

Series: *THE ANSWER NO ONE EXPECTED*—March 27, 2011

THE CLASS OF 30 A.D.

Matthew 28:16-20

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1. How many of you have ever wished you could re-do the high school years-- feeling about yourself the way you do now, and knowing what you now know? As I remember, I was **consumed** with whether I was noticed or not. I thought of this recently when I received a note from someone I knew in high school—who told me how I had somehow helped them in their search for God. I thought to myself, “I was so pre-occupied with my own feelings, I’m surprised that I helped **anyone!**”

-To be in school, of course, is to be, by definition, **incomplete**. In **process**. And you’re defined by your **graduation date**. When you’re at the beginning of high school or university, those in the graduation class seem **so** much more sophisticated and mature. When **you** get there—you wonder, “**They** didn’t seem as scared and uncertain as **I** feel!”

-Maybe I’m the odd duck here—but does anyone else, besides me, feel **less** smart as the years go by? You reach the pinnacle of confidence in your 2nd year of university. The typical name for that year, is...**Sophomore**. Ironically—but fittingly, it comes from two Greek words, **sophos**—wise, and **moros**—fool. **Wise fool!** It all goes down hill from there!

-Then you go into your job. A week into my first church as Associate Pastor, I was horrified to realize that **no one** cared by my GPA—or how well I could parse Greek verbs—or how well I did in Philosophy.

I **also** realized that seminaries can’t teach you what you need most; how to lead, how to love, and how to work with people.

 - a. A lot of universities are known for their graduates around the world. Know which graduating class has done the most to change the world at we know it? It was the **Class of 30 A.D.**—taught in an unusual little traveling seminary by a rabbi named Jesus. In fact, his trainees are **still** known and named—almost 2000 years **after** their graduation! Tell me one other university or school of **any** kind where a billion people in the world would be able to name at least **one** of it’s students. And most would know the name of the only one who flunked out--? **Judas**. **What went on in that school that made it so powerful?**
 - b. What I would like to do today—is tell you, first, a little about what it meant to be Jesus’ student—or **disciple**; apprentice. Because, see, he’s still accepting students. So, at the end of this talk, I’m going to give a take-home test with only one question; would **you** follow Him. Would **you** be his apprentice?
2. To understand Jesus—and how this whole discipleship thing worked, you need to understand that He was a **Rabbi**. The Bible calls Him either Rabbi, or Teacher over 50 times. In that culture, this was a profession with accountability and prestige—a little

like the title **Doctor** in our culture. Some great research has recently shed light on this.

- a. First, almost every young boy growing up in Israel in Jesus' day wanted to be a Rabbi. They knew that the Torah—the law—the prophetic writings of the Old Testament set them apart from everyone else. They knew God—they knew what He had promised through history. **That's who they were!**

-For a Jewish boy, learning the Bible started at the age of six. There are no printing presses—which meant that students had to memorize it. So almost every boy would sit at the feet of a teacher—from dawn till noon—and **memorize** the Bible.

- b. When they graduated from the **House of the Book** at age 10—most would go home and begin apprenticing in the family business; the brighter students would move on to **the House of Learning** until they were about 14. And the Rabbis—their Teachers--would teach them by asking questions. Anyone notice how much Jesus did that? Listen to this--when Jewish boys finished this regimen at the age of 14—they would have the **entire** Old Testament—from Genesis to Malachi—**memorized!**

- c. Most of these students would then, at the age of 14 or 15, find a Rabbi they admired and ask to be his disciples. If they were **good** enough, **bright** enough—after he'd tested their understanding—the Rabbi would invite them to be his **talmudim**—his learners—apprentices. But he would say to most, "I can tell you really love the Bible—but **you don't have what it takes**. Go home, get married, raise a family, and live a godly life. If they **did** get accepted—man, they dropped **everything** and followed him!

- The goal was **not** to accumulate information; it was to **become like that Rabbi**.

