

STANDARD B: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN CHRIST”?

Lesson 3: How Is It Possible to Live as a Disciple of Jesus Christ?

Introduction

One day Jesus and His disciples journeyed by boat across the Sea of Galilee. When they reached their destination, they stepped from the boat and were met by a dreadful sight. (See Luke 8:26-39.) A man met them who was possessed by demons. The demons had done him much harm. He wore no clothes and lived among tombs. He was so wild people had tried to bind him with shackles, but the man broke the bonds. The demons would then drive him into the wilderness. However, Jesus commanded the demons to leave the man. Because of Jesus’ authority, the demons obeyed, leaving the man and entering a large herd of pigs. The pigs quickly rushed down the hillside into a lake and drowned.

When people from a nearby town rushed out to see what had happened, what they saw surprised them. The man, from whom the demons departed, was clothed, and he was now at peace. The demons were gone, and the man was now in his right mind. When the people from the town arrived, the man was sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from Him.

When Jesus and His disciples were ready to leave, the man asked Jesus’ permission to go too. He wanted to follow Jesus, just as he had seen the other disciples doing. Instead of granting the man’s request, Jesus told him to return to his home and tell all of his friends and family what God had done for him. The man obeyed Jesus, He went away, announcing throughout the town what Jesus had done.

Question: What did Jesus want the man who was free of demons to do?

Question: Why did Jesus not allow the man whom He healed to go with Him?

A. It Is Possible to Live as a Disciple in Our Part of the World.

Today, none of us can follow Jesus around the countryside as some of His first disciples did. But we can do what He expects all of us to do. After Jesus touches and saves us, He expects us to return to the places where we work and live. Jesus wants us to live and witness for Him in our own homes, communities, and work places. He wants us to tell others what He has done for us. All of Jesus’ disciples are called to witness to other people for Him.

But it is not enough just to talk about Jesus. We can’t just talk about Him and think we have completed our witness about Him. We must also live for Him. Our lives must also proclaim that Jesus is Lord and that He has authority over the powers of evil. We must be really changed by Jesus, not just in the words we say. Our old life of slavery to sin must be gone, and the new life Jesus gives must take its place.

In the story about the demon-possessed man, Jesus set the man free from the demons and sent him back into his own part of the world. Today, Jesus sends His followers back to their world. He sends us back to our families and communities. He expects us to be His faithful disciples in the everyday activities of life. Some people think being a Christian is just something we do at special times, such as Sunday. This is not true. Being Jesus' disciples happens in our everyday lives. If we can't be successful followers there, then nothing else matters. Jesus needs followers who live for Him among people who are not His friends.

Question: What does it mean to be a witness for Jesus?

Question: How can you be a witness for Jesus to your family and community?

B. Disciples of Jesus Need to Rely Totally on God.

There are many questions new Christians have concerning being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Some of the questions are:

How can we live for Jesus and be faithful to Him in the everyday activities of life?

How can we live as Jesus' disciples when there are so many things that stand against it?

How can we obey Jesus' command to live according to His will when there are voices

around us that urge us to go back into our old life of sin?

How can we overcome the temptations we face every day?

What should we do when we fail to act and speak as Jesus' disciples?

Does Jesus forgive us when we fail Him?

How can we be strong as Jesus' disciples?

All of these are important questions. The answer is simple: No one can live as a faithful and victorious disciple of Jesus. The command is simply too great for any of us. Here is the reason why. No person can live for Jesus if he or she depends on his or her own strength and wisdom. None of us can follow Jesus if we have to do it by ourselves. Jesus knew this. He knew His disciples would be overcome by temptations and tests if they were left alone to rely on their own strength.

Thankfully, Christians do have to rely on themselves. Before Jesus was crucified, He began to tell His disciples about the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that He would pray and ask His Heavenly Father to send the Holy Spirit to live in them (John 14:15-17). The Spirit of God would actually come and live in Jesus' disciples. He would be there to give them power and teach them. He would help them overcome temptations. He would comfort them in times of sorrow and persecution. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come alongside all His disciples and be their Counselor. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be our Advocate.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us. He would teach us the most important things we need to know to live as disciples (John 14:26). Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would give peace to His disciples in the midst of life's problems. The early

Christians confronted all kinds of persecution. The enemies of the gospel killed many of the early Christians. Stephen was first (Acts 6:8-15). But the Holy Spirit gave them peace even though they were persecuted.

Question: Who do we need to rely on to live as Jesus' disciples?

Question: How does the Holy Spirit help Jesus' disciples?

