

Marks of Discipleship

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In & Beyond the Church

November 4, 2018

Day 1: Hebrews 11:32-34

32 And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

Faith - the evidence of things hoped for and the certainty of things not seen. Faith is believing and acting on those beliefs. Faith is not of human origin, it is a gift from God for all who ask. All of the persons mentioned in verse 32 were called by God to act in a specific way to lead the people of Israel. Each one was an ordinary person given an incredible task. God chose them so that when the task was completed both the individual and the world would know it was God acting through the person. God was (and is) acting to fulfill the promise that the world would be redeemed.

Question: Which one had long hair? Which one was a king? Which one did God tell to reduce his army?

Challenge: Do some research and see how old David was when he killed Goliath.

Scripture: Judges 7:4-7, Judges 16:15-22, I Samuel 16:1-13

Day 2: Hebrews 11:36-37

36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented—

The next set of individuals spoke the words that God wanted people to hear; however, for speaking God's word they suffered. Their task was harder than leading armies because they were not winning great victories against overwhelming odds but simply telling the people how God was not happy with them. Telling someone the truth about themselves (even the truth in love) will many times cause the other person to dislike you or hate you.

Question: What could a prophet say that would cause the rulers to be so angry and want to kill?

Challenge: Think about a time when you told someone the truth about themselves and they were angry. Why did you tell them what you did?

Scripture: Luke 13:29-14:4

Day 3: Hebrews 11:38

38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

The writer probably had both the prophet Elijah and Jeremiah in mind when he wrote these words. Both prophets warned their governments about the long term effects of their not listening to God and following God's law. Elijah spoke to the king of Israel and Jeremiah to the kings of Judah. Both countries had success with their armies and by forging alliances with idolatrous countries. By believing in their strength of arms and alliances, they substituted God's plan of redemption with their own plans.

Question: Who in the New Testament was 40 days in the desert?

Challenge: In our day what kind of letter sent to the president could land you in jail?

Scripture: I Kings 19:4-13, Jeremiah 20:1-2, 37:11-21

Day 4: Hebrews 11:39-40

39 Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.

All of the faithful people mentioned in Hebrews 11 died without seeing the final promise. They, like Moses, were given a brief look at the Promised Land but they were not to go there. At some point we will not go into the future. We will leave this earth and yet we are given a look at the future as we reflect on all the lives we have touched with God's love. Verse 40 tells us that those that went before and those leaving earth now we will meet in God's kingdom.

Question: Would you remain faithful at your task if you knew you would not see its completion?

Challenge: Think of family in the long term. Think of it as multi-generational (going back 100 years and into the future 100 years) and see how you can improve, by your actions, your family.

Scripture: Hebrews 11:4-11, 17-25

Day 5: Hebrews 12:1

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,

Whenever we gather for worship we gather with all those who have gone before. The Church is not just those here and now but it is all those who call Jesus Lord in every generation. The early Christians felt the support of all the saints who went before. They were bold in their witness and firm in their belief that Jesus is Lord and that Jesus will bring us to the new kingdom. We have seen the hope of the world in Jesus Christ so then we can be bold, knowing God has come and is with us in the Holy Spirit.

Question: What do you think the writer means by "the race that is set before us?"

Challenge: Write down 3 names of those who have been spiritual mentors for you. Now write down three reasons why for each one.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:2-12

Day 6: Hebrews 12:2

2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus has been to the future and came to tell us that it is OK for us to go forward. Jesus' trip to the cross and his ascension gave proof to His claim of being the Son of the Father. His death was not the defeat of God's plan but the completion of that plan. The power of death was destroyed at the cross. Fear of the hereafter is gone because we know Jesus is ever before God's throne making intercession for us.

Question: What do you think "the joy that was set before Him" was?

Challenge: Do some research to see why the right hand is the place of honor and power.

Scripture: Hebrews 3:1-6, 5:1-8

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November 11, 2018

Day 1: John 20:24

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

Thomas is the disciple that we hear from and about, the most in John. He answers and asks questions that others are thinking about. Thomas is very much like the person who is a believer but wonders deep down if God's promises can be trusted. All believers have times of wondering if all that Jesus said is true, especially during times of great sadness. If one of the first followers of Jesus can wonder about God's promises then when I do it I am in no worse shape than the early disciples.

Question: Why do you think Thomas was not with them?

Challenge: Name all twelve of the Disciples.

Scripture: John 11:11-21, John 14:1-10, Acts 1:12-14

Day 2: John 20:25

So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

Thomas calls for a level of proof that offends most people who read this section. We tend to think of ourselves as better than Thomas because we have believed without putting our hands in Jesus' side. Note that Thomas does not say *what* he does not believe. He knows that the tomb is empty and he has heard from the others what they experienced. To put this whole scene in a different frame - the disciples are telling Thomas that a flower is real and Thomas will not believe that the seed the flower comes from is real unless he sees it. He wants to see the plant seed, root, and flower.