3. Now, this all gives us some insight into Jesus—and the disciples He chose. What's **most** fascinating is how Jesus gathered his disciples. We know almost nothing about him until he was baptized by John in the Jordan River—and then went from being a construction worker to preaching in synagogues all over the place—including his home town of Nazareth—where he almost got killed!

-What made different than most of the other rabbis was how he gathered his disciples. No rabbi worth his salt in that culture went out and **asked** people to be his disciples. Students came to **them!**

- a. For Jesus to go down by the sea—and **ask** people like Peter, Andrew James and John to come and **follow** Him—guys who had likely already been rejected by other rabbis—was **very** strange! To ask a tax collector like Matthew to join his group—someone who was **hated** in the community—was religious suicide! But Jesus **does!** And to top off his list, Jesus asks a guy named **Simon the**

Zealot to join too—someone who, in our culture, would be a terrorist—whose goal in life was to kill as many tax collectors as possible!

- b. And when Jesus asks—they followed him **immediately**. Left every behind. Now, given the fact that some of these guys were working as apprentices in the family business—they were younger than you would think. Most men in that culture married in their late teens or early 20s—and Peter was the only married disciple—to the best of what we know. My point? Some of these guys may have been in their teens!
- c. One more thing you notice about these guys Jesus chose; they were Jesus disciples **before** they believed in Him as their Messiah. Fascinating, isn't it—especially when we talk about discipling people **after** they believe—when Jesus disciplined them **into** belief!

-And that would make sense of Jesus' words in what is now known as the **Great Commission**:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18-20 TNIV)

-Jesus says, "**As** you're going—disciple people everywhere—**then** baptize them and teach them!"

- 4. Jesus apparently had a **lot** of people following him closely—at least 72. He went up on a mountain one night, prayed till morning, and then came down and chose twelve. How many of you think that number has some significance? Of course it does. And as you read the Gospels, it's clear that, like us, Jesus had people who were part of his inner circle—three. People in the next circle—12. And in that other ring? Well, probably at least 72 or more. And the larger group included women—like Mary Magdalene and, apparently, women of some wealth who supported everything that was happening.

-The word **disciple** tends to make us think of learning **biblical content**. And Jesus' closest followers **did** learn an immense amount from Him in the three years they spent together. But mostly they learned to live the Jesus way of life; a life of mercy, compassion, love, generosity and humility. See, **that's how He lived all the time!**

-But there was more. They saw **phenomenal** power. I mean, Jesus **did** split history in half—and there's a reason for that. But, I'm guessing, they couldn't quite put their finger on it. He did phenomenal miracles; stopped evil forces in their tracks—multiplied food, calmed storms—and raised the dead. But it was even bigger than that! What **was it?**

- a. Well, Jesus didn't gather them to be professional students; He sent **them** out to do what they had seen **Him** do. First he sent out the **Twelve** in six teams—with instructions to preach the Good News of the Kingdom, heal the sick and cast out demons. Then he sent 36 teams of two—to do the same thing. And it **worked!** **They** could see the Kingdom—the realm of God's leadership moving through them and defeating the Kingdom of darkness that had dominated the world. Jesus was **ecstatic!**

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. (Luke 10:21 TNIV)

- b. But they weren't **always** victorious. Sometimes Jesus had to get after them. By the way, being a student **includes** being rebuked—did you know that? One day some Samaritan villagers refused to welcome Jesus and his disciples. James and John—whom Jesus affectionately called, **sons of thunder**—said,

"Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to burn them up?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. (Luke 9:54-55 NLT)

-There were times when being Jesus' apprentice was really, **really** cool—heart-warming, ego-building. And there were times when it was really, **really** hard and discouraging and disillusioning. Sometimes they made things worse for Jesus; sometimes they **totally** didn't get His teaching, and He'd say, **Guys....?**

-There were times when their egos got the best of them—like when some parents tried to bring their children to Jesus and got shoved away. Sometimes they were heroes—because they were with Jesus. Sometimes they were hated—because Jesus everywhere they went. Sometimes, **because** of Jesus—they were hated—especially by the religious.

