

Introduction

In 1961, the year before the Methodists planted a new church in South Tulsa called Asbury, eight students at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia enrolled in a seminar on Social Philosophy. The class met for two hours on Tuesday afternoons to discuss an imposing list of required readings. The list was composed of selections from some of history's most influential minds - Plato, Augustine, Kant, Marx, and more. The course was co-taught by a faculty member named Professor Samuel Williams, and a visiting scholar named Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It was the only official course that Dr. King ever taught, and there were only eight students in the class.

A few years ago, CNN ran a story about this class. They interviewed the surviving students and those closest to the students who had died. One of those students was Julian Bond. Julian went on to become a state legislator and the chairman of the NAACP. In his interview, Bond confessed, "I'm so ashamed I didn't take notes" (<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/24/us/martin-luther-king-class/>). He was one of only eight people who had the unique opportunity to learn from one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century and he didn't take a single note.

Now, I'm a bit of a geek. In fact, when my wife and I were dating, Sarah accused me of being a nerd in disguise. I looked cool - or at least I was trying to look cool - with my bleached blonde hair, ear rings, and leather flip flops.

I looked like a southern California surfer. But the truth is I grew up in small, one stop light, farming community in rural Iowa, and I read the encyclopedia for fun. So, for a geek like me, Mr. Bond's confession is a tragedy. How could you not take notes - pages and pages of notes? As tragic as this may be, perhaps there is a greater tragedy that could have happened.

Welcome

My name is Jason Jackson and I have the privilege of leading all of our Discipleship Teams. If you are visiting with us today, we are really glad that you are here and we welcome you in the name of Jesus. We welcome you just as he has welcomed all of us.

This is the third Sunday in season known as Lent. For Christians, Lent is a 40-day period during which we confess our brokenness before God and one another, we acknowledge our need for forgiveness, we express our desire for reconciliation by fasting or abstaining from anything from chocolate to Twitter, and we renew our commitment to Jesus, to his church, and to his on-going mission in the world.

As part of our Lenten observance, we are preaching a series from the book of Matthew on Following Jesus. We began the series two weeks ago by looking at Jesus' invitation to "Come, follow me!" - to come and be my disciple.

Last week, we explored the idea that a Jesus disciple is a student - someone who is learning from Jesus. A writer named Dallas Willard has described a disciple of Jesus as someone who is with Jesus, to learn from Jesus, how to live like Jesus (*The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, 276). Learning is a central component of following Jesus.

This morning we're going to look at the end of Matthew, chapter 9 and then we'll focus our attention at the beginning of chapter 10. If you would like to follow along, the references will be on the screen and the verses can be found on page 1510 in the Bible that is under your seat. Before we open the Scriptures, let's pray this prayer together.

Prayer

God who speaks, help us to hear your voice through your Word. As we open your Scriptures, grant that we will be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Open our ears to hear and our minds to understand. Then when it's time to respond to your revelation, inspire our spirits, encourage our hearts, and strengthen our wills for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.

Exposition

The book of Matthew is the first book in the second half of the Bible - the portion of the Bible called the New Testament. It is the first of four books - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - that we call "gospels." A gospel is a proclamation of victory. These four books proclaim the gospel - they proclaim the one true God's victory over evil, sin, and death through the life, death, and resurrection of his son, Jesus.

Matthew opens with four chapters about who Jesus is (**See Matthew 1:1-4:16**). He says that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah. He's the one who God's people had been waiting for - the one who God sent to deliver Israel.

He is the son of David - Israel's ideal king. He is the rightful heir to throne and the fulfillment of God's promise to make David's family an unending dynasty.

He is the Son of Abraham - the father of Israel. He is the true Israelite and the fulfillment of the promise that through Abraham's descendant, God would bless all the families of the earth. Most importantly, he is the very Son of God. In Jesus, God is with us. In Jesus, God has drawn near to the world - he has drawn near to us.

Over the next eleven chapters, Matthew focuses on Jesus' ministry (**See Matthew 4:17-16:20**). We pick up the story at the end of Chapter 9, as Jesus was going from town to town, teaching in local worship centers called synagogues, preaching the good news (or the gospel) about God's kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness (**Matthew 9:35**).

