

STUDENT NOTES

LECTURE 3 – MODELS FOR DISCIPLESHIP: THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

1. THE TWELVE

The twelve disciples of Jesus figure prominently as models of discipleship. The following chart lists them as they occur in the Gospels and Acts (as presented in the NLT).

Matthew 10:2-4	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:13-16	Acts 1:13
First, Simon (also called Peter)	Simon (whom he named Peter)	Simon (whom he named Peter)	Peter
then Andrew (Peter's brother)	James and	Andrew (Peter's brother)	John
James (son of Zebedee)	John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed the "Sons of Thunder")	James	James
John (James's brother)	Andrew	John	Andrew
Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
Matthew (the tax collector)	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
James (Son of Alphaeus)	James (Son of Alphaeus)	James (Son of Alphaeus)	James (Son of Alphaeus)
Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Simon (who was called the zealot)	Simon (the zealot)
Simon (the zealot)	Simon (the zealot)	Judas (Son of James)	Judas (son of James)
Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him)	Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him)	Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him)	

Key Distinctions of the Twelve

- There is a general uniformity denoting their importance in the early church.
- Although several do not have prominence attached to them in the New Testament, their inclusion guarantees an important place in the earthly ministry of Jesus and the early church.

- The twelve are formed in a recognizable grouping of four. The first name of each group remains the same in each list (the 1st, 5th, and 9th). Though the names vary within the group, the first name is consistent. This suggests the Twelve were organized into smaller groups with a leader in each.
- The first group is comprised of the two pairs of brothers who were first called (Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Matt. 4:18-22). Commonly known as the “inner circle” they are with Jesus during significant ministry moments such as the healing of Jairus’ daughter (Matt. 5:37), the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2), Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:3), Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37).
- Peter is first in all the lists, indicating his place of leadership within the Twelve, while Judas Iscariot is always last and totally omitted in Acts.

2. MATTHEW

- Matthew and Mark refer to only a small group of Jesus' disciples, differently than Luke and John who at times refer to a great crowd of Jesus' disciples (cf. Lk 6:17; 10:1; Jn 6:60, 66).
- Since Jesus can meet with the disciples “in a house” (cf. Mt 9:10-19; 9:28; 13:36ff.) and they can all travel together in a single boat (cf. Mt 8:23; 14:22) Matthew emphasizes that only a small group of disciples would have been able to accompany Him.
- This small group of disciples is closely related to the Twelve. Matthew and Mark tend to identify those individuals called “the disciples” with the titles “the Twelve” and “the apostles.”
- While Matthew (and Mark) *generally* identified the term disciple with the title the Twelve, he did not intend to *limit* the term disciple *exclusively* to the Twelve. Unless Matthew states otherwise, he refers to the Twelve when he refers to the disciples, but he does not mean to imply that Jesus has no other disciples.

Primary Groups in Matthew

- Three groups—Jesus' disciples, the crowds and the Jewish leaders-- provide a background for Matthew's story of Jesus.
- Jesus' objective was to make disciples from among the crowd. As Jesus teaches and preaches, the sign of faith is when one comes out of the crowd to call Jesus “Lord” (cf. Mt 8:18,21; 17:14,15).

- The Jewish leaders are the antagonists, the one's responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.

Discipleship in Matthew

- More than any other Synoptic writer, Matthew emphasizes that the essence of true discipleship lies in individuals who understand and obey Jesus' teaching.
- Therefore, Matthew focuses on a small group of disciples around Jesus, composed primarily of the Twelve, who are separated from the religious leaders and the crowds because they truly understand and obey Jesus' teaching.
- Matthew portrayed the disciples as they really were so that they could be an example of what his church should be.
- The Twelve are examples for both laity and leaders in the church (Mt 4:18-22 and Mt 10:1-2).
- Peter stands in Matthew because he is the only named disciple who is emphasized. Matthew brings Peter into more prominence—both positively and negatively—than the other writers.
- The disciples become the ambassadors of the Great Commission.
- Matthew, therefore, has constructed his gospel to be a "manual on discipleship."
 - Kingdom-life disciples (Mt 5-7)
 - Mission-driven disciples (Mt 10)
 - Undercover-kingdom disciples (Mt 13)
 - Community-based disciples (Mt 18)
 - Sojourner-disciples (Mt 24-25)

Implications

- a. Matthew intends his readers to understand that the Christian life is equivalent to being “with Jesus” as His disciple. This means that conversion marks the beginning point of discipleship, not a later point of commitment or a process of spiritual growth.
- b. Discipleship teaching is directed to all believers.
- c. Matthew also intends his readers to recognize that distinctions among disciples are related to function, not spiritual standing or commitment.