- c. The **hardest** lesson for them—was learning to humble themselves; to **serve**. I know, that's an easy one for us in our culture, right? I mean, it comes so naturally...! You mean it **doesn't?** It didn't come easy for them, either. This quest for self importance **really** comes out as they're on their final march to Jerusalem—where their school will end abruptly.

-I mean, Jesus **had** given them authority over forces of evil—and it seemed to go to their heads. Jesus is brilliant, courageous, powerful—but also gentle of heart.

After getting an A+ from Jesus for announcing seeing that He **is** the Messiah—Peter's head grows. When Jesus announces that he's going to Jerusalem where he will be tortured and killed—Peter actually **rebukes** Jesus and tells him--the very One he's just identified as the Messiah—that He's **wrong!**

-Again, Jesus tells them about the difficulty that lies ahead—that he will be tortured and executed. The sons of thunder, James and John, get their Mom,

Jesus' aunt, to come and ask if they can have the thrones on either side of him when He's king!

-This ongoing argument about who was the greatest disciple continues right up to the last supper, the night before Jesus died. It only ends when Jesus strips to his underwear—and does what **they** are all too proud to do. He washes their feet. And then, I think they understood. Jesus then said:

“Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:12-15 TNIV)

-That had to be a **profound** scene. Imagine coming to a point in life where you realize that you've spent three years of your life with God in human form—and the last time He touched you he was washing your filthy feet—something only the lowest of slaves did. When the **Class of 30 A.D.** saw those same hands of their Teacher and Lord nailed to a cross the next day, it must've hit them like a truck, “That's what he's been trying to teach us all along—**we are called to SERVE, not be big shots!**

-Then, as quickly as they were called, they abruptly graduated from Rabbi Jesus' one and only class. They knew when they were done that they hadn't been Jesus' apprentices—to then go through life with some really cool Bible lessons. No. Jesus, Son of God, Saviour of the world, Messiah, Lord of all, King of **all** Kings—sent **them—Apostles—“sent ones”** to complete His mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. They had been sent to change the world.

-But Jesus was clear, **“Don't try this on your own! Wait for the Spirit!”** To do what Jesus did—to continue the Mission of the Kingdom to redeem people—Jesus gave them the same Spirit of God who had raised Him from the dead. He would prepare the hearts of people to hear the Good News—and this Spirit would also transform their hearts—and give them power to do what they could **never** do on their own.

- d. The class of 30 A.D., who didn't make the cut with other rabbis, surprised the world. The other Rabbis snickered probably snickered when Jesus lowed himself to **recruit** these rejects. However, by the end of that first century—no one was snickering anymore. Aside from Jesus, their teacher, their influence on history has been unmatched. Most of them were executed with the words, **Jesus is Lord!** on their lips.

It wasn't their education or skills that made them so dangerous. The religious leaders in Jerusalem noted something else:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that *these men had been with Jesus.* (Acts 4:13 TNIV)

-Within 300 years of their graduation, the movement they led, started by Jesus, changed the world. See, the way it works is that God, through his Spirit—transforms people—and then uses them as a transforming influence to reclaim, redeem, and save the world!

5. And now, the torch has been passed to us. If you count every generation as 20 years—**we** are the 100th generation of disciples. We have the same Lord—Jesus. We have the same truth they carried—the Word of God and teachings of Jesus. We have the same power to carry on this mission—the Spirit. And, at this moment, we are facing about the same level of contempt they did. The **question** is—will we play church and wait to be rescued--or live as they lived—with the passion, the love, the tenacity, the kindness—and the **sacrifice** they lived with. And with the **impact** they made.

a. A word in our world that I think would give a clearer picture of what a disciple is—is **apprentice**. How many of you know what an apprentice is? Most trades have them. Jesus probably apprenticed with his Dad, Joseph, who was a carpenter or stone mason. An **apprentice** is someone who follows an expert around—and learns how to do what they do by watching, helping, copying and being corrected by them.