Matthew frequently summarizes Jesus' ministry as a ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. He announced that God's kingdom is here, instructed people how to live in God's kingdom, and demonstrated the nearness of God's kingdom by restoring those who were oppressed.

Wherever Jesus went, he drew a crowd. When he saw this crowd of weary and broken people, he was moved with compassion. He turned to his disciples, and he told them, "The harvest is ready but there aren't enough workers. So, pray that God will send workers" (**Matthew 9:36-38**).

Immediately after this summons to prayer, "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (**Matthew 10:1**). He called twelve ordinary people; twelve people who with a few exceptions we know very little about. We know their names, and we know about quite a bit about Simon Peter and Judas Iscariot. But we know virtually nothing about the rest of the bunch.

Jesus called these twelve people and he gave them authority - he gave them what he has. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus taught with authority, he forgave with authority, and he healed with authority. So, he gave them his authority and then he sent them out. He sent them into the harvest field to be the very workers he told them to ask God for. He sent them out as the answer to their own prayer.

I wonder how many times we are moved to pray about something or for someone, and then as we pray we discover that God is actually inviting, calling, and equipping us to respond to that need. How many times are we God's answer to our own prayers?

Jesus sent them out with these instructions - beginning in **Matthew 10, verses 5 through 10**. He said, *"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep."*

Jesus told them to do exactly what he was doing. Other than a few times, when a Gentile or a Samaritan approached him, Jesus' ministry was focused on Israel. Later on, Jesus would tell his disciples to go to every nation, but at this point, he told them to start small, to begin where they are, to start with their people, to go to their neighbors.

He told them to preach the exact same message they've heard him preach and to do the same things they've seen him do. He commissioned them to announce the arrival of God's rule in the world and to invite people to submit themselves to God.

They saw Jesus heal people with crippling diseases, including leprosy. They watched Jesus bring a synagogue leader's daughter back to life. They witnessed Jesus deliver two men who had been overcome by the forces of evil. Now he has given them the authority to do the same things - to bring healing, life, restoration, and freedom to those in need.

He told them to do this freely and to do it immediately. According to Jesus, they had everything they need. They didn't need additional teaching or training, they didn't need to raise funds or take extra resources. He had already given them everything they need to get started, and he'll provide anything they need on the way.

The harvest was ready - the mission was urgent - there was work to be done, but the workers were few. So, Jesus called his students, he gave them his authority, and he sent them out to do what he's been doing, to practice what he's been preaching, to live out what they've been learning, to freely give what they've been freely given.

What if they had said no? What if they - like the crowds - had said to Jesus, we'd rather just watch; we'd rather just receive. What if they decided simply to learn what Jesus had to teach about God's kingdom rather than to live in and for God's kingdom? What if they just took notes?

After all, they'd never done this before. They had been watching and learning, but now Jesus was sending them out to put everything they had learned into practice. And apparently, he wasn't going with them.

We can imagine what this must've been like for the disciples. When our parents, teachers, or mentors say that we're ready - that we can do what they've been teaching us, there's a sense of excitement or adventure and there's even a bit of dignity or delight in that moment. At the same time, there is some doubt and fear. What if they're wrong? What if we're not ready? What if we fail? What will happen if we do?

It's that mix of feelings we had the first time our parents took off the training wheels or let go of the bicycle seat, the first time we performed in front of an audience, made a presentation, saw a patient, waited on a customer, or hosted our in-laws. We were excited and afraid.

I remember this tension when we were preparing to bring our first born home from the hospital. We had taken a baby care class, read those what to expect books, subscribed to babycenter.com, bought more gadgets than we needed, and thanks to the local fire department, we had a secure car seat. We had everything we needed to bring Cora home, and I was excited and terrified. Surely, I was missing something. There was no way the doctor was just going to send us home and expect us to do this on our own. She certainly didn't expect us to care for a child without the constant supervision of a paid medical professional. If they do, I'm going to mess this up - and this is my daughter. If someone would have offered me a chance to stay and take another class, I may have chosen to take notes.