Question: Was Thomas' request unreasonable? Why or why not?

Challenge: What did it take for you to believe?

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:1-11

Day 3: John 20:26

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'

Jesus' words recall what he said in John 14:27. Jesus tells the disciples to have peace because he is going to prepare a place for them. Jesus' mission is not complete until he ascends to the Father. He had to go in order for the Spirit to come and be with the believers. The followers of Jesus felt at peace (complete) when Jesus was with them. Jesus knew He had to leave and wanted to leave them with that same sense of peace. He told them that they would recall all He had told them when they needed to recall His words.

Question: How would you get someone's attention if you did not want to scare them?

Challenge: To the best of our knowledge Jesus never wrote anything down. Why do think He did not?

Scripture: Luke 24:33-41

Day 4: John 20:27

Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not be unbelieving but believe.'

The term that is usually translated as doubt does not exist in the Greek. The word is unbelieving. Thomas does not doubt, he does *not believe*. Note that Jesus himself comes to deal with his unbelief. Instead of causing lightning to strike Thomas, Jesus comes to him. Jesus' response to Thomas is instructive for the church. Jesus did not curse or try to harm Thomas for his unbelief but instead came to him and allowed him to touch where he was wounded. The church has too often thought that unbelievers must be somehow punished but that is not what Jesus wants. The entire gospel of John calls for us to move from unbelief to belief. It is more important for persons to believe than for the church to be right.

Question: Would it have been enough for you to see Jesus?

Challenge: Why do you think the Church has been harsh with those who do not believe?

Scripture: Hebrews 3:7-17

Day 5: John 20:28

Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!'

Thomas has the fullest expression of belief in the Gospel. John has been showing through various "signs" that Jesus is the Son of the Father. Jesus was given the power to give life from the Father and Jesus can give life to his followers. Thomas puts it all together and believes that Jesus is Lord and God. Jesus is fully human and fully God.

Question: Do you think that Thomas actually touched Jesus?

Challenge: Write out a brief statement of faith.

Scripture: John 6:60-70

Day 6: John 20:29

Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

This last verse is addressed to the community that John is writing to and to us down through the centuries. Jesus in John 17:20-24 prays for all those who will find new life in Christ through the witness of the disciples. The disciples were more than the twelve; they were all those who experienced the Resurrection and witnessed to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. We are called to be witnesses to the whole world. We are blessed just as those who saw Jesus because in faith we also see Jesus.

Question: What does it mean to "witness" to something?

Challenge: If people cannot see Jesus today how does anyone come to believe?

Scripture: John 17:20-26

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November 18, 2018

Day 1: John 9:1-2

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

The disciples are not being unfeeling by asking Jesus this question about who sinned. Not really knowing how someone was born with a defect or how someone got ill, it was supposed that maybe a sin by a parent was being visited upon the child. With regard to birth defects today we do not use the term sinned but there is often wonder if the mother ate or drank something that hurt the baby.

Question: How could sin cause blindness?

Challenge: What do you think is the leading cause of children being sick today?

Scripture: Mark 8:17-38

Day 2: John 9:3-5

Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

Jesus responds that the person was not born blind because of past sin. Jesus' comment that the works of God might be revealed in him does not mean that God arranged for the man to be blind. The blindness of the man will be a sign that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus has the prerogatives of God - Jesus is the light of the world and Jesus can give light to whomever He chooses.

Question: Jesus said he is the light of the world. How has Jesus helped you see better?

Challenge: Why do you think bad things happen to good people?

Scripture: Luke 17:10-17

Day 3: John 9:6-7

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

We do not know if the man had ever hoped he would see again, all we know is that he is willing to follow Jesus' instructions to go and wash. We also do not know what he was thinking as he went to the pool. He might have begun to doubt as he walked or he might have begun to pray.

Whatever he thought about, he kept going. Jesus today gives instructions for our healing but too often we do not want to go and even wash (follow His instructions).

Question: Why would Jesus make mud to spread on the man's eyes?

Challenge: On a scale of 1-6 how well do you think you follow Jesus' instructions for living?

Scripture: John 5:2-12

Day 4: John 9:8-10

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?'

It is an interesting response on the part of the others. Instead of shouting, cheering and hugging, the people ask, "How did this happen?" This happens in church when a person has not been to worship for a time and they come back; the response is "Where have you been?" or "Look who's here!" We should greet a person first and ask questions later.

Question: What do you think the man did after he had his sight - do you think he stayed a beggar?

Challenge: Think of a time you felt very welcomed - how did you feel welcomed? Think of a time you felt unwelcomed - how did you feel unwelcomed?