-There's a TV show by that name that features a wealthy guy with a healthy ego—names everything after himself—who doesn't even seem to notice that he has a perpetual bad hair day. **[pic—Donald Trump]** But it's okay, see, because he has a **lot** of money. And that's what gives him the right to demand only the brightest and the best. And they follow him around and learn how to be important and ruthless and wealthy—like him. But **most** don't make the cut. **You're fired!**

-The **surprising** thing is the Jesus' standards are much **lower**. I mean, it's like He'll take **anybody** on as an apprentice/disciple—which is a **good** thing for me! **Everyone** is invited to join Him. But His goal is way different; he's creating servants, not big shots. And he's not looking for confident people who are convinced they can do it on their own—He's looking for people who, like little kids, will spread out their arms to Him. Oh—and He's not looking for 60 or 70 hours a week. Jesus asks for **everything**. But then his goal is not making money and getting ahead; it's to save the world.

b. So, how do you **become** Jesus' apprentice? Well, people don't become apprentices by signing a little agreement—then doing their own thing. Jesus was clear right from the beginning. Remember what He said? **Follow me**. Now, remember—He hadn't asked them yet if they believed; the **first** step was, "Hang around with me. Be with me. Watch me. See if I am who I seem to be—then count the cost, and decide."

-Know why He said that? Because that's how trust builds.

Think about it—following Jesus for a lifetime is **huge!** Anyone here who, a day—or month after you meet a guy or girl—would **marry** them? Of **course** not! Not unless your drunk—or in Las Vegas. It takes **time** to see if they are who they say they are. A **lot** of time. Jesus invites people to follow Him, watch Him, think about what He said and count the cost--**before** they choose to trust him with their lives.

- c. So, here's the problem. Jesus ascended to the Father 40 days after his commissioned these disciples to carry on His mission to seek and save what was lost—and who is lost. People can't watch Jesus anymore, right? He's not there to correct them.

-Remember what He said about that?

...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth....No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. (John 14:16-18 NLT)

-We have the Gospels—the descriptions of Jesus' life, the records of his teaching—and the same Spirit who inspired these men to write the record—and carry on Jesus' mission. Now. Have we been properly disciplined—apprenticed—if we just become **Bible experts?**

-That knowledge—and the understanding of who Jesus is, what He said—and what He meant by what He said is critical—and we're crazy to underestimate it. These first followers watched Jesus **every single day**—and saw God as a human being; they understood how He thought, how He loved. They saw how He cared for the weak, broken, sinful and lost. We **need** to understand that. John, one of Jesus' closest friends and followers says near the end of his book about Jesus;

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31 TNIV)

-Do you get what he's saying? If all you do is learn the content—that will **never** do. The life of Jesus is intended to change what you believe about **everything!** About right and wrong. About who God is. About the extent of His kindness; about the value of others; about what God is up to; about what matters and what doesn't.

-The discipleship/apprenticeship plan of Jesus is never complete without two components. There is the **outer** component—this historical story of Jesus' life—and the people He entrusted His mission to; the gathering of all his apprentices; the **Church**. The fragrance of their lives—of what a Follower of Jesus looks like as they mature, as they love, as they face crises, as they make choices, as they give, as they develop the character of Jesus.

-But **nothing** happens without the **inner** component--the Holy Spirit. See, He's the one who made the Class of 30 A.D. **way** more than a group of 11 graduates with a bunch of new ideas. **He** is the One who, with His power, worked through Jesus to split history in half.

