

Jesus and His Friends

by Harris Franklin Rall

Jesus formed an inner circle of friends and disciples to learn from him, share his spirit, and be trained for work, demonstrating his desire for friendship and his purpose of sending them forth to preach.

Scripture: Matthew 11:29, Mark 3:14, Mark 10:21, Mark 15:40, Luke 8:1, Luke 9:57, Luke 22:15, Luke 22:28, Acts 1:21

Topics: "Discipleship", "Christian Friendship"

Description

Harris Franklin Rall delves into the significance of Jesus' special circle of friends and disciples, emphasizing the deep human connection and friendship Jesus shared with them. This inner circle was crucial for Jesus' work, as they were not only companions but also learners who would be sent out to preach. Jesus demanded unwavering devotion, purity, fearlessness, and readiness to sacrifice from his disciples, preparing them for the challenges ahead. Despite the hardships, Jesus' plan to focus on training this inner circle proved successful, with most remaining loyal even after his death, boldly proclaiming his identity as the promised Messiah.

Transcript

One of the outstanding features in Jesus' life is the group of his friends and disciples. At the very beginning of his ministry we find these figures. According to the first chapter of John, Jesus meets his first disciples in the following of the Baptist. It is to the home of one of these, Simon, that he goes when he returns to Galilee to begin his ministry, and here he invites Simon and his brother Andrew, together with the other two brothers, James and John, to join his circle (Mark 1:16-20). A little later a publican, Levi, is added to the number, who is probably the Matthew of Matt 9:9 and 10:3. From this time on we find Jesus always with a circle of followers. They are with him when the crowds follow him in Galilee. They accompany him on his journeys outside the province. They are the companions in the quiet days, and, though they protest against his going, they follow him to Jerusalem.

What was the meaning of this special circle? It marked, for one thing, the friendly, deeply human nature of Jesus. There was in him not only a general love for humankind and a compassion for the needy, but this special capacity for friendship and the desire for it. "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations," he says (Luke 22:28). At the Last Supper together he says, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). At special moments in his life he takes with him the three who stood nearer to him apparently than the others--Peter and James and John (Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33); and in the garden of Gethsemane he misses the watchful sympathy which he craved in that hour

of need (Mark 14:37).

Deeper than this personal question was the purpose concerned with his work. Mark puts very simply this double purpose: "He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14). The stress of Jesus' work was upon his teaching. He must teach men the nature of the Kingdom, and what the life of the Kingdom was, and how to make ready for its coming. The changing throngs could not give him the best opportunity for such work. He must have men who could stay with him, whom he could lead by constant patient tuition not only into an understanding of his message but into a sharing of his spirit, into the life that he himself lived with God. They were to take his yoke upon them and learn of him (Matt 11:29). That is the reason for their name, disciples or learners.

The second purpose was to train these men for work--"that he might send them forth to preach." There was at least one occasion upon which Jesus thus sent them forth. Matthew and Luke report this with extended statements of the instructions that Jesus gave (Matt 10:1-42; Luke 10:1-20). As the statements agree in other respects, it may very well be that they refer to the same occasion, though Matthew speaks of twelve and Luke of seventy. How far beyond Jesus looked in this purpose we do not know. So much is clear, that in the early church this inner circle was regarded first of all as preachers, as those sent forth to proclaim the message.

It is this double purpose of Jesus that explains the demand that he made upon these disciples. It is not always clear in any given passage whether Jesus is speaking of what is required of all who would enter the Kingdom, or simply of what he asks of those who were to go with him. When he asks the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give them to the poor, it is because he wanted him to become one of his companions (Mark 10:21). Upon the men of this inner circle he made a special demand. They must leave their homes and their business and follow him (Mark 1:17:18; 10:28-30). They must be men of single and unswerving devotion (Luke 9:57-62). They are to go forth teaching and healing, like their Master, taking no provision and trusting to hospitality where they go. They must be pure men and fearless, ready to suffer, and yet with faith that they are in their heavenly Father's care. And they must stand ready to sever any tie or face any foe as this loyalty may demand.

The inner circle was not composed simply of those who came of their own accord. They were chosen by Jesus. In some cases men asked to be enrolled, like the scribe (Matt 8:19), and the Gadarene demoniac whom Jesus healed (Mark 5:18, 19). Not all were accepted, for Jesus sent the latter home. They were probably all Galilæans except Judas. We know, however, little of the circumstances of any of them except the first five named above. The limited group of the twelve was probably not fixed at the very first. But even after the selection of the twelve there was both a smaller and a larger group. The smaller group that was especially dear to Jesus was composed of Peter, James, and John. In the larger group there were men besides the twelve. Aside from the reference in Luke 10:1, we read in Acts 1:21 of others that were in the company of Jesus. There were certain women also who were members of the company for at least a part of the time--Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuzas, Susanna, and others, who assisted also in meeting the expenses of the traveling group (Luke 8:1-3). Some of the women followed him later to Jerusalem and we find them present at his death (Mark 15:40, 41).

The Galilæan ministry showed less and less promise of permanent fruit, and Jesus turned more and more to the training of the inner circle. The final issue justified his plan. It was not an easy task. He had to lament their hardness of heart, their slowness to see the real spirit of his work, his real aim. But in the end he won. Only one of the number failed him. Even the shock of his death could not overthrow their

conviction. After the first few days we find them rallying the other disciples and standing forth before the people who had put Jesus to death as a malefactor, declaring their faith in him as the promised Messiah. We try in vain to imagine what those weeks and months meant during which Jesus gave himself to this little group. There were long days when they traveled together or remained in quiet retirement, when he poured forth for their ears alone the wealth of his teaching. More important still must have been the deepening impress of his personality, his tenderness and sympathy, his courage in face of every danger and disappointment, his simple steady faith in God, his deep sense of the Father's presence and his fellowship with the Father. There is one fact that shows as no other what the power of his person must have been: These men who walked and talked and ate and slept with him in that simple human fellowship were the ones who declared when he was gone that he was Master and Lord and King.

Directions for Reading and Study

Read Matt 10:1-42 and Luke 10:1-20. On this basis state (1) what the work of the disciples was to be as they went out; (2) what qualities of character he demanded of them.

Make a list of the friends of Jesus outside of these immediate disciples, and mention any homes where he was wont to be entertained.

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