

What Does it Mean to Be a Disciple? (Matt 8-10)

Dr. Brant Pitre

What does it Mean to be a Disciple of Jesus?¹

1. Modern Preference for the word “*Believer*”
 - a. Modern-day skepticism
 - b. Protestant emphasis on “believing in Jesus” as Lord and Savior
 - c. Pluralistic Religious Environment
2. Biblical Emphasis: Jesus’ followers are “*Disciples*”
 - a. “Disciple”: from Greek word, *mathetes*, meaning “student”
 - b. *Mathetes*: someone who “learned” (*manthano*) from a Master by *imitation*
 - c. Learned by *reception* of teaching (“tradition”) and *imitation* (“following”)
3. Matthew 8-10
 - a. Narrative: The Miracles of Jesus (Matt 8-9)
 - b. Discourse: The Mission of the Disciples (Matt 10)

1. The Miracles of Jesus: Signs of the Kingdom of God²

The Catechism on the Miracles of Jesus

Jesus' words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished. The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries."³

We are All Lepers: “Lord, You Can Make Me Clean”

When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “*Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.*” And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “*I will; be clean.*” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to the people.” (Matthew 8:1-4)

The Centurion’s Servant: “Only Say the Word, and I Shall Be Healed”

As he entered Caper'na-um, a centurion came forward to him, beseeching him and saying, “*Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, in terrible distress.*” And he said to him, “*I will come and heal him.*” But the centurion answered him, “*Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.* For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard him, he marveled, and said to those who followed him, “*Truly, I say to*

¹ See K. H. Rengstorf, “*mathetes*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), Vol. 4:415-61.

² See Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 124-37.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1115, citing Leo the Great, *Sermon* 74:2.

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you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. *I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.*" And to the centurion Jesus said, "*Go; be it done for you as you have believed.*" And the servant was healed at that very moment. (Matt 8:5-13)

The Suffering Servant: "He Took Our Infirmities"

And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever; he touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and served him. That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. *This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."* (Matthew 8:14-17; citing Isaiah 53:4)

The Forgiveness of Sins: A Divine and Interior Miracle

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "*Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.*" And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? *But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins*" -- he then said to the paralytic -- "Rise, take up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. (Matthew 9:1-7)

The One Who Can Be Touched: the Woman with a Hemorrhage

While he was thus speaking to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment; for she said to herself, "*If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well.*" Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "*Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.*" And instantly the woman was made well. And when Jesus came to the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd making a tumult, he said, "Depart; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district. (Matthew 9:18-26)

And Now I See: "Lord, Have Mercy"

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "*Have mercy on us, Son of David.*" When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "*Do you believe that I am able to do this?*" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." *Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."* And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly charged them, "See that no one knows it." But they went away and spread his fame through all that district. (Matthew 9:27-30)

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2. The Mission of the Disciples: the Imitation of Christ

The Call and Sending Forth of the Twelve

And called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority (*exousia*) over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and infirmity... These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. *And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.* You received without paying, give without pay. Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomor'rah than for that town. (Matthew 10:1, 5-15)

The Fate of the Twelve Disciples

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. *When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; *and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.* But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes. *A disciple (mathetes) is not above his teacher (didaskalos), nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.* If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Matthew 10:16-25)

The Fear of Men

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. *So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.* (Matthew 10:26-33)

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Not Peace, But a Sword

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39; citing Mic 7:6).

The Fate of the Apostles in Ancient Christian Tradition⁴

1. Peter-crucified upside down
2. Andrew-crucified on an X
3. James, son of Zebedee: killed with the sword by Herod Antipas
4. John, son of Zebedee: boiled in oil; but not killed by martyrdom
5. Philip: crucified upside down
6. Bartholomew: skinned alive and crucified
7. Thomas: stabbed to death
8. Matthew: unclear how he died; some say by martyrdom, others natural
9. James the Less: stoned to death under sentence of Jewish High Priest
10. Simon: dismembered
11. Jude/Thaddeus: run threw
12. Matthias (replacement for Judas): stoned to death

The Catechism on Our Participation in the Mysteries of Christ

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as *our model*. He is "the perfect man", who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way.

Christ enables us to *live in him* all that he himself lived, and *he lives it in us*. "By his Incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man."¹⁹³ We are called only to become one with him, for he enables us as the members of his Body to share in what he lived for us in his flesh as our model: "We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect and realize them in us and in his whole Church. . . For it is the plan of the Son of God to make us and the whole Church partake in his mysteries and to extend them to and continue them in us and in his whole Church. This is his plan for fulfilling his mysteries in us."⁵

⁴ For more on the Twelve Apostles, see C. Bernard Ruffin, *The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles after Calvary* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997); Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus, the Apostles, and the Early Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007).

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 520-21; citing St. John Eudes