It's far more comfortable to listen, to watch, or to read, then it is to practice, to do, or to act, especially when it comes to Jesus. We are drawn to him. We like what he has to say, but doing what he says is another matter. Learning is safe, but practicing is risky.

So, we often go from class to class, group to group, Bible Study to Bible Study, video to video, book to book, and sermon to sermon, just taking notes.

Learning is a central and critical aspect of discipleship. It's absolutely essential. **But learning without practicing - hearing without doing - listening without obeying - is spectating - it's not following.** Jesus doesn't call spectators he calls disciples.

It is a tragedy that Julian Bond didn't take notes, but he and the rest of Dr. King's followers avoided a greater tragedy. It would have been a greater tragedy if they had never marched. It would have been a greater tragedy if they had learned about nonviolent resistance, but they never practiced it. It's a greater tragedy to hear and not do, to listen and not obey, to learn and not practice.

Jesus warned us about this in last week's sermon text. He said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand" (**Matthew 7:26**). But "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (**Matthew 7:24**).

Learning without practicing is spectating. Learning with practicing is following. Jesus calls us to both. The question this morning is how do we start practicing.

Application

According to Matthew 10,

1) **We Start Second** - Following Jesus begins with Jesus. He calls us, he gives us his authority, and he sends us out to practice what he preached - to do what he did. He never asks us to give what he hasn't given or to do what he hasn't made possible. He asks us to give what he's freely given to us, and he's given us everything we need. He has ushered us into his kingdom, healed us, revived us, cleansed us, and set us free. Therefore, he can send us to do the same for others in his name, by his authority, and through his Spirit. Jesus says, "Come" and we start second.

2) **We Start Here** - Following Jesus begins where we live, work, worship, and play. Jesus didn't start by sending his disciples to the nations, he started by sending them to their neighbors. So, we practice our faith in our homes, in our jobs, in our schools, in our church, and wherever else we find ourselves. We start with our families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, with one another, and with whoever else Jesus brings across our path. We see those who are oppressed, weary, and broken, and like Jesus we are moved with compassion, we proclaim the gospel, and we bring healing, life, restoration, and freedom in Jesus name. Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful," so we start here.

3) **We Start Now** - Following Jesus begins today. When Jesus called his first disciples, they immediately left everything and followed him. When Jesus sent these same disciples out on mission, he told them not to go home and pack. We tend to think that we need more before we can begin. Usually, we think we need more training. It's true that we always have more to learn. Learning doesn't end when practicing begins. The two should always go together. What we learn, we should do. We don't have to be a paid professional or an ordained pastor to partner with Jesus in his on-going mission. Jesus' invitation to go and do likewise is open to us all. Jesus says, "Freely we have received," so we start now.

Conclusion

My family and I have been at Asbury for less than two years, but we've known Asbury for years. In fact, I worked closely with the student ministry while I was a youth pastor at another church in town, and Sarah and I were married here in 2004.

We are known for being a church that studies the Scriptures. We have some incredible teachers and a plethora of opportunities to learn from one another. We also have a legacy and reputation for being an incredibly generous church. As we heard this morning, we have a history of being a church that prioritizes missions and outreach.

Yet over the last few years, I've heard from many of you and we also sense that God has been slowly stirring something in us. There is a growing sense of restlessness and a longing for something more. I think this was captured visually when we displayed the names of people that we know who don't know Jesus. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

I believe God is calling us - individually and collectively - to greater practice. I believe this stirring is the Holy Spirit's way of keeping us from a greater tragedy and inviting us into to a greater partnership with him. What would happen if we more deliberately - more purposefully - more courageously - more sacrificially - put all of our learning into practice?

Imagine what God can do through a community of people who by his grace and by his Spirit strive to learn and practice, listen and obey, hear and do. Imagine what God can do in us and through us when we start second, when we start here, and we start now. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!

Invitation

8:00 - At this time, let us start second by responding to Christ's invitation to feast at His table.

9:15 & 11:00 - As we respond to God's word through corporate prayer and song, if you would like to pray at the prayer rail or you would like someone to pray with you, please come forward.