn't make it through school, or they made it but then were not picked up by a Rabbi.

To some it didn't look like they had the right stuff, but Jesus chose them.

Jesus has a way of calling those who've been looked over, passed over, broken, or hurting.

He calls those who've known failure to be followers.

He said, remember, you did not choose me, I chose you and then reminded us in **Ro. 8:28-29** that, “In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose, to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many.”

We are not called because of what we can do on our own, but because of what we can do with his help and because of what he will do in and through us.

Rob Bell, a Pastor at Mars Hill, Bible Church, relates that we are often amazed when we look at the story in (Mt. 14:22) of Jesus walking on water and Peter's response as he got out of the boat and walked on the water.

Rob said what's amazing is **not** that Peter got out of the boat, it's that the other disciples didn't! Where the Rabbi went, the disciple followed. If Jesus was going to walk on the water then so was Peter.

But then the Bible says, “But when Peter SAW the wind and the waves he became afraid and began to sink.” His focus on imitating was distracted when he shifted his vision, looking at the wind and the waves faith was replaced with fear.

He cried out, “Lord, save me,” and Jesus reached out and took him by the hand and said, “You of little faith, why did you doubt.”

Rob said, Peter didn't doubt in Jesus ability to walk on water. His doubt was in himself. It was his instinct and faith in Jesus that got him out of the boat in the first place.³

² History. “*Rabbi and Talmidim*.” “Follow The Rabbi”

Shmuel Safrai. “*The Jewish People in the First Century*.” Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1974.

³ Rob Bell. “*Dust of the Rabbi*.” Teaching Pastor, Mars Hill Bible Church, Grandville, MI.

But then a wave caught his eye and he suddenly remembered, “Oh yeah, I can’t walk on water.” And began to sink. Jesus asks, why did you doubt (yourself).

As Peter imitated, Jesus enabled! We cannot imitate someone we don’t spend time with.

It happens naturally, the more time we spend with someone, the more we become like them. You know how they say that the longer people are married the more they start to sound alike, sometimes becoming so close they can finish each others sentences. People often tell me when they call my house, that my girls and I all sound the same on the phone.

Knowing that the more time we spend with someone, the more we can become like them for the good or the bad is one reason why the Bible warns us **not** to keep company with fools,

1Cor 15:33 says, “Do not be misled, bad company corrupts good character.” And,

Prov 13:20 says, “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

Now you may be thinking, it’s one thing to spend time being with my spouse, or with someone I can see, touch and interact with, and it’s *another thing* to “be with” someone you cannot see or touch or talk to face to face?

Let me share two practical ways that we can be with Jesus.

First of all, we can see Jesus. I can see him in you. He lives and dwells in believers.

Now, Jesus, was the manifestation of the invisible God. (II Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). He said, “if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” (Jn 14:9) and “I and the Father are one.” (Jn 10:30)

After he ascended into heaven, Jesus, who was the manifested image of the invisible God, sent His Spirit, which enters and indwells believers. (2Tim 1:14; 1Jn 2:27; 4:13; 1Cor 6:19) all speak to His Spirit living, abiding and dwelling within our bodies)

Listen to 1 Jn. 4:13;

“We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.”

We are not yet, what we shall be;

“Dear friends, now we are children of God. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He (Jesus) appears, we shall be like him.” (1 Jn. 3:2)

God will help us to become...For we have the transforming power of His Spirit at work in us.

WATER PITCHER

Water in the pitcher is the Holy Spirit....

This first glass is me. The same Spirit in the pitcher is in the glass.

The second glass is another believer (you). Same Spirit in both, so we are able to be in His midst...

1. So one of the best ways to “be with” Jesus is to be in community with other believers!

Second glass is another believer: The same Spirit in them.

Because he lives in us, believers bring the presence of Christ with them wherever they go. When we are together for worship, in small groups, in our various ministry areas and when we visit with each other, we literally bring the presence of Christ with us.

God said, “Where two or more are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.”

We are in the midst of Jesus’ Spirit in the other person.

Now, it’s not that He’s only present when two or more people get together, but there is a different sense of purpose and presence as *God reveals God’s self in the presence of community.*

2. Another way to be with Jesus is to spend time in the Word. Jesus is the living Word. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.”

How did God create? “In the beginning, God...”said..”

Revelation 19:13-17 declares Jesus to be Faithful and True, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, whose name is “*The Word of God.*”

Our attitude shapes our approach. As Pastor Doug talked about last week, if we approach it like with the attitude that it’s going to be awful and boring, we will not get as much out of it. And as my mom always says, “the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it.

Like disciples of old, we have to come to the Scriptures believing they are “sweeter than honey,” enjoyable, pleasurable, powerful. God’s Word has the power to change us, to heal us, to set us free, to help us become like Christ.

When we spend time in the Word, we *are* spending time with Jesus as disciples.

If we want to imitate him, we have to spend time, learning, listening, watching, and observing him at work, at social events, watching him worship and pray, visit with friends, relax and play, eat dinner, pay bills, have good days, bad days, frustrating days, handle conflict, run from danger, lose a cousin to murder, cry at the death of a good friend, experience betrayal, dread the next day, feel abandoned by his dad when he needed help.

We can learn from him how to be loving, forgiving, generous, merciful, and much, much more as he interacts with people in day-to-day life.

3. In addition to being with Jesus in;

- Community with other believers,
- Watching, listening and observing him in the Bible,
- We can also be with Jesus is by spending time talking to him, just like we would one of our friends,
- Write him letters like we might write to a friend, by keeping a journal,
- Listening to music that helps us think of him (our favorite praise song or hymn).

Who we shall become, depends on who we follow.

How we shall become, depends on how we follow.

It doesn’t matter who you are, how young or old you are. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, or where you are in life.

Jesus still calls out, “Come, Follow Me.”

Our becoming like Christ depends on how we respond to him.

Let’s Pray:

Dear God, thank you for loving us and calling us your children. Thank you for sending Jesus to the earth, as the first born among many, saying, this is my son, become like him. It’s amazing to think that out of all the times and places you could have sent him, he came in a time and to a place with model for learning to “becoming,” already established. Help us to cooperate with you in the process, to do our part as disciples. Help us to remember that it’s not our efforts alone that will cause us to prevail, that it’s you that makes us overcomers, that it’s your work in us, and what you will do through us. Help us in our efforts to be with you and to learn from you. Strengthen us when we stumble and fall, when we are distracted by the wind and the waves, when we doubt ourselves. Help us to hear your call, to follow your lead, to imitate your goodness, and to love one another even as you have loved us. In Jesus Name. Amen.⁴

BLESSING:

A person would extend a blessing to a disciple by saying, “May you follow so closely that you are covered in the dust of your Rabbi.” Follow close enough to get hit by the dust kicked up from his sandal.

May God bless you and keep you, may he make his face to shine on you and give you his peace. Go forth and follow. Amen.