C. Disciples of Jesus Need to Live in the Power of the Holy Spirit.

Did Jesus fulfill His promise to send the Holy Spirit to the disciples? Yes. The Book of Acts describes how the Holy Spirit came to the disciples. Before the Holy Spirit came, the disciples were discouraged and fearful. But when the promised Holy Spirit came to them, they became powerful witnesses for Jesus. Even the apostle Peter, who a few weeks before denied knowing Jesus, became a powerful witness for Jesus.

This is what the Holy Spirit did. Peter stood up to preach, and he rebuked those who had crucified Jesus. Boldly, Peter proclaimed that Jesus is the Lord. Peter became a powerful leader in the Church. Eventually, his faith in Christ cost him his life. Still, Peter remained faithful to his Lord. Here is what Peter told some Christians later in his life: "Therefore prepare your minds for action: be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:13-16). The Holy Spirit living in Peter made it possible for him to live for Jesus and to be a great leader in the Church.

The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome. These Roman Christians lived in a wicked city. There were many temptations. But Paul said the Spirit of God now lived in them. He said the Spirit of God was now leading them. Indeed, they were children of God (Romans 8:14). Paul wrote that the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead and that the same Spirit now lives in Christians. The Spirit brings believers new life in Christ. He gives them power to walk as Christ's disciples. He makes it possible for them to live in victory over sin. He gives them power to be His witnesses in places where people do not believe in Jesus.

Christians are supposed to walk according to the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Paul also wrote that the Holy Spirit assists us when we pray. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God (Romans 8:27).

Question: Who made it possible for Peter to become a great leader, even after he denied Jesus?

Question: In what other ways does the Holy Spirit help believers today?

D. Disciples of Jesus Worship God with Their Lives.

Paul wrote that Christians should daily offer themselves as living sacrifices to God. He said we worship God by giving ourselves to God. We worship Him by yielding our lives to God's rule (Romans 12:1-2). Each day Christians should give themselves to the Holy Spirit. Each day we worship God by letting the Holy Spirit shape us completely. Paul told the Romans that they should give all parts of their lives to Jesus Christ, just as they used to give their lives to sin. "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness" (Romans 6:19). What is the result of daily giving oneself to the Holy Spirit? Paul said that it is the peace of God, eternal life, and sanctification (Romans 6:21-22).

Question: How do we worship God *with* our lives?

Question: How do we worship God *through* our lives?

Question: How can we have the peace of God in our lives today?

E. Disciples of Jesus Take up the Cross Daily.

Jesus said that each day a disciple should take up His cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23-27). Just like Jesus, the cross for Christians means that they will not live according to their selfish desires. They will cease treating themselves as though they were gods. Each day a disciple must place obedience to Jesus above obedience to anything competing with it. And each day, every minute of every hour, the Holy Spirit will live in us and give us power to obey and worship the Lord.

The good news for young Christians is the old slavery to sin comes to an end through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit in us will give victory to all who will yield to the Spirit's instruction. We should depend completely upon Him for power and instruction. No Christian needs to fail. If Christ calls us to be His disciples, then we can be sure He will empower us. In the Book of Romans, Paul prays for the Christians in Rome. This prayer tells the secret for victorious discipleship, and it applies to us today. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

Question: Who empowers believers to follow Jesus and obey Him?

Question: What does it mean to take up the Cross and follow Jesus?

F. Disciples of Jesus Receive Life from Jesus the Vine.

Jesus told His early disciples that He would not leave them abandoned as orphans. Rather, He would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. Jesus fulfilled His promise. And the promise Jesus made so long ago, He makes to us today. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ gives himself to His disciples.

Christ gives himself to us in the way a vine gives life to its branches. Jesus used this language to describe the relationship between himself and His disciples. He told His disciples that He was the vine and they were the branches (John 15:1). He told them that

just as a branch gets its life from the vine, even so His disciples would get their life from Him. By the Holy Spirit, God the Heavenly Father sends the vine's life—Jesus Christ—into us who are the branches.

Question: Who is the vine and who are the branches?

Question: How can you get life from Christ, who is the Vine, this week?

Conclusion

Living for Jesus really means that Jesus himself lives in us and through us. He calls us to be obedient and to marvel at the transformation His Spirit will accomplish in us. Jesus calls all Christians to a magnificent journey, the journey of victorious living. The apostle Paul said that one time sin ruled over us. But now God has shown that His grace is even more abundant than sin. Those who receive God's abundant grace and His free gift of salvation will now have victory over sin through Jesus Christ.

Activity: Think about what it means to “live in the power of the Spirit.” Talk with your discipleship group about living in the Spirit's power today.

Activity: This week tell at least one person what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.