3. MARK

- Mark's portrait of the disciples is perhaps the most ambiguous among the gospel accounts.
- Empowered by Jesus for ministry in Israel, the disciples do as Jesus does: they preach, heal, and exorcise demons.
- On the other hand, the disciples are painted with unflattering colors. Although enlightened by God and empowered by Jesus, the disciples show themselves to be uncomprehending.
- This incomprehension eventually leads Judas to betray Him (14:43-46), the disciples to forsake Him (14:50), and Peter to deny Him (14:54, 66-72).

Discipleship in Mark

- Mark contrasts two fundamentally opposing points of view concerning Jesus' gospel message. These opposing points of view are “thinking the things of God” and “thinking the things of humankind” (cf. 8:33).
- Mark deals with a fact of history: during Jesus' earthly life the disciples did not completely understand Him.
- The kingdom is here in hidden fashion, and Jesus the Messiah, Son of God (1:1) must be understood in terms of suffering and the cross (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34).
- Jesus' pronouncement in Mk 10:45, demonstrates the difficulty of the disciples' understanding of life and ministry: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”
- The issue centers on servanthood, a concept not expected by the disciples.

Implications

- The disciple who is privileged to be a member of Jesus' kingdom is a servant, which means:
 - thinking God's thoughts (8:31-33),
 - pursuing the life of the cross (8:34-38) through the message (9:1-8) and example of Jesus (9:9-32),

- rejecting status (9:33-37),
 - exclusivism (9:38-10:16),
 - and the treasures of this world (10:17-31).
- The disciples in Mark's gospel are privileged members of the kingdom of God, and their incomprehension comes from their worldly expectations.
 - Discipleship teaching directs them to think God's way, the way of suffering and the cross through servanthood.

4. LUKE

- The picture of the disciples in Luke's Gospel bears many similarities to those found in Matthew and Mark, but differences occur as well.
- The most notable differences are as follows.
 - a. Luke gives a unique account of the calling of Jesus' first followers (Lk 5:1-11).
 - b. Luke mentions a large number of disciples never revealed in Matthew or Mark but recognized by John (John 6:60-66) (Lk 6:13, 17; 19:37-39).
 - c. Luke alone tells us that Jesus not only sent out the Twelve on a missionary excursion (cf. Lk 9:1-6; Mk 6:6b-13; Mt 10:5ff.), but also sent out seventy (two) (Lk 10:1-16).
 - d. Luke also tells of a preaching tour through Galilee in which Jesus took "with Him" the Twelve and several women who had been healed by Jesus and who were contributing to the support of Jesus and the Twelve out of their own means (Lk 8:1-3).
 - e. Luke reveals a tenderness toward Peter's denials not found in the other gospels (Lk 22:31-34).
 - f. Luke mentions that "all those knowing Jesus" were with the women from Galilee at the crucifixion (cf. Lk 23:49; Mt 27:55-6; Mk 15:40-1).
- An important light is thrown on Luke's portrait of discipleship when we compare the Gospel of Luke with Acts. In Acts, the word "disciple" (Acts 6:1-2, 7; 9:10, 26; 11:26; 14:21-22; 15:10; 16:1) is used as a synonym for "believers in Christ."
- Luke's use of the term "disciple" in his Gospel foreshadows the use in Acts.
- Since the "great multitude of disciples" (Luke 6:13, 17) is distinguished from the great throng of people" (Lk 6:17), Luke wants his readers to know that Jesus had a great following of people who were His disciples, who were not just part of the crowd (Lk 6:13; 8:9; 9:54; 10:23; 11:1; 14:26; 19:37, 39).

Discipleship in Luke

- Those who enter through the narrow gate are ushered into salvation, bringing into view the central highlight of Luke's portrait of discipleship: disciples of Jesus are followers on the Way.
- Both in his Gospel and in Acts, Luke emphasizes that entrance into the Way of salvation and discipleship is found through faith alone (Lk 7:50; 8:48; 13:22-30; 17:19; cf. Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; 16:31).
- This idea of salvation as "the Way leads in time to calling the community of disciples in Acts "the Way"" (Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22), an early designation or title for those known as "the church."
- The theme of "counting the cost" provides the primary imagery for Luke's overall portrait of discipleship (e.g., Lk 9:57-62; 18:24-30).
- Positively, to count the cost meant to recognize that love for God was at the center of faith.
- Negatively, to count the cost meant to recognize that one entered into the life of discipleship through detachment from competing allegiances and through giving personal allegiance to Jesus as Master.
- Following Jesus meant to place Him in such a place of prominence in the person's life that, if any other commitment dared to usurp the place of Jesus, one must "hate" it.
- The imagery of the cross necessarily implies considering well the suffering that will accompany following Jesus.
- Nothing else must be a substitute for Jesus as the focus of allegiance:
 - a. neither family (Lk 14:26),
 - b. nor wealth (Lk 12:13-21; 16:10-13, 14-16, 19-31),
 - c. nor one's own life (Lk 14:26),
 - d. nor anything at all (Lk 14:33).
- The cost of each person's cross was personalized in keeping with the inclinations of the heart of the individual and the will of the Father.
- Luke reveals to us that self-denial, taking up the cross, and following Jesus not only characterize entrance into the Way, but also characterize life on the way.