Scripture: I Corinthians 1:10-2:5

Day 5: John 9:11-12

He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

The man knew that it was someone called Jesus who had cured him. But he could not tell folks where Jesus was to be found. His story of receiving his sight is a great example of grace. If we ask for God's love we not only receive it but we can now see the world around us better than ever.

Question: Do you think the people wanted something from Jesus and that is why they asked where he was?

Challenge: How do you think you are doing in following Jesus' instructions on how we should live with each other?

Scripture: John 7:1-52

Day 6: John 9:24-25

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.'

When repeatedly questioned about how he received his sight and pressed to say that the one who gave him his sight was a sinner, the man stays with what he knows to be true. He knows that only God had the power to give sight and that no one could do what Jesus did unless they were from God. The former blind man may not be able to articulate great theological concepts very well but he knows he can see. He also knew that the others were blind as to who God is and how God was working.

Question: Why would they call Jesus a sinner? See verses 13-16

Challenge: List five things that you do know about Jesus.

Scripture: John 9:1-41

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November 25, 2018

Day 1: Revelation 1:1-3

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

The purpose of John's apocalypse (Revelation) is to interpret the present circumstances the churches in Asia are in and to give hope for the redemption to those under persecution. John's word can be trusted because a messenger from God has come to show John what must take place. John needs a messenger from God to interpret what he sees because the visions are beyond any human power to interpret. Without God's help the events happening to the churches would seem meaningless. Worse, they would be perceived as the powers of evil taking control of God's creation.

Question: Is it true that the time is near?

Challenge: The churches John was writing to were under persecution. What was the cause?

Scripture: Revelation 21

Day 2: Revelation 1:4

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,

John is known and well respected by the seven churches. He was exiled to the island of Patmos (a small rocky island not far from modern Turkey) for proclaiming his faith. John reminds the churches that the one they all call Lord, Jesus Christ, was with God in the beginning of creation, is with God now, and will come again. There were more than seven churches in Asia so the number seven may stand for all of the churches in that region, because seven is considered a whole number.

Question: What does John mean by "his who was"?

Challenge: If you had to draw God's throne, what would it look like?

Scripture: Revelation 2 and 3

Day 3: Revelation 1:5

and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

A witness, in John's writings, is someone who sees and testifies to what they have experienced. A witness does not have to be called but gives testimony freely. John now gives a very compact affirmation of faith; Jesus died, He was raised, and He is ruler over all creation on earth and in heaven.

Question: What does Jesus witness to?

Challenge: Who would be the kings of the earth today?

Scripture: John 1:1-5, Genesis 1

Day 4: Revelation 1:6

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

John continues his affirmation of faith by stating why God sent His Son and states what we are in relation to Him. Jesus loved us by making a sacrifice of Himself. He then enabled us to be a community where the love of God can be experienced and to bear witness that God is ruler of all creation. A priest today is one who communicates the reality of God and by their acceptance of being a priest demonstrates that God is ruler of the world. In our day we would not refer to ourselves as priests but use the term of faithful Disciples.

Question: How would you answer someone who asked what it means by saying we are God's priests? Is there a better word to describe what John is saying?

Challenge: Take the time this week to see if you have communicated the reality of God to a person or the world in general.

Scripture: Revelation 4:11-5:14

Day 5: Revelation 1:7

Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.

Verse 7 states a future reality and 22:20 (Amen, come, Lord Jesus!) is a prayer that He will come soon. John will tell us in this book how to act in the face of persecution. Revelation was not in the Bible all these years because it is interesting history; but it is for any age where the church is under attack. John writes to encourage his congregations and God writes to encourage all congregations under attack in the future. We need to be reminded (as did John's people) it is the same God who was with us in the past that will be with us into the future.

Question: "Even those who pierced him" - does this refer to the soldiers or someone else?

Challenge: How would you describe Jesus' coming again? What would it look like?

Scripture: Revelation 7:9-17

Day 6: Revelation 1:8

'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It would be like saying that Jesus is A to Z. There is a Hasidic tale about a boy in worship with the congregation on the Day of Atonement. The congregation was praying fervently for God's forgiveness but it seemed that the heavens would not open for their prayer to ascend. They prayed again and again and were about to give up when a little boy from the back came to the front of the synagogue and began to say all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As the members tried to quiet him the Rabbi said, "Stop bothering the boy, for when he said the last letter the heavens opened and our prayers ascended." Confused, the congregation was quiet and the Rabbi explained that when the boy recited the alphabet he said all the words that could be said and all their words went up to God. Jesus is everything that could be said and will be said; He is Lord of all.

Question: What does it mean that the Lord God is the beginning and the end?

Challenge: Based on Revelation 22 draw a picture of what heaven looks like. After that you can refer to chapter 4 and draw a picture of what heaven looks like.

Scripture: Revelation 22