He is the one who used a handful of ordinary people to change **everything!** If you want to be Jesus' apprentice—you have to **know** Him through what He did and taught—through the modeling and help of others—and then you have to **cooperate** with the Spirit of Jesus who said:

**I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth...
And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
(Matthew 28:18, 20b NLT)**

- d. **My** part—and **your** part—is our **cooperation** with the moving, the speaking, the urging of the Spirit as He works in us. See, one of the advantages in reading about how Jesus taught and worked with 12 people is understanding **how** God works with people; how he trains them—speaks to them. How He plows through their weaknesses—and cuts through their excuses and lies and pride—so they can become the people they were created to be. Think about it. What do you think Peter would've become if Jesus hadn't called him away from his nets that day? Probably an **older**, more belligerent fisherman with smellier hands.

-The work Jesus had to do on him was not at **all** pleasant. Jesus had to call him on his pride—I mean, stop him in his tracks when he thought he was smarter and more competent than he was. Know what ultimately made Peter usable? A **crushing** failure; when it really counted he slept instead of praying and denied instead of owning. Jesus didn't just rise from the dead; he raised Peter, too. And He raises **us!**

- e. And then there was the whole thing of actually **following** Jesus; doing what He did **all** the time, not just on weekends. It wasn't learning lessons about loving and healing and helping and serving—it was actually **loving** and **servng** and **showing kindness** when you **really** didn't feel like it.

-If you really want to follow Jesus—He will probably put his finger right on the sore spot in your life. The alternate God. When a rich young guy came to Jesus and wanted life, Jesus asked him to give up his money. He couldn't do it. When Paul came to Jesus, He put his finger on Paul's education and credentials. He may put his finger on your need for recognition, or your sexuality, or your ego. Jesus put his finger on James and John's hot temper—and on Martha's busyness. He put his finger on the Pharisee's religious pride—and on Judas sneakiness.

-Why? Because the goal, friends—if we're going to live with the power that Jesus and this class of 30 A.D. lived with—we need to **be** like Jesus.

Listen to Paul:

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (Romans 8:28-29 NLT)

-The point, believe it or not, isn't to make us better, more shined up people. The point is us make us partners with God in his Mission to save **everyone** and **everything!**

And that raises a question for us, doesn't it. Is that what **you** want? Is it your goal to **LIVE** like Jesus, **LOOK** like Jesus, and **LOVE** like Jesus—and **join His mission?** That can happen, you know? But God can't do it without you!

Q & A

6. So. **Why** would we want to look, live and love like Jesus? Because **He's right about everything.** Let me close with the words of an author named Dallas Willard from his book, **The Divine Conspiracy.**

At the literally mundane level, Jesus knew how to transform the molecular structure of water to make it wine. That knowledge also allowed Him to take a few pieces of bread and some little fish and feed thousands of people. He could create matter from the energy He knew how to access from the heavens right where He was. He knew how to transform the tissues of a human body from sickness to health, and from death to life. He knew how to suspend gravity, interrupt weather patterns, eliminate unfruitful trees without saw or axe. He only needed a word. Surely He must be amused at what Nobel Prizes are awarded for today.

In the ethical domain He had an understanding of life that has influenced world thought more than any other. Death was not something imposed on Him by others. He explained to His followers in a moment of crisis, He could at any time call for 72,000 angels to do whatever He wanted. A mid sized angel or two would surely have been enough to take care of those who thought they were capturing and killing Him. He plainly said, Nobody takes my life. I lay it down by choice. I am in a position to lay it down and I am in a position to resume it. My Father and I have worked all this out. All these things show Jesus' cognitive and practical mastery of every phase of reality—physical, moral, spiritual—He is Master only because He is maestro.

Jesus is Lord can mean little in practice for anyone who has to hesitate before saying Jesus is smart. He is not just nice. He is brilliant. He is the smartest man who ever lived. He is now supervising the entire course of world history while simultaneously preparing the rest of the universe for our future role in it. He

always has the best information on everything and certainly on the things that matter most in human life.