

Livin' the Life
Jesus Clarifying Who are Really Disciples
8:31-32

August 12, 2018

David Taylor

We are looking at the life of Jesus and the life he promises in our series on the Gospel of John, Livin' the Life. Today's message, Jesus Clarifying who are Really Disciples, is from 8:31-38. Please turn to John 8:31-38 and read along or listen as we read God's word.

Jesus wants those who believed in him (8:30) to understand the nature of true, saving faith and being a real disciple. We have already seen that believing in Jesus does not always mean genuine or saving faith. For instance, in chapter two many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man (2:23). Then in chapter six, the crowd believed that Jesus was the promised prophet but when Jesus realized they wanted to crown him king, he walked away from them (6:14-15). And later in that same chapter, many of his disciples stopped following him because his teaching was too hard to accept (6:60-66). Jesus is not making a distinction between salvation and discipleship but what it means to genuinely believe, what it means to follow him, what it means to be a Christian, and what it means to be a disciple.

So listen to Jesus, If you abide in my word then you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free (8:31-32). This is a conditional clause, meaning that if the first half of the clause is true then the second half is also true. If, you abide in my word, then you are really my disciples. The negative is also true, if you do not abide in my word, then you are not really my disciples. You are truly disciples if you are abiding in the word. Truly means really or genuinely. Jesus is making a distinction between genuine and false disciples. Jesus mentions this because there are those who are not true or really disciples. They have a form of faith but it is not saving faith. John wants us to ask ourselves, are we really disciples? Genuine disciples are those who abide in his word.

Now let's look at what Jesus means by my word. Word is a singular noun so I think Jesus means what he has been teaching up to this point in his ministry, who he is and his message. In short, he is the Messiah, the Son of God who is also God the Son who has come to rescue humanity from our sinful condition (1:29; 3:16-17). The best place to understand abiding is the imagery of vine branch imagery Jesus uses in John fifteen (1-11). The essence of what he says there is that a genuine disciple is one who abides in Jesus for a fruitful life. We also see that there is no difference between abiding in Jesus and abiding in his word (15:7). So, abiding in his word means that you are actively trusting in, pursuing, and engaging Jesus and the gospel in a way that you are looking to his word as your source of life and strength continually like a branch relies on the vine for life giving resources. Abiding is intentionally cultivating your relationship with Jesus. Abiding means that Jesus is the major influence in your life and that influence is growing and you fight against everything that distracts from him. You fight so that God's good gifts do not replace Jesus as the dominant influence in your life. You fight against all negative forms of unbelief - drifting, sluggishness, apathy, indifference – so that they do not lead you away from Jesus.

Jesus is clarifying to those who believed that only those who abide in his word are really his disciples. Genuine faith is a growing pursuit of Jesus, so that his influence grows in your life. It does not matter how dynamic your faith was at one time, how close to Jesus you used to be. If you are not abiding in his word then you are not a disciple! This is the plain meaning of Jesus' words and is consistent with what the rest of the New Testament teaches. Let's look at the parable of the sower and the seed as a good illustration of what Jesus is saying here. There are four different soils representing different individuals and their response to the word. The first one does not respond positively at all to the word (Mt 13:18-19); they are an example of those who reject Christ. The second person receives the word with joy yet there is no root so when tribulation or persecution

comes they immediately fall away (Mat 13:20-21). The third person hears the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches chokes out the word in this person's life so that they are unfruitful (22). The last person represents the only good soil. They receive the word and understand it so that he bears fruit in his life (13:23). The last one is the only one who abides and is fruitful (15:4-5). A disciple/Christian abides in Jesus' word because you recognize your own bankruptcy apart from him so you look to him and his word to know Jesus, to give you life, to strengthen your faith, to feed you, to refresh you, to open your eyes to sin and deception in your life, etc. Who or what is the dominant influence in your life? What are doing or using to cope with life?

The word is the primary means by which God produces fruit in our lives. Psalm one describes the person who abides in the word, who meditates on it throughout the day and so they are fruitful, their lives transformed by his Spirit through his word. Let me give you some practical advice to abide in his word. First, make a plan to read the bible daily. Start reading one chapter a day, thinking about what you are reading. Second, pray before you read, asking God to speak to you. Then, find a place to read. Read it thoughtfully, thinking about what you are reading. If nothing stands out to you, then read it again, asking God to speak to you. Look for one thing that strikes you or stands out to you. Then after you read, pray and ask God to help you to obey what he spoke to you. Protect this time by making an appointment in your calendar. Guard it with your life. Do it whether you feel like it or not. It is the long term effect of reading that you will benefit from.

The second means by which God produces fruit in our lives is through accountability to abiding in Jesus. Having people ask you on a weekly basis how your walk with Jesus is, about your time in the word, and your obedience to the word is necessary for consistently in abiding in Jesus and his word (Heb 3:12-14).