Implications

- Therefore, the blessed life on the Way is the one that hears and obeys the Word of God (Lk 11:27-28). Not all who walk on the Way truly belong to the Way.
- External statements of commitment must be judged by the fruit of one's life (Lk 6:43-49; 19:11-27).
 - a. That fruit consists, at least in part, in loving and doing good to others (Lk 6:17-36),
 - b. Proper stewardship of material possessions (Lk 6:35; 8:3),
 - c. Servanthood (Lk 22:24-30),
 - d. Prayer (Lk 10:2; 11:1; 18:1-8),
 - e. And testimony to the Way (Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-12, 17-20; 12:8-12; 14:23-24; 24:44-49).

5. JOHN

- The central characteristic of the disciple is belief or acceptance of Jesus' claims.
- This belief is portrayed as necessitating and undergoing a process of gradual understanding and perception.
- John draws a sustained and deliberate contrast between believers and unbelievers, between disciples and non-disciples.

Discipleship in John

- The disciples' belief differs qualitatively from others who observed Jesus' signs and heard His teaching and believed, but whose belief was defective. (see 2:23-25; 6:60-66).
- Abiding in Jesus' words (Jn 8:31-32) "Abiding" means to "remain in the sphere of existence," which is here Jesus' word.
- The disciples' love is in contrast with that of the unsaved world. Brotherly love is a distinctive characteristic of Jesus' disciples (Jn 13:34-35).
- Fruit-bearing is the outward and visible sign of a believer-disciple.
- Belief in Jesus initiates 'eternal life' as a present reality and a life of 'abundance' (i.e. spiritual abundance, see John 10:10).

Implications

Abiding in Jesus' liberating Word

- True discipleship, true belief, will be evidenced by abiding in Jesus' words.
- The evidence of true belief is seen in disciples who cling to Jesus' word as the truth for every area of life.
- As they hear the truth, they live it out (abide), which will eventually be evidenced in their lives. True disciples are free from bondage to sin through Jesus' liberating word.

Loving with Jesus' love

- What makes this love possible?
 - a. Through regeneration a change has been made in the heart of the believer by God's love which now impels the believer to love (cf. 1 Jn 4:17-21).
 - b. The regenerate heart now has an endless source of love from God by which it can continually pour forth love (especially 1 Jn. 4:12-16, 19. 21).

Bearing the fruit of Jesus' life

- What is the kind of fruit that will be produced?
 - a. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-26).
 - b. New converts produced by God through the disciple (In 4:34-38; In 15:16).
 - c. Righteousness and good works which are produced by God through the person who has received new life in Christ (Phil 1:11; Col 1:10).

6. ACTS

The teachings of Jesus for living out the meaning of life (Acts 1:1-3)

- First, certain teachings were addressed to the disciples primarily with reference to their life with Jesus in His earthly ministry (e.g. Mt 10; Mt 16:20; Mk 9:9).
- The second category of discipleship teachings include instructions or statements which were directed toward the Twelve with special reference to their foundational leadership role in the church (e.g. Mt 16:17-20)

- The third category are those discipleship teachings which are directed toward all disciples, both pre- and post-Pentecost. This category includes the majority of Jesus' discipleship teachings (e.g. Mt 28:18-20).
- The unity of community brought by the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5) cf. John 14:17; 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:1-7; 16:8-11; 16:13-15).
- Witness to the good news of Jesus in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:6-8)
 - a. Among Jews in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 2-7),
 - b. among Samaritans (Acts 8),
 - c. and among Gentiles of the nations (Acts 10-28). Cf. Acts 14:21-22.
- The absence of Jesus is an incentive to hopefulness until His return (Acts 1:9-11)

Implications

- A “community necessarily manifests two essential ingredients: relations (of mutual acceptance, forgiveness and service) and structured organization (with clear boundaries and demarcation of function).
- “On the one hand, discipleship consists of being molded by a tradition, being empowered by an experience, and being a participant in a community. On the other hand, it involves both a way to walk and a mission to fulfill.”
- Practices of the community.
 - a. Apostles' teaching.
 - b. Fellowship.
 - c. Breaking of Bread.
 - d. Prayers.