

By the Galilean Lake

by G.W. North

Jesus calls men to a new kind of discipleship, one that involves being born of water and of the Spirit, and following His example of discipline and obedience.

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 1:16-18, Luke 5:10, John 1:42, John 3:3, John 3:5, John 4:1-2, Acts 2:38, Romans 6:4

Topics: "Discipleship", "New Birth"

Description

G.W. North explores the transformative journey of Peter from a fisherman to a disciple of Jesus, emphasizing the significance of Jesus' initial encounter with him and the eventual call to follow Him. Despite Peter's initial hesitation and return to fishing, he ultimately recognized the depth of discipleship required and the necessity of abandoning his former life. North highlights the distinction between water baptism and Spirit baptism, asserting that true new birth comes from Jesus' baptism in the Spirit. He contrasts the early attraction to Jesus with the deeper commitment required for discipleship, as exemplified in the conversation with Nicodemus. The sermon concludes with a call to embrace the personal commitment that true discipleship demands.

Transcript

This man, who was later to become a leading apostle, was first brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who asserted to him that he had found the Messiah. That first meeting was momentous and left him speechless, 'Thou art Simon the son of Jona', said Jesus, 'thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone'. What a beginning! Who was this who at the first introduction made so bold as to change a man's name? Why and what was it all about? What effect this had on Peter is difficult to tell; he certainly did not regard it as a call to discipleship, but went back home to his wife and his fishing business -- undoubtedly with very mixed feelings and thoughts. However, Jesus had designs on him other than that, so following His temptation in the wilderness Jesus went after him. He found him with his brother, fishing in Galilee, 'follow me and I will make you fishers of men' He said and they straightway left their nets and followed Him. How long they stayed with Him or how far they followed Him then we are not told; we do know though that they did not continue with Him, for later we find Him back at the lake again seeking them; they had gone back. Why they went back is left to the imagination, we only know that this time the call was conclusive, they forsook all and followed Him and never went back.

At last the message had reached them. Until now they had not been prepared to forsake everything. They had responded to His charm and felt the pull of His attraction, but had not been ready to let go of everyone and everything else for His sake; their own business and home ties came first. But at last they realised there was much more to being a disciple of Jesus than just going to visit Him occasionally, or having Him visit them for long or brief spells as the case may be. Beside this, Peter at least had reached a place of desperation because of his sin. How long the conviction of his sinfulness had been growing in him is impossible to tell; maybe it had been growing in him over the days since John Baptist had first pronounced Jesus to be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Or maybe it was the presence of Jesus with him in the boat -- the sheer righteousness and purity of Him. Or it may have been the fact that he had been and still was trying to elude the Lord and His claims on his life -- perhaps it was all three, we do not know; all we know is that he felt he was a sinner and told Jesus to go away and leave him alone. They were tense moments of struggle, but Jesus won him and at last Peter and those with him abandoned fishing and home and became lifelong disciples.

John does not record any of this in his Gospel, nor does he mention the details of the successive callings of any of the disciples, neither does he show how the Lord elevated some of them, including himself, to apostleship and commissioned others to a less intimate position and ministry. John leaves that to his fellow-writers; he turns his pen instead to the task of recording other details relating to the development of everyone's spiritual life and calling rather than to original calls. Comparing his Gospel with Matthew's for instance reveals an illuminative detail, namely this: Jesus already had disciples before He specifically called anyone to follow Him. What is more important John also records the vital conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in Jerusalem at the Passover when the Lord so emphatically stated, 'Ye must be born from above'. It was not until after that and possibly also following His trip to Samaria that the Lord commenced calling men to discipleship. Before that it seems He was content to win men by attraction rather than by direct challenge and call.

Until this time all the people had been attracted to John Baptist and being converted by his gospel had become his disciples, but being pointed by him to Jesus, many of them, if not most of them, had been converted to Jesus. We see then that discipleship was at that time determined by allegiance to a person and acceptance of his leadership and teaching. John Baptist was a great light shining and burning in the wilderness, therefore he attracted multitudes to himself, but Jesus came into the world a far greater and more fiery light than His forerunner and, as we may expect, made and baptised more disciples than John. Significantly enough the Lord Himself did not practise water baptism; His disciples did it for Him, and, presumably in His name, disciple baptised disciple; perhaps that is an indication of the great numbers who turned from John to Jesus wishing to become His followers. This was perfectly acceptable to John and Jesus, but before the Lord went out to call men to Himself He firmly established at least one thing, namely this, that in order to enter the kingdom of God a man must be born of water and of the Spirit.

It is not sufficient that men should be baptised in water only; everyone must be baptised in Spirit as well. Water baptism is an external thing, though it should never be done except upon correct inward convictions; it can only ever be a symbolic act. When a man is baptised in water he is only as it were born into a new life. When John baptised a person, from that moment onwards he or she was regarded as his disciple; all sins were at that moment forgiven by God and John became his new teacher and scripture-interpreter; from then onwards that person entered into a different kind of life, his baptism was therefore as a new birth to him. But when Jesus baptises a man in the Spirit he is at that moment born from above; he is literally made a new man by a miracle wrought in him by Jesus. This is one of the major

reasons why Jesus did not practise water baptism -- it is of the earth, earthy. The baptism in Spirit is of the heavens, heavenly. Jesus only baptises from heaven. He is now ascended into heaven and from thence baptises men in the Spirit. Water baptism, as practised by John Baptist or any other person, is nothing more than a picture of new birth. Spirit baptism as practised by Jesus is the actual one and only new birth; John's water baptism but poorly prefigured it. It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Lord approved of what would now by some be called anabaptism, for it is almost impossible not to believe that some, if not all those His disciples baptised in water had previously been baptised by John. Be that as it may, one thing is very clear: water baptism is a figure of new birth and Spirit baptism is that new birth. What God hath joined together let no man put asunder; a man must be born of water and of the Spirit says Jesus.

Having established this truth the Lord went forth to call men to. Himself and to a new kind of discipleship. The kind of discipleship He intends for all men is that same life of discipline which He Himself knew as a human being on this earth. He said of Himself, 'the Son can do nothing of himself but what he seeth the Father do', and it is written of Him that He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness. Throughout His life He made remarks utterly consistent with the spirit of these truths, such as, 'as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do, arise let us go', and 'I know that His commandment is life everlasting, whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak'. Jesus of Nazareth was a disciple; He is also our Lord, and as He said, the disciple is not above his Lord; He has given us an example; He is also an ensample of what God means by discipleship and when we respond to Him He never asks or expects us to do or be anything He did not do or Himself become when He became a man. He did not leave it to another to show us what discipleship means, He has shown us Himself.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus he had no idea of what true discipleship meant; he made no secret of the fact that he and others regarded Jesus as a teacher, for he called Him that, 'teacher, we know thou art a teacher come from God'. He was himself the teacher of Israel and he undoubtedly wished to talk to Jesus on that level, but the Lord would have none of it. Like so many of his day (and ours too for that matter) he wanted things to be kept theological without any suggestion of personal commitment, He must have been absolutely astonished when Jesus told him that he must be born -- he had no intention of getting on to such intensely personal grounds. He was intellectually stimulated by Jesus' miraculous powers and was naturally inquisitive, but he was not prepared to throw in his lot with the Lord. Many have followed his example, but in doing so have thrown away the best in life. Happily the impression made on Nicodemus by the Lord was so great that he could not stand aside from Him completely; he eventually took a public stand for Him, but by that time he had missed so much. What would he have done if the Lord had specifically called him, as He did the apostles?

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